

Nachträglich, Liebe Grüße

Trauma disturbs what one normally takes to be the linear temporality of experience. Sigmund Freud gave the name Nachträglichkeit, usually translated as 'deferred action' to the curious retrospective temporality of trauma. (1)

Chapter

I am never where my body is

The analogy between the subject of trauma and photography

I remember

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Grief

*Life changes fast.
Life changes in the instant.
You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends.
The question of self-pity.
- John Didion*

I am never where my body is

I am never where my body is.
I think, therefore I am.
What kind of thoughts is my mind producing right now?
What am I feeling?
Directing my attention inside my body.
Are there any tensions?
I discover a certain discomfort, a background noise, ants in my fingers,
moving throbbing fast like anxiety does.
I turn away. Denying the now, avoiding the present moment.
My mind jumped to something else.

I am never where my body is.
The only exception: a few seconds while taking a picture.
Slowing time, down. To look, to listen.
I am here, I am present, part of this world.

My mind jumped already to something else.
A synthetic Image ... einundzwanzig, zweiundzwanzig, dreiundzwanzig, scroll.

I start to forget.
Everything reminded me of him.
Remembering moments together, things he used to say...
now there is a blur,
a few memories I collected.
But memories are no replicas, memories are not fixed, they change.

Where are the memories I could have never forgotten?
People used to tell me "As long as you will remember, he will live in your memories",
but then if I forget, he dies?
What a reality...
If someone dies, they're just dead.

I don't want to think but I don't want to forget.
I don't want to remember but I want you to live in my memories.
Memories are closely related to forgetting.
I turn away.
Denying the now, avoiding the present moment.

The analogy between the subject of trauma and photography

Photography can represent trauma by considering the capability of the photographic medium in representing, registering, and mediating the experience of trauma.(2)
Trauma theory defines trauma as an event that individual experienced but were unable to process through normal or habitual forms of knowledge.(3)

This is an analogy between the subject of trauma, marked by the sight of something leaving an indelible trace on the psyche, to the wide-open camera lens and light sensitive medium that records a trace of whatever happens on film. Anything and everything in the realm of materiality can be photographed, filmed, or recorded, especially the unexpected. (4)

The analogy between trauma and photography has its origin in the early years of photography itself.

The pioneers of this subject are Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, Andre Breton, Roland Barthes, Cathy Caruth and Didi-Huberman. They have emphasised how photography's combination of belatedness, stillness and repetition resembles the way trauma disrupts one's sense of time. (5)

In the early 20s, the Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud made a connection between the subject of trauma and the subject of photography. He compared the camera to our mental functioning and was therefore one of the first ones to explore this field.

Freud's psychoanalytic theories took shape and matured during this period. He frequently used the metaphor of photography – especially the photographic negative – to illustrate his theory of the unconscious.

For Freud, the fragmentary of human memory; the mind's eye, both conscious and subconscious, mimics the photographic lens.(6)

For Freud, later, the "*Optical unconscious*" by Walter Benjamin became a manifest on photographs. The-camera-picture's-phenomena is what the photographer has unconsciously registered but not consciously processed.

According to him "*Every one of your photos is your optical unconscious made visible, demonstrating the reach and complexity of your unconscious perception and properly analysed, and that gives access to the hidden psychological realities that animate you, including the style and structure of your perception, and the more nebulous regions of your psyche.*" He argues: "*The camera has the ability to capture something inexperienced that only comes to light later, when the film is developed.*" (7)

How often have you looked at your picture,
and out of the blue,
found a red
threat
through your impulsive photographing?

Suddenly you notice what your eyes unconsciously sought.

The cultural theorist Walter Benjamin followed Freud's steps and interacted with the analogy between photography and the unconscious. He wrote "*Little History of Photography*", precisely in relation to what he called "*the optical unconscious*", which was published in 1931.

"For it is another nature which speaks to the camera rather than to the eye: 'other' above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious. Whereas it is a commonplace that, for example, we have some idea what is involved in the act of walking (if only in general terms), we have no idea at all what happens during the fraction of a second when a person actually takes a step. Photography, with its devices of slow motion and enlargement, reveals the secret. It is through photography that we first discover the existence of this optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis."

Although Benjamin does not refer to trauma per se in this passage, it was the beginning of the understanding that experience reveals itself in the unconscious without the subject's awareness. These are the elements that form the optical unconscious.

(8)

Until recently, I couldn't find the right words to explain my devotion towards analog photography.

It was just a strong feeling.

Maybe as strong as I dislike taking pictures digitally.

It is precisely the magic, of oneself being only with an apparatus,

spending a moment together

but later on,

you can see the experienced moment you had together

oooooooooooooooooooo

you can see something different

- - -

*the fraction of a second,
which shows you something new,
something unconsciously experienced
a little surprise
something you were looking forward*

to the unknown

like a Christmas presents under the tree.

