

PERFORMING CULTURAL TRAUMA IN THEATRE AND FILM

Guest-editors:

Frederik Le Roy, Christel Stalpaert, Sofie Verdoodt

Introduction

Performing Cultural Trauma in Theatre and Film Between Representation and Experience

Alain Resnais's 1955 film *Nuit et Brouillard* (Night and Fog) is undoubtedly one of the most overpowering artistic landmarks dealing with the representation and memory of the Holocaust. Many commentators pointed at the startling effect of the film, already when it was screened at Cannes in 1956, despite the diplomatic protests of the German government, and later, when it was broadcast on French television in the 1970s. According to historian Michael S. Roth, *Night and Fog* remains "one of the most startling, powerful films made about the Nazi period" (202). Particularly unsettling is a sequence of documentary images made after the liberation of one of the Nazi death camps towards the end of the film. This sequence pairs the remains of murdered prisoners with images of objects that were made of these remains (soap, fertilizers, rugs). The voice-over text, which was written by novelist and former deportee Jean Cayrol, identifies these 'products' of the Nazi factories of death, revealing the shocking truth about the seemingly impossible pairings (human hair / rugs). After that, a tracking shot shows a table, displaying some of these 'useful' objects, like commodities devoid of their origins. The objects on display are pieces of human parchment, pages of paper made from 'recuperated' human skin, with children's drawings and a portrait of a woman on them. This overpowering film sequence is axiomatic for the unbearable horror of the Holocaust – not only the horror of the Nazi genocide but also of the way in which this killing was instrumentalized. In this introduction, it serves as a *Denkbild* to outline some topics in this thematic issue on *Performing Cultural Trauma in Theatre and Film* (see fig. 1).

Performing Cultural Trauma

In a first reading of this shot, the parchment confronts the spectator with the gruesome reality of the dehumanizing effects of the death camps. It is an image of the unspeakable, ineffable terror, of the unimaginable. In fact, in the middle of the sequence the voice-over says "on ne peut plus rien dire", "there's nothing left



Fig. 1: Film still from Alain Resnais: *Nuit et Brouillard*

to say”, and when the drawings are eventually shown, the narrator actually suspends his enumeration mid-sentence. The silence indicates the chasm that separates the (physical) traces from the lived experience. It reminds us of “the limits faced by knowledge and representation” (Greene 33). The silence points at a moment of traumatic shock; we are confronted with an impression we cannot translate into words. What happens here is what Joshua Hirsch in his book *Afterimage* calls “a crisis of representation”; when “an extreme event is perceived as radically out of joint with one’s mental representation of the world” (15). Cayrol’s text in fact expresses “both the needs and the impossibility of experiencing an experience that cannot be understood or imagined by those who were not there” (Greene 34). As the camera tracks through the dormitories of the now-empty concentration camp, the voice-over says:

No description, no picture can restore their true dimension [of the reality of the concentration camps]: endless, uninterrupted fear ... Of this brick dormitory, of these threatened sleepers, we can only show you the shell, the shadow.

Cultural trauma triggers a ‘crisis of representation’ in the sense that it disturbs the shared imaginations and representations upon which collective identities are based, while at the same time the trauma itself is undeniably an important part

(and sometimes the most important part) of that identity. Trauma studies have focused on these moments of crisis, knowing that ‘the shell’, ‘the shadow’ was the only thing to cling to in working through the trauma. In this context the title of this thematic issue – *Performing Cultural Trauma* – no doubt seems doubtful, even problematic; how are we to perform an event that is defined by the fact that it cannot be fully narrated, by “the impact of its very incomprehensibility” that haunts the present (Caruth 6). It is this tension that these collected essays want to tackle; how to perform that which is unspeakable but insists to be spoken about?

To focus on this paradox allows us to reassess the paradigm of the (im)possibility of representing cultural trauma. To an important extent this paradigm has been framed by Holocaust literature and Holocaust studies. Writer, Noble laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel called the Holocaust “the ultimate event, the ultimate mystery, never to be comprehended or transmitted” (qtd. in Hirsch 5).¹ Representations of the Holocaust might deny this ‘ultimate mystery’. Claude Lanzmann, for that matter, said of the Holocaust that any attempt to understand it is “obscene” (“The Obscene” 207); trying to depict it, like Steven Spielberg did in *Schindler’s List*, is transgressing a limit that should not be transgressed because “un certain absolu d’horreur est intransmissible” (“Holocauste”). Jill Bennett similarly pointed at the levelling power of representation as far as cultural trauma is concerned. Narrative memory or representational memory are “connected with the thinking process and with words – the realm in which events are rendered intelligible, pegged to a common or established frame”, she says (28).

