

Trauma, Media, Art

Trauma, Media, Art:
New Perspectives

Edited by

Mick Broderick and Antonio Traverso

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

Trauma, Media, Art: New Perspectives,
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This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-2283-3, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2283-1

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The essays in this Cambridge Scholars Publishing anthology were developed from papers presented at the *Interrogating Trauma: Arts & Media Responses to Collective Suffering* international conference convened by the editors and held at Murdoch and Curtin universities (Perth, Australia) in December 2008. This collection would not have been possible without the assistance provided to the conference and we would like to thank our sponsors, who generously granted financial and in-kind support. From Murdoch University: the School of Media Communication and Culture; the Faculty of Creative Technology and Media; the National Academy of Screen and Sound (NASS); the Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre; and the Institute for Sustainable Societies Education and Politics. From Curtin University: the Centre for Advanced Studies in Australia, Asia and the Pacific (CASAAP); the Faculty of Humanities; the School of Media, Culture and Creative Arts; the Centre for Aboriginal Studies; and the Sustainability Policy Institute. Thanks are also due to our conference co-convenor Dr Miyume Tanji of Curtin University. The conference and the present collection would have been impossible without the stimulating contributions from the authors assembled here, and many others whose works have been collected in another two publications: Mick Broderick and Antonio Traverso, eds. (2010) *Interrogating Trauma: Collective Suffering in Global Arts and Media*, London: Routledge; and Mick Broderick and Antonio Traverso, eds. (2010) 'Arts and Media Responses to The Traumatic Effects of War on Japan', Special Issue, *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, No. 24, June. Finally, our thanks go to the Cambridge Scholars Publishing editors for soliciting, commissioning and producing the present volume.

—M.B. and A.T.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON INTERNATIONAL TRAUMA CULTURE: AN INTRODUCTION

MICK BRODERICK AND ANTONIO TRAVERSO

During the past one hundred years or so the depiction of traumatic historical events and experiences has been a recurrent theme in the work of artists and media professionals, including those in literature, theatre, visual art, architecture, cinema, and television, among other forms of cultural expression and social communication. The sustained attention given to disaster by writers, directors, artists, architects and journalists has at the same time attracted the interest of critics and academics and, as a result, a substantial mass of theories, ideas and debates on the topic has accumulated across diverse disciplines. However, the analysis and discussion have tended to focus on representation of European and US historical catastrophes and relatively scarce critical interest has been committed to media and artistic depictions of third-world disasters, in spite of the fact that the latter often flood global contemporary media and art.

The essays collected in this book follow a contemporary critical trend in the field of trauma studies that seeks to redress this Euro-American imbalance by reflecting on artistic and media representations of traumatic histories and experiences from countries around the world. Focusing on a diversity of art and media forms—including memorials, literature, visual and installation art, music, video, film, and journalism—they apply dominant theories of trauma, yet also explore the former's limitations while bearing in mind other possible methodologies. Therefore, the essays in *Trauma, Media, Art: New Perspectives* are purposely preoccupied with the ways in which *concepts* of trauma are used to analyse artistic and media depictions of traumatic events and experiences. One of the outcomes of this theoretical concern is the promise of a critical trauma studies, a field that reinvigorates itself in the 21st century through its

constant reassessment of the relationship between theory, representation, and ongoing histories of global violence and suffering.

Thus, the fifteen essays that follow have been arranged thematically in order to reflect not only the vast disciplinary groupings through which the research and debates regarding trauma's representation in the arts and the media is currently undertaken but also the diverse epistemological and methodological approaches informing the field today.

Memorials, Trauma and the Nation

Public memorials are sites of collective remembrance usually devoted to experiences of great human suffering, loss and sacrifice. Their use as mediums of public memory, whether spontaneous or institutionalised, is widespread. In fact, it is not hard nowadays to find in most towns and cities gardens, commemorative structures, and spaces memorialising traumatic events in the community's local history, such as battles, atrocities or natural disasters. Yet memorials are neither formally homogenous nor simple, passive receptacles of truthful records of history. Rather they come in all sizes and shapes: from monuments and ruins to evocative parks and landscapes in which the regenerative capacity of nature has concealed all visible signs of the past. The critical study of memorials continues to occupy the attention of scholars working across the boundaries of trauma studies, memory studies, history, and visual culture studies. Following work in the 1990s on memorials that commemorate experiences from the twentieth century's two world wars—principally, James Young (1993), Raphael Samuel (1994) and Jay Winter (1995)—new and diverse scholarship has emerged in the past decade, such as Chris Pearson's incisive discussion (2008) of the function of the natural landscape both in war and the memorialisation of war traumas, and the highly influential study by Maria Tumarkin of sites marked by violence and tragedy, which she calls "traumascapes" (2005).

