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## After Effects: Performing the Ends of Memory:

### An Introduction to Volume II

In a recent article in the *Weekend Australian*, historian Jeffrey Grey worries about the slippage into ‘carnival’ that the nation’s Anzac Day memorial services now seem to strike (Grey in Matchett, 2009: 24). No longer solemn affairs that enable remembrance through studied silence, the annual assemblages of youthful pilgrims on Anzac Cove in Gallipoli each April 25 instead engage a heady phantasmagoria of signifiers exceeding even what Frederic Jameson might interpret as the ‘nostalgia mode’, in which ‘we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about the past’ (1983: 10). The 2005 camp-out, for example, earned its place in the canon of national memory “misfires” for its peculiar assemblage of a random set of loose memorial signifiers: a screened rock concert that featured the Bee Gees (whose cult classics *Stayin’ Alive* and *You Should be Dancin’* were aired to keep weary pilgrims awake), and a notable addition to the otherwise stark mise-en-scène – ‘drink bottles, rotten fruit and biscuit packets’ were left to flap in the breeze long after the ceremony had finished (Jackson and Conway, 2005). [1] In the same year, Danna Vale as the then Minister for Veteran’s Affairs proposed that a replica Gallipoli battlefield be constructed in Victoria’s Mornington Peninsula. For Vale, the landscape bore an ‘uncanny’ resemblance to Gallipoli and could thereby serve those ‘unable to make the long journey to Turkey’ by being just ninety minutes’ drive from Melbourne (Vale in Seccombe, 2005).

As this second volume of *Performance Paradigm’s* ‘After Effects: Performing the Ends of Memory’ makes clear, memory practice itself is challenging how we think, write about and become complicit in its operations. For Grey, such carnival fair ‘risk[s] [us] . . . los[ing] a sense of loss’ – ‘[t]he story of Australians at war is not a rugby tour with bullets’ (Grey in Matchett, 2009: 24). While Grey is concerned with the ways that memory practices preserve an adequate sense of the histories to which they respond, his point is offered less in the vein of implementing a conservative historiographic model, and more with awareness of the increasing incommensurability that exists between the traumatic event and its reinscription. In a cultural landscape in which an act of mourning includes watching a screening of *Stayin’ Alive*, or in which an act of “unity” comprises the collective munching of Anzac biscuits (a different kind of two-minute silence perhaps?), the ends of memory

appear as deeply vexed, deeply mediatised, cultural operatives. They perform tensions between popularism and preservation, and between acts of promotion, acts of false nationalism, and acts of truly participatory “understanding”. If the ends of memory enact misfire, they also stage the context in which this misfire is produced – the recycled, glocalised (Bauman, 2001: 298) nature of the cultural scripts that we as social subjects both generate and inherit. As memory’s “living” after effects, we are each caught in the aesthetics, poetics and politics of loss in profoundly complex ways.

As the articles in this issue attest, performance studies has much to contribute to the thinking on memory’s contemporary operations. Peggy Phelan’s account of performance as an inherently vanishing site establishes how performance has the capacity to make witnesses out of watchers, thereby enabling loss to be re-perceived by its ontological doubling inside the performance frame. What Phelan terms the practice of ‘an apprenticeship in dying’ in her article on photographer Francesca Woodman, is accomplished through the subject’s interplay with her own image – which then ‘looks [out] for an answering gaze’ from the viewer (2002: 1002, 998). [2] While Phelan’s work on specularities has led to an exploding sub-genre of studies on the ethics of witnessing and post-traumatic representation, Joseph Roach and Diana Taylor have differently construed performance’s staging of the ephemeral in terms of a collective identity mechanics that operates via the inherited corporealities of the west. Roach’s *Cities of the Dead* positions ‘behaviour’ at the heart of this discussion, to observe the co-presence of memories that transgress ‘borders of race, nation and origin’ in the formation of the ‘interculture’ of the early eighteenth century’s Atlantic rim (1996: xi). Taylor extends Roach’s model to read such interculturalities in terms of the activities of ‘archive’ and ‘repertoire’, that have their origins in the New World, but that still now stage points of contestation between practices of knowing and operations of power (Taylor, 2003). While Phelan’s account focalises performance’s restaging of the absent referent, Roach and Taylor draw out the shifting, mingling points of contact that co-produce both appearance and disappearance as vital sites of cultural knowing, doing and being. Put together, the kinds of perception and re-perception underscored by Phelan become frameworks for understanding how so much looking can be thought of as another kind of embodied doing in itself.