However, the conviction that the Shoah essentially is (and should be) unrepresentable has drawn more and more criticism.² The debate about the Holocaust is no longer centred around the question whether this event can or should be represented but deals with *how* it *might* be represented – in what genre (Hirsch or Huyssen) or by which aesthetical means (the “aesthetics of sense-memory”, Bennett). Moreover, philosophers like Jacques Rancière address and critically assess the underlying mechanics of the ‘unrepresentability’-argument itself and their repercussions for both political and aesthetical discourses today (109–139). Like Rancière, Alain Badiou points out that one of the most problematic outcomes of the discourse of unrepresentability is that it bars any attempt to understand the thoughts and motives of the perpetrators of the major historical cataclysms of the twentieth century. The claim that the Holocaust goes beyond human understanding might entail a denial of the rational decision making process at the basis of this event. The most disturbing fact of the Holocaust is not only that it happened, but also that it was extremely well organized, rational and deadly efficient. What makes Resnais’s *Night and Fog* so “overpowering”, says

¹ For the context of this quote, see Wiesel.

² See for example Huyssen 122–137: “Of Mice and Mimesis. Reading Spiegelman with Adorno.”

Gilles Deleuze, is that he “succeeds in showing, by means of things and victims, not only the functioning of the camp but also the mental functions, which are cold, diabolical, almost impossible to understand, which preside over its organization” (121). Deleuze even claims that Resnais attains a cinema “which has only one single character, Thought” (122). In fact, the narrator warns the spectator; “this is not a film of reminiscence nor of hatred but of disquietude.”

This challenge of thinking through the diabolical thoughts of the perpetrators in order to never let it happen again, will be dealt with in the contribution of Maaïke Bleeker. In “Playing Soldiers at the Edge of Imagination: Hotel Modern and the Representation of the Unrepresentable”, Bleeker raises important questions concerning what is at the heart of claims that some events cannot be adequately represented, or should not be represented at all. With their performances *The Great War* (life in the trenches during the First World War), and *Kamp* (Auschwitz), as well as their short video *History of the World Part 11*, the Dutch theatre company Hotel Modern uses theatre as what Bleeker has named a “critical vision machine.” They do so in order to undermine seemingly self-evident modes of looking, confronting the audience with how we are implicated in what we think we see, hence suggesting that resistance to representation might in fact be a manifestation of what Alain Badiou has labelled the ‘passion for the real’.

Reflection on hidden strategies is also present in Steven Jacobs’s article on *Memory of the Camps*, an exceptional documentary about the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps. Jacobs shows how a filmmaker’s personal visual style is challenged by his historical sensibility and vice versa. Alfred Hitchcock, who engaged in this production, emphasized the importance of factual recording, especially since he was concerned about the future reception of the film, while at the same time remaining faithful to his characteristic aesthetics. Apart from his personal selection of footage, Hitchcock made use of (modernist) long take aesthetics in order to guarantee historical certainty regarding the representation of cultural trauma.

While the Holocaust has been crucial and even paradigmatic in the development of the conceptual framework of research into (cultural) trauma, we will not limit cultural trauma to this singular event. Besides the Holocaust (in the texts of Maaïke Bleeker, Steven Jacobs, Maureen Turim and Joshua Hirsch), works dealing with other cultural traumas will be dealt with: 9/11 (Anneke Smelik) and the Iraq War (Kati Röttger), the First (Maaïke Bleeker) and Second World War (Gerald Siegmund), colonialism and genocide in Namibia (Kristina Hagström-Ståhl) and African-American slavery (Joshua Hirsch), RAF-terrorism (Gerald Siegmund, Kati Röttger) and the occupation of Palestine (Freddie Rokem).

This thematic issue is therefore not so much about the limits of representation, but about certain modes of representation, which are disrupted or made

problematic in light of cultural trauma. It is in this disruption that the strategies of a medium are foregrounded. The mechanisms of the visual machinery are decoded and the means and instruments of representation that would normally remain hidden behind the message they are transmitting become visible. If there is nothing left to say, there's so much more to reveal, to trigger, to evoke.

