1480s:
“On the Dignity of Humanity”:
Renaissance Hybridity / Christian Humanism

20 September 2007
Week 03 - Lecture 02
Commemoration: making sense of a trauma ---

trying to re-build a meaning system that has been shattered by an encounter with chaos…

Collective meaning differs from individual meaning:

Collective memory is always contested →

whose version of the story will become the “official” public version?
Atlantic Pavilion
Baldacchino --- laurel wreath --- eagles

400,000 dead
70,000 dead
"...this memorial is for those who have died, and for us to remember them."
- Maya Ying Lin, designer, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial recognizes and honors the men and women who served in one of America's most divisive wars. The memorial grew out of a need to heal the nation's wounds as America struggled to reconcile different moral and political points of view. In fact, the memorial was conceived and designed to make no political statement whatsoever about the war. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a place where everyone, regardless of opinion, can come together and remember and honor those who served. By doing so, the memorial has paved the way towards reconciliation and healing, a process that continues today.

http://www.nps.gov/archive/vive/home.htm
commemoration

O’Neill Media Center Stacks

NA737 .L48 M39 2003
James A. Garfield: assassinated 19 Sept 1881

commemoration…

remembering and forgetting
commemoration…

remembering and
forgetting

Transition back to the Black Plague:

You should see these all as *commemorations* --- i.e.,
acts of “trying to make sense” of the trauma

1. Painting: God in the *distance* with St. Sebastian
2. Philosophical Nominalism
3. *Carmina Burana*

*but also:* “The Renaissance”
Ca. 1400:

Post-traumatic Narratives: Nominalism/Totentanz/Polyphony/Perspective

B. Philosophical Nominalism
Positively, this begins the long-range basis for modern science ---

**MODELS** [names]

--- for which all knowledge is
hypothetical, subject to falsification,
not “things-in-themselves”
but rather things as they are-for-us [observed by us].

---

![Diagram: Wave-Particle Duality](image)

How to imagine the wave-particle duality.

---

*The following excerpt was originally published in* **Conjectures and Refutations (1963).**

**Science as Falsification**  
_by Karl R. Popper_

When I received the list of participants in this course and realized that I had been asked to speak to philosophical colleagues I thought, after some hesitation and consolation, that you would probably prefer me to speak about those problems which interests me most, and about those developments with which I am most intimately acquainted. I therefore decided to do what I have never done before: to give you a report on my own work in the philosophy of science, since the autumn 1919 when I first begin to grapple with the problem, "When should a theory be ranked as scientific?" or "Is there a criterion for the scientific character or status of a theory?"

The problem which troubled me at the time was neither, "When is a theory true?" nor "When is a theory acceptable?" my problem was different. I wished to distinguish between *science and pseudo-science,* knowing very well that science often errs, and that pseudoscience may happen to stumble on the truth.

[http://www.stephenjaygould.org/ctrl/popper_falsification.html](http://www.stephenjaygould.org/ctrl/popper_falsification.html)
“wave”
“particle”
= names: models

Not knowing “light in itself / light in its essence …”

• **Nominalism = end of rational religion**
  - Duns Scotus: “God could have willed the inverse of the 10 commandments”: “Thou shalt steal!”
  - William of Occam: “If God had willed the absolute opposite of the 10 commandments [“Thou shalt commit adultery”] they would have been binding absolutely
  - **God’s will is not reasonable ---
    it is arbitrary ... and yet absolutely binding!!!**

  - NB: for Aquinas this is absurd. God cannot be ir-rational.
12th-13th centuries: an “Age of Reason” [geometry]

and an “Age of Faith”

Or perhaps: age of “reasonable faith”

C. Musical Example
The end of a predictable cosmic meaningful order; the beginning of a sense of arbitrariness at hands of Fortune.

Juno as the goddess *Fortuna* [ancient Roman]

Ask yourself: why must you go all the way back to the ancient Romans to dig up a goddess for the Middle Ages???

Temple of Fortuna Virilis, late 2nd c. B.C.
Wheel of Fortune: in the Duomo (cathedral) in Siena (Italy):
first of marble floor inlays: 1372 !!!!
Title I: “O Fortuna”

• O Fortuna/ velut Luna / statu variabilis
• O Fortune, / like the moon
  you are changeable.
• semper crescis / aut descrescis; / vita detestabilis
• ever waxing / and waning; hateful life!
• nunc obdurat / et tunc curat
• now oppresses / and then soothes
• ludo mentis aciem,
• as playful whim has it,
• egestatem, / potestatem / dissolvit ut glaciem.
• poverty / power / it melts them both like ice.

• Sors immanis / et inanis,/ rota tu volubilis,
• Fate --- monstrous / and empty, / you whirling wheel,
• status malus,/ vana salus/ semper dissolubilis,
• you are malevolent / well-being is in vain / and always dissolves into nothing,
• obumbrata / et velata / michi quoque niteris;
• shadowed / and veiled / you plague me too;
• nunc per ludum / dorsum nudum / fero tui sceleris
  I bare my back to your villainy.
• Sors salutis / et virtutis / michi nunc contraria
• In health / and in virtue / now [Fortuna] is against me
• est affectus / et defectus / semper in angaria.
• I am driven on / and weighted down
  always enslaved.
• Hac in hora / sine mora / cordum pulsum tangite;
• So at this hour / without delay
  pluck the vibrating strings;
• quod per sortem / sternit fortem / mecum omnes plangite!
• since Fate / strikes down the strong man
  everyone weep with me!

