Terrorizing Images

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Terrorizing Images

Trauma and Ekphrasis in Contemporary Literature

Edited by
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Charles I. Armstrong and Unni Langås

Introduction: Encounters between Trauma and Ekphrasis, Words and Images

1 Central themes

This book seeks to question a juncture, or crossing, between two different discourses or fields of investigation: trauma and ekphrasis. It responds to the recognition that terrorizing images permeate the public sphere in connection with traumatic experiences and conflicts and emphasizes the ways in which such images are described and interpreted in words. Its main intention is to analyze the incorporation of verbally represented images – mental images, media images, and artistic images – in literary texts and to discuss their form and function. The importance of images in the context of political conflicts has been scrutinized in recent criticism, but scholarly attention to their verbal representations is less widespread. This book argues that an examination of the concept and practice of ekphrasis is crucial to understanding how the images in question work and that a foregrounding of their diverse effects and functions in contemporary literature is vital for illuminating and understanding such images.

Contemporary literature is analyzed here in the context of its engagement with visual culture in a broader present-day and historic perspective. The interpretations demonstrate how literature provides a meeting place between trauma and the visual image. Rather than scrutinizing this encounter as though it were exclusively the object of visual or cultural studies, we emphasize the specificity of the literary engagement with visual images. This entails neither jettisoning the traditional concept of ekphrasis, typically defined as encompassing "a verbal representation of a visual representation" (Heffernan 2004: 3), nor uncritically reproducing its traditional function, but rather subjecting it to scrutiny and, where necessary, to displacement. The force of this displacement can in part be observed in how contributors seek new turns of phrase – such as "ekphrastic inversion," "speculative ekphrasis," and "phantomogenic ekphrasis" – to describe the ekphrastic dimension of the texts interpreted. As the contributions to this volume will show, a traditional interpretation of ekphrasis as also encompassing a wider field of engagement, including pictorial *energeia*, also underlines how the concept suffers transformation as it travels into new historical and discursive zones.

One might construe ekphrasis as a conceptual dinosaur from an earlier age, when literary analysis had yet to face any real challenge from visual studies or

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cultural studies. Yet W. J. T. Mitchell has warned against the construction of simplistic historical narratives whereby, for instance, there is "a single 'great divide' between the 'age of literacy' [...] and the 'age of visuality.' These kinds of narratives are beguiling, handy for the purposes of presenting polemics, and useless for the purposes of genuine historical criticism" (Mitchell 2005: 349). Rather than looking at ekphrasis as a dated, exclusively literary approach, it would be more generous to view it as a trailblazer for later approaches to intermedial and multimodal forms of expression. Critical and literary engagements with ekphrasis were pioneering efforts to engage with the kinds of crossing of borders that are now among the central concerns of the humanities.

Seen from the perspective of literary studies, ekphrasis also has the benefit of not jettisoning the text for some frictionless multimedial space. This does not, however, entail that the earlier conceptions of ekphrasis can be accepted wholesale without reformulation. Early attempts to formulate how ekphrasis works concentrated almost exclusively on the relationship between word and image. The relationship between literature and painting was endlessly deliberated upon, their close but difficult relationship understood as one between "sister arts" (as in Hagstrum 1958), or even as a fraught but productive love affair. The temptation was to present them as natural opposites in an ineluctable binary. The identification of literature with temporality and the visual arts with spatiality, encouraged by Lessing's *Laocoön* essay (2003 [1766]), was key to the emergence of this conceptual dyad. Once they are presented together in this way, the two art forms quickly accrue other, metaphysical properties. In particular, the image becomes the carrier of spontaneity and presence, and ekphrasis becomes invested with a desire – or "hope" in W. J. T. Mitchell's formulation – to somehow allow the verbal medium to appropriate these qualities (see Mitchell 1994: 152–156). Coming as a belated supplement to the preceding image, the verbal performance tries to usurp the primacy of the visual.

Conceptualizations of the ekphrastic relation between text and image have been subject to historical change and are not built on natural or essential determinations. Yet the idea that visual images are somehow more direct and vital recurs and is perhaps also an inescapable part of the conceptual heritage of ekphrasis. From this perspective, literature's engagement with the visual is either a way in which literature can escape the confines of its own medium, or, more humbly, a means to revitalize our sensual engagement with the world. Subjected to a simultaneously defamiliarizing and deciphering gesture, obfuscating mechanisms give way to redemptive clarity. William Wordsworth wrote of poetry's need to show the extraordinary in the ordinary, and ultimately the wish to get beyond conventional barriers in order to gain access to vital immediacy is a Romantic one (Wordsworth 2012). Maurice Blanchot used a reading

of Friedrich Hölderlin to identify literature's desire for a spontaneous form of speech (Blanchot 1995: 111–131), and Geoffrey H. Hartman (1954) did the same in *Unmediated Vision*. The paradox here is that literature borrows the idiom of another medium in order to attain an unmediated condition. Does this mean that literature creating a false sense of immediacy? An important tenet of contemporary visual culture studies is that "the idea of the visual object cannot be reduced to codes and signifying systems" (Moxey 2008: 138). If literature is inherently bound to semiotic codes alien to the image, then its dealings with visuality may merely be paying lip service to an impossible ideal.

The opposition between word and image may, however, be a potentially limiting one, and we may have much to gain by opening it up or going beyond it. In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein humorously tries to encapsulate what he sees as the absurd consequences of a particular philosophical tradition in a brief anecdote: "I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden; he says again and again 'I know that that's a tree', pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and hears this, and I tell him: 'This fellow isn't insane. We are only doing philosophy'" (Wittgenstein 1969: 61e). What Wittgenstein satirizes here is the understanding of language as primarily referential, involving the subject in a verbal imitation of sensory objects. Wittgenstein's riposte to this view can be found in a parallel sketch, presented early on in his *Philosophical Investigations*, of a group of builders erecting a wall. Wittgenstein's imagining of a primitive language that "is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B" demonstrates that it is not enough to have names for the various tools employed by the builders: one also needs to be able to communicate how to employ those tools in the actual building process (Wittgenstein 1958: 3). The example entails moving from designative, subject-object relations (as in the pointing at a tree, or the naming of a tool) to an understanding of words as means to get a job done. One way to frame this is to say – as J. L. Austin and his followers indeed would – that Wittgenstein wants to replace a constative view of language with a performative one. One might go further and claim that he risks reducing language's role to a depressingly narrow utilitarian function. A different way of looking at this, however, would be to emphasize the fact that the builders are essentially placed within a context. The words they utter are not only intended to have an effect on their surroundings – they can and do, in fact, have such an effect.

One might speak of the event of ekphrasis, or – as Hans Lund already did in the 1980s – of "contextual ekphrasis." Lund's article focuses on how a poem by Swedish writer Birgitta Trotzig dealt not only with a sculpture by Bernt Notke but also with the surrounding environment of St. Nicholas's Cathedral in Stockholm (Lund 1998: 179–187). There is a parallel here to the highlighting of the role of

the museum in ekphrasis by such scholars as James Heffernan (2004), Catherine Paul (2002), and Barbara K. Fischer (2014). The institutional role of the museum both as a precondition for the distribution and the availability of artworks in the period after 1800, and the actual role of museums as a crucial motif in literary texts dealing with the visual arts, should not be underestimated. The museum is not a static background or setting for the act of ekphrasis but affects all the elements of the process. Jonathan Culler illuminates this point, by making a helpful conceptual distinction:

> [...] one might try to think not of context but of the framing of signs: how are signs constituted (framed) by various discursive practices, institutional arrangements, systems of value, semiotic mechanisms? [...] Although analysis can seldom live up to the complexities of framing and falls back into discussion of context, with its heuristically simplifying presumptions, let us at least keep before us the notion of framing. (Culler 1988: ix)

To think of a frame rather than a context enables us, in Culler's view, to take seriously the constitutive role of the underlying preconditions that surround cultures and make possible cultural expressions.

The essays in this volume investigate how extreme political, cultural, or psychological frameworks affect the use of ekphrasis. World War I, the Stalinist Terror, the Spanish Civil War, World War II and Auschwitz, the Vietnam War, the Northern Irish Troubles, the Bosnian War, the AIDS crisis, 9/11, and impending natural catastrophes are all addressed. Such grueling conflicts and catastrophes are indeed more than mere contextual background material. They act as implacable interpellations that demand our attention. They involve suffering on a scale hard to fathom and demand an immediate political or ethical response from literature and the arts. Yet even such disasters require interpretation rather than immediate visual responses or simply mimetic acts of witnessing.

These events can all be approached in terms of the paradigmatic narrative of trauma, even as all give that narrative their own unique inflection. If trauma has "created a new language of the event" (Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 6), the idiom of that language changes subtly, depending upon which historical occurrences are being formulated in it. Certainly, World War I, the concentration camps, the Vietnam War, and the sexual politics of the 1990s have played important roles in the articulation of the concept of trauma, even if the first modern uses of the term to denote mental rather than physical damage date back to nineteenth-century railway accidents (Luckhurst 2008: 22–26). Trauma provides a particularly influential and powerful conceptual framework that has steadily been accruing a dominion of its own. There is, of course, a danger that it will become a myth or naturalized ideology: the master narrative of trauma becomes vulnerable, in such a case, to being accused of being an arbitrary codification of

more or less indifferent empirical data. Diagnostic language and modes of explanation may, in such cases, appear oppressive and alienating to suffering individuals. Contemporary worries about the heterogeneity of the illnesses that are labelled as traumatic suggest that the widespread embrace of the concept has come at the price of empirical precision (see, for instance, Morris 2016: 13). One could also cite the work of Stef Craps (2013) and others on the Western inflection of the trauma paradigm. The latter developments have, however, led to a revision and expansion of the notion of trauma, making sure it also can address long-term, 'insidious' forms of violence such as colonial oppression.

If trauma is a fuzzy concept, and is subject to processes of revision and negotiation, it is nonetheless a framework that lends itself well to a two-way dialogue with ekphrasis. The two phenomena are closely related. The deferred manifestation, or *Nachträglichkeit*, of trauma is akin to the temporal lapse that typically occurs between the ekphrastic image and its verbal response. In addition, the visual element of ekphrasis essentially connects with the traditional conception of trauma as associated with particularly harrowing mental images. Ekphrasis becomes a literary mediation of the act of witnessing. At the same time, the concept of ekphrasis is arguably subjected to modification in the process. This is evident in the cases in this book where the visual image that the literary texts respond to is of a distinctly mental kind. This points to the need to broaden our understanding of ekphrasis so that the term encompasses not only objects or artworks but also a kind of *mimesis* of the traumatized mind. Ruth Webb's (1999) unearthing of how, in Greek antiquity, the term referred not only to responses to objects but also to a wide variety of phenomena (including actions) is productive in this regard, particularly because Webb interprets ekphrasis as *enargeia*, a vivid, picture-like description of a given. Thus, Heffernan's exclusion of pictorialism from the definition of ekphrasis is here challenged (Heffernan 2004: 3). Thanks to trauma, a wider understanding of ekphrasis, responding to a broader range of phenomena, becomes possible.

Terrorizing images have become more relevant than ever in light of the current conflation of worldwide terrorism and the new, digital articulation and proliferation of images. This situation leads to changes in how human communities and politics are constructed. While the use of new digital technology has expanded a global network of information, it has also fed parochialism, the "battle of civilizations" hypothesis, and nationalist upsurges such as Brexit and Trump's election victory. The idea of community is arguably in a particularly fragile state. The essays in this volume highlight this in various ways.

The role of the spectator is a contentious one. The ethics of spectating, and the inherent danger of voyeurism, may be described as an ineluctable problem especially characteristic of our contemporary age. This book addresses litera-

ture's engagement with a range of such practices, including video art, photography, and digital media. W. J. T. Mitchell's idea of the extreme "cloning" power of the digital media articulates how the very idea of images is being changed in a way that pushes Walter Benjamin's argument (1968: 217–252) regarding the age of reproduction to a further extreme. As digitalized images take on "a perverse life of their own" (Mitchell 2011: 99), the concept of the image is being changed into something characterized by extreme flux. Does the volatility of the image allow it to eventually stabilize, or does it rather expose a radical instability in which diverse interpretative frameworks are revealed to be only provisional, and potentially conflicted, heuristic devices? A layering of multiple images is a feature of many of the readings of this volume. If both collective and individual trauma are characterized by complex processes of memory, one of the ways in which that complexity becomes evident is through a staggering multiplicity of images.

Several contributors make use of psychoanalytical theory in their chapters, which, perhaps, is no surprise given the importance Freud ascribed to processes of repetition and transformations of psychic content. The Freudian paradigm's deployment of a therapeutic discourse in the analyses of literature and trauma is, however, not uncontroversial. Post-structuralist theory insists that the complexity of the literary text makes it irreducible to unequivocal determination, and therefore also not easily instrumentalized as a vehicle of catharsis. The chapters of this book view the novels, plays, and poems they address as more than simple addenda, trailing the force of the images that preceded them. The literary texts help us see and interpret the terrorizing images. Yet they are not simple instruments of catharsis, as they can also both prolong and reinvest the impact of those images. This ambiguity is essential to literature, and it is one of the reasons literature does not easily lend itself to straightforward instrumentalization and other acts of pigeonholing. Like the visual image, the verbal art is ultimately resistant to reduction.

2 The chapters

The opening chapter by Frederik Tygstrup takes as its point of departure Susan Sontag's and Judith Butler's discussions of photographs of war and human suffering to explore a political space from which terrorizing images can be assessed. His selected case study is Peter Weiss's novel *The Aesthetics of Resistance* (1975), which opens with a lengthy ekphrastic enactment of an encounter with the Pergamon altar, detailing the suffering and atrocities displayed on the frieze. As the description's reference is not immediately disclosed, Tygstrup suggests that it

paradigmatically demonstrates how a particular triangle of representation – the sacrosanct work of art, the worthy object, and the delectating beholder – needs to be broken up in order to reframe the affect and become responsive to it.

A recent novel by Don DeLillo is the topic of Øyvind Vågnes' subsequent chapter. He discusses *Zero K* (2016), where the protagonist arrives at a fictional facility, The Convergence, which specializes in extending life through cryonic freezing. Walking the corridors of The Convergence, he is confronted with silent footage that appears on screens that are lowered from the ceiling, all of which show scenes of devastation and destruction. Vågnes argues that *Zero K*'s ethical urgency derives from the book's central tension between two different body images: the precarious bodies of the footage and the bodies cryonically preserved. A critique of the basic tenets of posthumanism, DeLillo's speculative fiction pits cyber-fantasies of radical disembodiment and transcendence against imagery that evokes the uncanny, in the process questioning our sense of humanity in the era of the Anthropocene.

How can we understand the desire for trauma in our society, and what are the links between trauma and intermediality and between trauma and intertextuality? In chapter 3, Joachim Schiedermair discusses these questions together with Johan Harstad's play *Etc.* (2010) and his novel *Max, Mischa & the Tet Offensive* (2015). He argues that ekphrasis, on the one hand, functions as a transformation of a (mental, artistic, or documentary) picture into text (i. e., into a different medium). On the other hand, although trauma can be described as an uncontrollable recurrence of the same images, the context in which these images occur is subject to change. The identity of traumatic images and their tendency to be subject to mobility and transformation can therefore be analyzed as an intertextual phenomenon in trauma literature: as travelling images (akin to Mieke Bal's (2002) concept of "travelling concepts") moving through a number of texts.

Two of the contributions examine novels by Michael Cunningham. Unni Langås's chapter is a reading of *The Hours* (1998), which echoes not only Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) but also Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). From Woolf's post-WWI novel, Cunningham picks up the motif of trauma-ridden suicide and re-inscribes it into the character of an HIV-positive author at the end of the twentieth century. Cunningham repeats the idea of trauma as a return of images in individuals, but his novel is also a repetition of images, understood as ekphrastic descriptions and intertextual dialogue with literary references. Langås's reading emphasizes how the acute crisis of the novel's AIDS context turns the haunting images of the past into terrorizing anticipations of the future.

In chapter 5, László Munteán compares Michael Cunningham's novel *Specimen Days* (2005) with Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* (2007) on the basis of the

techniques they employ to represent images of the New York 9/11 jumpers. While ekphrasis, in the traditional sense, relies upon the imagination of readers to achieve its purpose, the kind of ekphrasis examined by Munteán builds on readers' memories of a particular event. Owing to the traumatizing nature of these events, such as the sight of people jumping out of the burning World Trade Center towers, visual documents thereof have been repressed and censored. Employing Nicolas Abraham's notion of the phantom, Munteán develops the concept of phantomogenic ekphrasis to address the oblique memory of these tabooed images, highlighting how the process of recollection in this text takes place without direct description.

In the sixth chapter, Adriana Margareta Dancus focuses on Édouard Louis's novel *Histoire de la violence* (2016), where the author recounts his own embodied experience of being physically and sexually assaulted. Louis mobilizes a variety of narrative voices and images to reconstruct what happened over the course of twenty-four hours, embracing the events before, during, and after the rape. Dancus shows how Louis reanimates a traumatic past in order to reclaim his story from forensic, medical, and judicial discourses. The author turns the tables not on the rapist but on the friends who pushed him to report the assault to the police, on the medical staff who objectified his personal trauma through the scientific gaze, and on the police, who asked him to recount the traumatic episode innumerable times and archived his story in a racially charged fashion.

Taking poems, prose vignettes, essays, short stories, and novels about the siege of Sarajevo by Semezdin Mehmedinović, Miljenko Jergović, Alma Lazarevska, and Mira Otašević as his point of entry, in chapter 7, Stijn Vervaet explores the relationship between war photography, ekphrasis, and memory. He examines how the writers reflect upon war photographs by international and local photographers, how and why they read the highly aestheticized work of Bosnian war photographers as an alternative to the media images produced by international war reporters, and how they describe images of war – both "mental images" and "real" war photographs. By embedding images of war in a literary discourse, these authors not only explore the tension between empathy and war photography but also aim to give back agency to those portrayed. They also seem to suggest that the alliance between literature and a specific type of war photography can help to create a counter-memory of the siege of Sarajevo.

Media images can be fundamentally manipulated by political interests, a historic phenomenon that Sinéad Morrissey addresses in her poem "The Doctors" (2013). In chapter 8, Charles I. Armstrong discusses how the poem casts critical light on the Soviet practice of "desecrating photographs," including those of undesirable or suspicious individuals, which was widespread during the more repressive period of the Soviet Union. Armstrong explores how Morris-

sey's text casts poetry in the role of a kind of remedial intervention, suturing the wounds inflicted by the mismanaged "doctoring" of state propaganda. As a work of ekphrasis, he demonstrates that "The Doctors" has an ambivalent relationship to the paragonal tradition. For even though the poem presents an ethical lament to the erasure of the visual image, in some respects – as a work of literature, rather than a visual representation – it cannot help but prolong or even further that erasure.

The Troubles of Northern Ireland have been addressed in many works of fiction. Stephanie Schwerter's contribution – in chapter 9 – focuses on Mary Costello's novel *Titanic Town* (1992), in which the experience of political violence is rendered from a juvenile perspective. Set in Belfast in the early 1970s, *Titanic Town* illustrates the traumatizing influence of civil war on the development of young people. Her analysis is based on the concept of "mental maps," which have become one of the key references in contemporary urban studies. Schwerter explores the different ways in which Costello attempts to depict war-torn Belfast through the protagonist's mental images of her urban environment. She investigates how mental images are incorporated into the narrative of the story and how those images portray the city of Belfast as a place of conflict and tension.