The use of the title *Performing Cultural Trauma* needs some further etymological clarification, as 'performance' and 'performing' are terms that are notoriously difficult to pin down.³ Originating from the Old French *parformir* – meaning 'to bring forth', 'to carry forward', 'to bring into being' – the word 'performance' calls forth a complex set of tensions between absence and presence, between showing and telling, between the performativity of the medium and the agency of the spectator, between representation and experience. Rather than limiting the scope to the connection between the experienced cultural trauma and its representation, this issue looks at what the specific means and modes of aesthetical representations of cultural trauma in theatre and film *bring into being*, what they *perform* and *bring about*, or, to be very brief, what they *do*. The texts in this issue all share an approach vis-à-vis the representation of cultural trauma in film, theatre and other media like installations and mobile phones: they focus on the effects on an audience incited by the artistic rendering of cultural traumas.

History Written on the Skin of the Present

In a second reading of the startling sequence of Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog*, the human parchment evokes an uncanny, metonymical association with the tattoo. The drawn-upon skin, then, becomes a poignant figure of the way in which the past is, so to speak, tattooed on the present, like an everlasting stain that can only be covered, not washed away. Cultural traumas unsettle the linear and chronologically ordered time line to which we tend to pin historical events. These traumatic wounds of history leave a lasting scar. A complex relation between past and present is revealed here; it is this disturbing presence of the past in the present, this contemporariness of an event from the past, the need to show and create gaps between the drawing and the skin that have been the subject in the performing arts and film. Deleuze writes that in Resnais's film the strata or sheets of the past coexist and confront each other, while the centre or fixed point disappears. "Death does not fix an actual present, so numerous are the dead who haunt the sheets of past. [...] the present begins to float, [...] absorbed by the past" (Deleuze 116; see fig. 2–4).

³ For the complex theoretical genealogy of the "p-word" see Jackson. For a discussion of the etymological roots of 'performance' see, among many others, the introduction to Carlson.

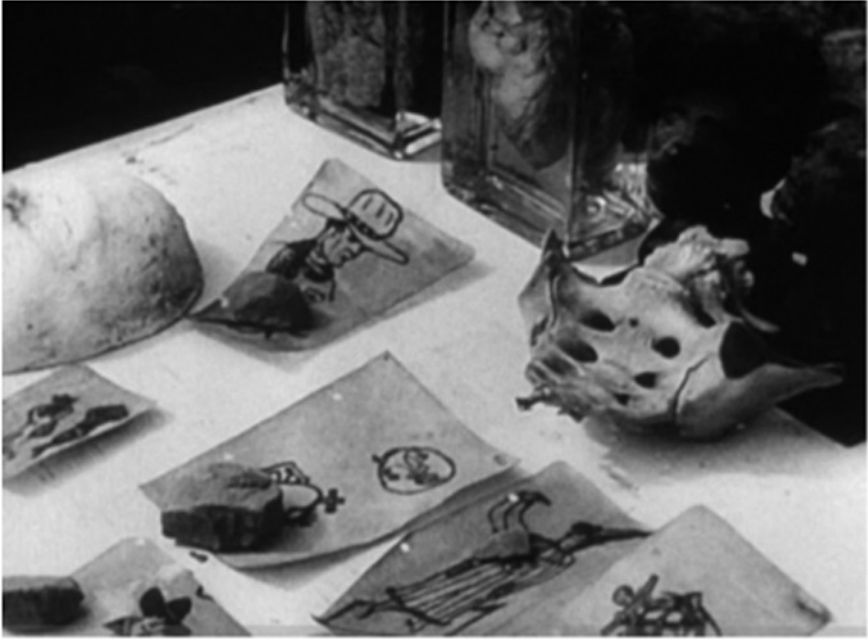


Fig. 2: Film still from Alain Resnais: *Nuit et Brouillard*



Fig. 3: Film still from Alain Resnais: *Nuit et Brouillard*



Fig. 4: Film still from Alain Resnais: *Nuit et Brouillard*

The title of this thematic issue *Performing Cultural Trauma* was in part inspired by the notion of *performing history* developed by Freddy Rokem in *Performing History. Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*. Rokem shows here how historical breaks like the French Revolution or the Holocaust can be understood through works of art, more specifically through theatre, in addition to or even beyond the representation of that past in historiography. Indeed, theatre, thanks to its specific characteristic of liveness and theatricality, can perform history in a particular way. Actors bring the historical past and the theatrical present together, theatre becomes a particular site of moving beyond the linear and chronological paradigm of historiography. In this issue we want to broaden the question and make it more specific. Broader: we want to look not only at theatre but take an interdisciplinary approach by including the performing arts, film and other media into consideration, which, like theatricality, can achieve the double-headed feature of being both the source of a certain experience of the past and a *Denkbild* of how that experience is being produced. Narrower: we want to focus in this issue on the way in which cultural traumas are ‘experienced’ through theatre and film. We want to look at the creative echoes of the traumatic past, and at the mechanisms developed in films and theatre productions to convey these echoes. The key question underpinning this issue then is: how do performing arts, film and the ‘new’ media ‘perform’ the