As vectors of instability, these points of tension between body and text, and individual and social, enable for a certain poesis to be discerned in the mutability of memories themselves, and in the ephemeral materiality of the body. They also spell out a complex Bakhtinian and Foucauldian interplay: the body is staged as both the site of deeply transgressive potential and is also the regulated mechanism by which State entities maintain power. If memory itself is ‘the behavioural vortex where cultural transmission may be detoured, deflected, or displaced’ (Roach, 1996: 29), then this journal issue is surely another such vortex that re-routes important pathways in the memory studies / performance studies nexus. Roach, in fact, pre-empted two threads that become paramount to this collection: notions of the prosthetic and the global – concepts that themselves rely on the idea of the hybrid as endemic to how we now think ourselves. Having been written on the underside of the millennial cusp, both Roach and Phelan’s models are now asked to take on the complexity of a memory practice that is evermore operating in terms of global cultural

capital, caught in the kind of blank repetitions that stage both loss and the ‘*loss of . . . loss*’ (Grey in Matchett, 2009: 24, emphasis added). The contributions in this issue mark a disciplinary shift that is hence responsive to shifts in the cultural field of traumatic memory itself. In this, they indicate new discursive and corporeal literacies – the repertoire by which we come to practice memory in the twenty-first century; the languages, both theoretical and theatrical, by which we might talk about it. They stage a kind of prosthetic awareness towards the tacit enmeshment of archive and repertoire that now filters (us) through our cultural systems.

In Chris Hudson’s examination of normative national memories, we understand the complex flows of meaning, and pre- and post- scripted behaviours, that comprise the ritualised staging of Australian identity through the (re)territorialised spaces of Western Thailand’s Kanchanaburi district. Hudson’s essay draws into focus relationships between space, place, narrative and body as she literally walks us through the tourist journey that re-performs the trauma of Australian prisoners of war at Hellfire Pass. What becomes apparent are the mechanics by which memory operatives mobilise each other: place becomes practiced as a pre-scripted ‘geography of emotion’ (3); affect becomes movable and cumulates in effect as tourist bodies trudge along the landscape. This journey encompasses an ambivalent sense of both unity and commodity, where what the tourist comes to feel is a highly engineered, but nonetheless “real” affective enterprise in a site of national nostalgia and deep grief. In her article, Laurie Beth Clark contextualises this tourist experience by offering a taxonomy of trauma tourism ventures that collectively enact the terms of ‘never again[ness]’ through a range of performative memory modalities (10). In traversing the memorials of the Americas, West and South Africa, South East Asia and Japan, Clark’s essay works to catalogue the repetitions of the ‘commemorative impulse’ as an event of global capital in itself (4). Again caught between staging and commodifying the traumas that have borne relations between first and third world, local and global, past and present (and that have in many ways been inscribed into the trauma canon via a hierarchy of their respective unspeakabilities), we come to ask what the “best” mechanisms are by which to understand trauma tourism’s own mechanics of loss – particularly when given the evocative image of the Vietnamese ‘ritual mourner[r]’ whose job it is to ‘cr[y] every day’ (7).

Maria Tumarkin considers the performative after effects of the ‘long Soviet silence’ (7) in the Gulag, and how the embodied silences of an often overlooked geosocial context echo discursive silences within the canon of trauma studies itself. Tumarkin frames her essay as a provocation for thinking through the connections between acts of silence and trauma theory that mis-recognise the logic of the Gulag, which simply ‘does not look like anything we [have] know[n]’ (5). In doing so, she considers diverse methodologies of the performance apparatus – from Beckettian to Cagean silence – to finally stage silence as an active repertoire that both *voices* and *listens* to dissent.

Karen Jürs-Munby shifts considerations of the culturally performative to considerations of theatricality, in an interrogation of postdramatic form as a site that manages and manipulates the vicissitudes of traumatic memory. In her discussion of UK-based group Forced Entertainment, and Neil Mackenzie and Moll Wetherell, and US-based Goat Island

Theatre, the postdramatic is mapped along a continuum of formal codes that enable or conversely disable the creation of an “adequate” memory apparatus in its spectator communities. For Australian theatre artists Alicia Talbot and Roslyn Oades (Urban Theatre Projects) and Tim Carroll (Bankstown Youth Development Service), some of these ideas are taken up in an interview in which they discuss their practice of the postdramatic through an account of their differently resistive, and possibly post-traumatic, works on stories of ‘contemporary life’. For Talbot, an ethics of non-disclosure frames her directorial resistance to the continuation of the pathologisation of trauma victims. Rather than asking for the narration of life stories, Talbot instead offers a space for critical dialogue in which ‘life experts’ become the dramaturges and managers of the theatrical semiotic. Oades and Carroll’s verbatim theatre practice alternately works with an explicit ethics of disclosure to position interviews with community groups as both radically “authentic” and radically “unstable” rhetorical and textual exercises. These texts strike a postdramatic rupture between the discursive and the embodied, to again dissect how acts of spectatorship conflict with, or enforce, acts of listening.