As Winter argues in relation to war memorials, while these have often been discussed as expressions of architectural or visual art forms, as well as in terms of the politically charged debates concerning their historical meanings, they are also important in facilitating and encouraging "rituals, rhetoric, and ceremonies of bereavement" (1993: 79). Thus, the first two essays of this collection focus precisely on the dense, multilayered, and polyvalent nature of memorials. In the first essay, 'Collective Suffering and Cyber-memorialisation in Post-genocide Rwanda', Giorgia Doná

explores the aesthetic response to collective suffering in virtual reality, and its relation to performative politics in post-genocide Rwanda. Indeed, the use of interactive digital technologies such as the internet, as the loci for the construction of public memorials, is becoming an increasingly common occurrence. As Doná's essay attests, the virtual memorialisation of Rwanda's genocide is in this sense no longer an exception.¹ Officially more than a million Rwandans (the vast majority identified as Tutsi) were killed during one hundred days of sustained slaughter as the West and the rest of the world, forewarned of the approaching butchery, withdrew international peacekeepers and denied genocide was occurring. More than fifteen years on, Rwandan society grapples with rebuilding the nation and narrating its own history to both citizens and the outside world via traditional static memorials in situ and new sites accessible online.²

Doná's rich analysis provides a critique of trauma that "essentialises socio-political suffering in contexts of violence", where it is "appropriated to promote national agendas in transnational spaces". The virtual memorialisation online at the 'Kigali Genocide Memorial' site, according to Doná, clearly illustrates a dialogical tension between "corporeal and a-corporeal representations of collective trauma". This Rwandan site also exhibits both apolitical and political strategies for representing societal suffering as well as national and transnational agendas. For Doná, conventional memorialisation relies on the "physicality of buildings, corpses, and bones to express embodied traumas of the past". Yet these constructions serve to "deny the existence of contested and contestable spaces". Virtual memorialisation in Rwanda, she asserts, "denies the socio-political suffering of the nation as a whole". In this way "reductionist appropriations of trauma representations" serve to "de-politicise socio-political suffering and to silence alternative contested traumatic memories", especially when aligned with "western humanitarianist sentiments with the politics of nation-building" that avoid capturing "the suffering of the social fabric of society".

¹ Other important examples of virtual versions of genocide memorials include the website of Villa Grimaldi, an ex-torture house of General Pinochet's regime, now a peace park and memorial in Chile, www.villagrimaldi.cl; and the website of the Armenian Genocide Institute, which includes an Armenian Genocide Memorial virtual tour, www.genocide-museum.am/eng/index.php (also see Torchin 2007).

² For informed accounts of the historical, social and political antecedents of the Rwandan genocide, see Dallaire 2003 and Melvern 2004; on the role of media in the context of the genocide and after see Thompson 2007 and Broderick 2009.

Jennifer Harris' essay 'Memorials and Trauma: Pinjarra, 1834' suggests that memorials frequently reflect traumatic experiences by insisting on the historic, lived quality of the events while paradoxically attempting to reflect the events in a manner which "transcends politics". Memorials are, she suggests, "rich sites of semiotic contradiction". Harris examines aspects of the memorial experience at Pinjarra in Western Australia, the site of a contested "event" which occurred in October 1834 between British colonisers and the Indigenous Binjareb people. For the British it was the place at which south-western Aboriginal resistance to colonisation was overcome in what has been referred to most often as a "battle", a word which many still insist is the correct description. For the descendants of the 1834 Binjareb, and their supporters, it is a place known through oral history as a "massacre" site in which a number of people estimated between 15 and 80, mostly women, children and the old, died in an ambush by white settlers, an event that deeply marking yet not destroying their society has carried intergenerational trauma.

Like Doná, Harris recognises the "performative quality of memorials", implicit in their narratives, but often suppressed due to a contradictory insistence that historical events are "beyond debate". Accordingly, Harris asserts that memorials must be reconceptualised as cultural resources that could "open up the act of narrativising trauma", and as highly effective spaces for confronting traumatic history. Harris proposes a reconceptualisation of the role of memorials, one diverging from places of assumed harmonious memory that are fixed in the landscape. Instead, she proposes that memorials be seen as "process sites" that could activate debate with the intention of easing trauma. Memorials "used actively", she proposes, could result in apologies for historic events, re-narrativisation and some social control of trauma.