traumatic events and historical catastrophes that mark culture but are deemed be difficult or impossible to be represented.

In his book, Rokem stresses that ‘performing history’ is characterized by “the time lag between the *now* of performance and the *then* of the historical events themselves” (6). A distinction can then be made between the preserved elements of the past (like historical documents or witness accounts) and the past as it is evoked, referred to, (re)created or staged. We want to stress that the texts written for this issue inevitably focus on the latter, rather than on the former, i. e. on the aesthetic strategies used to evoke, produce and reproduce cultural traumas in a work of art. Of course, performances as live events play an important role in trauma studies. The transmission of traumatic memory often relies on live, performance-like interactions, such as victims recounting their traumatic experience and sharing a space with the witness listening to their story. Performance theorist Diana Taylor, referring to the work of trauma theorists Felman and Laub, makes this connection between witness account and performance explicit: “bearing witness is a live process, a doing, an event that takes place in real time, in the presence of the listener who ‘comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event’” (Taylor 153). Furthermore, theatre can become the medium of this performative (and often therapeutic) exchange between traumatized subjects ‘enacting’ their traumatic experience on stage and a live audience (Stepakoff 17–31). This has been the theme of many films. Such ‘performances of trauma’, in which individual pathology and a one-on-one interaction in the act of witnessing are a key issue, or in which the therapeutic practice itself is shown or represented, will, however, not be the subject of this issue. Nor will we look into topics like the narrative or aesthetic qualities of accounts by victims or witnesses of (cultural) trauma. These ‘performances of trauma’ will only be dealt with to the extent that they are part of or are reflected upon in theatre performances or films dealing with cultural trauma (see, for example, the contributions of Maureen Turim, Ilka Saal or Joshua Hirsch). Consequently, the position of witnessing, which, in one way or another, plays a crucial role in almost every article in this issue, is understood here from the perspective of the spectator witnessing the ‘performance’ in theatre, film or other media, rather than from the eye witness model of the traumatized subject.

Situating Trauma

In focusing on performing *cultural* traumas, we move from the level of the individual to the level of the collective, from the personal psyche to the cultural community. This might seem unproblematic at first sight; however, some of the implications of this shift certainly are or have been perceived of as problematic. Trauma, as it is understood initially, cannot be dissociated from the suffering subject. A wound or injury, even if it is psychically experienced as something

alien to the body, cannot be detached from that body. The pain inflicted by the wound of trauma, is your own pain, and nobody else's. Even if your pain can be recognized and medically diagnosed and is thus also a malady that can be acknowledged by others, it remains singularly yours. Even though trauma can have the effect of a profound de-subjectivation and alienation (think of the temporal 'time lapses' of trauma), this alienation is not alien to the subject: the traumatized subject is defined by this very process of de-subjectivation. In this sense, trauma is intimate. It is this intimate connection between the trauma and the traumatized subject that, once it is used to denote the effects of tragedies or catastrophes experienced by a larger cultural entity, causes problems. If cultural trauma is like a wound that, even though singularly experienced, can be inflicted anyone, we risk blurring some crucial differences.

This is most evident if we look at the difference between *perpetrator* and *victim*. According to Michael Rothberg, the fact that perpetrator and victim can be equally subjected to cultural trauma, has been one of the major points of critique on Cathy Caruth's influential book *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative and History*. The confusion between 'perpetrator trauma' and 'victim trauma' is perceived as particularly troublesome in the context of Holocaust studies, in which the discourse not only tries to understand how personal lives were affected by the life in the camps but also attempted to characterize the historical condition of the Jewry after the Shoah. "There's a natural tendency to conflate the terms 'victim' and 'traumatized person'", Rothberg writes, "but this represents a conceptual error" ("Decolonizing Trauma Studies" 231). This conflation not only leads to the wrong assumption that the victim of atrocities is always traumatized while the subject committing these atrocities never can be, but often also results in the assumption that the traumatized victim acquires a certain moral superiority. For Rothberg, however, trauma is an ethically neutral and diagnostic notion that can occur both in victims and perpetrators (Rothberg, "Un Choc"). At several instances, this collection of essays counteracts this conflation of 'victim' and 'traumatized subject', of 'traumatized subject' and 'moral subject'.