It is precisely the magic of oneself being only with an apparatus.

It did not take long for the surrealist Andre Breton to respond to Freud's theorisation of trauma, by writing the *"objective chance"* in *'L'Amour fou'* in 1937. Breton's *"modern materialist"* definition of chance allied it with the idea of traumatic encounter:

"Chance is the form making manifest the exterior necessity which traces its path in the human unconscious."

Just as traumatic events bypass the psychic defences of consciousness, the protective shield against stimuli, leaving behind an indelible trace, so also does the chance encounter breach that shield and touch an exposed nerve. Breton evoked photography's affinity with trauma by emphasising its unguarded quality and referring to the camera as a blind instrument. (9)

does the chance encounter breach that shield and touch an exposed nerve - ?

Cathy Caruth is a leading theorist in trauma studies. She published her book 'Unclaimed Experience' in 1996. Caruth says: *"In trauma there is an incomprehensible outside of the self that has already gone inside without the self's mediation, hence without any relation to the self, and this consequently becomes a treat to any understanding of what a self might be in this context."* (10)

"Trauma creates a disturbingly ambiguous relation between inside and outside, self and other. To be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event." (11)

someone or something intervened in my inner self

nasty

surreal

changes my nature

I identify myself with it

it was not my fault -

(still, I identify myself with it)

I remember

I remember waking up way too early on a Tuesday morning in the middle of summer.

I remember the heat and I remember the panic in my chest.

I remember running, without brushing my teeth nor taking a shower, towards you.

I remember seeing your window open and thinking if the window is open then everything must be ok.

As if an open window has any meaning.

I remember calling the police for no reason.

I remember them coming 20 minutes later.

It felt like a lifetime.

I remember one police officer climbing through a window to open the door from the inside.

I remember when the door was opening slowly, the police officer was looking straight into my eyes.

And I remember asking him "And? ... And ??....."

I remember it like it was yesterday.

"99.9% dead," he answered.

For a second, I actually calculated what the 0,1% means.

For the next couple of days all my senses were hyperstimulated.

My inner life intervened with my exterior life. What I saw, what I heard and what I felt became in a way so clear that it was like being fully awake for the first time.

Going through the supermarket I realised that I have never seen it like this before.

It is like seeing the whole picture for the first time.

All the smells where there.

From fruits to vegetables to baked pastries to ham and cheese to cleaning products.

The music in the background was playing way too loud.

And the light was just killing my eyes.

Although it seems overwhelming and I guess it was, I also felt extremely calm.

Calm and peaceful like I had never felt before.

At the same time my heart was hurting so much, all the time.

My mother said this is a chronic pain.

She says "A heart cannot actually hurt."

Mine was hurting for several years.

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke describes this state in *"The Nothebooks of Male Laurids Brigge"* as follows: *"I am learning to see. I don't know why it is, but everything enters me more deeply and doesn't stop where it once used to. I have an interior that I never knew of. Everything passes into me now. I don't know what happens there."* (12)

Through the effect of trauma, the boundary between inside and outside blurs.

A traumatic experience you do not only experience in the moment but also afterwards. You experience it all over again and again and again. This glimpse of a second, it come's and go's – it is out of our control. It can come during sleep, through a sound or a smell, when least expected – you just can not really control it. Remembering a picture can come in a similar way.

“One simultaneously feels stopped in time while constantly repeating the actions within that isolated moment. The normal flow of time has been fragmented into shards of isolated events, while the traumatised subject remains trapped in the continually recurring scene, unable to break out of the ever-recurring pain.” (13)

Slowing down time

After experiencing a traumatic experience, it was hard for me to be present.
Feeling disconnected and rarely pausing,
I formed an unconscious resistance to what is.
My life suddenly split into two parts.
The one I had before he died and the one I have where he is dead.
The only thing these two parts have in common, is the skin of my body.
Everything else changed.
Through constant practice, I learned to stand on my feet again.
They are not the same ones, but they do go forwards.
At some point, I met myself somewhere. Confused, tired and bitter but still trying.

Everything takes time.
Count to 10.
And start again.
You now have 10 seconds more.
When you think you come towards an end,
don't you worry
- you can start again.
You now have 10 seconds more.
One, two, three, four...
Trying to slow down time.

The moments I do fully connect with the present moment are while taking a picture.
If it is a snapshot, I of course connect only for a few seconds while being focused, but if
it is my artistic practice, I do have the impression that I am able to slow down time.
In a sense of not rushing through a moment, places, or times.