The Holocaust, Trauma and the Arts

Contemporary scholarship on the artistic engagement with the Holocaust is vast.³ One of the most traumatic event of the past century, its impact and legacy remain ubiquitous. Yet, while the field of Holocaust studies appears well established, new research, interpretation and insight is not only abundant and ongoing but is reinvigorated by a new critical impetus that

³ Only in terms of Holocaust cinema sources the list is generous. Key examples include: Hirsch 2004, Hornstein & Jacobowitz 2003, Vice 2003, Walker 2003, Zelizer 1998 and 2001, and Insdorf 1989.

seeks to revise the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study of this key event of the twentieth century. The next two essays illustrate these fresh energies. Magdalena Zolkos' contribution 'The Weight of the Other: Jean Laplanche and Cultural Trauma Studies' explores the thematics of trauma in Imre Kertész's book *Fateless*, which narrates the incarceration in (and survival of) a Nazi extermination camp by a Jewish-Hungarian schoolboy, Gyuri Köves. Zolkos studies the metaphoric relation that *Fateless* delineates between trauma, spectrality and a community "haunted" by past violence. Her close reading of *Fateless* is divided into four segments: on communal violence towards trauma subjects and community as being-with the other; on the continuity of the catastrophic; on the strangeness of the other's love; and on writing-as-witnessing. Drawing on the alternative theory of trauma found in the works of Jean Laplanche, Zolkos offers a psychoanalytic reading of *Fateless*, arguing that the novel makes a contribution into two debates relevant to contemporary trauma studies. Firstly, the author points out that this narrative work concerns "the extraneous and subjective workings of trauma, and the distinction and relation between the psychic experience of trauma and a catastrophic event, which is external to and affects the psychic". Secondly, and most importantly, Zolkos explores the novel's enacting of "the individual-collective and intrapsychic-intersubjective working of trauma".⁴

In a deeply personal reflection, Stephen Goddard's contribution, 'Video Testimony: The Generation and Transmission of Trauma', appraises his mother's experience of the Second World War when she was traumatically displaced and separated from her family.⁵ Goddard recounts how in 1997, more than five decades after the events, his mother narrated on video her individualised testimony ("once again, separated from her family") as part of the Shoah Foundation Visual History series. Goddard's essay scrutinises the methodologies of this video testimony in relation to two important and related questions, which are relevant to anyone conducting research in the field. The author asks provocatively: "[W]as my mother traumatized or re-traumatized by the process of providing her testimony?" and "by narrating and recording her video testimony, did she, unwittingly, 'transmit' her traumas, and those of her generation to my generation?" The significance of such unsettling questions for Holocaust and trauma studies

⁴ For a robust use of Laplanche's theory of trauma in the context of film analysis, see Radstone 2011.

⁵ For another insightful discussion into the use of video testimony in Holocaust remembrance and research, see Brown 2011.

today is great, as they emphasise the way in which new Holocaust scholarship appears to be redefining the long accepted parameters of this field of study.

History, Trauma and the Arts: Experimental Visual Arts, Literature and Opera

Representing the social and subjective aftermath of traumatic experiences has been a key concern to artists from across the globe and the growing scholarship on the topic demonstrates its importance.⁶ The intersection between theoretical insights and the critical impulse to apprehend and convey trauma to audiences remains a profound intellectual and praxiological challenge. In ‘Dancing Out of Trauma: From Charcot’s Hysteria to Haitian Voudoun’, Dirk de Bruyn references the “classic and foundation work” of American avant-garde cinema and situates Maya Deren’s 1943 experimental short film *Meshes of the Afternoon* as having lasting relevance due to the filmmaker’s use of a “cyclical, repetitive narrative structure” that would pre-date Lev Manovich’s “new media concerns with database and narrative fusion”. According to de Bruyn, Deren’s process of editing was a conscious strategy for examining “issues of amnesia and dissociation”. Expanding E. Ann Kaplan’s analysis of *Meshes of the Afternoon*, de Bruyn suggests that Deren’s “self-theorised strategies of horizontal and vertical editing open the film up to multiple readings not only in terms of the film’s content, but also around contestations of authorship and critical debate as to whether the film should be interpreted through psychoanalysis and surrealism or through Deren’s stated preference for psychopathology and Imagist poetry.” The author traces Deren’s anthropological work on Haitian Voudoun, contrasting sharply with Charcot’s (and later Freud’s) clinical containment and framing of hysteria in the late 1800s. As a “parallel phenomena”, both the ‘disciplined’ Haitian Voudoun dances of possession and the dominant western pathology of hysteria would have led Deren to proclaim that it was the “cultural context” in which hysteria occurred that made it “aberrant or dysfunctional in western culture”.

In a similar vein, Lee-Von Kim’s ‘Rethinking Visual Representations of Trauma in the Work of Kara Walker’ investigates the representation of historical trauma in relation to the work of another controversial avant-

⁶ Two often cited sources on trauma and contemporary visual arts are Bennet 2005 and Guerin & Hallas 2007.

garde visual artist, in this case the silhouette tableaux of African-American artist Kara Walker. In her essay Kim explores the way in which Walker's artistry grapples with the representation of the trauma wrought by slavery in order to consider how the work "engenders new ways of theorising trauma in visual productions". Walker's black paper silhouettes, the author maintains, can be read as a series of incisions "which bring to mind the notion of physical wounding". Kim proposes that Walker's *Slavery! Slavery!* constitutes a rich and productive space for the discussion of visual representations of trauma, since trauma is "doubly encoded in the text, both in its form and subject matter". Walker's silhouettes not only engage with the historical traumas wrought by slavery, but their very production would also "[enact] a kind of physical trauma".⁷