One of the main areas of trauma research is the Holocaust, which Christine Berberich discusses in her reading, in chapter 10, of Jonathan Littell's novel *The Kindly Ones* (2006). Despite its subject matter, the novel's graphic representations of violence are of a kind not commonly found in Holocaust writing. Drawing on classical understandings of the ekphrastic genre, Berberich argues that *The Kindly Ones* uses ekphrasis in order to provide a perspective different from that found in traditional Holocaust writing and to solicit affective responses from its readers. By conjuring up images of the Holocaust – painful, brutal, uncomfortable – the novel forces the reader to look, to address the very thing, rather than just think about it as a euphemism or an abstraction. She concludes her reading with a discussion of the novel's ethical implications.

Finally, in the volume's final and eleventh chapter, Karin Sanders examines how a memoir by Jenny Diski, *Skating to Antarctica* (1997), tries to circumvent trauma by searching for a space of deliberate forgetfulness. Diski makes use of two central images: the first is the whiteness and ice connected with a trip to Antarctica, and the second is "Schrödinger's box" and the possibility of a superposition of states, which Sanders reads as a powerful literary metaphor for the suspension of knowledge about the key agent of Diski's trauma. Diski's memoir demonstrates how entrenched the concept of icescapes is as a blank space in our cultural imagination and how it can be used not only to represent mental distress and trauma but also to expand the perspective from individual to historical trauma. The essay shows how whiteness – as in the colors of walls, bed

sheets, and ice – can be seen not only as a kind of non-image, an image of ultimate (albeit failed) forgetfulness, but also as a powerful mnemonic linked to trauma.

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Frederik Tygstrup

De te fabula narratur! Violence and Representation in Peter Weiss's *The Aesthetics of Resistance*

1 Violence

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag launched a still ongoing discussion about the effect of mass mediated images of atrocities in a public sphere saturated with images. On the one hand, she argued, images of suffering human bodies have the capacity to produce a violent affect in the beholder and make the pain of the other incontestably, insupportably present. The vivacity of the image, and even stronger, the indexical veracity of the photograph, puts two bodies up against each other in an encounter that somehow seems to undercut the process of mediation. Two similar bodies, posited in two incomparable universes, creating a dissonant interplay of proximity and distance that keeps resonating adversely in the beholder. Images of atrocities, by way of this logic, have a specific capacity to create concern; Sontag mentions the role of press photos in the rise of protests against the American warfare in Vietnam in the 1960s and in the awareness of the conflict in Bosnia in the 1990s, but examples are legion: famines, tsunamis, migrant vessels. On the other hand, though, we know only too well also that this affect will eventually wane when we are put, as Sontag has it, "on a diet of horrors by which we are corrupted and to which we are gradually becoming habituated" (Sontag 2003: 106). Here, it is as if mediality clicks in again and we see not the painful testimony of suffering, but the innocuous first order reality at hand, the newspaper next to the morning tea, or the flickering screen on the wall. The acuity of the affect elicited by an improbable encounter across time and space eventually recedes, aligning with the surface of the medium again.

This incessant maneuvering between shock and habit, between affect and numbness, is itself indigenous to modernity, to a form of life engulfed in more sensual stimuli than can be processed in an orderly manner. Walter Benjamin adopted Freud's idea of consciousness's shock suppression mechanisms when glossing Baudelaire's poetic impressions from meandering the city streets to pinpoint the need to regulate what to take in and what to discard (Benjamin 1974: 109). The ubiquity of mediated images increases this pressure, supplementing the hypertrophy of stimuli in crowded environments with instant, real-time stim-

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uli coming from virtually everywhere, and thus reinforces the need to police the sensual interface we have with the world even more fastidiously with a constantly effective suppression of unwanted affects. Such repulsion is itself an eminently political mechanism, as it operates a distribution between what counts as a concern and what does not. Judith Butler has recently portrayed this mechanism as one of "framing," determining "whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable" (2010: 38). For Butler, what in Benjamin was very much a question of mental capacity becomes a matter of political capacity as well, the capacity to embrace other peoples' lives as something that concerns us. Such a framing operates particularly by the construction of identitarian communities that facilitate the exclusion of those who, by way of dissimilitude to "us," fail to deserve responsiveness when their vulnerability becomes apparent.

The incapacity to let oneself be affected by the obtrusive images of other people's suffering is, to Butler, a political stance which today, "during these times of war," as she repeatedly insists, converges with a still more poignant rhetoric of enmity. Sontag is no less concerned with the political implications of the waning of such affects that are induced by witnessing the suffering of others, but she articulates it more cautiously, mourning the feeling of numbness and the incapacity to stay alert amidst the endless flow of terrorizing images and blaming herself (and her fellow Americans) for having their sense of reality eroded: "There is still a reality that exists independent of the attempts to weaken its authority. The argument is in fact a defense of reality and the imperiled standards for responding more fully to it" (2003: 109). Sontag turns inward, not recoiling from a moralistic slant, and demands that we find ways of staying attentive and responsive. "Let the atrocious images haunt us. Even if they are only tokens and cannot possibly encompass most of the reality to which they refer, they still perform a vital function. The images say: This is what human beings are capable of doing – may volunteer to do, enthusiastically, self-righteously. Don't forget" (2003: 105).

Don't forget. But it is difficult not to; Sontag's somewhat oblique political statement in *Regarding the Pain of Others* is not a confrontation with violence, but a quest for a position from where to be able to – from where to find the strength to – see and respond to the reality of violence. "But that would seem to demand some equivalent of a sacred or meditative space in which to look at them. Space reserved for being serious is hard to come by in a modern society, whose chief model for a public space is the mega-store (which might also be an airport or a museum)" (2003: 119). Sontag's argument pretty much ends here, political in its own way insofar as it actually airs a petition for a political infrastructure able to support a worthy response to being affected by terrorizing images –

a "serious" political space that can accommodate the responsiveness to the pain of others.

The point of this initial foray into a well-known contemporary discussion about mass-mediated circulation of images of atrocities is to retain this idea of a *political space* where terrorizing images can be responsively assessed. We are affected by these images, partly because encountering them impinges on us painfully, but also partly because the encounter envelops a particular sense of non-encounter, in the guise of an impossibility to respond properly to them, as we watch them from the vantage point of the consumer in the mega-store. The politics Sontag points towards is one of construing a different mode of reception – and eventually, I would claim, one of forming a community where we do not look at images as weary consumers, but as responsive, even responsible, citizens.

The political act of founding a space from where terrorizing images might be apprehended: this is, in short, the matter I want to explore in the following. Contrary to identitarian communities of enmity that disengage their members from the lives of others, can a differently organized assembly of individuals be conceived that would be able to accommodate the affect of terrorizing images? My case for this will not, however, be one of photographs of contemporary war and destruction, but images of horrors and suffering from the history of occidental art, and how they are collectively processed in Peter Weiss's monumental novel from the 1970s, *The Aesthetics of Resistance*. The novel famously opens with a lengthy ekphrastic enactment of the encounter with the Pergamon altar, detailing the sufferings and atrocities displayed on the frieze, and it comprises similar ample literary evocations also of Géricault's *Medusa's Raft* and Picasso's *Guernica*. What these images have in common, apart from being consecrated as belonging to the very apex of *chef d'oeuvres* in the Western art canon, is of course the ghastly sceneries they portray: the mythological scene of carnage associated with the confrontation between the Olympian gods and the Giants, the suffering and tormented bodies of the Medusa shipwreck in 1816, and the horrors of the Fascist bombing of the Basque village of Guernica in 1937.

2 Representation

To be sure, looking at these masterpieces of art history differs radically from being confronted with contemporary images of suffering, in which we somehow *a priori* have a part, and the conflicting emotions we might have regarding them are configured in an altogether distinct way. What I want to argue, though, is that Weiss proposes a way of seeing that *structurally* sheds important light on the pol-

itics of watching images of atrocities. On a general level, what stunning artworks such as these have in common with everyday media images of suffering is that they are culturally effective representations. As representations, however, we tend to consider them in very different ways. In the case of the war photograph, we see the representation as bringing testimony of suffering to our morning table, whereas in the case of artworks, we appreciate the artfulness of the piece all the while perhaps commemorating the violence of the past. Or, to provisionally put it too crudely, in the first, we see the message, followed by a reflection on the medium; in the second, we see the medium, followed by a reflection on the message. In each case, we are eventually also invoked ourselves, either as social beings in a world of violence, or as historical beings in a history of violence.

Considered in this way, a common structure becomes apparent in that both situations, all differences notwithstanding, involve a triangular relationship: something that is depicted, a medial formatting of it, and mode of subjective reception. A representation, therefore, should not be considered solely as a piece of matter that holds a sign function, like a photograph on a small screen or a canvas on the wall of a museum. Representations, of course, involve signs of different kinds, something referring to something else, but they involve more than that: they involve a particular construction of an object to which they refer, and a concomitant construction of the subject that is implied in recognizing a specific object in a specific perspective. Representations, thus, are not just a matter of making non-present objects present again to some subject to whom they are brought. On a more profound level, they *produce* certain objects and certain subjects by way of putting them into relation and by providing this relationship with a specific order. Or differently again: representations are not mediations between objects and subjects, between things in the world and individuals attending to them; they are signifying practices that mold specific objects and interpellate specific subjects. The challenge is to refrain from picking the situation of representation into pieces, and rather to look at it as an encounter between a set of predefined elements: the object, the image, the medium, the beholder; the point is, on the contrary, to insist that the relations that come together in this encounter are more important than the nodes they connect, and that they are formative of the further individuation of those.

In the case of war photographs, a baseline of such an analysis has been put down by Ariella Azoulay:

> Photography takes place in and through an encounter between people, none of whom can ever dictate alone what will be recorded in the photograph and what will remain concealed. The photograph is evidence of an event – the taking of a photograph, the event of photog-

> raphy – which the photographic image could never exhaust on its own. This event is an invitation for yet another event – the viewing of the photograph, its reading, taking part in the production of its meaning. The photograph cannot determine the limits of this event. What the photograph shows exceeds that which the participants in the event of photography attempted to inscribe in it. Moreover, their attempt to determine and shape what will be seen in the frame and the power relations between those participants within it leaves traces that enable one to reconstruct the complexity of the event of photography. (2013: 556)

Azoulay thus recommends that we consider, not just the photograph, but "the photographic event" as an entity that comprises the full representational triangle, and consequently also that we realize how such events of representation tend to recur – the same object constructions coming out of complex social and material assemblages, the same kinds of reactions provided by recipients of the photos, all differences untold. Thus, again, the object that is allegedly being documented is already folded into the representational act, and so are the affects the images come to produce as they reach their audiences. This is also very much the gist of the interpretations of terrorizing images suggested by Sontag and Butler, with Sontag emphasizing the affect implicit in the representations she examines, and Butler emphasizing the framing of the object.

A similar point can be made about painting, with all due differences, in terms of how different objects become painterly in different historical situations, of how the space in which they abide is conceived, of the materiality of their rendition, of the institutional scaffolding of a particular "aesthetic" relation to them *qua* works of art.

For contemporary cultural analysis, this expanded approach to understanding representations is crucial. It is, of course, a truism that cultural analysis has representations as a core object of research as it glosses the world-making mechanisms inherent in the symbolic forms that underpin our language, habits, imagination, feelings, and desires. We study how representations document historical and contemporary cultural situations, in art and in literature, but also in law, medicine, economy, biology – everywhere a symbolization of the world is being articulated. If we would want to take a following step, however, we should see representations – in Michel Foucault's words (1969: 14–15) – not only as documents, but also as *monuments*, expressive acts that are instrumental in the emergence and reproduction of a specific culture. This is actually the direction pointed out by Sontag, Butler, and Azoulay: if we are to understand the agency of representations, we should supplement the analysis of what they say with an analysis of that which they do to the objects they predicate and to the subjects they invoke. Or again, to take into account the entire triangle of rep-

resentation, which is not actually there to read in the representational form, all while it remains part and parcel of the representation.

This expanded approach to representations takes an interest in what happens at the fringes of the representational form proper, the concerns that inform the way in which objects are tailored, and the affects they cultivate when addressing their audiences. What we are studying in this case is not just the "content" of a given cultural moment, it is culture at work, the performative agency of cultural forms as they filter into the fabric of everyday life. Representations in this comprehensive sense give us access to the seminal functional nexus of culture that Jacques Rancière has aptly baptized "the distribution of the sensible." Here, in the opening lines of his definition:

> I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts. This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution. (2004: 12)

"Distribution" here translates the French "partage," which has a fortuitous double meaning of "sharing" and "dividing." "Partage du sensible" thus bespeaks both the existence of a shared sensuous world and the division of what and whom can be included in this shared world from what and whom cannot. Like Michel Foucault before him, Rancière insists that we should consider both sides at once, that there is no common world that does not come with an exclusion of that which does not qualify to partake, and hence that the basic civilizational asset of a shared world also inevitably exercises a power, and therefore stands out an essentially political mechanism that suppresses by means of normalization and silences by way of non-recognition.

Rancière recommends approaching the distribution of the sensible by way of an *aesthetics*, not in the sense of a philosophy of art, but in a Kantian sense of understanding how the transcendental framework for experiencing a world is delimited. In distinction to Kant, however, Rancière does not see the transcendental conditions of possibility for sensing the world in a meaningful way as something universally given; whereas Kant was inspired by the physics of his day and suggested a Newtonian grid of space, time, and causality as that which would underpin any apprehension of things in the world, Rancière's idea of transcendental aesthetics is more akin to the historicizing versions we find in Cassirer or in Foucault. Here, the transcendental remains that which con-

ditions the world-making mechanisms of any given culture, only it comes in different forms and shapes, and its coerciveness does not stem from its being universal, but from the powers in place that reproduce themselves by perpetuating particular forms and shapes.

My theoretical argument so far comes in two steps. The first suggests expanding the analysis of representations to embrace – in addition to the traditional focus on the formal and medial articulation of meaning – the concerns through which they format their objects and the affects through which they condition the subjects they address. And the second suggests considering the work of representations, in addition to seeing them as the very backbone of what we understand by culture, also as an inherently political distribution of power by delimiting an inside and an outside of a shared and recognizable world. With this backdrop, my initial question about how to imagine a space from where terrorizing images might be apprehended will reach out in both of these dimensions. It will be a question, first, of understanding how the place of the receiver is formatted in a representation and how the triangle between the image, the object, and this place can be unpacked, and, second, of how to gain room for maneuvering to criticize the political nature of this system of positioning.

3 Ekphrasis

These are the opening lines of *Aesthetics of Resistance:*

> All around us the bodies rose out of the stone, crowded into groups, intertwined, or shattered into fragments, hinting at their shapes with a torso, a propped-up arm, a burst hip, a scabbed shard, always in warlike gestures, dodging, rebounding, attacking, shielding themselves, stretched high or crooked, some of them snuffed out, but with a freestanding, forward-pressing foot, a twisted back, the contour of a calf harnessed into a single common motion. A gigantic wrestling, emerging from the grey wall, recalling a perfection, sinking back into formlessness. A hand, stretching from the rough ground, ready to clutch, attached to the shoulder across empty surface, a barked face, with yawning cracks, a wide-open mouth, blankly gaping eyes, the face surrounded by the flowing licks of the beard, the tempestuous folds of a garment, everything close to its weathered end and close to its origin. (Weiss 2005: 67)[1]

1 "Rings um uns hoben sich die Leiber aus dem Stein, zusammengedrängt zu Gruppen, ineinander verschlungen oder zu Fragmenten zersprengt, mit einem Torso, einem aufgestützten Arm, einer geborstnen Hüfte, einem verschorften Brocken ihre Gestalt andeutend, immer in den Gebärden des Kampfs, ausweichend, zurückschnellend, angreifend, sich deckend, hochgestreckt oder gekrümmt, hier und da ausgelöscht, doch noch mit einem freistehenden vorgestemmten Fuß, einem gedrehten Rücken, der Kontur einer Wade eingespannt in eine einzige ge-

This description goes on for a couple more pages until it is gradually revealed, in interspersed asides, what this text is, namely a minute ekphrasis, progressively developing the impression of looking at the Pergamon altar in Berlin. Then eventually we get to know when this happens ("twenty-second of September nineteen thirty-seven" [Weiss 2005: 73])[2] and who are looking, a nameless first-person narrator and his two friends. Weiss, in other words, chooses to set off the encounter with the altar – an encounter that takes up the first thirty-something pages of the novel, which becomes a privileged motif and theme throughout the novel, and which states *in nucleo* the most prominent issues in the novel – in a myopic and decontextualized ekphrastic "close-up" on a section of the piece. *In medias res* of sensation, so to speak. The terrorizing nature of the vision is apparent: torn bodies, fighting gestures, convulsion, and fragmentation, and it is hard to remain unaffected by such dismembered and agonizing bodies, a veritable degree zero of violence. But when embarking on the first pages of the novel, the reader will still not know *what* is described: if it is some actual fight, an image of one, or simply a fictional tableau being unrolled. Weiss thus uses the ekphrastic form to radically unframe the situation, in order, probably, to provoke this affective immediacy, a sense of terror and agony without any benchmarks to situate it and thereby to capture it in some reassuring category. This is in itself a rather shrewd literary device, a kind of surprise attack on the reader who will have to enact this ekphrastic moment in her own mind without a chance to take in a position from where the affect can be managed. A literary opening, in other words, that produces the same shock Sontag was referring to when a tormented body suddenly breaks free of the screen or the page of the newspaper and transfers its terror to the unprepared beholder.

In Weiss – the painter who became a writer (see Müllender 2007) – there is a highly meditated pedagogy of images, and its first step is invariably one of pure seeing, of letting the affect seep in with no underpinnings, no defenses up, no attempts at understanding, so as to learn, as it were, to be properly affected. Unframing, however, remains an initial, propaedeutic device; the more difficult question is how then to re-frame the affect pinpointed by way of ekphrasis in

meinsame Bewegung. Ein riesiges Ringen, auftauchend aus der grauen Wand, sich erinnernd an seine Vollendung, zurücksinkend zur Formlosigkeit. Eine Hand, aus dem rauhen Grund gestreckt, zum Griff bereit, über leere Fläche hin mit der Schulter verbunden, ein zerschundnes Gesicht, mit klaffenden Rissen, weit geöffnetem Mund, leer starrenden Augen, umflossen von den Locken des Barts, der stürmische Faltenwurf eines Gewands, alles nah seinem verwitterten Ende und nah seinem Ursprung" (Weiss 1975: 7).

2 "zweiundzwanzigsten September Neunzehnhundert Siebenunddreißig" (Weiss 1975: 16).

a way that will not cross it out again, but, on the contrary, will accommodate it and sustain it, thus doing justice to the initial sensuous affect.

In the case of great canonical artworks, the initial affect is already framed by the monumental art institution that invites us to admire them for their artfulness rather than to commiserate the suffering they put on display. Circumventing the generic attitude of admiring ancient masters in the docile museum setting, where everything is per convention in its right place, is the first challenge. Weiss's solution to this is as simple at it is effective, when he puts three teenagers of proletarian origin in front of the monument, to which they don't have an acquired attitude they can flaunt. "The initiates, the specialists talked about art, praising the harmony of movement, the coordination of gestures; the others, however, who were not even familiar with the concept of 'cultured,' stared furtively into the gaping maws, felt the swoop of the paw in the flesh" (Weiss 2005: 70).[3] They are not watching as habitués, but from a place outside, with a mixture of naïveté and seriousness. On the one hand, the affect actually gets to them, as they cannot conceal it behind the nonchalance of the educated, while on the other, they are spurred to study and understand what they are seeing, to actually establish a link between where they are themselves and what they are seeing unfold in front of them. In this vein, most of the long introductory section that takes place at the Pergamon Museum is a long and studious polylogue between the three adolescent boys in which they struggle to come to terms with the impressive piece.

