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MEMORIOGRAPHY AND THE ANARCHIVAL IMPULSE

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ABSTRACT

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MEMORIOGRAPHY AND THE ANARCHIVAL IMPULSE

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On 30 September 2014, Marianne Hirsch delivered her lecture entitled 'Mobile Memories' at the Department of Gender Studies and the Jewish Studies project, Central European University in Budapest. It was a privilege to discuss with her one more time, after meeting her a month ago, for the first time, in Stockholm. In her exposé, Marianne Hirsch discusses the age of 'monumental memory' focussing on the range of institutional commemorations and new museums which continue to be set up, the National September 11 Memorial Museum in New York or the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. In relation to the thematics of the Conference/Training School, 'Mobilising Memory for Change', she poses the question 'How can memory be mobilised for a transcultural future that resists the national imaginaries and ideologies displayed in these institutions?' In that aspect she presents a set of artworks which are presented as counter-memories where the artists 'activate small, fragmentary archives... creating networks of connectivity and potentiality that might enable memory to move and be moved towards the future'.

My research focusses specifically on the (an-)archives activated by such artists which are 'small, unofficial, anti-monumental memory practices' and 'fragmentary' according to Hirsch, but which I argue are central to a political project and not situated on the periphery, as counter memories. I am particularly interested in the 'multiple forms of mediation' (Hirsch, 2012) which inspire Marianne Hirsch to develop her argument that 'postmemory is not an identity position but a generational structure of transmission embedded in multiple forms of mediation'. Scholars of memory have referred to second-generation fiction, diaries, memoirs, testimonies, art and music, establishing a dichotomy between the rational, scientific and objective approach traditionally preferred by historians to the interdisciplinary approach of memory scholars influenced by 'humanities disciplines from history to literary studies, anthropology, sociology and art history' (Carrier, 2014).

Peter Carrier focuses on the rhetoric of memory and its impact on the historiography of the Holocaust and defines a new category of historiography, "Holocaust memoriography", [as] a body of professional historical writings which deals with the way in which this event is recalled and understood in the present'. He refers to the 'many works about memory' referring to 'professional historical writings' which however do not fit in the historiographical canon but which form part of a newly defined

category 'Holocaust memoriography'. For Carrier, memoriographers use 'diaries, witness accounts, art or music' as evidence and therefore operate on the periphery of the discipline of history.

At this COST conference on 'Mobilising memory for change', I argue that Memoriography is defined as a body of creative works (and not professional historical writings) which deal with the way in which events are recalled historically and understood affectively in the present. I am still developing this argument for my thesis and I will attempt to present this concept at this particularly point of my research. My background in Visual Arts and Media Theory and the influence of British Cultural Studies on my research bring me to question whether creative works in the form of protest art, performance, poetic pieces, diary narratives, fiction are actually only an alternative form of Memory. Marianne Hirsch in her lecture establishes a parallel between institutional memory (commemoration, official historiographies, monumentalisation of memory...) and the 'small' resistances to institutional memory in the forms of literature, visual or performative arts. She focuses extensively on photography and creative works in *The generation of Postmemory: Writing and visual culture after the Holocaust* and acknowledges that those 'works have spawned a veritable industry of critical and theoretical work on memory' being a 'self-conscious, innovative, and critical aesthetics that palpably conveys absence and loss'. I argue that the terminology 'memoriography' is used to mean the way that memory is memorised and the study of how memory is produced, in the same way that historiography is the writing of history' and the study of the way history is written/interpreted in a specific context.

A second use of the term 'Memoriography' sheds light on the production of memorial materials produced as forms of evidence of historical memories. Japanese artist Chino Otsuka, entitled her video works *Memoriography I* and *Memoriography II* in which she explores different temporalities in memory, blurring the chronological framework of historiography. *Memoriography I* transports the spectator to a doorway in Paris. The video is a 6-minute pause on a photo of the young artist leaning against a majestic wooden doorway, the image eerily superimposed by sound of walking pedestrians and the opening and closing of the heavy door creating an illusion of film. What is unnerving is to slowly witness the image of the younger Otsuka gradually fading from the filmed photograph to give way to an older self-transposed in front of the doorway. The video is an extension of the theme she explores in *Imagine Finding Me*, a series of twelve photographs from her childhood immaculately photoshopped to connect her adult self in another timeframe, that of her younger days. She superimposes two images of her childhood and adulthood to intersect at a junction in memory. The photographs transport the spectator to the various geographical locations of her childhood. Most importantly the audience travel with the artist on her journey of meticulously superimposing her adult self in the memories provoked by the photographs collected in a family album. This memoriography for her is the reversal of temporality and the linearity of a chronological