In my article, I consider the machinations by which memory and trauma become performative consumables across three sites of contemporary mourning. By offering a theory of ambivalent bereavement, I think through the role of the body in the enactments, stagings and repetitions of traumatic memory in the twenty-first century West. In doing so, I outline some of the cultural politics by which traumatic memory is assembled and how it refigures the ways in which the body is itself staged as one central site of memory culture’s latest reenactments. I ask not only whose memory is privileged in the gains for visibility that surround so many contestations of public memory, but also, whose body is privileged as the site through which memory is played out. Amidst a memory culture that offers such a complex vista for the functioning and manifestation of bereavement, I investigate how our bodies become caught in the politics and aesthetics of loss in complex ways.

The articles herein suggest that if a misfiring memory is ‘a perfectly legitimate and agreed procedure which . . . has been invoked in the wrong circumstances’ (Austin 2000: 244), or is rather a break from ‘accepted’ or ‘exist[ing]’ convention (242), then there is something important to be beheld in the gap that differentiates conventions of authenticity from “fakery”, and indeed, there is something *productive* to be made of the sense that contemporary practices of mourning, ‘invoked in the wrong circumstances’, mark both *loss* and the ‘*loss of . . . loss*’. At the very least, these articles together stage an end of memory in itself: marking a new call to considering the complexity of its registers and praxis. In this vein, the Anzac Day ceremony spells out one form of memory that importantly mis- and re- construes some of the longer held notions that comprise the performance studies / memory studies nexus. It becomes a reflection on the traditional activities run for Anzac Day, as well as a new insertion into the repertoire of activities that are connected to this event. The doublings and triplings of memory here speak to the crisis in recollection that has been in slow build since the 1980s (Huysen, 1995): a crisis that in many ways began as a socio-political revolution for minority groups across a whole spectrum of causes from the 1960s onwards (Hacking, 1998), only to be met with the mediated repetitions of hypermodernity. When placed in the context of contemporary memory practice, the stakes

are now raised for how we understand the application of the key terminologies of performance studies to such an event.

Notions of embodiment, reenactment and reconstruction, aftermath and site-specificity – for which memory and cultural studies disciplines are deeply indebted to performance studies – now beckon radical re-thinking. As Sara Ahmed has anticipated, the performative ‘I apologise’, for example, becomes darkly ambiguous when placed in the context of Australia’s 2008 National Apology – a memory event that arrived on the tail end of a decade-long era of culture wars, which were themselves staged in an effort to reclaim national memory over its endemic forgetting (Ahmed, 2004; Healy, 2008). How, then, is apology both performed and performative, particularly when it also arises as a repetition of the many other global stages of reconciliation in recent years? Ruptures within the Australian memorial psyche, as legacies of colonialism, have been bubbling within media and policy discourses particularly over the last ten or so years. While this journal issue is not focused on Australia’s own recent memory politics, there is indeed something endemic to the slippery vicissitudes of Australian national memory that speak to a broader cosmopolitics of memory and forgetting; one necessarily created by the global flows of meaning that make memory into the tourist commodity that it has in many ways become. These contexts make us ask whether a national ethics of *either* remembering or forgetting is even possible when memory and its operations have been so thoroughly appropriated. And yet, the articles held herein seem to attest to a slowly building (but extremely important) taxonomy of postmemorial, postdramatic performativities: a taxonomy that is complex enough to take into account slippages in the mnemonic register of memory itself.

### Endnotes

[1] Up to 20,000 people attended this event and it was notably the 90th anniversary Anzac Day ceremony.

[2] Phelan’s account is interested in the (mis)readings of Woodman’s work that occur because of the author’s subsequent suicide. Phelan’s arguments are largely covered in the first issue of this volume: *Performance Paradigm* 5.1 (May 2009) ‘After Effects: Performing the Ends of Memory I’.

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### Editorial Note

*Performance Paradigm* issues 1 to 9 were reformatted and repaginated as part of the journal's upgrade in 2018. Earlier versions are viewable via Wayback Machine:  
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