There are several remarkable features to this conversation as it extends in a number of different directions. Most importantly, it avidly seeks to fill the gap between the acuity of the affect and the exactly, well, museal distance of the object, a more than two-thousand-year-old monument built to celebrate some long-gone empire by staging an even more ancient mythological battle. The youngsters are indeed attentive visitors – they meticulously identify the mythological figures that populate the altar and provide them with ample glossing, expanding on the complex filiations and the devious machinations of both bigger and lesser protagonists of the altar. Moreover, they seek out not only the content of its fable, but also the historical moment when this precise fable was invoked to celebrate the victory of Eumenes II, and the subsequent fate of his empire. And in particular, they struggle to fashion the building of the monument:

3 "Die Eingeweihten, die Spezialisten sprachen von Kunst, sie priesen die Harmonie der Bewegung, das Ineinandergreifen der Gesten, die andern aber, die nicht einmal den Begriff der Bildung kannten, starrten verstohlen in die aufgerissenen Rachen, spürten den Schlag der Pranke im eignen Fleisch" (Weiss 1975: 11–12).

> Prior to the genesis of figurations, there had been the bondage, the enclosure in stone. In the marble quarries on the mountain slope north of the castle, the master sculptors had pointed their long sticks at the best blocks while eying the Gallic captives toiling in the sultry heat. Shielded and fanned by palm branches, squinting in the blinding sun, the sculptors took in the rippling of the muscles, the bending and stretching of the sweating bodies. The defeated warriors, driven here in chains, hanging in ropes on the rock faces, smashing crowbars and wedges into the strata of glittering, bluish white, crystalline-like limestone, and transporting the gigantic ashlars on long wooden sleds down the twisting paths [...] (Weiss 2005: 72).[4]

Throughout the prolific commenting and expanding on what they observe when looking at the altar, the perspective of the youngsters consequently refrains from any evaluative-aesthetic mode; the link between themselves and the bodies carved in stone that they contemplate is not one of cultural appreciation, nor of historical erudition. They remain, one could say, loyal to the initial affective encounter also as they embark on building the frame around it, which is one of violence. What they recognize is the violence of the Titans' uprising against the Olympian, the violence of Eumenes's Mediterranean warfare, the violence of slave labor in building the thing. In this sense, the altar itself becomes an allegory, testifying to a history of violence.

What they recognize, furthermore, in this unbroken chain of violent acts is the struggle between those in power and the disempowered. This is what they see:

> The superiors had always asserted their rights. And they had always insisted on their hegemony until they were replaced by other powerful men, and we had never managed to get beyond buckling and submitting, and once again we faced a burgeoning tyranny that we had not seen coming. (Weiss 2005: 106)[5]

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4 "Vor dem Entstehn der Figurationen war die Gebundenheit gewesen, die Eingeschlossenheit im Stein. In den Marmorbrüchen an den Berghängen nördlich der Burg hatten die Bildhauermeister mit ihren langen Stöcken auf die besten Blöcke gewiesen und dabei die gallischen Gefangenen bei der Arbeit in der dumpfen Hitze beobachtet. Beschirmt und umfächelt von Dattelzweigen, die Augen vor der blendenden Sonne zusammengekniffen, nahmen sie die Bewegungen der Muskeln, die Beugungen und Strekkungen der schwitzenden Leiber in sich auf. Die in Ketten herangetriebnen besiegten Krieger, die an Seilen über den Felswänden hingen, Brecheisen und Keile in die Schichten des bläulich weißen kristallinisch glitzernden Kalksteins schlugen und die riesigen Quadern auf Schlitten aus langen Hölzern die gewundnen Wege hinab beförderten [...]" (Weiss 1975: 20).

5 "Immer hatten sich die Oberen ihre Rechte geholt, und immer hatten sie auf ihrer Hegemonie bestanden, bis andre Mächtige zur Ablösung kamen, und wir hatten es nie weitergebracht, als nachzugeben und uns zu fügen, und wieder einmal verharrten wir angesichts auflebender Tyrannei, die wir nicht kommen gesehn hatten" (Weiss 1975: 72).

Instead of disinterestedness, in other words, they engage with the images of violence precisely by positioning their own interest. The wide gap between themselves and the historical testimonies they find themselves confronted with, which would usually be considered as one of culture and of learning, is here being filled, not with apprenticeship of cultural asset, but by way of sheer identification: "This was our race. We evaluated the history of earthly beings" (Weiss 2005: 67).[6]

Going back to the question of affect and how it is framed, there is surely an affect to be sensitive to in contemplating the Pergamon altar: horror, violence, dismemberment. It is framed, in the setting of the museum of colonial heritage, as art, indeed a stunning masterpiece of occidental creation, as featured in the novel by the amateurs and school classes milling around it. But our protagonists do not simply comply with such a setting and learn to muster the appropriate sense of admiration; their allegorical wit rather compels them to affirm the distance and to appreciate what they see *otherwise*, not through a mode of acquired delectation, but through pure and simple identification. By being attentive to the affect, they insert themselves into the frame, and thereby eventually change it.

4 Recognition and empowerment

In the perspective of Weiss's novel, there are two features that stand out in this process of reappraisal. The first one has to do with this question of art, the fact that our three beholders in the museum are initially estranged to art. For one thing, they are not privileged with an education that would secure access to the sphere of artistic creation, nor do their everyday lives offer the leisure to attend to spiritual matters. Art, so far, does not really have a place in the world of their experience. The question, thus, is whether art would retain any interest on their part. One way of answering this question would be to dismiss art altogether as the pastime of the well-off, a question the protagonists keep returning to, denouncing bourgeois delectation of art as a somewhat decadent mode of self-fashioning that would become irrelevant along with the abandonment of the privileges upholding this ritual. What this crude argument is up against is, of course, the universalist claim dear to idealist aesthetics that art transcends social differences to reflect and enhance fundamental human conditions, an argument that has been vehemently contested by theorists of the Left throughout the twentieth century, insisting that art, as we know it, cannot not be considered as an integral part of a class society. Adhering to this stance as a point of departure,

6 "Dies war unser Geschlecht. Wir begutachteten die Geschichte der Irdischen" (Weiss 1975: 13).

Weiss on the other hand has his protagonists query probingly into a position that would be contrary to the one of idealist aesthetics without, however, negating it altogether. That is, that art and all the framework conditions that come with it do indeed circumscribe a bourgeois privilege, supported by bourgeois sensibilities which cannot, and should not, be uncritically adopted by the historical antagonist to the bourgeoisie. But also, that works of art retain a value that goes beyond the bourgeois taste art has contributed towards cultivating, and even contradicts it:

> [E]verything we produce is utilized way over our heads and [...] it trickles down to us, if at all attainable, from up there, just as work is said to be given to us. If we want to take on art, literature, we have to treat them against the grain, that is, we have to eliminate all the concomitant privileges and project our own demands into them. (Weiss 2005: 84)[7]

If the achievements of art were to be re-appropriated along these lines from a different class standpoint, "against the grain" (a figure of speech Weiss significantly borrows from Walter Benjamin's theses on the philosophy of history), they need to be inscribed, not in some history of the golden moments of human spirit, but in a history of violence – exactly that history of violence the protagonists laboriously unearth in their quest to come to terms with the altar. Art rests upon violence, and the beauty of artworks remains inextricably intertwined with the violence that made it possible. "The grander and the more sublime the creation, the more furious the reign of brutality has been" (Weiss 2005: 86).[8] *Against the grain*, here, means not to retract from art the violence upon which it rests, but inversely to highlight it in order first to recognize it, liaise with it based on their proper experience, and second, by performing a gesture of inheriting these artworks precisely to the extent that, whichever majesty they claim, they do it at the price of the violence they testify to.

In this way, by claiming their own sphere of experience as non-privileged, they break free from the representational order maintained by the art institution; they are not "given" art, just as they are not "given" work: they find their way into art by refiguring it through the lens of their proper experience, re-entering

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7 "...dass alles von uns Erzeugte hoch über uns verwertet wird und daß es, wenn überhaupt erreichbar, uns von dort oben zukommt, wie es auch von der Arbeit heißt, daß sie uns gegeben wird. Wollen wir uns der Kunst, der Literatur annehmen, so müssen wir sie gegen den Strich behandeln, das heißt, wir müssen alle Vorrechte, die damit verbunden sind, ausschalten und unsre eignen Ansprüche in sie hineinlegen" (Weiss 1975: 68).

8 "je größer, je höher das Zustandegebrachte war, desto wütender war die Herrschaft der Brutalität gewesen" (Weiss 1975: 71).

those works that silently adorn the museum walls by claiming their particular affinity to a facet of art that has been thoroughly eclipsed – namely its tacit complicity with a history of violence, which in turn, eventually, comes to concur with the initial affect of their encounter with the frieze. This proletarian pedagogy of art, itself a core piece of Weiss's idea of an "aesthetics of resistance" (see Madsen 2003: 66), is thus not a matter of initiation to the wonder of art, but a historical encounter – an encounter between these communist youngsters about to embark on their journey to fight with the international brigade in the Spanish Civil War, and another testimony of violence, suppression, and upheaval to which they obviously relate, and through which they will reassess their position in the world.

There is a long way from the terrorizing images of war and suffering addressed by Susan Sontag (who also discusses, curiously, Virginia Woolf's reaction to the press photos from the Spanish Civil War) to the terrorizing scenes of violence from the history of art picked out by Weiss. Between the two, notably, lies the question of art. But all differences notwithstanding, the extensive scene from Weiss's novel (and many more scenes like it) paradigmatically demonstrates how a particular triangle of representation – the sacrosanct work of art, the worthy object, and the delectating beholder – needs to be broken up in order to reframe the affect and become responsive to it. This would be an example of the political constitution of a space from where terrorizing images can be viewed, to which I referred earlier – a space where the triangle of representation is disturbed and then reconfigured in order to share an experience over even considerable spans of time and space through a sustained reflection on what we look at and who we are as we look at it.

A second – and final – point on the political constitution of a place from where to look at terrorizing images to be found in Weiss's novel concerns the subjective pole of the relation, the onlooker. Significantly, the minute contemplation of the Pergamon altar takes the guise of a conversation, a dynamic web of intermingling voices. The one looking is not one, but legion; it is a "we." This is, in fact, another device in Weiss's attempt at breaking up the triangle of representation: to supplant the interpellated spectator with a fluid, collective intelligence that reduplicates the sense of solidarity and connectedness established between the beholder and the object of the artwork to also operate on the receiving side, reinforcing the sense of a "we" across time and space by constituting another "we" in the moment of engaging.

To appreciate this point, a note on Weiss's narrative style is in place. *The Aesthetics of Resistance* comprises a huge number of characters that come and go over the novel's 2,000 pages, characters that are all documentary, historical individuals, retrieved in Weiss's ample research for the novel – except for the protagonist (plus his parents), who shares some features with the author himself,

bar his humble origins, which Weiss did not share; in this respect, he himself talked about the novel as a "dreamt biography" ("*Traumbiographie*"). Everything the characters say, however, is invented – Weiss's version of what these characters could or might have said. Second, now, Weiss does nothing to individualize all these different voices – which is indeed one of the reasons that so many readers have found that reading the novel is actually a quite bland experience. So many words are uttered throughout the novel, by so many different characters, but utterly indistinguishable: only large blocks of text – an impression which is underscored by using almost no paragraphs and no *inquit*s at all – with an interspersed "said he" or "said her," often even nesting such quotations within each other; a technique subsequently developed even further by W. G. Sebald in his *Austerlitz*, in many respects an homage to *The Aesthetics of Resistance*. The effect of this stylistic choice – and this is what I am coming at – is a (difficult) conversion of reading, no longer attaching too much importance to the dramatic mode of who is saying what, but instead being attentive to what happens in the collective murmur, in the event of their voices merging into a blended magma, dryly recorded in the novelistic text.

Seeing, sensing, and thinking come forth as a collective process, as figments of a trans-individual intelligence deployed in the event of the conversation. This is the second versant of the politics of relating to terrorizing images that can be found in Weiss: if the first is about reframing the object, the second is about performing this reframing in a process of collective fabulation. Part of the disquiet that for Sontag comes with being interpellated by photographs of suffering has to do with the way in which the beholder finds herself locked up in an affect that doubles with powerlessness. Weiss's remedy for this deadlock is to reopen the position of the beholder. Rather than having the affect terminate painfully in a torn individual, he puts the problem of individuation itself at stake again as a matter of collective negotiation. The affect of the image impinges on the viewer, as if saying "who are you to look at this?" To politicize this situation, Weiss suggests transforming this "you" into a "we," thus creating a shared forum to ponder what kind of "we" can possibly respond to what is displayed. Rather than having the affect terminate in an impotent and torn subject, he recommends challenging the geometry of the triangle of representation and open up the subject position for the becoming of a veritable political subject which is, almost by definition, a collective.

Unframing images of suffering, challenging particular distributions of the sensible, re-working the triangle of representation – what these intentions have in common is their aim to politicize the situation of encountering representations of suffering. Following Weiss, this can only be achieved in a twofold process of thoroughly unpacking the represented object, glossing it with fabulation,

and constituting a collective political subject that can respond to the affect of the image. This is about recognizing properly what the image provides a snippet of and about recognizing oneself as someone able to be properly responsive to it – to leap into the image and to let the image sift into oneself. Or, as Horace succinctly had it, to recognize that "the tale is told of you": *de te fabula narratur* (Horace 1929: 9 – 10).

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Øyvind Vågnes

What Does It Mean To Be Human? Speculative Ekphrasis and Anthropocene Trauma in Don DeLillo's *Zero K*

1 Introduction

The Manhattan art gallery visit has become something of a regularity in Don DeLillo's twenty-first-century fiction. The entirety of the short story "Baader-Meinhof" (2002) takes place at the Gerhard Richter retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in February–May of 2002. In *Falling Man* (2007), a visit to a Giorgio Morandi exhibition in Chelsea provides scenes central to the novel's overall design. And the early pages of *Point Omega* (2010) once again pay a visit to MOMA, where an unnamed character spends a considerable amount of time in the darkness of a room in which Douglas Gordon's "24 Hour Psycho" (1993) is being projected.

In spite of all its encounters with images of different kinds, *Zero K* (2016) marks a break from this tendency to fictionalize events taking place at real-life exhibitions housed by landmark institutions in New York City's art world. The ekphrastic moments of what is the author's most markedly futuristic novel to date all appear at a fictional facility, The Convergence, which specializes in life extension through cryonic freezing. Rather than revolving around existing art works, the scenes are engaged with the visualization of fictitious images that do not belong to what we normally think of as the realm of art. The ekphrasis of *Zero K* can thus be understood as what I in this chapter propose to describe as "speculative ekphrasis": evocations of visual events that resonate with distinct, speculative aesthetic imaginaries. In what follows, I will show how the juxtaposition of this form of speculative ekphrasis with a markedly non-ekphrastic, traumatized language is instrumental to the novel's exploration of what I find to be its chief concerns: the ramifications of the parallel emergence of what is referred to in critical discourse as "the Anthropocene" and "the posthuman subject."

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2 DeLillo's speculative ekphrasis

Images play a very important role in DeLillo's oeuvre. In a frequently cited interview, the author shares some reflections on this continuing prevalence, suggesting that "the age of images" has transformed, no less, our modes of self-understanding: "I don't think any attempt to understand the way we live and the way we think and the way we feel about ourselves can proceed without a deep consideration of the power of the image" (Howard 2005: 125). Undoubtedly, such a consideration merits a broadly designed unravelling of our multifarious interactions with visuality that exceed the various genres of art writing. It would have to address the ways in which the image appears in our everyday lives in a global world where the infrastructures of communication and information are increasingly shaped by the digital screen. Furthermore, it would have to engage not merely with the literary description of images, but rather, more comprehensively, with the dramatization in novelistic form of the various influences they exert on individuals and collectives.

Indeed, much of DeLillo's fiction is characterized by an ambition precisely to perform "a deep consideration of the power of the image." In *Underworld* (1997), for instance, the evocation of a fictitious screening of Abraham Zapruder's infamous footage of the Kennedy assassination revolves as much around the impact of the images on a very select audience gathered in a Manhattan loft as around the massively recycled images themselves, which DeLillo probably took for granted would be well-known to his readers; over a few pages, the novel can be said to address and demonstrate the way the film has shaped the cultural and collective memories of the President's brutal death.[1] Similarly, for all their vibrant art description, the ekphrastic moments of "Baader-Meinhof," *Falling Man*, and *Point Omega* are as significant for their elaboration of the human mind in the moment of preoccupation with the image, as with the image itself. Rather than revolving around the verbal description of specific imagery as it appears through a medium-specific semiotic system, DeLillo's ekphrastic object is more aptly described in terms of what we might call the evocation of a distinctly visual event.

Such a re-articulation of the ekphrastic object is not unprecedented in the scholarly literature that has appeared over the last quarter of a century. Indeed, it appeared urgent in several writings that were published during a decade that must be considered seminal for any conception of "ekphrastic studies," namely, the 1990s, which offered explorations of the elasticity of ekphrasis from impor-

1 For more on this passage in *Underworld*, see Vågnes 2011: 74 – 78.

tant contributors such as James Heffernan, Peter Wagner, Mieke Bal, and W. J. T. Mitchell. Chiefly, these writings spoke for a generalization of ekphrasis as a critical concept, accentuating its potential to address intermediality across the arts.[2] This movement of ongoing reconceptualization has continued into the digital age, with its many reorientations concerning the relationship between image and word.[3] We have witnessed what Keith Moxey describes as a fatigue in the humanities with "regimes of representation that trade in ascriptions of meaning" at the same time as they express a newly intensified interest in *presentation* – in what Moxey refers to as "the presence of the visual object, how it engages with the viewer in ways that stray from the cultural agendas for which it was conceived and which may indeed affect us in a manner that sign systems fail to regulate" (Moxey 2008: 132–133). Arguably, this shift in focus also implies a recognition of the "visual event" as the object of visual culture studies. The question of visuality, Mieke Bal insists, is simple: "What happens when people look, and what emerges from that act? The verb 'happens' entails the *visual event* as object, and 'emerges' the visual image, but as a fleeting, fugitive, subjective image accrued to the subject" (Bal 2003: 9). In more recent years, ekphrastic theories have been articulated increasingly in response to present media ecology, reflected, for instance, in a thematic issue of *Poetics Today* published in 2018, which aims to revive "rhetorical and performative understandings of ekphrasis that can augment theoretical conceptualizations and bring them into line with the participatory and hybrid practices of ekphrasis today":

> Increasingly, what used to be a central aim of ekphrasis – the description of an artwork – has been replaced by modes of rewriting the artwork and in the process questioning accepted meanings, values, and beliefs, not just relating to the particular artwork in question but

2 See, for instance, Peter Wagner's discussion of this impulse (1996). James Heffernan's general definition of *ekphrasis* as a "verbal representation of a visual representation" (1991) was further developed by Mitchell in *Picture Theory*, which described ekphrasis as a description of images that "cannot literally come into view" (1994: 158) (see also Mitchell's comments in Grønstad and Vågnes 2006), and by Mieke Bal, who refers to ekphrasis as an "evocation of absent images" (1999: 118).