Just as the history of slavery informs contemporary art practice, Sarah Leggott finds a "tremendous upsurge of interest" in the remembrance of Spain's twentieth-century traumatic history, in particular the years of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) and the transition to democracy in the immediate post-Franco period. In 'Representing Spain's 20th Century Trauma in Fiction: Memories of War and Dictatorship in Contemporary Novels by Women' Leggott considers the lingering social and political debates over "how best to deal with the country's recent repressive past". As contemporary legal battles and political contestations around the legacies of this nation's traumatic twentieth-century history intensify, the phenomenon has been increasingly reflected in contemporary cultural production, in particular, narrative fiction. Drawing on the literary works of Dulce Chacón and Rosa Regàs, Leggott examines these novelists' presentation of "the complex relationship between remembering and forgetting in a society in which the articulation of the past has been forbidden". By examining the recent novels by Spanish women writers who "open up for debate important questions about the on-going process of remembrance in Spanish society and the impact of past wounds on the present", Leggott evaluates the extent to which "traces of traumatic experience might be meaningfully represented in fiction".

Additionally, in 'Trauma, Memory and Forgetting in Post-War Cyprus: The Case of *Manoli...!*' Anna Papaeti discusses the representation of the legacies of historical trauma in an artform seldom given critical attention

⁷ For further examples in the growing literature on the work of Kara Walker, see Fryd 2011 and Shaw 2006.

in the field: opera. Papaeti identifies a “distinct change in opera” regarding its subject matter and aesthetics for over a century, with “earlier notions of redemption increasingly replaced with issues [of] loss, trauma and anxiety”. It is from this new operatic tradition that post-1945 political opera emerged, “depicting the silences, horrors and traumas of war and political instability”. The author views the horrors of World War II as “an historical caesura that impose new problems on artists and composers”. Vassos Argyridis’s chamber opera *Manoli...!*, commissioned by and performed at Pfalztheater Kaiserslautern in 1991, deals with traumatic events in recent Cypriot history, and “specifically with the absence of catharsis and justice after the Greek coup d’état that led to the Turkish Invasion”. Based on a play and the libretto by George Neophytou, the opera tells the story of a Cypriot mother who was an eye-witness to her son’s murder during the Greek coup in Cyprus in 1974. Papaeti’s essay explores the manner in which the opera *Manoli...!* recounts the trauma and anxiety of contemporary Greek-Cypriot society in relation to the events of July 1974. By focusing on the opera’s reception in the Greek-Cypriot press, she examines the “mechanisms of memory and forgetting” in post-1974 Cyprus in the context of a “tenuously restored national unity”.

Journalism, Trauma and Mental Health

As Alan Thompson’s collection *The Media and Rwanda* (2007) attests, the implications of reporting trauma, and its transmission to journalists and readers alike, warrants investigation. Sue Joseph’s essay ‘Narrating the Silence of Trauma’ foregrounds how silence is a “ubiquitous by-product of traumatic crime”. She relates that when the subjects of such crime finally decide to speak, “the interview process itself can be a traumatising experience”. Furthermore, Joseph argues, the use of such material by journalists, particularly in the format of extended narratives, is integral to that traumatic experience. Contextualising these narratives within the genre of literary journalism, Joseph explores the ethics of professional practice when dealing with the traumatic memory of interviewed subjects. Her essay draws from interviews relating to traumatic experiences, particularly sexual assault kept undisclosed for a very long time (including racist pack rape, war time rape, and child sexual abuse), which form part of her creative, non-fiction manuscript, entitled *Speaking Secrets*. Joseph argues for a greater academic discussion of empathy “as a tool of journalism”, rather than empathy being regarded by most as “anathema to the industry”. Instead, she suggests that “empathy must and should be

taught and embraced within journalism education”, particularly within long-form literary journalism.

Traumatic silence of a different nature informs Deb Waterhouse-Watson’s contribution to this collection: ‘Silencing or Validating Traumatic Testimony: Footballers’ Narrative Immunity Against Allegations of Sexual Assault’. The essay explores several sets of sexual assault allegations made against professional footballers in Australia throughout 2004. According to Waterhouse-Watson, these public allegations sparked an “intense media debate around the culture of the leagues and the nature of relations between elite footballers and women”. Her analysis examines the role of narrative and grammar in different commentators’ engagements with the complainants’ traumatic testimony. By comparing “different narrative constructions of the same events”, Waterhouse-Watson demonstrates that even when commentators engage with a complainant’s account, the techniques used to narrate it can evoke cultural narratives that “blame the complainant and discount her testimony”. In this way, the author maintains, narrative and grammar are used in public commentary to perform a *de facto* adjudication of the cases, “deflecting blame away from footballers” and providing them with a “narrative immunity” against complaints of sexual assault.

