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**Book Review: Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik (eds), *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2013. 229 pp., ISBN 978-0-415-81140-8**

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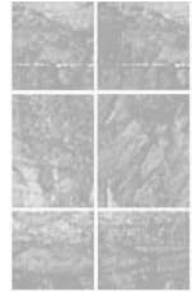
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## Book review



Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik (eds), *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2013. 229 pp., ISBN 978-0-415-81140-8

Edited by Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik, *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* is a book of 12 essays. Its focus is on exploring the traces of the past as they are actualised in the present through practices of commemoration and remembrance in art and popular culture (p. 4). Unlike prior studies, which excluded the specific agents, institutions and contexts of remembrance from analysis, *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* understands remembrance as a *performative act* which happens in current time and place and is shaped by social, generational and cultural contexts as well as being informed by medial and technological frameworks. In other words, the performative activities are treated as *reconstructed* behaviours rather than reproduced ones. Therefore, stories are never completely the same as those that have come before.

The book addresses four research questions: How are art objects and practices used to perform the past in the present? How do objects and practices open up possibilities for future memorization? How are art and popular culture used to 'do memory'? What kind of memory do they 'do'? In order to answer these questions, *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* investigates how memory, performance and affect vary with time while being performed in present and how art and popular culture produce a relevant experience for their spectators.

As to the structure of the book, Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik group it into four parts based on different memorial focuses: 'Staging Memory', 'Spectral Memory', 'Embodied Memories' and 'Mediating Memories'. More specifically, the essays in the first part of the book present the theatrical and dramatic ways of memorizing pains of the Second World War. The essays in the second part centre on the memories of catastrophes and hunger that are 'ghostlike', hovering between presence and absence, substance and insubstantiality. In the third part of the book, the focus shifts from a focus on spectral memories to the architecture and contemporary dance embodied memories. In the last section, the authors consider other art forms and medium mediated memories, such as paintings, performance and costume films.

The authors draw attention to a number of important themes in the study of performing memory. Among these are the following:

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*Space*: Chapters 2, 6 and 8 in *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* are about memory and space. Memory takes place in space and reconstructs space. That is to say, doing memory entails doing space. Memory informs the design of space and affects the way that space is practised and experienced. Through exploring Salomon and Akerman's lives and works, Lisa Saltzman, in Chapter 2, 'Life or Theatre, Diary or Drama: On the Performance of Memory in the Visual Arts', opens people's understanding of the sites and situations in which the performance of memory takes shape and takes place in the present. In the process of reconstructing memory, she helps readers experience the dead end of the Holocaust void in the Second World War. Marguërite Corporaal, in Chapter 6, 'Haunted by Hunger: Images of Spectrality in Literary Recollections of the Great Irish Famine, 1850–1900', discusses a story about the famine that struck the West of Ireland and argues that the spectre is an important transcultural mnemonic image carrying and performing the memory of the Famine. In Chapter 8, 'If These Walls Could Walk: Architecture as a Deformative Scenography of the Past', apart from exploring the connection between space and memory, Kris Pint explores the active feature of performing memory. He argues that historical buildings should be regarded as actors that engage with other human actors in performances of memory rather than as static and passive forms of memory.

*Time*: In Chapter 12, 'Textures of Time: A Becoming-Memory of History in Costume Film', Elise Wortel and Anneke Smelik examine how post-modern costume films allow the audience to experience the past in the present with the help of Gilles Deleuze's notion of 'becoming'. In this essay, the films open up the past for the spectator through creating an intensive and affective performance of history.

*Reconstruction*: Memorization is not a simple reproductive process of the past in the present because physiological, environmental and social developments have an impact on the remembrance process. The South African mine is investigated by Michael Rothberg in Chapter 3, 'Multidirectional Memory and the Implicated Subject: On Sebald and Kentridge'. In his essay, Michael Rothberg starts from the spatial figure of the mine, and then traces histories and memories such as apartheid, the Holocaust, slavery and colonialism and emphasizes the reconstructive feature of performing memory.

*Agency*: Chapters 5, 9, 10 and 11 focus on performing social reality through art forms. In chapter 10, 'Punctuating the Nation's Narratives: History Painting and Performativity', Louise Wolthers analyses contemporary painting that embodies collective and political features of the past and underscores the importance of painting for such identity performances. In Chapter 11, "'Forget Me Not": The Performance of Memory in *Xena: Warrior Princess*', Wim Tigges investigates the role of fantasy in re-engendering the cultural memory of myth and history by telling mythical stories through female characters and argues that *Xena: Warrior Princess* offers opportunities for 'correcting' memories of mythological as well as historical events. Meanwhile, in 'Bodies with(out)

Memories: Strategies of Re-enactment of Contemporary Dance', Chapter 9, Timmy De Laet inquires into the memory of the body by looking at the ways in which experimental contemporary dance explores and shows that choreographers rely on strategies of staging to memorize the body. However, while some essays in this volume concentrate on the traces, marks and scars of the Second World War, 'Memories of Catastrophes Yet to Come: New Brutalism and Thing Memory' in Chapter 5 by Ben Highmore shifts the investigation of the spectral and scarified qualities of the memories of traumatic events during the Second World War to the materiality of the art works of New Brutalism.

*Modern media:* In 'Phantom Pains: Dramatizing Flemish Collaboration with Nazism', chapter 4, Klaas Tindemans explains the gap between remembering a painful and tabooed memory of the Second World War and performing that experience on stage. He thinks reconstructing that memory which had escaped people with the passing of time requires a creative use of dramaturgical devices. Moreover, to demonstrate the hallucinatory power of media in obscuring the live and the mediated in events they transmitted, László Munteán moves the reader from European trauma to the United States of America catastrophe in Chapter 7, 'Naming the Unnamable: (De)constructing 9/11's "Falling Man"'. He inquires into the real and the virtual in the highly mediated attacks of September 11, 2001 through tracing the history and representations in the photograph of the 'Falling Man'.

To draw a conclusion, *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* sees performing memory as an active, dynamic and reconstructive process which is subject to technical and socio-cultural factors. More precisely, the essays in this volume focus on how cultural memory is reconstructed, enacted and transmitted through a wide range of art forms as practices, such as literature, media, painting and architecture. Unlike previous studies, this volume seeks to understand memory as an embodied and localised practice. Such a move is part of a broader paradigm shift in cultural memory studies, from a linguistic focus to a performative one. The difference is not only one of focus, shifting attention from the memory trace to its act, but it also implies an epistemological, even ontological shift, from memory as the trace of what once was to memory as the past's present moment (pp. 5–6). Therefore, *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* is a valuable academic book. Through highlighting the performative feature of memory, it offers a new perspective for future memory research.

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