3 In the introduction to a 2010 special issue of *French Studies* on a "new ekphrastic poetics," Susan Harrow observes that the wide approach of "contemporary ekphrastics" reflects a desire to address and critically engage with "reciprocal visual and textual cultures" to study "the modes whereby texts engages with visual culture" (Harrow 2010: 257). On somewhat different but related terms, Cecilia Lindhé distinguishes between "printed ekphrasis" and "rhetorical ekphrasis," the latter of which "encompasses aspects relevant for our digital age that have not been fully perceived before; digital literature and art align with this concept of ekphrasis, especially in the way that its rhetorical meaning is about effect, immediacy, aurality, and tactility" (Lindhé 2013: 2).

> referencing the ways of seeing and the scopic regimes of the culture at large. Since these changes in writing and reading practices tend toward increasing the participation of the reader, a more meta-representational and rhetorical conceptualization of ekphrasis is desirable. (Brosch 2018: 225)

Indeed, the advent of what DeLillo calls "the age of the image" urges such a reconsideration of how ekphrasis might be mobilized as a critical concept in a cultural analysis more aptly directed at contemporary forms. A radical acknowledgment of situatedness allows for a form of image writing that brings spatial, temporal, and affective elements into play in new ways. The conceptualization of what I propose to call "speculative ekphrasis" must be considered as a response to these ongoing considerations in the arts and the humanities.

To an unprecedented degree, *Zero K* sees DeLillo venture into a form of narrative alternatively referred to as "science fiction" or, in this case (and more fittingly), "speculative fiction," thus introducing new forms of fictional ekphrasis into his writing. It is the writer, editor, and critic Judith Merril who is credited for first idealizing "speculative fiction" as a way of examining "some postulated approximation of reality by introducing a set of changes, imaginary or inventive," and in recent years, writers from Margaret Atwood to Charlie Brooker (*Black Mirror*) have returned to that generic description, finding the *sci-fi* moniker an ill-fitting description of their work (Merril 2017: 27). In a concise yet rich historization of the term, Marek Oziewicz observes how its "semantic register has continued to expand":

> While "speculative fiction" was initially proposed as a name of a subgenre of science fiction, the term has recently been used in reference to a meta-generic fuzzy set supercategory – one defined not by clear boundaries, but by resemblance to prototypical examples – and a field of cultural production. Like other cultural fields, speculative fiction is a domain of activity that exists not merely through texts, but through their production and reception in multiple contexts. (2017)

Such a domain can be productively understood in terms of an "aesthetic imaginary." The concept of the imaginary, Claus Clüver, Matthijs Engelberts, and Véronique Plesch observe, "has long been an intrinsic part of the ways we understand creative productivity in any medium," alternatively delineated "as an interface between the subjective position and the world, as a register of thought or as the universe of images and signs, texts and objects of thought," or "as a way of interpreting the world" (Clüver, Engelberts, and Plesch 2015: 11). As Lene Johannessen observes, aesthetic imaginaries "assume a tenor and function that flow through all the other variants, feeding on and fed by the constituents

that make them up in a temporal and spatial flux, suffusing all that there is in a constant ebb and flow of constitution and rupture" (Johannessen 2019: xi).

As will be evident from my reading of the novel, the ekphrastic moments of *Zero K* mobilize several tropes that we recognize from the aesthetic imaginaries of speculative fiction. They could be considered a variety of what John Hollander in 1988 described as "notional" ekphrases, of imaginary or absent artworks, since they appear at a fictitious underground compound somewhere near Chelyabinsk in Russia, where those wealthy enough to do so have retreated to have their body frozen, anticipating that science will, at some point, be able to bring them back to life (Hollander 1988). All ekphrasis is, in a certain sense, notional, W. J. T. Mitchell argued in *Picture Theory* in response to Hollander's definition; it must be understood as an attempted creation of "a specific image that is to be found only in the text as its 'resident alien,' and is to be found nowhere else" (Mitchell 1994: 157n). Like much of DeLillo's fiction, the premise of *Zero K* is, in fact, based on existing models, as Eric Cofer points out in a reading of the book: KrioRus, the world's first actual storage facilities for cryonic treatment, opened in Russia in 2005 (Cofer 2018: 7). As is typical for speculative narratives, the novel provides us with a universe that can be interpreted as both parallel and near-future, but on further inspection, certain aspects of the world it depicts turn out to resemble our historical moment more closely than many readers would like to think. As Dominic Preziosi observes in a review of *Zero K*, the novel stands out in DeLillo's oeuvre for being "less historical" than his previous work – it is "more futuristic, yet it's set in a worrisomely recognizable present" (Preziosi 2016: 32). Whereas the ekphrastic moments of *Underworld*, "Baader-Meinhof," *Falling Man*, and *Point Omega* involve a metareferential play that resonates with their mimetic relationship to existing artworks, similar moments in *Zero K* are non-mimetic in the sense that they engage with distinctly speculative imaginaries. Of particular interest in this context are contrasting imaginaries that are pitted against each other by means of speculative ekphrasis: those of a ravaged, increasingly inhospitable planet, and those of human individuals seeking to transcend this misery, in a form of embodiment yet unknown to us.

3 At the convergence: Aesthetic imaginaries of the Anthropocene

Zero K revolves around protagonist Jeffrey Lockhart's visits to The Convergence to spend time with his father, Ross, and his seriously ill partner, Artis Martineau,

who, at her deathbed, is about to undergo cryonics. Ross Lockhart, we learn, has made his considerable fortune on "analyzing the profit impact of natural disasters," and has invested heavily in The Convergence (DeLillo 2016: 14). A significant part of the novel has Jeff wandering the corridors of the compound, which are minimalist, nearly empty, and non-distinct, lacking any kind of visual art. There are no windows in the uninviting halls, and all doors are shut, so that both outside and inside worlds have an impenetrable quality. The Convergence is the white cube where you go to die, in order to be resurrected, sometime in the future, under unknown circumstances.

Walking around, Jeff repeatedly confronts lowering screens that stretch from wall to wall and reach nearly to the floor, inviting him to watch, describe, and reflect upon what they show him:

> There was water racing through woodlands and surging over riverbanks. There were scenes of rain beating on terraced fields, long moments of nothing but rain, then people everywhere running, others helpless in small boats bouncing over rapids. There were temples flooded, homes pitching down hillsides. I watched as water kept rising in city streets, cars and drivers going under. The size of the screen lifted the effect out of the category of TV news. Everything loomed, scenes lasted long past the usual broadcast breath. It was there in front of me, on my level, immediate and real, a woman sitting life-sized on a lopsided chair in a house collapsed in mudslide. A man, a face, underwater, staring out at me. I had to step back but also had to keep looking. It was hard not to look. Finally I glanced back down the hall waiting for someone to appear, another witness, a person who might stand next to me while the images built and clung. There was no audio. (DeLillo 2016: 11)

The footage is silent in terms of its audio but turbulently noisy on a visual level. The lack of any authoritative voiceover to help Jeff contextualize the events that are unfolding in time and place further removes it from the realm of reporting. Indeed, several of the scenes that will appear in collage on the screens at The Convergence might have been recorded during natural disasters. Whoever has edited the material has made use of a number of creative strategies in the montage, which eventually comes to include slow motion segments and certain visual motifs that are repeated for effect. Like the setting in which they appear, these video installations are all the author's invention, vivified in evocative passages that veer between, connect, and interweave descriptive and introspective modes, as the narrator takes the time to dwell on specific images and the impact they have on him, which is both visceral and intellectual.

Among the disturbing segments, one stands out for its depiction of self-inflicted violence. The lowered screen shows three monks seated cross-legged on mats, each holding containers, with candles within reach. They douse themselves with what Jeff realizes is flammable liquid, one of them taking sips

from a bottle. Then the moment pauses distressingly, as one of them struggles with, then finally succeeds in, striking a flame:

> I stepped back from the screen. My face was still twisted in response to the third man's reaction when the kerosene passed through his gullet and entered his system. The burning men, mouths open, swayed above me. I stepped farther back. They were formless, soundless, screaming. (DeLillo 2016: 61–62)

The footage will remind some readers of AP photographer Malcolm Browne's award-winning press photograph of Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc's self-immolation on June 10, 1963, a protest against South Vietnam president Ngo Dinh Diem's favoritism of Catholics for jobs in higher office in a population overwhelmingly Buddhist. As I have noted before in writing about the picture, research shows that such acts are committed to make claims for a collective cause – they are performative acts staged to appear in a public place, often accompanied by a statement addressed to political figures or to the general public. Their self-destruction is not intended to harm others that happen to be in the vicinity.[4]

The specific background for this particular kind of protest will remain unclear to Jeff as well as to the reader, but self-annihilation through fire comes to serve as a traumatic counter-image to that of self-preservation through ice. The disaster footage as well as the self-immolation video appear to reflect what Susan Sontag, in her 1965 essay "The Imagination of Disaster," described as science fiction allegories that represent new myths about "the perennial human anxiety about death" (Sontag 1965: 48). Behind science fiction narratives, Sontag wrote, "lurk the deepest anxieties about contemporary existence, about the condition of the individual psyche," but also "new anxieties about physical disaster, the prospect of universal mutilation and even annihilation" (Sontag 1965: 47). To Sontag, the model scenario of science fiction "involves the discovery of some fundamental alteration in the conditions of existence on our planet" (Sontag 1965: 43). That alteration would, in today's critical language, be described in terms of the "Anthropocene." Introduced into current critical terminology by chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoermer in 2000, it designates the present era as human-influenced, or anthropogenic, based on global evidence that atmospheric, geologic, hydrologic, biospheric, and other earth system processes are now altered by humans (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). The Anthropocene is dated very differently by scientists and researchers in an ongoing struggle for the authority of conceptualization and periodization, but, in many accounts, the period starts some 250 years ago with the industrial revolution.

4 See Vågnes 2015. For more on self-immolation, see Biggs 2005.

Any fiction of the Anthropocene thus involves an engagement with pasts as well as futures, for as Jennifer Wenzel observes, "prophecy is inseparable from memory, which is another way of saying that memory is always implicitly about futurity." As Wenzel points out, speculative fiction is "premised on offering 'memories of the future', drawing upon the prophetic mode in order to warn us, here and now, of how things will turn out to be, or to have been" (Wenzel 2018: 503).

Jeff Lockhart's response to his visual encounters in the controlled confinement of The Convergence is characterized by its engagement with the aesthetic imaginaries of the Anthropocene. Reverberating with the etymological roots of the word "speculative," in the Latin *speculatio*, these speculative ekphrases invite the reader to consider the entanglement of Jeff's observations and contemplations both, as these are shaped by his confrontations with the screens that are lowered in front of him. The protagonist's acute sense of what Christopher Schaberg describes as "ecological disorientation," of "confusion concerning one's place on this planet, however muted, unacknowledged, or pronounced," shapes his experience of the footage at The Convergence (2017: 75). When he arrives there, several flights have already extended the entirety of his stay, but this exhausting trip is the source of something much more profound than the significant jetlag he experiences – in fact, it sets into motion a series of reflections that collectively represent what Schaberg refers to as the "key phenomenological exploration that underpins the novel" (2017: 89). With its location peripheral and remote by any going definition of *central*, and its interiors unable to denote any specific cultural identity rooted in geography, the underground compound seems to leave its visitors in a numbing state of transit, albeit of a more existential kind than that of airline travel. Having been transported across the planet and into the corridors of The Convergence, Jeff's sensitivity to the images is marked by an escalating sense of a double disorientation that is both personal and ecological. Taking a step back, feeling his face twist, Jeff is all at once experiencing, observing, and contemplating the effects of what Richard Crownshaw describes as "Anthropocene trauma," effective across space and time, in response to "environmental catastrophe generated by global capitalism," where implicated subjects can be perpetrators (by being, for instance, agents of climate change) but also potential victims (Crownshaw 2016: 247). The traumatic imagery affects what has been called "psychoterratic geographies," referring to "mental health (psyche) states that are related to place and the condition of the earth (terra)," and, in particular, a sense of "solastalgia," or "a feeling of desolation and melancholia about the emplaced and lived experience of the chronic deterioration of a loved home environment":

> Open pit coal mining, other forms of mining, urbanization, gentrification, toxic pollution of places and, now, global warming and attendant climate extremes such as drought, have been identified as factors that potentially drive people into solastalgic despair. (McManus, Albrecht, and Graham 2014: 59)

Neither news reportage nor documentary, most of the catastrophic, disturbing visuals appear to be partially staged or manipulated segments intended to instill in the spectator a collectively felt sense of solastalgic despair, on behalf of an increasing percentage of the global population, and thus a desire to leave this troubled world momentarily, only to return with a yet unknown posthuman subjectivity.

Are the images Jeff is confronted with catastrophe art? Does the assembled material represent a form of essayistic or documentary filmmaking? Rather than falling into any of these categories, the films are produced within and for the institutional framework that is The Convergence, and the installations are designed by two men who are described as "tall and fair-skinned, twins, in old workpants and matching gray T-shirts" (DeLillo 2016: 68–69). In a presentation resembling a TED talk, the Stenmark brothers – a name Jeff gives them – describe how they intend to "stretch the boundaries of what it means to be human – stretch and then surpass": "Death is a cultural artifact, not a strict determination of what is humanly inevitable," they declare (DeLillo 2016: 71). The future is uncertain, but in the face of the Anthropocene trauma of the lowered screen, that uncertainty is a more attractive alternative: "Not so easy to imagine what will be out there, better or worse or so completely altered we will be too astonished to judge" (DeLillo 2016: 75). In *Zero K*, the dystopian aesthetic imaginaries of the Anthropocene are mobilized in order to ignite the utopian aesthetic imaginaries of immortality, manifested in the temptation to cryopreserve the human body and wake up in a moment in time in which what is now our future will have become our past.

4 Artis speaks: Traumatized language and non-ekphrastic style

"They weren't scientists or social theorists," Jeff muses about the Stenmark brothers: "What were they? They were adventurers of a kind that I could not quite identify" (DeLillo 2016: 71). Protesting our assumptions about the finitude of human life, the twins instead insist on the capacity of the human race to extend the life span beyond the limitations of our biological bodies. Our sense of self is a product of the neurochemistry of the brain, and if we are able to preserve

this human organ in the temporary slumber of the deep freeze, the lives of our minds can surpass that of our bodies, and our human subjectivity can re-emerge in hitherto unknown forms of embodiment. The brothers are, in part, proponents of what N. Katherine Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman* describes as "the posthuman view," which sees "embodiment in a biological substrate [...] as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life" (Hayles 1999: 2).

Artis Martineau, an archaeologist and a scientist, has in her escalating terminal illness decided to believe in the brothers' vision of cryonic life extension to which her partner has contributed funding. In spite of her deep knowledge of deep time, she has chosen to come to The Convergence to visit Zero K, a special unit "predicated on the subject's willingness to make a certain kind of transition to the next level" (DeLillo 2016: 112). The name "Zero K" refers to the conditions necessary to undergo cryonics – absolute zero degrees Kelvin is the temperature at which atoms stop moving. Ross Lockhart, who is in good health, is thinking about joining Artis. Musing on these prospects, Jeff admits to not knowing whether to regard the physical form that the scientists at The Convergence are working on as a "body," a notion that inevitably raises questions around the very distinction between life and death:

> The other thing I didn't know was what constituted the end. When does the person become the body? The body withdraws from one function and then possibly another, or possibly not – heart, nervous system, brain, different parts of the brain down into the mechanism of individual cells. It occurred to me that there was more than one official definition, none characterized by unanimous assent. They made it up as occasion required. Doctors, lawyers, theologians, philosophers, professors of ethics, judges and juries. (DeLillo 2016: 139 – 140)

The posthuman view considers "consciousness, regarded as the seat of humanity in the Western tradition long before Descartes thought he was a mind thinking, as an epiphenomenon," writes Hayles, who continues: "extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born" (1999: 3). This aspiration of posthuman philosophy, with genealogies in Cartesian dualism, is manifested in the discursive distinction between "having" and "being" a body: "Identified with the rational mind, the liberal subject possessed a body but was not usually represented as *being* a body," Hayles writes (1999: 3). As Bernadette Wegenstein observes, human embodiment can be expressed via the phenomenological differentiation between "being a body" and "having a body":

> the former, insofar as it designates the process of living the body, the first-person perspective, coincides with dynamic embodiment; the latter, referencing the body from an external, third-

> person perspective, can be aligned with the static body. [...] Contemporary technoscience is in a unique position to exploit this phenomenological convergence of first- and third-person perspectives. (2010: 21)

Indeed, this convergence of perspective is thematized in DeLillo's narrative design in *Zero K* in the characterization of Artis Martineau pre- and post-cryonics. The reader is first introduced to her voice in the dialogue in the first part of the novel, where Jeff, serving as the first-person narrator of the novel, also makes several comments on the way in which she expresses herself, and how she sounds, as she is about to go into treatment. Then, we are led to believe that the voice of a narrative titled "Artis Martineau," placed at the novel's middle, between Jeff's visits to the compound and a closing return to New York City, in fact belongs to Artis, or whatever is left of her, as she wakes up after years in frozen suspension.

The contrast in these two highly different manifestations of how the same individual thinks and articulates herself before and after cryopreservation is striking (and no less so to the reader who decides to delve into the audio book version of *Zero K*, narrated with fine-tuned nuance by actor Thomas Sadoski). When Jeff finds Artis in her suite at The Convergence, he places himself at her side, holds her hand, and talks with her. In a hushed, faltering voice, she describes how she finds herself preoccupied with memories of the smallest bodily sensations of everyday life, seemingly trivial past moments to which she is now highly attentive in an intensified way: "I think about drops of water. How I used to stand in the shower and watch a drop of water edge down the inside of the sheer curtain" (DeLillo 2016: 17). Struggling to articulate how her biography feels shaped by the sense of being a body rather than having a body, her pre-cryonics recollections are both moving and ambiguous and reflect the intensity of the transition that Artis is facing, which, to her, is simultaneously a kind of death and a kind of birth. Indeed, she feels this split at the core of her own speaking voice, in a self-awareness that seems intimately connected with her very sense of language, of the way in which utterance is conditioned by embodiment. "My voice is different," she tells Jeff: "I hear it when I speak in a way that's not natural. It's my voice but it doesn't seem to be coming from me." When Ross protests and suggests that this sensation is a result of her medication, Artis either does not hear or ignores his comments and continues to reflect on the source of the words that are made by her vibrating vocal cords and that pass through her mouth: "It seems to be coming from outside me. Not all the time but sometimes. It's like I'm twins, joined at the hip, and my sister is speaking. But that's not it at all" (DeLillo 2016: 52). For all her frailty and weakness, Artis is intensely present in her conversations with Jeff. She has made her choice

and is determined to follow up on it: "I'm so eager. I can't tell you. To do this thing. Enter another dimension. And then return. For ever more" (DeLillo 2016: 53).

The sparse dialogue of the fourth and fifth chapters of *Zero K* is enough to give the reader a sense of who Artis is, even if her abilities to express herself are reduced by illness and medication both. Her aesthetic sensibilities shape her very persona, her eye for detail, her touch for tactility. Thus, when she reappears in the six pages that form the chapter "Artis Martineau," it is hard to recognize her voice, since tone, syntax, and grammar are jumbled: "But am I who I was. I think I am someone. There is someone here and I feel it in me or with me. But where is here and how long am I here and am I only what is here" (DeLillo 2016: 157). An intense feeling of disembodiment and dislocation, expressed by a subject who lacks the human senses, the capacity to smell, taste, and see, characterizes this frightening voice. Artis might be addressing us in the first person, but her perspective is not that of the first person.