This becomes most poignantly clear in some of the works addressed in this issue that challenge the viewer to look from the perpetrator's perspective, to imagine being in his or her position. Maaïke Bleeker, for example, shows how in Hotel Modern's performance *Kamp* the spectator is invited to think through the rational logic leading up to the cultural trauma of the Holocaust. This does not, however, lead to a total identification, for as an audience we get to see more than the perpetrator does. In overlooking the overlooker, the spectator notices what the perpetrator overlooks in the sense of denying or not seeing. This creates a performative constellation of understanding and insight. We do not see the catastrophe itself, except with an inner contemplative eye. We do not look directly at the suffering of the traumatic event, we are not a direct witness to a

particular catastrophe. We are engaged in a thought-image – a *Denkbild* that resembles that in Andrzej Munk's film *The Passenger*. In "On the Charge of Memory: Auschwitz, Trauma and Representation" Maureen Turim analyzes this film which "links the Jewish trauma to that of political resistance, yet tells this tale with consummate and poignant irony through the eyes of a Nazi, examining her bad faith testimony and subjective memory". The persecutor-protagonist chooses not to testify. She continues to be silent, to remain a mute witness, but this is revealed as an act of self-deception, since the audience gets to see more than the persecutor desires to see. The visual foci counter the narrative foci and foreground her self-deception in her choice not to testify.

These examples show that developing the perpetrator's perspective does not lead merely to a 'correction' of trauma theory's 'victim testimony model' (filling up, as it were, the 'blind spots' of this model by expanding it), but infuses the discussion with one of the key elements in the ontology of performance: the complex position of the viewer, the spectator of the traumatic event and its representation.

To Rothberg's assessment that trauma is ethically neutral, these texts add that the ethical stance towards trauma lies elsewhere, not in the 'traumatized victim' or the 'traumatic situation' per se, or, for that matter, in the representation or mediation of trauma, but in the way we look at trauma and its representations or mediations. The relationship between the individual victim's and collective trauma seems to be on account of a shared experience and a collective horror. This ethical stance could be a response to the concern expressed in this issue by Maureen Turim, namely that "the most horrendous and multifaceted traumas of history" are reduced "to intra-subjective trauma".

In "Mediating Memories: The Ethics of Post-9/11 Spectatorship", Anneke Smelik argues for an "ethics of spectatorship", to deal with trauma as it is mediated to us, on an almost daily basis, through the mass media. She explores the notion of 'mediated memory' in relation to films and other media about 9/11. Media technologies invariably shape our memories of past and present life. Rather than simply representing the past, even the recent past of an event like the attack on the Twin Towers, media like television, internet and cinema enable and produce particular memories with the use of specific techniques. Smelik argues that the representation of 9/11 is a case of 'real virtuality' that has turned the disaster into a media spectacle. The question then becomes how films after the traumatic event can avoid spectacularizing a disaster that is already settled in cultural memory. Focusing on the film *11 '09'01* (2002), consisting of eleven shorts by established directors from different cultural backgrounds, she addresses the vexed issue, what the ethical position of the spectator could be in a global media culture.

Freddie Rokem also tackles these ethical implications in "The Violin Player, the Soccer Game and the Wall-Graffiti: Rhetorical Strategies in the Border-

Regions between Israel and Palestine”. He argues for “an ethical position in the labour we do as spectators and researchers of film, theatre, performance and art” by “examining our positions as witnesses, not merely as passive onlookers or distant, detached observers, but as active and engaged witnesses”.

Another important limitation of trauma studies is, according to Rothberg, the fact that it stresses the ‘eventfulness’ of trauma. Trauma theory does not deal with the effects of continuous and quotidian violence inflicted on humans, where not one catastrophic event but many recurring events are the source of a whole atmosphere or situation that is traumatizing (“Un Choc”). Sexism, racism, political oppression and the daily fear of persecution and colonialism – these ‘uneventful’ forms of trauma are not taken into consideration, says Rothberg. These forms of trauma, often referred to as “insidious trauma,”⁴ are the subject of Freddie Rokem’s text (the oppression in Palestine by the rigorous control over the movements of the Palestinians), and also play an important role in the articles of Joshua Hirsch (the history of slavery) and Kristina Hagström-Ståhl (colonial violence).