Just as issues of empathy and ethics increasingly pervade media professions, Katrina Clifford’s “confessional” reflection on her own research into discursive representations of fatal mental health crisis interventions demonstrates the limitations of traditional trauma theory, which, according to the author, has “conventionally insisted on a model of spectatorship that remains passive”. In ‘Mental Health Trauma Narratives and Misplaced Assumptions: Towards an Ethics of Self-care among (Humanities-based) Trauma Researchers’, Clifford draws from a key case study involving the fatal shooting by police of a mentally ill man, and the graphic media coverage that ensued. She demonstrates how a shared negotiation of meaning “extends beyond research participants with lived experience of trauma to (humanities-based) trauma researchers themselves” who are typically exposed to a ‘vicarious trauma’ from secondary source documents including “often distressing media materials that can shape and complicate such trauma narratives”. Clifford’s essay challenges the “strongly paternalistic ethical frameworks of a psycho-medico tradition”, which she asserts has largely failed to acknowledge the importance of maintaining an obligation to self among trauma researchers, in addition to the ethical responsibility required towards their research participants.

Refugees, Trauma, Gender and Racism

As with the observations of Joseph, Waterhouse-Watson and Clifford, the reportage of mass human suffering and traumatic upheaval due to voluntary or enforced migration away from natural disasters and human atrocity (war, genocide, ethnic cleansing) is the subject of Pauline Diamond and Sallyanne Duncan's 'Professional and Ethical Issues in Reporting the Traumatic Testimony of Women Asylum Seekers'. In particular, this essay examines "the professional considerations and dilemmas" of reporting the personal testimony of women asylum-seekers. According to Diamond and Duncan, "women asylum-seekers often have different reasons for seeking refuge than men", such as "gender-based persecution, which is not recognised in the UN Convention on Refugees". Sourced from interviews conducted with both women asylum-seekers and journalists in Scotland, Diamond and Duncan explore "issues of truth, trust, empathy, exploitation and intrusion in the mediation of others' experiences of trauma, torture and atrocity", while reconstructing these intimate stories as representations of catastrophic events.

Similarly, Anne Harris's essay 'Too Dark, Too Tall, Too Something: New Racism in Australian Schools' considers the re-traumatisation of young Sudanese-Australian women in Australian schools via "both subtle and overt racism", insufficient school support, and competing home and school demands on these former refugees. Harris' experience working with this cohort suggests that "arts-based educational tools might be best suited to assist former refugee students", and that critical pedagogy offers a theoretical framework for more successfully assisting integration with input from the students themselves, through film and other arts methodologies.

Trauma, Cinema and the Mass Media

The concepts of 'empty empathy' and 'vicarious trauma' appear latent in much conventional western mass mediation of human suffering. Lindsay Hallam's essay "Genre Cinema as Trauma Cinema: Post 9/11 Trauma and the Rise of 'Torture Porn' in Recent Horror Films" seeks to comprehend how trauma theory can be usefully applied to a maligned film genre in order to 'work through' the collective sense of "culpability in the use of violence and torture as a form of retaliation and revenge" by

the US military.⁸ For Hallam, one of the most shocking revelations post-9/11 was the awareness that outside of their own borders Americans “were hated”. For decades US audiences had bought into the myth “continually perpetuated by Hollywood” that “the American way” was held internationally as “a beacon of truth and justice”. The impact of 9/11 changed that, Hallam suggests, adding that it is this “newfound vulnerability and insecurity, and the trauma resulting from this realisation” that is expressed in these recent ‘torture porn’ horror films. Despite this fear and vulnerability being masked by a veneer of self-conscious “ignorance and arrogance”, Hallam concurs with “the long held notion that horror can have a cathartic effect”. Having grown up “in a nation that is traumatised and in a state of constant fear”, the author proposes, young audiences in the US are using torture porn as a form of release by ‘acting out’ trauma.⁹

Problems with identification and empathy also inform Glen Donnar’s final contribution to this volume: ‘Levinas and the Face: Helping News Consumers Witness, Recognise and Recover Trauma Victims’. Adopting a Levinasian philosophical approach¹⁰ to ‘the face’ Donnar reminds us that we often ignore the mediated suffering and trauma of (distant) others and effortlessly “accept their effacement”. Accordingly, one way for news consumers “to bear witness and establish a social connection with (often anonymous) victims” is through a consideration of images of terror and trauma, rather than refusing to look. For the author, “witnessing is essential if we are to ‘recover’ victims as individuals”. Following Levinas, Donnar suggests that in the “encounter with the Other—unique and irreducible—‘the face’ discloses itself *to me*. It exceeds and transcends both death *and* mediation.” In addition, for Donnar empathy and transmission are unavoidable: “the Other’s regard of me provokes recognition, commands my respect and elicits my responsibility”. Donnar concludes that in mass media representation “the effacement of victims in death or mediation cannot be reversed”, but in our response and recognition “it can be exceeded, transcended and then, ultimately, recovered”.