Artis's voice pre-cryonics reflects the fine-tuned machinery that enables human beings to speak, where our brains depend on our sensory organs and on bodily sensations in shaping our sense of self. We are not born with language, we learn to express ourselves through experience, and in "Artis Martineau," the human voice seems to be cut off from that experience. Artis's cognitive abilities and her speaking faculties seem to have suffered trauma, and the elegant idiosyncrasies that the reader has come to think of as characteristic of her self-expression have disappeared from her language. Interspersed with her fragmented narrative, such as it is, are sentences articulated by an omniscient narrator in italics: "*She knows these words. She is all words but she doesn't know how to get out of words into being someone, being the person who knows the words*" (DeLillo 2016: 157). "*She is first person and third person with no way to join them together*" (DeLillo 2016: 160). In a novel dense with visuality and imagery, "Artis Martineau" stands out for its lack of the visual. Whereas several of the scenes that play out at The Convergence are characterized by an intense display of the intricate relationship between the branches of what W. J. T. Mitchell described in 1984 as the "family tree" of images – images that are "graphic (pictures, statues, designs), optical (mirrors, projections), perceptual (sense data, 'species,' appearances), mental (dreams, memories, ideas, fantasmata), verbal (metaphors, descriptions, writing)" (Mitchell 1984: 505) – it is as if Artis's voice is bereft of any relations with the image, including sense data and memories that can assist her in getting in touch with what was herself: "*She is the residue, all that is left of an identity*" (DeLillo 2016: 160). Indeed, the unnerving narrative of her new subjectivity is marked by blindness, by a non-ekphrastic style that seems to speak out of darkness.

5 Iconic speculative ekphrasis: Aesthetic imaginaries of immortality

Gradually, an ekphrastic tension appears to shape Jeff's ruminations about what he is witness to at The Convergence. The traumatic imagery of disaster arrives with regularity and eventually even an air of familiarity – when a screen is lowered in the corridor before him during his second visit, in the seventh chapter of the second part of *Zero K*, he even describes it as a "welcome sight": "The serial force of images would overwhelm my sense of floating in time. I needed the outside world, whatever the impact" (DeLillo 2016: 235). Pitted against this imagery of natural disaster and violence, however, is the sublime vision of after-life that Jeff is allowed a glimpse of towards the end of his second visit, when he is permitted a brief walk in the cryostorage section into which his father is finally about to enter, two years after Artis was placed there:

> There were rows of human bodies in gleaming pods and I had to stop walking to absorb what I was seeing. There were lines, files, long columns of naked men and women in frozen suspension. [...] All pods faced in the same direction, dozens, then hundreds, and our path took us through the middle of these structured ranks. The bodies were arranged across an enormous floor space, people of various skin color, uniformly positioned, eyes closed, arms crossed on chest, legs pressed tight, no sign of excess flesh. [...] Here, there were no lives to think about or imagine. This was pure spectacle, a single entity, the bodies regal in their cryonic bearing. It was a form of visionary art, it was body art with broad implications. (DeLillo 2016: 256)

The image of the body in the pod represents the iconic speculative ekphrasis of *Zero K*, a spectacle of hubris that invites comparison with Frankenstein's monster "reassembled by Science into an automaton of flesh" (Helman 2004: 5). It is emblematic of the aesthetic imaginary of immortality: a figure of Artis's leap of faith and of Ross's refusal to accept the realities of the finitude of human life.

Writing about cryonic suspension in *Impossible Exchange*, Jean Baudrillard suggests that it represents to him the ultimate human fantasy, namely, immortality: "once the human is no longer defined in terms of transcendence or liberty, but in terms of functions of biological equilibrium, the definition of the human itself begins to fade, along with that of humanism" (Baudrillard 2001: 35). "Here was science awash in irrepressible fantasy," Jeff muses as he is wandering through the storage facilities of The Convergence: "I could not stifle my admiration" (DeLillo 2016: 257). When he finally arrives at the room where Artis has been placed, her body seems "lit from within," her cryopreserved organism a

symbol of "the human body as a model of creation." "[S]haved head tilted upwards," her posture is statue-like and her encasement sculptural, carefully designed for the purpose of exhibit (DeLillo 2016: 258). Isolated so as to stand out from the many rows of pods surrounding her, with an open space next to her clearly provided for Ross's body, her quasi-entombment might be intended as a monumental reflection of her stature but ends up as a statement of economic privilege and immense financial wealth. Recalling the royal mortuary rituals of mummification in ancient Egypt, the iconic speculative ekphrasis of the body in the pod reflects a stratification according to the hierarchies of modern capitalism, which now extends from its late period and into infinity.

The iconic qualities of the image are reflected in the fact that it appears in the literary narrative as object and projection, through observation, memory, and recollection, and thereby through an ekphrastic evocation that simultaneously involves the graphic, optical, perceptual, mental, and verbal image, and thus its persistence through time. Following up on his influential mid-1980s delineation of a family tree of images, W. J. T. Mitchell helpfully distinguishes between "image" and "picture" in *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005) and more recently in *Image Science* (2015), an analytical move that enables him to address the pervasive life cycle of certain images: "The picture is a material object, a thing you can burn or break or tear. An image is what appears in a picture, and what survives its destruction – in memory, in narrative, in copies and traces in other media" (Mitchell 2015: 16). The body in the pod is an image that has the power to, in the words of Mitchell, "go on" (Mitchell 2005: 87); it is an image that has the capacity to "travel" across media (Vågnes 2011: 18). As an image, it is surrounded by paradox; it is immediately understandable, and, yet, in a sense unfathomable, "pure spectacle" and "visionary art," and is thus constitutive of an aesthetic imaginary of immortality. It is also clearly an example of what Mitchell describes as a "metapicture" in the sense that it can be "employed as a device to reflect on the nature of pictures," as it contributes substantially to Jeff's reflections on human life, and thus to the meta-literary qualities of the novel (Mitchell 2015: 19).

When Jeff wanders among the gleaming pods in the eighth chapter of *Zero K*, the reader will have the chilling narrative that is "Artis Martineau" in mind, and so the body in the pod also becomes a tragic image of imprisonment and speechless isolation, of irreparable loss, so that the uncanny silence of rows and rows of pods appears foreboding in a way that will be hard for Jeff to comprehend, but that will inform the reader's experience of the passages in question. Artis's traumatized language echoes through the second half of the novel, inevitably shaping how the reader "sees" her in the pod, bringing an element of dramatic irony

into the reading, since only we, and not Jeff, are privileged with knowing the voice of her awakened mind.

6 The self as brain and the minded animal: Concluding reflections

The final scene of *Zero K* finds Jeff on a crosstown bus in Manhattan, as "the streets were charged with the day's dying light and the bus seemed the carrier of this radiant moment." A boy in the back of the bus cries out as "the sun's rays align with the local street grid," a natural phenomenon that takes place "once or twice a year" (DeLillo 2016: 273):

> The full solar disk, bleeding into the streets, lighting up the towers to either side of us, and I told myself that the boy was not seeing the sky collapse upon us but was finding the purest astonishment in the intimate touch of earth and sun. I went back to my seat and faced forward. I didn't need heaven's light. I had the boy's cries of wonder. (DeLillo 2016: 274)

Jeff's journey, which has brought him back to his home environments, is also a journey towards resolution, towards a way to live with the questions he has been pondering in the corridors of The Convergence and bedside with Artis, many of which revolve around what distinguishes "the person" from "the body" (DeLillo 2016: 139). The final, epiphanic moment of *Zero K* describes a strong sense of being in the world instigated by a shared, interhuman response to the novel's final, resonant image of sunlight, concrete, and glass. The present, with the boy's cries of wonder, is enough for Jeff; he does not need heaven's light, the promise of transcendence.

In *The Posthuman View*, Hayles places her hope in

> a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information techniques without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival. (Hayles 1999: 5)

Jeff's repeated encounters with catastrophe footage and his climactic confrontation with the endless rows of frozen bodies places him in a position not of convergence, but of divergence, where two different views of human agency are recognized as incompatible. Rather than instigating collective or activist response, the traumatic images are projected in order to signal the option of an exit strat-

egy for the chosen few. In the end, they have the opposite effect on Jeff, whose return to his urban quarters is an active, ethical choice, since his own father offers him the option of joining him and his partner in cryopreservation storage.

In writing about science fiction in the early 1980s, Frederic Jameson insisted on the abilities of speculative writing "not to give us 'images' of the future – whatever such images might mean for a reader who will necessarily predecease their 'materialization' – but rather to defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own *present*, and to do so in specific ways distinct from all other forms of defamiliarization" (Jameson 1982: 151). Ultimately, the mobilization through speculative ekphrasis of the contrasting, but related, aesthetic imaginaries of global, ecological destruction on the one hand and life extension on the other, and their juxtaposition with a desensitized narrative of mental and physical dislocation, makes it reasonable to read *Zero K* as cultural critique. The novel quite explicitly sees the intensification of various strains of technological utopianism in response to the expansive narrativization of Anthropocene trauma and urges ethical questions concerning the relationship between their parallel emergence.

As Colin Milburn has pointed out, the very discourse of cryonics "makes no secret of its intimate relationship with science fiction; in fact, cryonics traces its conceptual origins to pulp magazines. [...] The posthuman future, it would seem, remakes old myths into technological realities" (Milburn 2014). In employing speculative aesthetic imaginaries, DeLillo inverts generic elements, and, I would argue, relates cryopreservation's promise of rebirth to what German philosopher Markus Gabriel finds to be a neurocentric conflation of "mind" with "brain" in contemporary neuroscience, a prominent cultural notion that "the self is a brain" (Gabriel 2017: 21). Gabriel sees it as an important task of our century "to take a new look at our situation as minded animals":

> We must overcome materialism, which would have us believe that all that exists is what is found in the universe (in the sense of the reality of hard anonymous causes, of matter and energy), and which for that reason desperately seeks a conception of the mind that is able to reduce *Geist* to consciousness and then reduce consciousness to an electrical storming of neurons. We are citizens of many worlds, we move in the realm of ends. This provides us a series of conditions for freedom. (Gabriel 2017: 226)

Our self-conception and mental life, Gabriel stresses, and the ways in which we think about our own identity as "minded animals," will always be affected by more than the neurochemistry of our brains. Having witnessed Artis's descent into the netherworlds of an unknown future, it is this self-understanding that Jeff comes to peace with as *Zero K* draws to an end – as a citizen of many worlds.

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Joachim Schiedermair

The Ordinariness of Trauma: Reconstructing Intertextuality as an Aesthetics of Trauma

1 Vietnamization

In 2012, the Whitney Museum of American Art displayed an exhibition by Canadian artist Mischa Grey under the sober title *Grey – A Retrospective*. Pictures of the series *Vietnamization* from 1998 were among the pieces of art on display. The catalogue describes this creative phase of the artist with particular detail, and one sentence of the phraseology used there takes us to the core topic of this anthology: the discursive relation between image, trauma, and literature.[1] It reads as follows: "By drawing heavily on image material from the Vietnam War era and recirculating it, Grey has created an art series that symbolizes the loss of contact with the self."[2]

Vietnam played the lead role in the fight for medical recognition of traumatic suffering: as is commonly known, the American Psychiatric Association decided to react to the mass traumatization of the Vietnam veterans by adding *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* to their manual of mental disorders in 1980 (Mülder-Bach 2000: 8).[3] Considering that 18 years later, Grey compiled a series of images under the title *Vietnamization*, all of which depict "the loss of contact with the self," this phrasing presents a suitable description for the paradoxical situation of the traumatized person: the sufferer loses contact with his present life because the past – in the form of mental images within the traumatized memory – forces its way between the self and the present. The point of Grey's art is that she de-

1 For a good overview of the phenomenon of ekphrasis, see Boehm and Pfotenhauer 1995.
2 "Ved å trekke veksler på og resirkulere billedmateriale fra vietnamkrigæraen, skapte Grey en serie verk ment å symbolisere noe som var løst fra kontakt med seg selv" (Harstad 2015: 598). The quotations from the original Norwegian texts have been translated for this article.
3 "Als Reaktion auf die massenhafte Traumatisierung dieses gesellschaftlich zunehmend umstrittenen und militärisch verlorenen Krieges entschloss sich die American Psychiatric Association 1980, eine neue Kategorie in ihr Handbuch psychischer Erkrankungen aufzunehmen: die Kategorie ‚Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' (PTSD)." ["In reaction to the mass traumatization in this publicly disputed and, from a military perspective, lost war, the American Psychiatric Association decided in 1980 to add a new category to their manual of mental disorders: the category *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (PTSD)."]

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picts the traumatic recurrence of mental images by reusing pictures from the media associated with the war in Vietnam from 20 to 30 years ago; or, as the *Retrospective* catalogue puts it, Grey produces the traumatic effect of losing contact with the self by letting *image* material from the Vietnam War era *re*-circulate in her own pictures. (How she does this exactly, will be described further below.)

The third aspect, literature, comes into play when we realize that Mischa Grey's pictures exist merely as verbal images: that they were part of a Retrospective in the Whitney Museum in New York is already – as is the existence of the artist – in itself a fiction, part of a brilliant novel titled *Max, Mischa & tetoffensiven* (*Max, Mischa and the Tet Offensive*) from 2015. The author, Johan Harstad,[4] one of the most important and at the same time most entertaining representatives of contemporary Norwegian literature, has the protagonist of his novel, Max Hansen, take stock of his life over 1000 pages. In his statement of account, Max quotes his friend Mischa Grey's *Retrospective* catalogue over five long pages. This quote is thus a detailed ekphrasis of images of the trauma of Vietnam.

The fact that the pictures described there do not exist in the reader's reality, that we are not confronted with the *description* of an existing object but with the *evocation* of an imaginary object, does not take anything away from this. The same is true with regard to the very first example of this genre: Homer's ekphrasis of the images on the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad* (Book 18) does not refer to a specific material object but to one that Homer imagined (Simon 1995: 123 – 141). The ekphrasis replaces the image. The important aspect of investigating this topic is rather the fact that Max Hansen, by recirculating an existing text (that of the *Retrospective* catalogue) in his own text, transfers the layering technique – which Mischa uses in *Vietnamization* – from visual arts to literature. That means that a technique from visual arts, used to artistically explore traumatic flashbacks and recurring dreams, is reproduced in the layering of texts. Thus, Harstad ties together two topics that initially do not seem to be connected to each other: on the one hand, mental suffering triggered by the experience of extreme violence, and, on the other hand, already established methods in artistic creation that are known in literary studies under the names of intertextuality, intermediation, or adaptation.

At the end of this article, I will draw two conclusions about the connection between trauma research and research into intertextuality by reconstructing the ekphrasis of Mischa Grey's *Vietnamization*. But before that, I will use the first half of the article to address another question, and its focus can also be derived

4 In literary studies, only a few works on Harstad have been published so far. Three examples are Jindřišková 2011, Mørk 2011, and Waage 2015.

from the ekphrastic passage in the novel: the *Retrospective* catalogue not only includes information about the techniques of trauma depiction, but also frames another objective of Mischa Grey's work, for the prints "reflected Hansen's fixation on Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* and the Vietnam conflict in general."[5] Thus, the topic is not really Vietnam veterans' trauma, but rather the main character's preoccupation with media images of that trauma. Using one character as an example, the novel negotiates the presence of trauma in our society: Harstad circles around the question of the attraction exerted by depictions of trauma. This question sounds improperly cynical: to what extent do we, as readers, museum-visitors, or filmgoers, benefit from other people's trauma? Why are we so interested in texts, films, and paintings about humans haunted by images of violence? Why do we, who do not suffer from trauma, expose ourselves, in the cinema or in our readings, to pictures and scenes that those suffering from trauma would very much like to be rid of? Why are non-traumatized people so fascinated by other people's trauma?

Although I will refer to two of Johan Harstad's texts in both parts of this article, I will not do so in the sense of a classical interpretation. Instead, I want to use literature's epistemological potential to discuss, *together with* Harstad's texts, the desire for trauma in our society and the link between trauma and intermediality, and trauma and intertextuality, respectively. Both issues are, of course, demanding and far too complex to be settled here, but I hope to illustrate one or two facets that can at least provide more structure in this complex area.

2 Regarding the pain of others: The authenticity of trauma

In order to investigate the attractiveness of trauma, I want to establish a dialogue between Harstad's play *Osv.* (*Etc.*) from 2010 and Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman's study *L'empire du traumatisme*[6] from 2007. The play's plot develops over the years 1994 and 1995. The focus is on an American family suffering severe traumas. The daughter, Nola Zimmer, is traumatized because her husband and child were killed in the London Underground by a man also suffering from trau-

5 "reflekterte Hansens fiksering på Coppolas spillefilm *Apocalypse Now* og konflikten i Vietnam generelt" (Harstad 2015: 598).

6 I will quote from the English translation: Fassin, Didier, and Richard Rechtman (2009) *The Empire of Trauma. An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*. Translated by Rachel Gomme (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press).

ma. The shock of this event causes Nola's father, Joseph Zimmer, to recall crimes he committed as a soldier in the Vietnam War. The images of this past take possession of him so radically that he chooses to live as a tramp in a park, where he scrubs a Vietnam monument with soap and brush. And then there is the son, Alan Zimmer, who works as a war photographer, documenting war and genocide in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Chechnya; in the epilogue set in November 2004 (i. e., almost 10 years later), he has a stroke, triggered by trauma, during a job in Fallujah, which, in turn, drives a suicide bomber to detonate his bomb.

The central problem, which is negotiated by the play on different levels, is that of testimony. Nola represents the victims, Joseph the perpetrators, and Alan the bystanders. All of them are traumatized. Time and time again, the other characters in the play ask them to recount the horrors they have experienced, convinced that trauma can be alleviated by testifying about it. But what was intended to be a therapeutic talking cure ends – in the case of the father, Joseph – in a criminal confession and with the question as to whether a sinner only needs to confess to be forgiven. The issue of war photography enters the discourse of testimony as well.[7] Unni Langås (2016: 150) writes of the drama: "How far can we go, what are we allowed to take pictures of, and when do we have to intervene?"[8] At what point does journalistic testimony become voyeurism? The question of why we non-traumatized people expose ourselves to images of trauma is directly addressed in *Osv.* using a war photographer as a character.

When tackling this question, one quickly notices that there are at least two possible paths to finding an answer. Langås took one of them in 2016 with her book *Traumets betydning i norsk samtidslitteratur* (*The Meaning of Trauma in Norwegian Contemporary Literature*), and her answer is so comprehensive that I am happy to just outline the basic ideas. With the help of many examples (and one of them is Harstad's play), Langås shows that trauma has been present in Norwegian fiction for the last 15 years. Behind her analyses lies the belief that literature has a social function. Narrative fiction constitutes an interface between collective and individual consciousness. This means that in the process of reading literature, the imagination of an individual is synchronized with the events in the world. It is this synchronization that enables us to talk about a common reality in the first place. And this also applies to the trauma: by depicting traumatizing events and traumatized characters, novels, plays, art exhibitions, and films com-

7 On photography and testimony, see Hirsch 2003: 19 – 40. On photography and trauma, see Baer 2002.

8 "Hvor går grensen for hva man kan ta bilde av, og når bør man gripe inn i en hendelse?"

municate the reality of the trauma to the individual imagination. Trauma literature takes the suffering of the traumatized seriously and interprets it as social and political reality.