A repeated question here is: “How to move from denial to accountability?” The ways in which the uncomfortable realities of uneventful forms of trauma are avoided and evaded, are diverse. Denial can be individual, personal, psychological and private – or shared, social, collective and organized. Acts of denial may range from contested media images of suffering to a denial of responsibility by the ‘passive bystander’ or the choice of the perpetrator to remain a mute witness. Thinking through the modes of thinking that lead to traumatic events is but one of the many modalities that generate acts of denial and deals with the ethical dimensions of responsibility and accountability. In “Mourning as Method: William Kentridge’s *Black Box/Chambre Noire*”, Kristina Hagström-Ståhl points out how the South African visual artist and stage director William Kentridge, having decided to do a piece on the German colonial presence in Southern Africa, travelled to Waterberg to find a military cemetery only containing the graves of German soldiers. The ‘invisibility’ of the Herero history in Namibian commemorative and historiographic accounts points at the mechanisms of denial. In his 2005 gallery work, *Black Box/Chambre Noire*, Kentridge attempts to trace what he calls a ‘hidden history’ of German colonialism, as well as the relationship between ‘uneventful’ forms of trauma and Enlightenment ideals.

⁴ The term ‘insidious trauma’ was first introduced by the feminist therapist Maria Root (1992).

Trauma, Mourning and Narrative

Narrative enables the traumatized subject to recount the experience that at first resisted all language. Narrative is thus a vital element in the difficult process of moving from the ‘denial’ and ‘acting-out’ to the ‘working-through’ of trauma. Working through trauma, however, “need not be understood to imply the integration or transformation of past trauma into a seamless narrative memory and total meaning or knowledge”, LaCapra writes (121). Even though narrative has the therapeutic value of warding off the compulsive repetition of a trauma, it does not lead to its total redemption or to the full restoration of the subject’s past as an autonomous, un-affected unity. Provoked by the policies of the United States after the ‘cultural trauma’ of 9/11, Judith Butler criticizes in her recent work this attempt to salvage a fully knowable and understandable subject through the working-through or narrativizing of trauma. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, for example, she argues that psychoanalysis has a tendency to regard “the narrative reconstruction of a life” as the normative goal of all therapy. “Narrative work” has an important role to play “in the reconstruction of a life that otherwise suffers from fragmentation and discontinuity”, but “the conditions of hypermastery [...] are no more salutary than conditions of radical fragmentation” (52). According to Butler, we need a narrative to connect what in the psyche was disconnected by the traumatic experience, but this does not imply that the “fundamental interruption” at the basis of subjectivity, the condition in which we as subjects are always already affected by the Other, should be disregarded (52). Still according to Butler, it is precisely this “failure to narrate fully” that indicates that we are “implicated in the lives of others” (64), and it is precisely in being affected by alterity that we can reach out in an ethical manner to the other.

For Butler, narrative then, is not intrinsically salutary, and Ilka Saal takes this as her point of departure when she examines how narratives frame the cultural trauma of 9/11 in American theatre, in particular in three recent plays by Ann Nelson (*The Guys*, 2001), Neil LeBute (*Mercy Seat*, 2002) and Karen Finley (*Make Love*, 2003). In “‘It’s about us!’ Violence and Narrative, Memory in Post 9/11 American Theatre”, Saal draws on Butler to argue that “paying attention to the narrative framing of 9/11 is [...] of the utmost importance not only with regard to the manner in which the event will be commemorated and inscribed into the nation’s memory but also with regard to how the nation will position itself in the world now and in the future, how it will engage the very Otherness that has temporarily threatened its existence.” In the wake of 9/11, however, the master-narrative in the United States offered a mostly narcissistic assessment of an event that touched American culture in its very hearth and ultimately led to the unilateral foreign policy of the Bush administration. The dominant post-9/11 narrative was a self-centred story about America’s own grief, its own pain, and its own right for retribution, instead of an ‘ethics of vulnerability’, which

could have considered, when under attack, the harm done to itself in relation to that done to the other, regarding the fundamental interrelation between people along the axis of a shared physical vulnerability. Saal discovers this story in the hero-narrative that was reproduced in Ann Nelson's play *The Guys*, but she also shows how other theatre work like Karen Finley's performance, is more akin to Butler's ethics of 'vulnerability'.