historiography. In that sense I re-appropriate this term to enclose the visual carriers of memory arguing that the notion of 'professional historical writings' is ambivalent with the embodied state of recollection - 'recall'. Carrier, whose research focused on the rhetoric of memory in political communication, and on the ethical precepts of contemporary discourse about the Holocaust, believes that Holocaust memoriography evolved from Holocaust historiography. He confesses that certain political memoriographies adopt a similarly chronological and national perspective but that the study of memory should not be 'conceived as an alternative to the study of historiography ...but as its complement'. I argue that Carrier proposes a counter historical interpretation of the Holocaust, where the shift of historical narratives have moved from a focus on glorifying the victor to a compassionate approach to the victims. Hence a shift in historiography.

While a historiography denotes the writing of History or the study of historical writings, I argue that a memoriography cannot encompass counter historical writings, nor contain counter memories as evidence. Memoriography asserts itself as a body of creative works which propels memory writings and a shift in historiographical works. If historiography is the writing of history and the study of historical writings, Memoriography is broadly the memorising of memories and the study of memorial works. In my argument I differentiate between institutional memory as deriving the kind of authority ascribed to historical writings (official commemoration, monuments, official narratives of history...) and works pertaining to memory which according to Hirsch can be found in aesthetic practices which act as counter memories. Although my research investigates contemporary visual and literary works in the activation and dissemination of memory, I take into consideration an array of performative acts which potentially act as counter-institutional projects, sometimes outside the institution, sometimes inside. I found the example given at the end of Hirsch's lecture very inspiring. Marianne Hirsch finishes her presentation on the performative act of Emma Sulkowicz, senior visual arts student at Columbia University whose project 'Carry That Weight/Mattress Performance' provoked a mobilisation of students, activists and members of the public around the handling of sexual assault in America. In my research I reflect on the performativity of certain counter-institutional creative instances like Emma's one or the living memorial on Szabadság Square in Budapest 'erected' by the ritual of the performance of a protest by Jewish organisations to the institutional 'falsification of history'. The development of the concept of Memoriography, englobes performance in art (theatre, music and contemporary art) but also art in performance (forms of performative protest).

My research is greatly influenced by Cultural Studies (less of the Birmingham Marxist and psychoanalytical approach but following a more contemporary direction in the field, specifically in Critical Theory and philosophy). From Derrida's deconstruction to Foucault's discourse on power to Feminist Theory via Butler and Braidotti which I will be exploring in the next year, I wish to build upon the relevance of memoriography, NOT as an alternative form of memory but as a mnemonic tool with prospective potentialities which transcend institutional memory.

At this point, I build my argument on the anarchival impulse of artists. According to Hal Foster (2004), critic and art historian, archival artists extract historical information often displaced or misinterpreted, and bring forward its visibility. The artist feels an impulse to 'anarchive', that is to produce counter narratives, with new perspectives to well-established histories and perceptions. 'The archives at issue here are not databases in this sense; they are recalcitrantly material, fragmentary rather than fungible, and as such they callout for human interpretation, not machinic reprocessing' (Foster, 2004). The body of creative works asserts an achronological disposition which defy the linearity and temporality of historical narratives. This paper traces my line of thought starting from the ontology of an institutional archive and the imposition of its authority to the anarchival impulse of artists which provokes a memoriography, central to the discussion of institutionalised memories. It is at this junction that the field of Cultural Studies potentially provokes new debates and interdisciplinary approaches to understanding memorial materials.

Meta narratives and counter narratives become another imposed body of knowledge which imposes a new authority and become what Derrida calls a house arrest in his lecture '*Archive Fever, a Freudian Impression*' in 1994. Derrida's deconstruction of the archival propensity of institutions to chronologically record history and instil its authority as institutional truth provides me with a starting point to analyse the Memory of the State and its institutions and how historiography pervades a collective memory. Derrida's lecture on the archive questions the philosophical practice which has privileged the authenticity of the archive as construing the natural, originary device for the preservation of meaning, securing authentic identity. His reference to the etymology of the word archive allows him to subtract two principles to the word archive: ontological and nomological. The word archive is derived from the Latin word *archeion*, which means the house magistrate but also comes from the Greek word *arkhe* which has two meanings: commencement and commandment. What is interesting in the etymology of the word archive is where things commence and can be related to how historiographies and archives are born simultaneously. As soon as an event is ascribed historical status, it is archived in collective memory. To be historical is to start remembering an event

in the past and to demarcate this event from other events. This marks the beginning of archiving remembrance, hence the physical, historical principle. The archive derives its existence from an initial private domain which acquires authority on becoming publicly recognised.