⁸ See Lowenstein 2005 for a broad discussion of the engagement with historical trauma in horror films from countries around the globe.

⁹ In relation to the problem of acting-out and working-through in trauma cinema, see Walker 2005, Collins 2011, and Traverso 2011.

¹⁰ For an encompassing anthology of discussions and applications of philosophical theories of trauma, see Sharpe et al 2007.

Film Program and Art Exhibition

Trauma, Media, Art: New Perspectives concludes with two appendices. The first presents the *Interrogating Trauma* conference's Film Program, held at the Film and Television Institute in Fremantle, Western Australia, in December 2008. This program, curated by this volume's editors, included film and video productions from Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, Rwanda, the UK and USA. The second appendix lists the conference's Art Exhibition, also curated by the editors, which was held at the Kidogo Art House in Fremantle simultaneously. The exhibition featured multimedia installation works, sculpture, experimental video, painting, sketches and photography by artists from Australia, Ireland, Germany, and the USA.

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MEMORIALS, TRAUMA AND THE NATION

COLLECTIVE SUFFERING AND CYBER-MEMORIALISATION IN POST-GENOCIDE RWANDA

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Introduction

The year 2009 marks the 15th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, an event which has entered our collective imagination as a marker of 20th century violence, and one that has profoundly shaped Rwanda's recent socio-political landscape. Following the shooting down of the plane that carried Rwandan President Habyarimana on April 6th 1994, Hutu militias, soldiers and civilians initiated a systematic slaughter of approximately one million Tutsi and moderate Hutus over three and a half months of widespread violence. In July 1994, the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), composed mostly of Tutsi refugees living in the Eastern African region, gained control of the capital and ended the killings. The RPA advance led to the mass exodus of two million Hutus into neighboring states.

If visible violence ended in July 1994, physical and emotional scars are the ongoing signs of the 'traumatic' historic rapture the country endured. The legacy of the genocide shaped the political agenda of reconstruction and national unity of the post-genocide Rwandan Government, and it is embedded in various initiatives like justice, assistance, reconciliation, and international relations.

The memory of the genocide is kept alive through acts of memorialisation that include the preservation of memorial sites and yearly commemorations. Across the country, there is awareness that trauma and memory are connected; for instance, the 'commemoration programme' of the 15th anniversary of the genocide includes trainings on 'psycho-social trauma' for understanding and managing 'the psychological trauma phenomena that are frequent in our community so that they may be helpful within the

national mourning period' (GAERG Commemoration Program - Rwandan 15th Commemoration of Tutsis Genocide.htm).

Caruth (1995, 1996) writes that trauma is expressed, processed and integrated in the act of remembering. There is a curative aspect to memory whereby collective memories can act as a response to trauma (Brown 2004), constructed in transmissible form through the performative practice of memorialisation. In the Rwandan context, the act of remembering has the potential to help survivors to deal with the traumatic events of the past through an acknowledgement of their experiences and the offering of public support (IRDP 2006).

Corporeal forms of memory embody an active process of remembering (Kuhn 2000) and recycling of meaning (Nora 1989). Revisiting the past through memorialisation fulfils helpful functions but the active process of remembering may lead to the resurgence, reoccurrence or re-elaboration of past traumas. In Rwanda, the National Commission to Fight Genocide against Tutsi, aware of the link between memorialisation and re-traumatisation and in preparation for the 15th anniversary commemorations of the genocide, set up a unit within the Commission itself to address the ongoing psychological side effects that memorialisation may trigger.

Private and public memorialisation fulfils different roles. Nora (1989) writes that a monument constructed in marble or erected in public places performs different memorial functions than a personal object. By acting as material matter, as *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1989), these public projects of shared memory mark bonds, connect individuals, and place them within ideological and political spheres. State leaders regularly deploy *lieux de mémoire* and memorialisation of traumatic events to promote identities or ideologies, and to prescribe action. Through the recalling of the violent past and the affect affirmation of grief, fear and anger associated with loss, mourning may be directed to instrumental ends that include nationalism, political transition, modernization, revolution, capitalism, institutionalised justice, human rights, and national projects (Saunders and Aghaie 2005).

Memorialisation becomes an activity through which a mythical truth is conveyed to construct a new identity (Gillis 1994). A key aspect of this reconstruction is what is not done. Memorialisation is about not forgetting and yet by choosing what to tell, stories and traumas are either forgotten or become unspeakable. In rethinking 'After Auschwitz', Mandel (2001) writes that the unspeakable can be what is part of an agenda or what

cannot be physically spoken or pronounced, like an infinite word or a scream. The unspeakable is echoed in taboos or injunctions against certain speech acts by the community, and in these instances the unspeakable takes the form of trauma, not merely for the individual survivors but for a collective post-Holocaust culture, which is perceived to be traumatized by the presence of the Holocaust in its past.

