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Introduction to After Effects:

Performing the Ends of Memory

The German city of Cologne woke up yesterday without a memory. (Boyes, 2009)

In March of this year we were both struck by an image in the *Times Online* of a collapsed archives building in Cologne, which, before becoming a ‘pile of smouldering brickwork’, had held the manuscripts of Karl Marx, the letters of Friedrich Hegel, edicts issued by Napoleon and King Louis XIV, and an early document dating back to 922 (Boyes, 2009). The event was suggestive enough, yet the newspaper account was arguably even more so. The headline ran ‘The city without a memory’ and the article noted that ‘There was even less warning of the collapse of the building than would have been given during a nuclear attack’. Even the typos were evocative, with an image caption rather endearingly referring to the ‘six-story’ building. Inevitably the loss was read through the prism of other, prior losses – some of the documents ‘had been recovered from library buildings smashed by Allied bombing during the Second World War’, the damage was compared to that caused by a fire in the Anna Amalia library in Weimar 2004, and a reader (Jessica of Indianapolis) commented ‘It’s the library in Alexandria all over again.’ Intriguingly, it was also read in terms of future losses: John of Vancouver chastised the archive for not having digitised the documents, while Daniel of London opined ‘This story will trouble my sleep. My epiphany, my moment of clarity may have been prompted by a piece of literature now lost. I shall never know.’

Of course, these statements are both overblown and incomplete. What we would add to them is that while Cologne may have woken up without an archive, it has not woken up without a memory. (Taylor, 2003). Yet this event, its reporting, and the response to it seem to literalise a cultural moment in which memory collapses under its own weight, in which citizens (both local and global) are traumatised both by the event (what has happened), and the non-event (what was never to happen – they will never read that book that they were unlikely to read anyway). In fact, it seems to speak to the parallel conversations taking place across trauma

studies, memory studies, and performance studies, for how it positioned notions of the “unspeakable” familiar to trauma discourse, alongside notions of the “restorative” or “repeatable” familiar to memory discourse. Hence to write about performing the ends of memory is to write at the intersection of two prefixes: the ‘re’ and the ‘un’, where one can simultaneously mourn the loss of Marx and Hegel’s original documents and nonetheless celebrate their endless repetition(s) in contemporary research in the Humanities. As a post-discipline, performance studies attempts to find pathways through these oppositional pulls, where performance itself is at once recollective and generative, an unrepeatable event that is nonetheless constituted through acts of repetition.

Performance Paradigm has already charted the ‘live ends’ of the information age (2005), the ends of the sixties (2006), and the question of the end of ethics (2007). More recently, it has even canvassed the end of ends, leaving behind ‘the heavy dystopian tones of the late 1990s and early C21 discourses’ to map new emergences in a mood of critical optimism (Eckersall et al 2008). Thus, this 2009 double issue sits between acts of optimism and retrospection. Rather than “applying” a memory and trauma studies approach to performance, this journal issue asks what performance and performance studies might bring to memory and trauma studies. In the words of our call for papers: What can performance studies bring to our understandings of trauma? What can trauma and memory studies bring to the dramaturgies and exigencies of performance? How do particular performances illuminate or complicate the ethics of representing trauma? How can social and political concerns connect with the personal and pathological dimensions of memory and trauma studies?

We had anticipated responding to these questions within a single issue however, as the project progressed, it became clear that one issue would become two. Both a splitting and a doubling, this division references the divisions between trauma and memory studies, as well as theatre and performance studies. It also manifests itself at the expense of brevity: we offer a joint introduction to our issue introductions and two issues on the topic instead of the originally conceived one. Yet, this split is more a matter of emphasis than of irreconcilable differences. The authors of the first issue (Geraldine Harris, Christine Stoddard, Petra Kuppers, Jen Webb and Caroline Wake) emphasise trauma studies, spectatorship and witnessing, while the authors of the second issue (Chris Hudson, Laurie Beth Clark, Maria Tumarkin, Karen Jürs-Munby and Bryoni Trezise) tend to focus on the vicissitudes of traumatic memory, the stagings of cultural and theatrical mnemonics, and the operations of embodiment. The importance of these twin issues, however, is the linkages that occur across the two collections, to offer different thematic and theoretical frameworks. Webb’s overview of writing practices sits alongside Clark’s overview of trauma tourism practices; Tumarkin’s account of hearing Aleksander Galich’s poetry on tape reflects notions of mediatization important to Harris’s account of witnessing Whoopi Goldberg on DVD; Hudson’s embodied experience of the traumascapes compares to Kuppers’ embodied readings of the artworks of Kara Walker and Berni Searle. The crossovers and points of connection are importantly multiple.

This issue *After Effects: Performing the Ends of Memory* is itself an after effect of a conversation sustained between us both over the past few years and intensified over the past few months. The impetus for early thinking on these topics was realised in the form of a symposium hosted by the School of English, Media and Performing Arts in the University of NSW, titled 'After Effects: Trauma, Memory, Performativity', which proved to be a rich ground for the discussions that have since followed. Of course, Peggy Phelan has already noted the connection between witnessing, collaboration, and performance, writing that 'Witnessing in the theatre might be likened to that strange collaborative process . . . whereby one sends words, letters, e-mails, introductions, back and forth hoping to discover what one just wrote, what one just read' (1999: 14). It is in this collaborative spirit that we offer *After Effects: Performing the Ends of Memory*.

Works Cited

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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:

http://web.archive.org/web/*/performanceparadigm.net

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