I can not exactly explain how I choose the women I photograph.
It is intuitive, there is a feeling, somehow a mirror towards myself.
Once I established this connection, I create a space for my model to be in.
The space is wisely chosen, not representative per se, but characteristic for the ethos of
my opposite.
Often my opposite is a friend.
I guess we choose our friends partly because we find a little bit of us in them.

(A mirror towards myself).

The clothing is decided by me as well, interpreting the women I photograph.
Once we are in the specific space,
I have a medium format camera with 16 pictures on it.
16 pictures is not a lot.
I want to capture the women in front of me in their most natural and purest way.
I try to go away from the idea that this is a setting –
there is just me, the other person,
the light and the camera with 16 pictures in-between us.
Through conversations I create an intimate space.

Slowing down time

I took something that was thought through, something that was organised, something that was artificial and turned it into something natural.

Something intimate and something real.

The person I decided to take pictures of slowly forgets the camera in between us.

From posing a lot at the beginning, slowly transitioning to their natural self.

These are the moments I want to capture.

16 times I want to capture them.

There is stillness in my doing.

My mind is calm, clear, focused, and my senses are strong.

Sometimes it is a pleasant moment and sometimes it is uncomfortable but I stay present.

I am not in the past nor the future.

I am in the now. It is the only moment I will ever have.

I disidentify from myself.

It is just me – in the purest state.

A similar experience happens during a traumatic experience.

Not for everyone, but for me it did.

(Disidentification through experiencing the precise moment/

identifying yourself with trauma on the long run)

The perception of time is an interesting thing.

I once read in the Bible about the qualitative type of waiting.

Waiting means being present, Jesus said.

Waiting also means total awareness.

And waiting means that something can happen at any moment.

A servant that waits for his master to return, without knowing the exact time, has to stay present, fully awake, balanced and still. So he wouldn't miss the arrival of his master.

In this state there is no room for daydreaming, thinking, remembering or expecting.

In this state there is no tension or fear.

Some zen teachers are said to sneak up behind their students, out of nowhere, hit them with their stick to test their level of presence.

If the student had been fully present and in a state of awareness, he would have heard the teacher coming from behind and would have stopped him or moved aside.

But if he was beaten, it meant that he was lost in his thoughts.

He was absent and unconscious. (14)

- the perception of time is an interesting thing

The consciousness of a person in a moment as powerful as death, is to be fully present.

But at the same time, the mind jumps through an enormous amount of memories.

Your mind is playing.

It's like zooming in and zooming out.

This intervenes between mind and no mind.

In the future, you'll relive the past but it's going to be the present.

The french writer and Philosopher Roland Barthes wrote on the theme of traumatic photography, in 'Camera Lucida', *Reflections on Photography*, which was published in 1980, about the phenomena of past existence: things that are happening in the past but are visible in the future.

"The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent, like the rays of light from a distant star that reach us only after the star has ceased to exist, the photograph can only attest to the past existence of the object; the photographic declaration, that-has-been, hovers between the presence and the absence, now and the then. Part of what is traumatic about photography is that it is an indexical trace of someone or something that is no more, or is no longer the same.

We are dealing, then, not with presence but with past presence, which is to say, the hollowed-out presence of an absence." (15)

George Didi-Huberman is a french art historian and philosopher.

He wrote the following in *'Lacuna-image'*:

"An image or an event lingers in the mind of the subject, without being either understood or truly forgotten. This suggests that what connects photography and trauma is not so much the capacity of photography to show or prove the existence of a traumatic event, but rather its resemblance to the psychic phenomenon of trauma itself."

"The lacuna-image is a trace-image (image-trace) and a disappearance-image (image-disparition) at the same time. Something remains that is not the thing, but a scrap of its resemblance. Something – very little, a film – remains of a process of annihilation: that something, therefore, bears witness to a disappearance while simultaneously resisting it, since it becomes the opportunity of its possible remembrance. It is neither full presence, nor absolute absence. It is neither resurrection, nor death without remains. It is death insofar as it makes remains." (16)

Grief

I thought grief was a cycle of bad days with the occasional good day.
Through writing these words, something changed.

A state of transition.

Maybe it is one of those steps.

There was a turning point in my writing where I realised a few things.

First of all, I let go of the sadness.

Sadness was the part that made me feel the closest to you.

But sadness was also the part that made me not fully live.

Secondly, maybe I do want to remember you.

Maybe I do want to talk about you, maybe I do want to tell your story.

Maybe I want to tell the stories you used to tell me.

Maybe I want to feel proud again.

Proud that my feet fit into your footsteps.

But I do not want to define myself by the loss anymore.

Slowly there is meaning in things again.

Everything takes time.

Count to 10.

And start again.

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Nachträglich,
Liebe Grüße

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