The *Archivum* or *archeion* is initially a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, hence those who command. The museum is established in a similar way. It's usually a heritage house, a historical building or a new location designed for the project. It starts as an address simply but imposes itself as a depository of knowledge, scientifically assessed historical findings or gives itself the right to appropriate objects and narratives of others and house it in the name of preservation or restoration. Derrida calls it the topo-nomology of the archive, which means the authority and place of truth (nomology) of the public archive being possible upon its physical domicile (topology). The topological is the place, the domicile, the attribution of a physical and virtual location to the formation of an archive which marks the institutional passage from the private to the public and affirms an entity of authority and truth. Initially the house magistrate, the archive is now housed in institutions like national archives, museums, art galleries and other institutions. The house gives itself the power, the law to make the law. At this point the trespass between private and public is made. The private domicile imposes itself as a publicly recognised authority. Official documents can be filed, security is imposed upon those who the domicile judges as needful and the institution gives itself the hermeneutic right and the power to interpret the archive. Derrida calls it the house arrest where the archives would not hold power without substrate or domicile. It is this dwelling which marks the institutional passage from the private to the public.

Derrida acknowledges that a science of the archive must include the theory of this institutionalisation, that is the theory that the law begins by inscribing itself there with the right which authorises it. From here we understand the politics of an institutional archive, the political power which gives control and law to that archive. Derrida's archontic principle of the archive (the real, physical or factual existence of the archive) finds resonance in the physical and nomological existence of the historical document; the document as the archiving of events as being historically defined as an event, becomes the authority of one particular way of remembering history. The historian is thus the first archivist, the first to create the archive, the archaeologist, the first to exhibit his document. It is at this junction that I define memoriography as anarchival and intrinsic in literary works, biographies, the visual arts or music, which share 'a commitment to grounding theory in lived experience, and in revealing the way in which the world is produced through the constituting acts of subjective experience' (Butler, 2003).

Hirsh (2012) also refers to Connerton's (1989) inscriptive memorial practice which retains an 'incorporative' embodied dimension where 'photographs give rise to certain bodily acts of looking and certain conventions of seeing and understanding that we have come to take for granted but that shape, seemingly re-embody, and render material, the past we are seeking to understand and receive'. I focus on memoriography, not as a counter narrative of any meta-narrative of historiography but driven by memorial materials which influence memory scholars in the writing of historical documents. An anarchival impulse in the forms of the performativity of protest or 'conceptual art, institutional critiques, feminist writings ... [is] enough so to be considered a tendency in its own right' (Foster, 2004). Drawn from the archives of historiography, memoriographical materials produced in a 'gesture of alternative knowledge or counter memory' (Foster, 2004) expose an affective and subjective reaction to an event.

Can memories be prospective instead of retrospective?

Although Foster (2004) does not explore this aspect, he questions its possibility. In his footnotes, Foster raises two speculations: Archival art as counter memory to a memory culture which is prone to amnesia and secondly, contemporary art mimicking a 'society of control' with an 'archive reason' for the possibility of future behaviour prediction. At this point, I argue that memorial materials are always prospective as they exist as ways of determining future actions. These materials are fundamentally not meant to be institutionally archived, yet they are creating an archive of the future in its appropriation by memory scholars to historicise its existence. In this paper which is a developmental piece of writing, I argue that this memoriography deeply connected to 'affective memory' (Benett, 2005) 'have the capacity to address the spectator's own bodily memory; to touch the viewer who feels rather than simply sees the event, drawn into the image through a process of affective contagion'. It is this memoriography which influences historical writings from memory scholars and brings the shift from historiography appropriated by national, religious or ethnic identities to an 'authorial positioning' (Carrier, 2014) of scholars who focus on the subjective complexity of creative works such as literary pieces of victims' life stories in response to institutional historiographies. I conclude that an anarchival impulse influences the shift in institutional historiography and I provide ample case studies in my research to demonstrate its affective monumentality.

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