Johan Harstad's play has the same function: the title of the drama *Osv.* is explained on the spine of the book. One reads: *Vietnam, Bosnia, Rwanda, Tsjetsjenia, Somalia, Darfur, Afghanistan, Irak osv.* (*Vietnam, Bosnia, Rwanda, Chechnya, Somalia, Darfur, Afghanistan, Iraq, etc.*) The title *Osv.*, hence, stands for the never-ending series of wars and military conflicts, which manifests itself in the changing locations that Alan Zimmer, the war photographer, travels to for his work. But, as the series of wars that were raging in the main plot of the play (Bosnia, Rwanda, Chechnya) stretches in the epilogue into the present-day of the reader, it renders the play highly authentic. Implicitly, the title says: I am telling a story about real-life military conflicts; this is about *your* reality, about *you!* Using Langås, it is possible to say about *Osv.* that trauma literature "points towards the present and the future, because the text delivers [...] critical perspectives and ideas on opportunities for action, that show a way out both at an individual and at a social level" (2016: 175).[9]

3 Re-authentication

The question of what "we" gain from other people's trauma can be looked at in a second, complementary way. This approach may be called literary-anthropological. In the words of Clifford Geertz, cultural artefacts are understood as acts of self-perception of a given culture. Therefore, my argument would be that trauma literature not only helps us to comprehend a reality that is not ours, but it also reflects the role that trauma plays in the framework of the signification of culture as a whole. Or, in the blunt words of Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, trauma can be seen "as a resource" (2009: 11).

We get a first hint at what this cynical thinking means when reading the afterword that Harstad appends to the printed version of *Osv.* Here he points towards a long series of non-fiction books and documents he consulted for his draft. The fact that he admits to the possibility of having made mistakes and that at one point or another, he might have made use of his artistic freedom, rather strengthens the authenticating pact he makes with the reader because the point of reference for his artistic freedom is simply the reality of the conflicts.

9 "er vendt mot nåtid og framtid fordi teksten leverer [...] kritiske perspektiver og ideer til reparerende handlemåter på individuelt og sosialt plan."

Accordingly, Harstad says that several scenes describe "what could have happened, or they are a fusion of several events, their point of departure being reality."[10] But then he suddenly breaks with the rhetoric of the documentary; he pinpoints the idea that "*Osv.* also includes quotes and edited material" from fictional films,[11] naming *The Shining*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Full Metal Jacket*, and *Se7en*. This means, therefore, that the play draws its strength not only from its documentary material, but, to the same extent, also from images in the archive of popular culture that have become part of the cultural imagination.

This duplication becomes a topic in the text itself. In the park in which Joseph Zimmer spends his nights, there is a souvenir stall run by another Vietnam veteran. His name is Edward Bowman. In a conversation with Zimmer near the beginning of the play, Bowman describes how it feels to be haunted by the memories of Vietnam:

> And this is where Colorado comes in. The nature [...] is stunning [...]. Wide-open space. But when you close your eyes, you hear the music from *The Shining*, and then you know that no matter where you go, it will always be with you. Vietnam. You cannot escape. You remember it, crystal-clear, like photographs taken with expensive Hasselblad-cameras, everything you did. Everything you do not want to remember.[12]

The medium of the documentary, the photograph, becomes a metaphor for the memory. However, the surprising aspect here is that it is not only the direct experience (the jungle, the acts of war) that is recorded by the memory as the authentic Vietnam, but also *The Shining*, Stanley Kubrick's film from 1980, in which Jack Nicholson takes on the role of a madman hunting Shelley Duvall in a hotel in Colorado. So even the veteran's imagination makes use of the archive of popular culture in order to zoom in on experiences stored in the memory. Or, to put it differently, the archive of popular culture becomes a medium for the re-authentication of experience.[13]

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10 "hva som kunne ha hendt, eller de er en sammenslåing av flere hendelser, med utgangspunkt i virkeligheten" (Harstad 2010: 507).

11 "*Osv.* inneholder også sitater og bearbeidelser fra" (Harstad 2010: 507).

12 "Og det er der Colorado kommer inn. Naturen, [...] overveldende [...]. Åpent landskap. Men hvis du lukker øynene, så hører du den musikken fra *The Shining*, og så vet du, at uansett hvor du drar, så følger det med deg. Vietnam. Du slipper ikke unna. Du husker det, krystallklart, som fotografier tatt med kostbare Hasselblad-apparater, alt du gjorde. Alt det du ikke vil huske" (Harstad 2010: 101).

13 Harstad uses the same point in *Max, Mischa and the Tet Offensive*. The veteran Owen experiences his first traumatic flashback triggered by the movie *Apocalypse Now*.

4 A variant of normality

This circumstance directs our attention to the fact that trauma is no longer merely a recognized clinical picture. Actually, in collective consciousness, trauma has acquired the status of a contextual framework. In their book *The Empire of Trauma. An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*, Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman identify this aspect. They start by pointing out the incredible trajectory that trauma as a concept[14] has travelled in the last 30 years. The fact that a person subject to extreme violence is at risk of suffering trauma and, thus, of needing psychological help, is a diagnosis that is not only discussed by experts, physicians, psychiatrists, and psychologists. "Trauma is not confined to the psychiatric vocabulary, it is embedded in everyday usage. It has, in fact, created a new language of the event" (Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 6). The significant reversal from a medical term to an expression of everyday language coincided with the end of the Vietnam War, when *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (PTSD) was recognized as a diagnosis. After recognition, the public opinion towards trauma changed fundamentally. Whilst during World War I, trauma had been defamed as a neurosis of quitters and weaklings (Horn 2000: 131–162), in 1980, PTSD was identified "as a normal response to an abnormal situation" (Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 96). According to Fassin and Rechtman, it is exactly this reinterpretation that has laid the foundation for the success of the concept of trauma outside of medical discourse, for the expression "that trauma was a variant of normality" (Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 97) allows us to detect that the conception of the human being has been reassembled in trauma:

> [T]he truth of trauma lies not in the psyche, the mind, or the brain but in the moral economy of contemporary societies. The fact that trauma has become so pervasive [...] is rather the product of a new relationship to time and memory, to mourning and obligations, to misfortune and the misfortunate. The psychological concept, trauma, has enabled us to give a name to this relationship. (Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 276)

The proposition of a new "anthropology of the subject," which is concentrated in the practice of speaking about trauma, becomes especially comprehensible in the way that Fassin and Rechtman (2009: 279) reconstruct the situation of the

14 Of course, there are other scholars who investigate trauma as a concept with a cultural function. To name only two: Mülder-Bach (2000) demands that research should treat trauma in the same way as Susan Sontag deals with cancer and tuberculosis in her famous essays "Illness as Metaphor" and "AIDS and Its Metaphors," and E. Ann Kaplan (2005) coined the expression *Trauma Culture*, claiming that trauma literature helps to produce specific political contexts.

Vietnam veterans. The recognition of trauma "as a normal response to an abnormal situation" manages to solve a very specific dilemma in the context of the political and social situation in post-Vietnam America. The war had been lost, both in terms of military and propaganda. The returned soldiers who – according to the common war narrative – were supposed to be celebrated as heroes, were now suspected of being war criminals. In this situation, trauma offered the possibility for compromise because under the umbrella of trauma, even the perpetrators could be recognized as victims. The atrocities committed by the American soldiers could be interpreted as the causes or even the consequences of a traumatizing situation. In both cases, the soldiers who were labelled "traumatized" were entitled to compensation, medical care, and compassion. This provided the divided nation of America with the opportunity to deal with the abominable crimes that had been committed by their soldiers.

Suffering trauma displays even further the ordinariness of a person who had been, directly or indirectly, subject to extreme violence. And this ordinariness even applies to the traumatized perpetrator. As an anthropological concept, trauma offers a secular version of the Christian distinction between sinner and sin: the sin is to be condemned; the sinner, however, is to be recognized for his humanity. Yet, again in the words of Fassin and Rechtman, the "concept of trauma seems to indicate a general approval of the attractive idea that something of the human resists all forms of moral destruction" (2009: 97).

5 The anthropology of *Osv.*

Let us return to *Osv.*, or, rather, to the extended version of the title: *Vietnam, Bosnia, Rwanda, Tsjetsjenia, Somalia, Darfur, Afghanistan, Irak osv.* (*Bosnia, Rwanda, Chechnya, Somalia, Darfur, Afghanistan, Iraq, etc.*). According to the Norwegian article on the play on Wikipedia, the title expresses that "warfare will continue indefinitely."[15] However, against the background of Fassin and Rechtman's reconstruction of the Vietnam War, we need to formulate a more nuanced theory. First, the never-ending story of war does not begin with the Vietnam War. Why does Harstad start his title with Vietnam and not with World War II or even the Trojan War? Second, Vietnam as a battlefield differs significantly in one point from the other wars and massacres in the title: from a temporal point of view, the catastrophes of Bosnia, Rwanda, Chechnya, Somalia, Darfur, Afghanistan, and Iraq all occurred within a period of just a few years. They cover a pe-

15 "at krigføringen fortsetter i det uendelige."

riod of time stretching from the 1990s until today. The Vietnam War, on the other hand, ended back in 1975 (i. e., 17 years before the start of the Bosnian War). Vietnam's temporal distance to the continuous series of the other battlegrounds indicates that Harstad does not list Vietnam to simply name yet another war, but that it holds a special position or functions as a model. This special position would be justified by the role that Vietnam played in the social history of trauma as reconstructed by Fassin and Rechtman. Both indications point to the idea that the title does not merely aim to address a trans-historicity of war. Instead, *Osv.* is about a cultural model that originated in the Vietnam War.

This becomes particularly apparent when Benjamin, a man of 20 years of age, enters the plot in *Osv.* He is a nerd looking for Vietnam memorabilia at the souvenir stall. Bowman, who earlier described the film *The Shining* as a medium for re-authentication, insists in this passage on the absolute difference between experience and fiction. When Benjamin wants to buy a helmet that had been worn in Vietnam, Bowman mocks, "Do you really think that you become one of us by simply putting on a helmet and pretending to be at war?"[16] But then Benjamin gives a furious reply which takes up almost three pages in the printed version. I will only quote the most central sentences:

> Nobody wants to be like you, do you understand? [...] You are the biggest cliché in modern American history anyway. Nobody has ever disagreed that you went through hell in Vietnam, nobody has ever objected to that, we read all the books you wrote, we watched all the documentaries, all the films you made, oh my god, you lavished us with films and shouted that nobody understood what you went through. But, do you know what, we have seen it, my generation was brought up with it, we have watched them altogether, *The Boys in Company C*, *The Deer Hunter*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Good Morning Vietnam*, *Hamburger Hill*, *Bullet in the Head*, *Heroes*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Birdy*, *Missing in Action* part 1, 2, 3 [...]. Vietnam is not a historical event anymore, it has become a cultural-historical event. [...] It has become its own myth, do you not see that? A national trauma, but you do not allow anyone else to touch it. It is one of this country's three biggest cultural export goods, the Vietnam War, Elvis and *Star Wars*! [...] We have made it a part of the American Dream.[17]

16 "Tror du virkelig at du blir som oss bare ved å ta på deg en hjelm og late som om du er i krig?" (Harstad 2010: 126).

17 "Det er ingen som vil bli som dere, forstår du det? [...] Dere er den største klisjeen i moderne amerikansk historie, jo. Det er ingen som er uenige med dere i at det var jævlig i Vietnam, ingen har protestert på det, vi har lest alle bøkene dere skrev, vi så alle dokumentarene, alle filmatiseringene deres, herregud, dere pøste ut filmer og ropte at ingen skjønte hva dere gikk gjennom. Men vet du hva, vi har sett det, min generasjon er oppfostret på det, vi så dem alle sammen, *The Boys in Company C*, *Hjortejegeren*, *Apokalypse nå*, *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Good Morning Vietnam*, *Hamburger Hill*, *Bullet in the Head*, *Krigens Helter*, *Født 4. juli*, *Birdy*, *Missing in Action* part 1, 2, 3 [...]. Vietnam er ikke lenger en historisk hendelse, det har blitt en kulturhistorisk hen-

Two aspects of this quote are particularly important. The first is the approach to trauma from a collective psychological point of view: Benjamin clearly denotes the consequences of transferring the traumas of individuals or of a certain group into a national trauma. On an individual level, trauma destroys the identity of a person and, thus, is a threat to his or her social ties. The play uses the three characters – Joseph, Nola, and Alan Zimmer – and their anti-social behaviors to exemplify this. Although the term denotes the destruction of individual identity and social proximity, "national trauma" serves to express collective identity. The Vietnam trauma does not weaken the identity of America; it is its stabilizer. To say it in Benjamin's cheeky words: "We have made it a part of the American Dream." Harstad expands on this collectivizing aspect. He leaves the national frame of the United States behind and broadens the reconciling function of the trauma concept globally by treating a series of other conflicts: Alan works in the conflict areas in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Chechnya (i. e., on different continents with different ethnic groups and very different conflicts). However, in the play, we do not learn anything about the specifics of the conflicts in the respective regions. Their individuality is erased and they are reduced to their traumatizing impact. In doing so, Harstad uses the socializing effect that the concept of trauma had for the American nation, but establishes its worldwide relevance. As a concept, trauma points towards an imaginary unity between the manifold phenomena (Bosnia, Rwanda, Chechnya, Somalia, Darfur, Afghanistan, Iraq). Thus, it performs a cultural task that was previously seen to by the great narratives of history: the universality of trauma seems to imply the idea of a world community. In a world of violence, trauma is the fate of everyone beyond all cultural, social, and religious differences.

The second, narratological aspect that I want to deduce from Benjamin's monologue becomes especially evident in his statement that the Vietnam veterans are "the biggest cliché in modern American history." As the trauma has now so often been the subject of films, novels, and documentaries, it has acquired the status of a narrative model in the collective consciousness: trauma provides the framework for a narrative in which a distinct series of events is brought into relation with each other, and we experience this sequence as meaningful. The logic of trauma is, so to say, the cultural hardware, with which the software of single trauma narratives can work. When reading *Osv.*, it immediately makes sense to us that a war veteran leaves his wife, lives as a tramp in a park, and wants to

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delse. [...] Det har blitt en egen mytologi, ser dere ikke det? Et nasjonalt traume, men dere tillater ingen andre å ta del i det. Det er en av de tre største kulturelle eksportartiklene fra dette landet. Vietnamkrigen, Elvis og *Star Wars!* [...] Vi har gjort det til en del av den amerikanske drømmen" (Harstad 2010: 126 – 128).

make amends for the past via a rather pointless activity. Harstad uses this self-evident connection for the exposition of the play. When his character Benjamin later betrays this technique, this part should be read as a meta-narrative: Benjamin draws the recipient's attention to the idea that we do not need any explanation of the logic behind the network of events. We are already familiar with it and have brought it with us to the theater. In terms of systems theory, the logic of trauma could be called a "re-enforcer of improbability," which means that the logic of trauma makes plots appear plausible, even if they seem to be absurd *per se*. The trauma narrative is established in such a way that authors like Harstad only have to hint at it and the reader will upload the entire context: Joseph Zimmer was in Vietnam and becomes a tramp – these few details are enough for the reader to know that Joseph suffers from trauma.

Now, it would be a mistake to think that Harstad wants to criticize the ordinariness of the logic of trauma when he uses the pejorative term "cliché," for it is not he who uses the term, but Benjamin, a flustered young man who feels he has to defend himself. The ordinariness in the context of trauma should, rather, be viewed as output in the cultural meaning-making process ("as a resource," as Fassin and Rechtman put it).[18] This output emerges only if someone (such as Benjamin) clearly differentiates individual suffering from the narrative model, because an important reassessment is made in the transformation of trauma from disorder to narrative model. If a person suffers from PTSD, it means, amongst other things, that the biographically significant sequence of past, present, and future is disrupted; the images from the past dominate the present in such a way that a normal way of life becomes impossible. Harstad exemplifies this with Nola, Alan, and Joseph Zimmer. However, as a narrative cliché that advances the plot, trauma has its own temporal rationality: we have become used to detecting the dysfunctional unity of trauma behind the pieces of a life in front of us. The term trauma, thus, denotes both individual suffering, which can be described as both the loss of meaning, and a culturally established pattern – a narrative context that makes immediate sense.

At the beginning of this article, I stated that testimony is an important concept of *Osv*. The drama narrates how different characters bear testimony to their respective trauma. But what does the drama itself testify to? To the reality of the trauma, or, rather, to the impact of a cultural pattern of interpretation? I believe

18 My expression "ordinariness of trauma" refers to something completely different than what Ban Wang in his article calls "the banality of trauma:" "The 'banality' of trauma draws attention away from the private psyche to the historical and enduring consequences of modern institutions and economic forces that destroy the entrenched, life-conditions of community on a daily basis" (2002: 146).

that *Osv.* shows both. It allows us to experience the reality of other people's suffering, but it also shows us that a new definition of humanity is concentrated in the trauma, offers the vision of global unity after the end of the great narratives of history, and functions as a narrative pattern that reveals some kind of logic behind an apparent senselessness. In short: *Osv.* shows the imaginary potential of trauma. It shows how trauma, as a code for a certain anthropological attitude, works in the cultural meaning-making process: trauma has become the signifier of our age.

6 Extended version

Benjamin only appears for a few minutes of the play, although the part he plays is of immense significance. Harstad's novel *Max, Mischa and the Tet Offensive* can be read as an expansion of his character over more than 1000 pages: Benjamin's fixation on the Vietnam industry is brought to a head by Max's obsession with a single film, namely Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. Like the play, the novel makes a clear distinction between traumatic suffering and the cultural code: Max represents the cultural longing for trauma, and his Uncle Owen, a Vietnam veteran, stands for the mental suffering from trauma. Owen first re-experiences his trauma eight years after his return from the jungle – and the trigger is the movie *Apocalypse Now* (the entire flashback covers four pages; in the following quote, I have skipped over several ekphrastic passages in which individual sequences from *Apocalypse Now* have been retold):

> It turns dark [in the theater], it goes quiet and the movie begins, Owen watches the helicopters pass the sinister treeline to the sound of The Doors, and already here, after two short minutes, he feels a growing unease; it had not bothered him before [...]. His ability to sleep had been affected only slightly by Vietnam, he was almost surprised by that, but now, here in the movie theater, whilst the line of palms is exploding without warning and without a sound to Jim Morrison's singing voice, *This is the end, beautiful friend,* now he suddenly feels a wave of nausea sweep over him; his heart begins to pump and cold sweat runs down his neck. It is the treeline, this damned treeline, it reminds him too much of the view he once had, for heaven's sake, it's the same bloody view [...]; there are too many colours in the pictures and there is too much unpleasant music, his stomach is in knots and he gasps for air, feels how difficult it is to take in oxygen.[19]

19 "Det blir mørkt, det blir stille og filmen starter, Owen ser helikoptre passere foran den uhyggelig trelinjen til lyden av The Doors og allerede her, etter knappe to minutter, kjenner han ubehaget; det har ikke plaget ham før [...]. Han har mistet forsvinnende lite nattsøvn over Vietnam, det har nesten overrasket ham, men her, nå i kinosalen, mens trelinjen av palmetrær uten forvarsel og uten en lyd eksploderer til Jim Morrissons stemme, *This is the end, beautiful friend*, da

As for Bowman in *Osv.*, the movie is superimposed over what Owen has experienced; the fiction revives the repressed images of the woodland edge, places them into a new context and brings them back to mind. In the novel, Owen's suffering is important as a backdrop to Max's fixation on *Apocalypse Now*, because this is how it receives meaning: in the summer of 1990, at the age of 12, the first-person narrator, Max, has to emigrate with his family from Stavanger in Norway to the United States. On the face of it, Max's life seems to be a story of success: in 2012 (the "now" of the story), he is a young, and at the same time already renowned playwright and theater director living in Manhattan's Upper West Side. But his life has been shaped by an existential uneasiness and the search for its cause.