Saal argues that after 9/11 the mourning work of the injured nation quickly transformed into a celebration of the strong, united and retaliatory nation. A complex story of loss was reworked into the unilateral story of war and retribution. But can we think of another way of mourning, one that does not finally lead to the restoration of the 'I' and hence the dismissal of the 'other'? Following Butler, David Eng and David Kazanjian, Kristina Hagström-Ståhl reconsiders the work of mourning by re-evaluating the connection between two modes of dealing with loss that Freud distinguishes in his *Mourning and Melancholia*: the relation between the so-called 'healthy' work of mourning and the 'pathological' melancholia. The latter is similar to nostalgic 'narrative memory', against which LaCapra warned or the 'narcissistic narrative' that, according to Butler, leads to 'closure'. In mourning, loss is countered by the forgetting of loss, while the melancholic subject 'incorporates' its loss, staying attached to it. Mourning infused with melancholia doesn't erase but bears the traces of loss. Hagström-Ståhl sees the work of mourning as a process of dealing with loss without completely erasing its traces. In William Kentridge's *Black Box/Chambre Noire*, where the South-African artist returns to a seemingly forgotten history of colonial violence against the Herero population, his distinctive aesthetics indicates that loss is "an intrinsic aspect not only in the history of events or of the mourning 'self', but also of the work of art." She shows how Kentridge's work offers a strong call to the European nations to incorporate the violence of colonialism in their national histories.

The Ghosts of History

How to render visible? How to invite to responsibility and ethical accountability then? Certainly not by creating new morality plays, in the sense of didactic renderings of an historical traumatic event, giving clear-cut answers to complex questions, but with works of art entailing a certain ambivalence, foregrounding the mechanisms and politics of representation. In "Beyond Medusa: Recovering History on Stage", Kati Röttger explores the deconstructive power of the 'Jelinek-Moral-play'. She discusses *Babel* (2005), a play that closely follows the media reports about the Iraqi War and the tortures in Abu Ghraib. Jelinek calls *Babel*, in a slightly ironical way, an 'artwork of morality'. "Morals do not negotiate / Moral lässt nicht mit sich handeln", Jelinek writes. In deconstructing the

mythologizing effects of a ‘wartainment’, her strategy of remembering relies on inscribing what does not allow inscribing: the contingency of events of terror, war and torture that ruptures continuity and signification. *Babel* generates a complicating and confusing identification, heralding “blended figures, speaking voices that are compounded in a polyphonic and disparate way”. Mediating trauma might then entail wandering between representation and experience, creating a mixture of identification and reflexivity.

In “Unclaimed and Unclaimable: Memories of the RAF”, Gerald Siegmund similarly points out the particular construction of character in Nicolas Stemann’s *Ulrike Maria Stuart* (2006, Thalia Theatre), based on a text by Elfriede Jelinek. The performance deals with the memory and heritage of the German terrorist group RAF by means of “hybrid figures, where semantic spaces and references overlap, ghosts that create confusion and unrest in the minds of the spectator”. But Siegmund also points to the specific performance situation and Stemann’s multiplication and ghosting of the Ulrike Meinhof figure. Here, strategies of remembering rely on quotations that are de- and re-contextualized in the particular performance situation. The materiality of the performance situation itself provides an ambivalence, foregrounding the mechanisms and politics of trauma-representation. Ghosts create confusion and unrest in the minds of the spectator.

Siegmund’s essay reminds us again of Alain Resnais’s *Night and Fog*. Naomi Greene aptly remarked how the deserted, empty rooms and stone walls of the prison camp breathe “the cold of a universe under the moral way of the inorganic”; “an emptiness haunted by the ghosts of millions”. She refers to these spatial traces as mental spaces, breathing death-haunted anguish: “Stone, the very embodiment of a universe set under the sign of petrification, is everywhere. [...] [and] evoke the glacial aspects of cemeteries” (33). Deleuze describes these empty spatial traces in terms of a diagram, “a superimposing of maps which define a set of transformations from sheet to sheet, with redistributions of functions and fragmentations of objects: the superimposed ages of Auschwitz” (122). In Siegmund’s analysis of Klaus Michael Grüber’s production of *Winterreise im Olympiastadion* (1977) at the Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer, Berlin, the particular deconstructive power of the spatial traces are also manifest. The active participation of the performance place, Hitler’s Olympic Stadium, provides an ambivalent locus of remembering for the spectator. Interfering with the theatre’s liveness and presence, it blocks every attempt to look for clear-cut (national) identities, straightforward accusations and cathartic moments of collectively working-through the traumatic event.