The remembered, the forgotten and the unspeakable coexist. Trauma politics and aesthetics go hand in hand. Memorialisation of a traumatic past is subjected to political manipulations because the choice of specific representations of suffering leads to the exclusion of counter-narratives of forgotten or unspeakable traumas. Memorial sites and other types of corporeal memory play pivotal roles in the aesthetics of trauma and its appropriation for political purposes. Memorials ‘invite us to remember, but they are far from neutral and universal; they are influenced by their locations, constructed from various subjects’ positions, and embody the ideals of those who erect them (Ngwarsungu 2008, p 83). In other words, they inhabit a performative model of politics (Chakrabarty 2002).

In this essay I want to explore the aesthetic response to collective suffering in virtual reality, and its relation to performative models of politics. I will use the ‘Kigali Genocide Memorial’ virtual site as a case study of memorialisation, and I will compare its narrative with ‘real’ memorialisation in the country where I conducted fieldwork in 2009. Through this analysis I want to expose the dialogical tension between corporeal and a-corporeal representations of collective trauma; a-political and political strategies for representing societal suffering; and national and transnational agendas. The essay offers a critique of trauma to capture socio-political suffering; it warns against the dangers of its appropriation for political purposes; and it advocates a move ‘beyond trauma’ towards a re-politicisation and re-contextualisation of collective suffering.

Memorialisation in Rwanda

Memory and trauma coexist both temporally and spatially in Rwanda. Immediately after the genocide, the newly established Government of National Unity announced the suppression of Easter as a public holiday to be replaced by a week of ‘mourning’—the week of the 7th of April—the day the killings began. No music is allowed in public spaces; marriages, naming ceremonies and other festivities are halted; and offices remain closed during the week of mourning. April is the unofficial month of

mourning, during which the trauma of the one hundred days is re-counted by survivors in public ceremonies that keep the memory alive. Bodies continue to be exhumed and transferred to communal sites, officials preside commemorations in the capital and replicate them at 'cellule' level (the second smallest administrative unit of local government), and public testimonies are heard across the country.

Internationally, the genocide is commemorated by Rwandans living abroad and by Friends of Rwanda. The United Nations Security Council responded to the call to internationalise national memorialisation by declaring April the 7th an international genocide day. In preparation for the 2009 commemorations, Rwandan diplomatic corps across the world were recalled to Kigali to attend a meeting with the National Commission to Fight Genocide against Tutsi in March. The aim of the meeting was to discuss the role that the diplomatic corps can play in making the commemoration of the 1994 Rwandan genocide an international one, and for commemorations to be carried out internationally. A representative of the National Commission reported that commemoration had been held at national level but "this time around it should be done at international one" (Rwandan Television news, 12th of March 2009).

These initiatives map national memorialisation onto the international arena, and diplomatic relations are played out through memorialisation. The international community is invited to participate to the Rwandan nation-building project in which the memory of the genocide plays a central role, by participating in collective mourning, validating survivors' stories, and acknowledging that it did not intervene to stop the genocide.

If annual commemorations of the genocide are the main reminders of the traumatic past, its legacy is embedded in the social, cultural and political life of the country through other lieux de mémoire, including public executions of those accused of involvement in the genocide, the establishment of gacaca courts to promote justice and reconciliation at grass-root level, and the release of detainees from prisons. These public acts are ongoing reminders of the genocide that trigger traumatic memories.

The flourishing of various types of literature on the subject and the undertaking of cinematic and arts projects testify to the continuing resonance of the genocide internationally. The wish to comprehend and remember is visible in the increasing number of artistic and cinematic projects like Hotel Rwanda, novels like A Sunday by the Pool by Gil Countenance, and

documentaries like the Gacaca trilogy by Ghion. This last one comprises the documentary *My Neighbour My Enemy*, in which the viewer is shown how gacaca, grass-level justice, is performed and its impact on the life of survivors. The viewer hears survivors making constant references to the embodied pains of their “hearts” through metaphors like the “broken heart” or the “empty heart” that poignantly convey their past and present sense of loss, emptiness, and suffering.

Localities where massacres took place were converted into sites of memory to show the extent to which cruel suffering was inflicted (Caplan 2007). Upon entering these sites, estimated to be approximately 200 across Rwanda, the visitor is exposed to the stark view of ‘bare bones’. The remains of the dead and their possessions are neatly arranged on benches, shelves and boxes. Bones and skulls are exposed in open air; there are no glass cabinets to protect them from the passing of time, and no strings to delimit the space that separates the viewer from the dead. Their physical proximity makes them almost touchable, were it not for a sense of respect and awe. Stains of blood can still be seen on the altar’s tablecloth at Nyamata Memorial site and the writings of the children who died during the genocide can be seen in their exercise books piled up in a cask at Ntarama Memorial site.