Max is deeply fascinated by the fact that his Uncle Owen is a Vietnam veteran. Shortly before learning of his parents' plans to emigrate, and years before meeting his American uncle for the first time, the 12-year-old boy secretly watches a copy of *Apocalypse Now* on their video player at home in Norway. The film is re-enacted in a game of cops and robbers, during which Max sustains a broken collarbone. "You are now a war veteran, we all are," one of his teammates whispers to him, while Max is lying in the hospital in a plaster cast.[20] "We fought hard and bravely and we won. We deserved to return back home."[21] This episode passes into the legend that Max later uses to deal with the loss of his primary socialization in Norway: he construes the move from Europe to the United States as trauma, which, even at the age of 35, allows him to interpret his existential rootlessness as analogous to Coppola's Vietnam soldiers. Like Benjamin in *Osv.*, Max longs for a narrative model of trauma that would allow him to hold onto the loss of his primary socialization as a wound. And when, at the end of the 1990s, his girlfriend Mischa Grey calls her series *Vietnamization*, she does not interpret his "interest in and/or longing for Vietnam"[22] as longing for traumatic suffering, but for a recognized cultural trauma pattern, which is attractive because it creates meaning in the emotional chaos.

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kjenner han med ett kvalmen velte inn over seg; hjertet begynner å slå og kaldsvetten renner nedover nakken hans. Det er denne trelinjen, denne helvetes trelinjen, den ligner for mye på den gamle utsikten hans, det er faen ta den samme jævla utsikten [...]; det er for mange farger på bildene og for ubehagelig musikk, det knyter seg i magen og han hiver desperat etter pusten, merker hvor vanskelig det er å få oksygen" (Harstad 2015: 408 – 411).

20 "Du er krigsveteran nå, vi er alle sammen det" (Harstad 2015: 95).

21 "Vi hadde kjempet hardt og tappert og vi hadde vunnet. Vi hadde gjort oss fortjent til å reise hjem" (Harstad 2015: 95).

22 "Vietnam-interesse og/eller lengsel" (Harstad 2015: 599).

7 Grey's aesthetics of trauma

When Max sees life through the filter of *Apocalypse Now*, he does exactly the same as Mischa Grey in her *Vietnamization* pictures. He recirculates image material that already exists and creates a distance between himself and the world around him. The ekphrasis of Grey's images in the *Retrospective* catalogue verbalizes this distance as the loss of contact with the self. Max describes his situation like this: "I was about to change from somebody that wished to return home, to somebody that wished he had the wish to go home."[23] The spatial distance to his former home, Norway, has turned into a mental distance to himself.

According to the *Retrospective* catalogue, Grey achieves the effect of traumatic distance in her images by letting existing image material recirculate. I have already mentioned this aspect in the introduction. Now I would like to reconstruct this technique with the help of two ekphrases from the catalogue: in one of her images, she blends "technical drawings of Bell UH-1B Iroquois helicopters (the first aircraft to be used in Vietnam)"[24] into a map of Norway. "The country's outline was confusingly identical with the outlines of the helicopters."[25] With that, she illustrates Max's "encapsulation" graphically: just as the helicopter, as the container of America, circles above the Vietnamese jungle, the mental image of Norway becomes a container for the lost primary socialization that mentally circles above his life in America in a traumatic way. More important for our general enquiry into the iconicity of trauma, however, is the fact that Grey's technique is in no way original, for she borrows the idea of recirculating images from Vietnam on a silk screen printing from Per Kleiva, the most important Norwegian pop-artist.[26] She finds inspiration in two of his pictures in particular: *Amerikanske sommerfugler (American Butterflies)* and *Blad frå imperialismens dagbok II (Page from the Diary of Imperialism II)*, both from 1971. In these prints, Kleiva also makes use of photographs of the Bell UH-1B Iroquois helicopters, which

23 "Jeg var i ferd med å forandre meg fra en som ønsket å dra hjem til en som ønsket at han ønsket å dra hjem" (Harstad 2015: 598).

24 "tekniske tegninger av Bell UH-1B Iroquois-helikoptre (den første modellen som ble satt inn i tjeneste i Vietnam)." (Harstad 2015: 599) The 'Huey,' as the Bell UH-1 Iroquois was nicknamed, had become an icon for the American War in Vietnam. The aircraft was given this status because Vietnam was "America's first television war" and the aircraft was used frequently by the American troops in Vietnam. See Thomas Elsaesser and Michael Wedel (2016: 28).

25 "[O]mrisset av nasjonen [var] til forveksling [...] likt omrisset av helikopterkroppen" (Harstad 2015: 599).

26 On Kleiva see Renberg et al. 1986 as well as Christian Norberg-Schulz et al. 1983: 182–188, 285–287.

were also nicknamed 'Huey': *Amerikanske sommerfugler* blends colorful butterfly wings with the grey rotor blades of helicopters, and in *Blad frå imperialismens dagbok II*, Kleiva copies a convoy of Hueys as a ghostly silhouette into the sky above a flowering meadow. The second print is particularly interesting because the meadow carries a visible European-Western connotation. The print does not depict the attack of a helicopter fleet on a Vietnamese village but the flashback to an attack that is blended into a (supposedly) Norwegian landscape; the real threat for the Vietnamese population is changed into a mental (but nothing less real) threat for the Norwegian television viewers that only know the helicopter images from the media. In the continuation of Kleiva's technique, Mischa Grey not only blends together two images (the technical drawing of a helicopter and the geographical map of Norway), but at the same time also blends in Kleiva's *Blad frå imperialismens dagbok II*, which again consists of two images that have been joined together. Her originality lies not in the technique itself, but in the intensification of the technique.

The *Retrospective* catalogue gives a very detailed description of a second painting from the *Vietnamization* series. The image material Grey reuses in the print *(Colby)* is based "on a still from Coppola's film."[27] Here, the character Colby appears only in one take, namely when the main character, Captain Willard, arrives at the camp of the monstrous Colonel Kurtz and his private army. He sees Colby standing with a rifle, surrounded by Asian women and children. Colby fulfils the narrative function of being a mirror for Willard, because he, just like Willard, received orders to liquidate Kurtz for the U.S. Army but, in contrast to Willard, he was drawn in by Kurtz's charisma and changed sides. So, Willard sees a copy of himself in Colby and, consequently, one of the possible future outcomes for himself. Colby's role in the film is limited to this one shot, thus becoming the subject of the gaze *per se*. Now Grey extracts this image from the film, and cuts and distorts it. The *Retrospective* catalogue describes *(Colby)* as follows:

> In Grey's reproduction of Colby, he appears out of context and an audience that has no deeper knowledge of Coppola's film will hardly recognize the motif. As the original photograph has been edited this way, Colby is standing in the center of the artwork, reminiscent of Christ (and with Kurtz outside the frame, as a possible God), surrounded by South Asian women and children, with a few soldiers standing in the background. But, as if he were a violent incarnation of Christ, Colby looks miserable, and misplaced. He does not belong here and he knows it. So if we add what we know from the film that the picture

27 "på et stillbilde fra Coppolas film" (Harstad 2015: 601).

> was taken from: He cannot leave. It is too late now. He may be staged as a deity, but he is oh so human.[28]

The image's effect is again produced by the multilayered overlay. Of course, there is the still from Coppola's film. But *Apocalypse Now*, as we know, is itself already an adaptation of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899),[29] filtered again by another adaptation. This time, it is the radio drama produced in 1938 by Orson Welles, which had a considerable influence on Coppola.[30] But even the reference to incarnation in the quote above opens the gateway to a tradition of images: the God presenting himself in Grey's image is marked as "oh so human". With this, Harstad refers to the motif of the *Ecce Homo*, which must be translated as "Behold the man". In the Gospel of John, the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate presents the scourged Jesus, wearing a scarlet coat and the crown of thorns, to the people of Jerusalem, and with his dictum *ecce homo*, he emphasizes his humanity, which, in this situation, means his vulnerability. Since the Middle Ages, the motif of a scourged and humiliated Christ had become a popular motif for devotional pictures in which Jesus (like Colby in Grey's image) is extracted from the whole scene in Pilate's palace. This highlights the aspect that in the biblical scene, Christ (again like Colby) has become the subject of the gaze altogether: "He may be staged as a deity, but he is oh so human." Additionally, in the Gospel of John, Pilate wanted to come to Jesus's defense against the accusation that he had committed blasphemy, by pointing out his humanity; Jesus was accused of making himself God, which in Judaism was a contemptible crime. And this element is repeated in the character of Colby. Although he committed the most horrific crimes in Kurtz's camp, he still deserves pity for his trauma. The trauma of the Vietnam soldiers "showed they still shared in the humanity that their cruelty would seem to have destroyed" (Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 94).

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28 "I Greys gjengivelse av Colby opptrer han utenfor kontekst, og publikum uten nær kjennskap til Coppolas film vil neppe gjenkjenne motivet. Fordi kildefotografiet er beskåret slik det er, fremstår Colby plassert i sentrum av maleriet, som en kristuslignende persona (og med Kurtz selv utenfor billedrammen, som en mulig Gud), omgitt av sørøstasiatiske kvinner og barn, med noen få soldater stående i bakgrunnen. Men som en voldelig inkarnasjon av Kristus ser Colby mistrøstig ut, og ute av sitt rette element. Han hører ikke hjemme her og han vet det. Så, hvis vi legger til det vi vet fra filmen motivet er hentet fra: Han kan ikke dra. Det er for sent nå. Han blir kan hende sett opp til som en guddom, men han er akk så menneskelig" (Harstad 2015: 602–603).

29 On Coppola's adaptation of Conrad, see Poppe 2007: 243–304.

30 For more details on *Apocalypse Now* as a mirror cabinet of the texts, see Elsaesser and Wedel 2016: 19–24.

If Fassin and Rechtman are right in stating that trauma is a "major signifier of our age" (2009: xi) and is seen "as the locus of an essential truth about humanity" (2009: 95), then the title *Vietnamization* has to be read as a modern variant of the term *incarnation:* the incarnation of man, the recognition of man's vulnerability as his essential human quality. The fact that this is shown using the character Colby from *Apocalypse Now* makes it clear that the novel *Max, Mischa and the Tet Offensive* comes to the same realization as *The Empire of Trauma:* that the anthropology of trauma achieved its breakthrough in the context of the Vietnam War.

8 Two conclusions on intermediality, intertextuality, and trauma

With regard to the play *Osv.*, I have tried to differentiate between trauma as a mental disorder and trauma as an anthropological code in the study of trauma literature, and with regard to the novel *Max, Mischa and the Tet Offensive*, I have reconstructed intermedial techniques of the depiction of trauma. Let me make one outcome very clear: it would be wrong to read trauma fiction (in pictures, films, and novels) solely as depictions of trauma. It is not trauma on the one hand and its representation on the other. In fact, trauma has been integrated into processes of mediatization right from the very beginning. This applies to suffering, but it applies even more to the cultural pattern of trauma. I therefore endeavor to present two conclusions about the mediality of trauma that could affect the handling of literature in trauma studies.

Intermediality: a traumatized person does not suffer due to having to experience the same traumatizing event over and over again. Instead, the trauma itself is a mediatization of said event (i. e., the event has already been translated into images or mental scenes). Therefore, it is not the actual event repeating itself in trauma, but the images and scenes connected to it. The literary technique of ekphrasis functions as a transformation of a (mental, artistic, documentary) picture into a text (i. e., into a different medium). Ekphrasis therefore resembles trauma in one important aspect: as a change of medium. The dense presence of ekphrastic passages in trauma literature that the essays in this volume bear witness to shows that literature makes extensive use of this analogy. Therefore, ekphrastic competence is an essential tool for research in literary trauma studies. As the examples from *Osv.* and *Max, Mischa and the Tet Offensive* show, literature investigates the intermedial logics of trauma by reshaping them in other forms of intermediality, namely in ekphrastic passages.

Intertextuality: the phenomenon of literary recurrence has often been addressed under the heading of intertextuality. Literary studies emphasize that the intertextual element changes its meaning according to its new context, even if the element itself is integrated without any morphological alteration. Intertextuality is therefore a character of semantic change. The same can be said about trauma. Although trauma can be described as an uncontrollable recurrence of the same images, the context in which these images occur is subject to change. This is true, on the one hand, for a specific person's individual suffering: traumatic images recur, influencing an increasing number of life spheres (i.e., they flow from one semantic field into another), thereby changing their meaning. But the same also applies to collective traumas. They refer to one and the same event as well; however, the social situation they are staged in is constantly changing. Therefore, although the collective images seem to remain unaltered, they may play different political roles depending on the social situation. An intertextual examination of trauma literature could hence bring attention to the – so far scarcely considered – semantic change of seemingly unalterable traumatic images. The specific relation between identity and variance of traumatic images can be analyzed as an intertextual phenomenon in trauma literature: as travelling images throughout a number of texts. This is reflected by the novel *Max, Mischa and the Tet Offensive* when it presents Grey's picture (*Colby*) as a layering of intertexts: Conrad's novel, Welles's radio drama, Coppola's film, the *ecce homo* tradition. At the end of this intertextual crisscrossing, the semantics of trauma rubs off on the medieval *ecce homo* motif and the semantics of incarnation rubs off on today's concept of trauma.

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Unni Langås

Terrorizing Images and Traumatic Anticipation in Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*

1 Introduction

The cultural politics of AIDS have been like those of no other disease, Marita Sturken writes in her book *Tangled Memories*. It spawned an "epidemic of signification," a proliferation of cultural meanings that parallels the medical epidemic, and it emerged at a moment in history when social groups were claiming political identities derived from specific shared characteristics – gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity. From the beginning, AIDS was associated with practices regarded as deviant, such as homosexuality, drug abuse, and sexual promiscuity, but since it also affected communities comprising middle-class professionals with access to a diversity of public arenas, discourses that were perceived as stigmatizing were intensely contested. In this "battle of representation," media imagery played a crucial role by giving the deadly disease a face and a body. While, on the one hand, these images were meant to serve "well-intended" medical and societal information purposes, on the other, they portrayed people as vessels of disease and tended to dehumanize the patient. Photographs of a person with AIDS most often enhanced notions of the disease as a source of contamination and sexual deviancy, Sturken maintains, accentuating that starkly lit photographs underscored the symptoms of illness as being lesions, wasting limbs, and loss of hair (Sturken 1997: 145 – 152).

A similar critique of documentary photographs was put forward by Douglas Crimp, who, like Michael Cunningham, took part in the ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) movement and edited a special issue of the journal *October* (vol. 43, Winter 1987) on the AIDS crisis. In an article on portraits of people with AIDS, he critically assesses media photographs, and he characterizes the depicted bodies and their intended meaning in a way that discloses the complex cultural frame that conditions representations of AIDS:

> [T]here is a deeper explanation for portrayals of PWAs [People with AIDS], and especially of gay male PWAs, as desperately ill, as either grotesquely disfigured or as having wasted to fleshless, ethereal bodies. These are not images that are intended to overcome our fear of disease and death, as is sometimes claimed. Nor are they meant only to reinforce the status of the PWA as victim or pariah, as we often charge. Rather, they are, precisely, *pho-*

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> *bic* images, images of the terror at imagining the person with AIDS as still sexual. (Crimp 1992: 130)

Crimp suggests not only that photographs of persons with AIDS are terrorizing but also that their "phobic" quality has to do with the connotative relationship between sexuality and an expected death. He assumes that the beholder will see a "grotesquely disfigured" body and associate its appearance with imminent death and sexual activity. Paradoxically, since he wants to object to this kind of representation, he nevertheless confirms the relevance of the chosen rhetoric, which doubtlessly tunes in with scare-enforcing and de-humanizing patterns of representation. Without going further into this problematic, which indeed is a recurrent issue in debates on the spectatorship of suffering,[1] I take Crimp's ekphrasis as a useful guide into the complex dynamics between AIDS and its representations as well as the productive rivalry (*paragone*) between words and images in the U.S. context of responding to AIDS.

Most importantly, however, Crimp's ekphrasis diagnoses an underlying terror that haunts experiences, representations, and interpretations of the epidemic threat. As such, it performs a powerful notion of being haunted; similar, I will argue, to the one that Michael Cunningham explores in his novel *The Hours* (1998). This was one of the most successful fictions of the 1990s that tried to come to terms with the AIDS epidemic. Both Crimp and Cunningham respond to the crisis by addressing cultural undercurrents imbued with phobic images of death and sexuality, but where Crimp's activist rhetoric speculates around intentions, Cunningham's intertextual composition instead explores historical resemblances and hints at consequences. *New York Times* critic Michael Wood, in his review of the novel, calls this interconnectedness "beyond allusion" and identifies correctly, I think, its theme as "the haunting of present lives by memories and books, by distant pasts and missed futures, by novels and poems to be read and written" (Wood 1998).

In the following, I will examine figures of haunting – texts and images – that saturate *The Hours* and show how it hovers between terrorizing images of the past and traumatic anticipations of the future. My point of departure will be a discussion of the "phantom" and the "specter" as two forms of ghostliness theorized in psychoanalytic and deconstructive scholarship on trauma in the years encircling Cunningham's novel.

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1 Cf. Sontag 2003, Chouliaraki 2006, Butler 2009.

2 Figures of haunting

The term "hauntology," coined by Jacques Derrida in his 1993 book *Specters of Marx*, has proven to be a fertile rehabilitation of ghosts. Prior to his contribution, though, psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok published a re-working of Freud's Wolfman case study and suggested a new view of the phantom (*le fantôme*).[2] They were interested in transgenerational relationships and how the undisclosed traumas of previous generations might disturb the lives of their descendants even if they knew nothing about their distant causes. A phantom, in this conception, is the presence in the living ego of a dead ancestor who refuses to let the secrets of the past come to light. This phantom is a "metapsychological fact," Abraham explains, but it does not seem to have any substance because "what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others" (Abraham 1987: 287). Furthermore, he sees this mental gap as closely tied to Freud's concept of the death drive:

> A surprising fact gradually emerges: the work of the phantom coincides in every respect with Freud's description of the death instinct. First of all, it has no energy of its own; it cannot be "abreacted," merely designated. Second, it pursues in silence its work of disarray. Let us add that the phantom is sustained by secreted words, invisible gnomes whose aim is to wreak havoc, from within the unconscious, in the coherence of logical progression. Finally, it gives rise to endless repetition and, more often than not, eludes rationalization. (Abraham 1987: 291)

Be it a dead person, a mental gap, or a death drive, the phantom in this psychoanalytic framework haunts the living in its capacity of being a reminder or a return of past secrets. Derrida, on his side, inspired by Marx ("Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa – das Gespenst des Kommunismus"), also uses the word *specter* (*le spectre*) to designate the apparition of something that returns, but emphasizes, instead, the "*waiting* for this apparition" (Derrida 1993: 4). He writes, "The anticipation is at once impatient, anxious, and fascinated: this, the thing ('this thing') will end up coming. The *revenant* is going to come" (Derrida 1993: 4). Hence, Derrida's specter is oriented toward what lies ahead, something that will happen but has yet to occur and thus, in its ability to haunt the present, gestures toward a nebulous future.

These two branches of the hauntological trend operate, in other words, with two related but different concepts of the ghost that are "to some extent incompatible," as Colin Davis suggests (Davis 2005: 373). On the one hand, Derrida's

2 Cf. Abraham and Torok 2005.

specter is a deconstructive figure "hovering between life and death, presence and absence, and making established certainties vacillate" (Davis 2005: 379). This approach does not see the secret of the ghost as a puzzle to be solved, but as an attentiveness to its voices from the past and the possibilities of the future. On the other hand, Abraham and Torok's phantom is understood as a mental knot in need of treatment. It harbors a secret, but a secret imaginable to reveal, although – or rather because – it is a source of disgrace and prohibition. "It is not at all that they [phantoms] cannot be spoken," Davis writes, "on the contrary, they can and should be put into words so that the phantom and its noxious effects on the living can be exorcized" (Davis 2005: 378). In his view, Derrida's specter and Abraham and Torok's phantom have little in common, primarily due to – as I read him – the different use of their psychic insights within hermeneutic practices.