Like Hitler’s Olympic Stadium in *Winterreise*, like Auschwitz in Alain Resnais’s *Night and Fog*, the castle in *Sankofa*, a film by Haile Gerima (1993), also functions as a site and trigger of posttraumatic memory in Joshua Hirsch’s “Afterimages: Post-Holocaust, Posttraumatic, and Postcolonial Cinemas.” Speaking as a child of a Jewish Holocaust survivor, Hirsch aims at a cross-cultural

dialogue about cinematic responses to historical trauma. Next to *Sankofa* (about African-American slavery), he deals with *History and Memory* (Rea Tajiri, about the Japanese American internment camps) to compare and contrast particular cinematic devices of presence and remembering cultural traumas. In Deleuze's words, in these films, the screen becomes "the cerebral membrane where immediate and direct confrontations take place between the past and the future, the inside and the outside [...] The image no longer has space and movement as its primary characteristics but topology and time" (125).

Finally, we would like to add a fourth reading of Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* sequence. The drawing at the end of the film can be interpreted as a *mise-en-abyme* of *Night and Fog*. The sudden silence of the off-screen voice is, then, not only the embodiment of the 'crisis of representation' but also a moment of self-reflectivity, suggesting a connection between the drawing and the project of the film itself. When we see the beautiful drawing of a young woman's face, the image literarily and metaphorically stares back at us and a whole array of questions arises about the relationship between the horrific historical reality and the art work 'drawn from' these events. These questions are not so much about the possible 'moral limits of representation', but about the function of aesthetics working with, and the specific artistic procedures working on, cultural trauma. Dealing with the stare of history without overlooking it or looking away, is the topic of this issue.

Frederik Le Roy
Christel Stalpaert
Sofie Verdoodt

Works Cited

- Badiou, Alain. *The Century*. Trans. A. Toscano. Cambridge & Malden: Polity Press, 2007.
- Bennett, Jill. "The Aesthetics of Sense Memory. Theorising Trauma Through the Visual Arts." *Regimes of Memory*. Ed. Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin, London: Routledge, 2003.
- Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of Oneself*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.
- Carlson, Marvin. *Performance. A critical introduction*. 2nd ed., London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *The Time-Image*. Transl. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub. *Testimony. Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, New York: Routledge, 1992.

- Greene, Naomi. *Landscapes of Loss. The National Past in Postwar French Cinema*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Hirsch, Joshua. *Afterimage. Film, Trauma and the Holocaust*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004.
- Huyssens, Andreas. *Present Pasts. Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford: University Press, 2003.
- Jackson, Shannon. *Professing Performance. Theater in the Academy from Philology to Performativity*, Cambridge: University Press, 2004.
- LaCapra, Dominick, "Trauma Studies: Its Critics and Vicissitudes." In: LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, Cornell, 2004, 106–143.
- Lanzmann, Claude, "The Obscenity of Understanding. An Evening with Claude Lanzmann." In: Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. 200–220.
- . "Holocauste, la représentation impossible." *Le Monde*, 3 March 1993.
- Rancière, Jacques. *The Future of the Image*. Trans. Gregory Elliot, London and New York: Verso, 2007.
- Root, Maria P.P. "Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality." Laura L. Brown and Mary Ballou (eds.), *Personality and Psychopathology. Feminist Reappraisals*, New York: Guilford, 1992, 229–266.
- Roth, Michael S. *The Ironist's Cage. Memory, Trauma and the Construction of History*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Rothberg, Michael. "Decolonizing Trauma Studies. A Response." *Studies in the Novel* 40.1–2, 2008, 224–234.
- . "'Un Choc en Retour'. Rethinking Trauma Theory with Aimé Césaire." Paper presented at the international conference *Literature and the Memory of Catastrophe*, Brussels 29–30 May, 2009.
- Stepakoff, Shanee. "Telling and showing. Witnesses Represent Sierra Leone's War Atrocities in Court and Onstage." *The Drama Review* 52.1, 2008, 17–31.
- Taylor, Diana. "You Are Here. The DNA of Performance." *The Drama Review* 46.1, 2002, 153.
- Wiesel, Elie. "Trivializing the Holocaust. Semi-Fact and Semi-Fiction." *New York Times*, 16 April 1978, sec. 2: 29.