In 2004, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the genocide, a new purpose-built Kigali Genocide Memorial centre (KGM) was officially inaugurated in the capital Kigali. The undertaking is a partnership between the Rwandan Government and Aegis, a UK Non-governmental organisation, highlighting the relationship between national and international memorialisation agendas. The installations for the Kigali Genocide Memorial are artistic responses to suffering made by national and international artists. The Rwandan sculpturer Laurent Hategekimana created three pieces to represent the pre, during and post-genocide periods while the artist Ardyn Halter, the son of a survivor of the Auschwitz camp, made the *Windows of Hope*. Part-cemetery, part-museum and part-education centre, the Kigali Genocide Memorial fulfils various functions, ranging from the recording of history to mourning the victims and educating the young.

Inside the building there are three main exhibitions: the Rwandan genocide, a children’s memorial, and an exhibition on the history of genocidal violence around the world. The Rwandan genocide exhibition introduces the viewer to a brief history of Rwanda and the causes of the

genocide. Path to Genocide is followed by The 100 Days Genocide with pictures of the massacres and their victims, and concludes with The Aftermath, a brief description of life in the years following the genocide.

The internationalisation of memory can be seen in the modern features of the memorial centre and the choice of its exhibits. The KGM is one of few memorials to include other genocides across the world to remind us that genocide is not a brutal tribal affair but a crime against humanity, adopting the language of the human rights discourse. A stereotype of Africa as a place of natural violence and tribal bloodshed is replaced by a view of genocide as historical norm and colonial legacy.

The children's memorial is personal to create a rapport with the dead child. It shows pictures of children, and underneath each picture there is a caption that describes the child's behaviours, their hobbies, favourite people, and how they were killed. Suffering is conveyed in personal and affective modes that echo western preoccupations of children as innocent victims.

A virtual site called 'Kigali Genocide Memorial' brings together preserved and purpose built memorial sites in cyberspace. The virtual site transcends the physicality of memorial sites to generate a distinct performative narrative of suffering, one that I argue is complementary yet distinct from 'real' memorialisation. If memorialisation represents the embodiment of memory, what happens when this is performed in disembodied cyberspaces?

Memorialisation in cyberspace: Embodied and virtual memories

As social activity, memory is the product of ongoing interactions among recollections of the mediated past. It generates narratives about specific times, places, persons, and events that are laden with affective meanings. Memory websites fulfil the social functions of commemorative sites: memory is socially and culturally shaped—but differently from conventional memorial sites, these are "alive" through the possibility of ongoing contributions and additions (Douglas 2006). Virtual memorial sites offer support to those who bereave their lost ones: personal involvement in the creation and development of web memorials engages family and friends in active mourning and memorialisation while the creation of support group websites offers spaces for informal bereavement and for group support to take place (Roberts 2004).

In Rwanda, memory narratives fulfil various functions. Remembering the genocide is a way to pay collective tribute to the deceased, and an action that makes survivors feel supported by society and that strengthens “individual and group therapy” (IRD 2006, p. 145). Preserving the memory of the genocide has educational functions because it teaches future generations of Rwandans and non-Rwandans the lessons of the past and acts as a warning sign that genocide should happen “never again”. Memory helps to bring facts to light, and can be the basis for cohabitation (IRD 2006).

Cyber-memorialisation transfers the narrative of the genocide from the space of nation-state into the transitory space of global and diasporic dwellings. In the context of Rwanda, cyber-memorialisation contributes to internationalise memorialisation, to promote the Rwandan nation-building project transnationally, and to target the diasporic and international community for financial contributions.

In the following section, I describe my ‘virtual’ visit to the Kigali Genocide Memorial site, as I explore the aesthetics of memory and trauma and their relation to performative models of politics. The virtual Kigali Genocide Memorial reproduces memorialisation in cyberspace, opening possibilities for ongoing revisiting of the past and for transnational participation in the national project of memorialisation. Upon entering the virtual Kigali Genocide Memorial (KGM)¹, the visitor is confronted with the possibility of exploring a number of sites: Rwanda, the genocide, survivors’ testimonies, documentation, and fundraising. The clicking of one heading opens possibilities for further exploration. Under the Genocide heading, the visitor can explore its history, or she can view memorial sites across the country, or the Kigali Genocide museum.

The site on Memorials contains pictures and captions of physical buildings scattered across the country, reproduced in a standardised manner. Each of the sites shows a picture of the preserved memorial, formerly a church or school. The similarity in the aesthetic representation minimises the existence of local history, local dynamics, and local spaces where life pre- and post- genocide unfolds. The physicality of the buildings is altered not only by the virtual modality of representation but also by the absence of landscapes in which these buildings are situated. Through another click it

¹ www.kigaligenocidememorial.org.