



Universität Zürich
Englisches Seminar

Call for Papers

(Mis-)Representations: Trauma Discourses and Cultural Productions Postgraduate conference, 17.10.09, University of Zurich

Moving far beyond its origins in medical terminology, “trauma” has enjoyed a multitude of applications in various disciplines. Where trauma originally denoted a physical wound, within the fields of psychoanalysis and psychology, any inspection or treatment of the traumatic wound shifts the main emphasis from somatic to psychic topologies. With the inclusion of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) into the official diagnostic manual in 1980, public awareness of trauma increased rapidly. Since the mid 1990s trauma has also gained a great deal in currency within fields other than psychology and psychiatry. Scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Shoshana Felman and Lawrence Langer have introduced trauma theory as a central concern of their literary interpretations. The term has taken on cultural dimensions due largely to its relevance for issues of collective identity, and has thus become popular in Cultural Studies. The vogue of the concept has also necessarily been contingent on a succession of historical conditions – two World Wars, the Vietnam War, (post)colonialism and global terrorism – as well as on changes in the ideologies, philosophy, and cultural practices of the West: particularly the popularization of psychoanalytic discourse and the proliferation of public stagings of personal suffering in the mass media. While the concept of trauma has traditionally been used to address concerns of the victimized and marginalized, it has also come to function well as a paradigm for postmodern anxieties concerning experience and representation. Though a widespread interest in concepts of trauma presents possibilities for fecund transdisciplinary interconnections and knowledge transfer, its apparent protean adaptability also requires a continual critical reevaluation of its applications.

The aim of this conference – which is conceived as a forum of exchange primarily for doctoral and post-doctoral researchers – is to explore the potentials and the limitations of the concept of trauma in its various appropriations for cultural productions. We invite contributions on topics from various fields and eras of literary or cultural studies. Topics to be considered include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Representation of Trauma in Literature, Art and Media
- Trauma and Narrative
- Gendered Trauma and Traumas of Gender
- Testimony, Truth, Ethics
- Trauma, Memory and Identity
- Collective / Cultural Trauma
- Trauma and Language
- Application of trauma discourses for cultural and literary analysis
- Definitions of trauma and their political and cultural implications
- Histories of Trauma, Traumatic Histories

Please send a 250-word proposal for a 20-minute talk and a brief CV to scott.loren@unisg.ch by 29 May 2009. Further information will soon be available on the website of the English Seminar, University of Zurich: <http://www.es.uzh.ch/Subsites/events/trauma09.html>