Title II: "Fortune plango vulnera"

• Fortune plango vulnera / stillantibus ocellis,
• I bemoan the wounds of Fortune
  with weeping eyes,
• quod sua michi munera / subtrahit rebellis.
  for the gifts she made me
  she now perversely takes away.
• *Verum est, quod legitur, / fronte capillata,*  
  It is truly written  
  that she has a fine head of hair,

• *sed plerumque sequitur / occasio calvata.*  
  but when she seizes opportunity  
  she is bald.*** {Repeat loudly}

• {***NB: anthropological boundaries being bent: HAIR!  
  Is she female or male? Only males are bald! Trans-gender}

• *In Fortune solio / sederam elatus,*  
  On Fortune's throne  
  I used to sit raised up,

• *prosperitatis vario / flore coronatus;*  
  crowned with flowers of prosperity;
• *quicquid enim florui / felix et beatus,*
  though I may have flourished
  happy and blessed,

• *nunc a summo corrui / gloria privatus.*
  now I fall from the peak
  deprived of glory. {Repeat loudly}

• *Fortune rota volvitur;*
  *descendo minoratus;*
  The wheel of Fortune turns;
  down I go, demeaned;

• *alter in altum tollitur; nimis exaltatus*
• another is raised up; / far too high up
*rex sedet in vertice - caveat ruinam!*
The kind who now sits at the summit ---
let him fear ruin!

- *nam sub axe legitimus: Hecubam reginam.*
  for under the axis [of the wheel] is written:
  "Queen Hecuba."**  {Repeat loudly}

- ** In Greek mythology: Hecuba, once daughter of a king, was turned into a
dog ! NB: anthropological boundaries! [trans-species]

---

**Conclusion: Disorder at the Center**

- Plague can strike anyone anytime
- Fortune turns her wheel as she wants: loves to bring about “reversals of fortune”
- The world: no longer divided neatly into safety and danger
- What used to be predictable / orderly / controllable --> now subject to occult *arbitrary* forces beyond our control...

Definition of CULTURAL TRAUMA:
“a collective encounter with chaos.”
O Fortuna!

From the “Late Middle Ages” to the “Renaissance” …
From Middle Ages to “Renaissance” [re-birth]:
Emphasize the BODY
(and “NATURE” in general)
In other words: not “Super-natural”

Opening words of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*:

_Umana cosa è aver compassione degli afflitti_ . . .

_Human(e) it is to have compassion on the afflicted_ . . .
Central Renaissance concept:

**HUMANISM**

"Man is the measure of all things."

1486: Pico della Mirandola,  
- *Oration on the Dignity of Man*

1492: Columbus

1466-1536: Erasmus of Rotterdam

Gothic: Measure of all things is super-human
Gothic vs. Renaissance Architecture:
Who or What is the measure of all things?
Greg Epstein, who advises fellow atheists and agnostics at Harvard University, wants to create a kind of church for those who reject religion. But he's encountering resistance from some of the very people he wants to unite.
Michelangelo, *Pieta*
I. Pre-Renaissance: Hieratic Art
Rome ➔ Byzantium = “Byzantine Empire”

“HIERATIC”: Late Antiquity ➔ Byzantine Middle Ageds
Portait: Roman Philosopher, 400s ➔ Icon: Christ, 700s
NB: EYES in the hieratic style:
a window on to the eternal world behind the eyes…
“realism” only captures the surface; the reality lies deep within

II. Renaissance Art:
A. Perspective
B. Contrapposto
C. Chiarascuro
End of Viking invasions [ca. 1000] → “Re-birth” of Antiquity

"School of Athens", Raphael
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_School_of_Athens

“Re-naissance” === “re-birth” of Antiquity

A. Perspective
Renaissance: from “hieratic” to “realist” perspective.
The “real” is here-and-now --- NOT somewhere beyond the eyes...
B. *Contrapposto* [cf. “counterpoint”] --- “contra” = “against”
C. *Chiaroscuro* = “light/dark”
Like perspective, light and dark gives volume
II. Renaissance Hybridity:

Christian Humanism

Was the “Renaissance” an age of “secularization”?
Steinberg: we find in the Renaissance not only all kinds of religious subjects; but we also find their bodies emphasized, and especially their sexuality.

Leo Steinberg: *Sexuality of Christ in the Renaissance and Modern Oblivion* (1983)
“Father, if it is possible, let this cup [of suffering] pass away…”
CHIAROSCURO =

Allows for human 
drama; for the depiction 
of suffering, even of the 
Divinity; for the tragic 
moments of human 
history

God who enters human history: a 
way of answering the problem of the 
crisis of mediation --- the distance of 
an aloof “eternalist” God
POINT: To take on human form is to take on suffering.

Adoration of the Magi
Against “docetism”:

dokeo = “to seem”

Since the Divinity cannot suffer [=passio],
Christ only “seemed” to be suffering / dying.
The hybridization of “Christian Humanism” – *commemoration* --- another way of dealing with problem of God’s seeming arbitrariness.