Without neglecting these epistemological differences, but recognizing literature as a discourse of its own, I will suggest reading *The Hours* as a third voice in the setting of this problematic. In its effort to stage the terrorizing climate from which it originates, and to address a situation of fear and cultural crisis, the novel unveils several strategies of verbalizing the experience of being haunted. One of them regards its temporal order, which is characterized by a narrative composition that is seemingly straightforward but still quite messy. The novel's three storylines are certainly temporally fixed – in 1923, 1941, 1949, and sometime in the 1990s – but they nevertheless challenge the reader's sense of chronology. The echoes forward and backward make events and narrated minds collapse into an indistinguishable no-time, and the personal ties between some of the characters resemble the kind of generational trauma that Abraham and Torok describe in their conception of the phantom.

A second strategy regards its intertextuality, which underpins a rhetorical composition – words and images – with a thematic relation to the experience of terror and trauma. In playing with the motifs, citations, and repetitive structures from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and in referencing sources about her life, *The Hours* presents itself as a dialogue with the preceding text.[3] There is also an intertextual link between Cunningham's novel, Woolf's novel, and Sigmund Freud's essay Jenseits des Lustprinzips (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) from 1920. Here, the idea of a human death drive, originally proposed by Sabina Spielrein (1994 [1912]), is suggested by Freud as a supplement to the

3 Integrated in the text are quotations from *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume II: 1920 – 1924* (1978), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), and *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume VI: 1936 – 1941* (1980). (Cunningham 1998, colophon page) In his "Note on sources," Cunningham also refers to biographies, autobiographies, and letters as well as introductions to Woolf's novels.

pleasure principle. Although Virginia Woolf did not read Freud until 1939, his work was well known among the Bloomsbury artists and intellectuals, and psychoanalysis became a main topic of discussion in the early 1920s (Lee 1996: 68, 383, 472). Woolf's depiction of a traumatized war veteran in *Mrs. Dalloway* is clearly inspired by debates on shell shock and war neurosis (Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 40 – 76), whereas in *The Hours*, Cunningham seems to have strengthened the allusions to Freud and his death drive concept in the suicide theme of both novels.

A third strategy regards the novel's flashforward techniques. Its contemporary scene, 1998, is interpreted with reference to history, but this implies not only a projection of current knowledge to past events but also an incorporation of the past as an anticipation of the future. There are scenes and situations in the text that can be identified as "traumatic moments," potent with a deep concern for the future. They foreshadow coming events through parallels, echoes and poetic images, and these figures of future apparitions resemble, I will suggest, Derrida's notion of a specter predicted as a coming return. In the following, I will analyze the novel's figures of haunting from three angles: temporalities, intertextualities, and anticipations.

3 Temporalities

The opening pages describe Virginia Woolf's suicide in 1941, as she walks into the river with her pockets full of stones. Like the bombers in the sky, her headache and the voices have "appeared again" (Cunningham 1998: 4) and she thinks that she has failed as an author. While perceiving the details in the landscape around her and encountering thoughts of her family, she rejects the option of staying alive and lets herself be taken by the strong currents in the water. The scene is not described as a tragic event, but rather as an understandable one from the point of view of a person who regrets the situation but does the right thing. It is followed by the real letter from Virginia to Leonard Woolf, in which she explains her act and tells him she loves him. The letter is remarkably characterized by repetition, especially by sentences starting with an "I": "I feel" – "I feel" – "I shan't" – "I begin," etc., and since she comments on her inability to write: "You see I can't even write this properly" (Cunningham 1998: 6), the letter's helpless, yet strong, rhetoric ties her act and state of mind to repetition. It is a regretful testimony of felt failures in the past and the present, but it also reveals a profound concern for the future of her husband. "I can't go on spoiling your life any longer" (Cunningham 1998: 6 – 7).

This prologue on Woolf's suicide mixes facts and fiction and makes the scene echo through other depictions of people in the novel on the verge of self-destruction. Without diagnosing Woolf as a traumatized person, the narrator contextualizes the event in a way that underscores its traumatic resonance for the surrounding world. The narrator follows her dead body, which is "borne quickly along the current" and "comes to rest against one of the pilings of the bridge at Southease" (Cunningham 1998: 7). A mother and a three-year-old boy are walking on the bridge; cars and trucks are driving over it; the clouds in the sky reflect on the water. The scene ends with an expressive emphasis on how the body interacts with its surroundings: "Her face, pressed sideways to the piling, absorbs it all: the truck and the soldiers, the mother and the child" (Cunningham 1998: 8).

One of the three storylines in the novel is about another mother and her child. Laura Brown is a housewife in Los Angeles, married to a WWII veteran, pregnant, and mother of the three-year-old Richie. The novel depicts one day of her life in June 1949, starting with her reading the first pages of *Mrs. Dalloway* in bed. It is her husband Dan's birthday and she decides to make a cake for him together with Richie. She knows already that this day will be difficult – she is pressed by a "nowhere feeling" and has "trouble believing in herself" (Cunningham 1998: 38). The beauty of the novel strikes her, but she is also confused by the thought of the brilliant Mrs. Woolf's suicide. While Laura struggles with her daily duties as a mother and housewife, and finds her birthday cake a failure, she is occasionally reminded of the author's suicide: "Virginia Woolf put a stone into the pocket of her coat, walked into a river, and drowned" (Cunningham 1998: 141). This image functions increasingly as a strong temptation against which she must fight.

Laura Brown permits herself a time-out from the house and the child for a few hours, and, having left Richie with Mrs. Latch down the street, she drives along the Pasadena Freeway, initially without any planned destination. In her perception, everything around her is permeated by pain, "the way etherized butterflies are pinned to a board."[4] This escape from daily life is described in Freudian terms as a re-enactment of a dream, "as if she's remembering this drive from a dream long ago."[5] She seems to be haunted by and forced to submit to

4 An allusion to T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock": "Like a patient etherised upon a table."

5 In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud writes: "The study of dreams may be considered the most trustworthy method of investigating deep mental processes. Now dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright" (Freud 1999 [1920]: 13).

a death drive. By driving away from home to an unknown destination, she repeats her own dream while using Woolf's self-inflicted death as her model.

In this chapter, the title of the novel – *The Hours* – points at a break from life, a few hours during which the person we read about desires a liberation that is simultaneously shadowed by death.[6] The reader is left in suspense regarding the outcome of Laura's journey when she installs herself with her book in a hotel. Is she going to repeat Woolf's suicide, or will she return to her family? Her acts are controlled, calm, competent, but her reasons are obscure. She has left home and finds it necessary to lie to the receptionist about a husband on his way with their luggage. Laura acts as if she is not herself, as if her life is performed by another, an invisible sister, and her thoughts are drawn to possible other guests who may have committed suicide in the very same hotel room. As a dissociative maneuver, she creates her double in an invisible sister, and the image of other hypothetical suicides also heightens the atmosphere of trauma in the scene.

However, Laura survives, largely thanks to thoughts of the baby she is carrying. In fact, she survives all the members of her family, including the unborn little girl, who later in life dies in a car accident. Her husband Dan dies of cancer, and Richie, who eventually appears to be the poet Richard, takes his life by jumping from a window. Ironically, Laura, who is haunted by her own obscure drives towards escape and self-destruction, turns out to become the haunting ghost in Richard's life. At least that is how his friend Clarissa Vaughan sees her when she, on the last pages of the novel, receives Mrs. Brown in her New York home and learns that Laura left her family many years ago to start a new life as a librarian in Toronto. From Clarissa's point of view, Laura is a woman "in love with death," a woman "of dazzling charm," but also a "victim and torturer who haunted Richard's work," a "beloved" and a "traitor" (Cunningham 1998: 226).

The second storyline follows Clarissa Vaughan one day in June in New York at the end of the twentieth century. Her character and her behavior are conceptualized as a repetition of Clarissa Dalloway's one-day business in Woolf's novel. Clarissa Vaughan's earlier lover – the bisexual author Richard Brown, who calls her "Mrs. Dalloway" – has won a prestigious prize and she is preparing a party

6 "The Hours" was Virginia Woolf's original title for *Mrs. Dalloway*. In his second epigraph, Michael Cunningham (1998) quotes Woolf from her diary, 30 August 1923: "I have no time to describe my plans. I should say a good deal about The Hours, & my discovery; how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters; I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect, & each comes to daylight at the present moment."

for him. Richard, who suffers from AIDS, is a parallel to Septimus Warren Smith, a traumatized WWI veteran who commits suicide by throwing himself out of a window in Woolf's novel.

Septimus and his Italian wife Rezia mirror the couple Richard and Clarissa in how the two worried women care for their husband and friend, while the men are unable to really respond to the women's compassion and love. Like Richard, Septimus has homosexual inclinations, suggested by his lack of desire for his wife as well as the close relationship with his friend Evans, who was killed in the war. Septimus's trauma is, to a large extent, explained as a preoccupation with the death of his friend, a death that he initially meets with a surprising lack of emotion. He is clearly numbed by the shocking experience and is unable to absorb it adequately. After his return home, he is haunted by intrusive images and voices in his head. He also shows typical symptoms of a traumatizing experience of time as the terrorizing events of the past turn up and violate his present, making him confused about where he is, and at what time. When watching a man wearing a grey suit in the park, Septimus mixes this perception with that of his dead friend covered by clay. He repeatedly says that he will kill himself, as if he wants to join his friend in death, and he finally carries out his intention.

Like Septimus in Woolf's novel, Richard in Cunningham's is in a state of trauma, but his background is different. He has not been to war or experienced the brutal death of a lover, but his childhood was dominated by an absentminded mother, Mrs. Brown, who left him for a few hours when he was three, an episode that we now must read as a prefiguration of her later departure for good. His condition is obviously very serious, and a telling symptom is his confused experience of temporality. "I seem to have fallen out of time" (Cunningham 1998: 62), he says, mixing up imagination and reality. The party is in the future, Clarissa tells him, when he thinks that he has already been there.

Another similarity between the two men is that Richard is also tortured by voices in his head. He associates the language of the voices with Greek, and thus echoes Woolf's novel where Greek is the language used by a sparrow that chirps "Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over" (Woolf 1981 [1925]: 24) while Septimus is sitting on a bench in the park. Joined by another sparrow, "they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words" (Woolf 1981 [1925]: 24), making Septimus think it is a message from the dead. Voices in the head are also symptoms of Virginia's headache as she is portrayed by Cunningham in *The Hours*. They seem sometimes to be "reciting text" (Cunningham 1998: 71), he writes, whereby he recites Woolf's novel: "A flock of sparrows outside her window once sang, unmistakably, in Greek" (Cunningham 1998: 71).

In the very tense situation that occurs when Clarissa enters Richard's apartment and finds him sitting on the sill of the open window, even she hears voices

in her head. Like a kind of déjà vu, the scene appears as if she is "witnessing something that's already happened" (Cunningham 1998: 197). And of course, it *has* already happened, in Woolf's novel, where Septimus throws himself violently out of the window, as if in protest against his doctor, Holmes, whom he despises for his ignorance of the severity of his situation. Richard, on the other hand, does not want to provoke, but lets his body fall down in front of Clarissa after having uttered the very same sentence with which Virginia Woolf ends her suicide letter to Leonard: "I don't think two people could have been happier than we've been" (Cunningham 1998: 200).

The third storyline follows Virginia Woolf one day in a suburb of London in 1923. As I mentioned, it starts with her suicide in 1941, which Cunningham uses to prepare for the portrayal of a person with strong inclinations towards death. The plot of this part of the novel is centered in a short expedition that Virginia carries out after having first sent her housekeeper Nelly to London by train on a silly errand. Her pointless command is explained to be a result of Virginia's incompetent way of dealing with servants, but it also functions as a prefiguration of her own intentional trip and desire to go back to London. Virginia's plan from the outset is to let Clarissa kill herself, and, as a suicidal character, Mrs. Dalloway is designed by Cunningham as a projection of Virginia's own desire: "Mrs. Dalloway, she thinks, is a house on a hill where a party is about to begin; death is the city below, which Mrs. Dalloway loves and fears and which she wants, in some way, to walk into so deeply she will never find her way back again" (Cunningham 1998: 172).

Another telling hint of Virginia's obscure intentions behind the planned trip to London is the dying bird that her sister Vanessa's children find in the garden. They bury the bird in a ceremonial act, and Cunningham uses this scene to project Virginia's death drive onto the bird's grave: "She would like to lie down in its place" (Cunningham 1998: 121). It seems as if this bird funeral instigates her escape, because she starts walking shortly after her sister and her children have left. She passes the grave and gets a "cemetery feeling," which is not unpleasant, but "real," and she feels the nearness of the "old devil" (Cunningham 1998: 165), which is the headache with its multiple faces and voices. She has meant to disappear for a few hours, and has bought a ticket, but in the end, she turns home again since the train does not immediately take her away.

Cunningham inscribes Clarissa Dalloway as an alter ego of Virginia Woolf. In his story, Virginia thinks of Clarissa as a suicidal character, a woman inclined to desire other women, but sensible enough to marry a man. However, Clarissa is also her opposite, her projection, a woman whose destiny she can outline. Conceptualized as a woman heading towards death by her own hand, she instead ends up as "exultant, ordinary Clarissa" who will "go on, loving London" (Cun-

ningham 1998: 211). In her place, someone else will die, "a deranged poet, a visionary" (Cunningham 1998: 211) – in short, Richard Brown. Thus, the fate of Clarissa Dalloway is like that of Laura Brown, who survives the death drive, thereby earning Clarissa Vaughan's disrespect. And while Virginia Woolf, the author, dies in suicide, her invented heroine Clarissa Dalloway survives.

Like the metaphor of the city as a producer of hidden desires beneath the conscious surface, *The Hours* intertextually includes Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* as well as Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as productive intertexts that not only inform the novel's plot but also strengthen its construction of trauma as return. Through his three female characters and their stories, Cunningham echoes Freud's insight into the power of involuntary repetitive action, as well as his more daring idea of an unconscious death drive in human beings. In both Laura's and Virginia's cases, this death drive is inscribed in the fiction as impulsive journeys with an obscure intention, while in Clarissa Vaughan's case she is the shocked witness to her friend Richard's self-imposed death, which parallels the similar fate of Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Virginia Woolf's suicide is prominently placed in the prologue as an unambiguous anticipation and therefore reverberates in the novel's subtext, as if it were the unconscious drive of the novel itself.

4 Intertextualities

As a novel of returning images in a traumatic memory plot, *The Hours* plays with a variety of image descriptions and allusions. In his portrayals, Cunningham makes use of allusions to visual objects but invokes the ekphrastic genre differently than is traditional, where the text describes or comments on a painting, a photograph, or another work of visual art. Cunningham does not describe an art object but refers to it to make a vivid portrait of his character that is dense with art history and other connotations. I call this method of image inclusion "ekphrastic inversion." For instance, Mrs. Woolf is, as the young Virginia Stephen, described as "pale and tall, startling as a Rembrandt or a Velázquez" (Cunningham 1998: 33), but in her mature days, she has "begun to look as if she's carved from very porous, gray-white marble" (Cunningham 1998: 33). The difference between the two sisters is likewise underlined with reference to art: "If Virginia has the austere, parched beauty of a Giotto fresco, Vanessa is more like a figure sculpted in rosy marble by a skilled but minor artist of the late Baroque" (Cunningham 1998: 114). Today, famous art does not have to be described, because we have all seen mass-produced copies, and therefore the ekphrastic genre develops

functions other than detailed description, as here, where the works of art instead serve as objects of comparison.[7]

Clarissa thinks of Richard as a man who loves interpreting images: "The old Richard would be capable of talking for half an hour or more about the various possible interpretations of the inept copy of Botticelli's Venus being drawn by a young black man with chalk on the concrete [...]" (Cunningham 1998: 19 – 20). Here, the reference to this classic picture can be read as a way of characterizing Richard not only as an art connoisseur, but also as a man with no racial biases and as an intellectual with goodwill for both street and non-professional art. The picture and its surroundings function as a characterization of him, not the other way around. Towards the end, when Richard is on the verge of suicide, he appears, from the blurred points of view of the narrator and Clarissa, like a statue by Giacometti: "He looks insane and exalted, both ancient and childish, astride the windowsill like some scarecrow equestrian, a park statue by Giacometti" (Cunningham 1998: 196). Connotations to the equestrian figure on the one hand and the anorectic body on the other help to create a complex image of the successful poet, the stubborn friend, as well as the abandoned child.

Another visual reference in the novel is to a movie being shot in Clarissa's neighborhood in New York. On her way to the florist one early June morning, Clarissa passes a film team and thinks she recognizes a celebrity who looks out of a trailer door. It could be Meryl Streep or Vanessa Redgrave. We get no further information about the movie, but the two names point back to the film version of *Mrs. Dalloway* from 1997, where Vanessa Redgrave played the main role,[8] and forward (from our point of view) to a then (in the 1990s) non-existent film that later became *The Hours*, a movie from 2002, where Meryl Streep played Clarissa; Julianne Moore, Laura Brown; and Nicole Kidman, Virginia Woolf.[9] This integration of a movie team, which is introduced as an ordinary phenomenon on a New York street, works on two levels since, on the one hand, it locates the trauma theme in a cultural exchange context and, on the other hand, locates it as an implied anticipation. Nobody could know that a movie would be adapted and realized from the novel, and nobody could know that Clarissa's part would be played by Streep, but the narrative arrangement of the novel, as well as its con-

7 James A. W. Heffernan writes in his chapter on modern and post-modern ekphrasis that the genre on the one hand has kept its basic features but, on the other hand, has changed, from "epic ornament to free-standing literary work" (Heffernan 2004: 138).

8 *Mrs. Dalloway* is a 1997 British film directed by Marleen Gorris, starring Vanessa Redgrave, Natascha McElhone, and Michael Kitchen.

9 *The Hours* is a 2002 Anglo-American film directed by Stephen Daldry, starring Meryl Streep, Julianne Moore, and Nicole Kidman.

struction of traumatic memory, involves a prefigurative scenario that implies an expectation of coming events.

A closer look at the narration of the characters' mental conditions will reveal a systematic representation of flashforward imagery triggered by painful experiences and memories. This technique not only exposes hopes and expectations in the fictive persons – it also conceptualizes trauma as an interrelation between past and future events. Little Richie is a good example of such aesthetics. In the 1949 chapters, he is described as a three-year-old boy who loves his mother but is very anxious about her movements. The scene where mother and son prepare the birthday cake for Dan is a strong anticipation of later events, and Richie's emotional response to his mother when he spills the flour and thinks he has spoiled the cake, is telling: "He looks at her in terror. His eyes fill with tears" (Cunningham 1998: 78). His frightened gaze at his mother not only reveals his fear of having destroyed the cake, it also hints at his mother's reaction and possible disappearance from him. A repetition of his response comes when Laura picks him up at Mrs. Latch's house: his face is "a miniature agony of hope, sorrow, and confusion," while she is "embarrassed by his tears" (Cunningham 1998: 190). As a flashforward, his terrorized eyes anticipate the later separation between them, his poetry, in which she appears as both beloved and despised, and finally his decision to commit suicide, which he explains as resulting from his failure, not mentioning which one, just: "I've failed" (Cunningham 1998: 199).

His line echoes Virginia Woolf, who in the suicide scene thinks of herself as a person who has failed. While she seems very certain about her decision to kill herself, Cunningham also lets her play with other options: "She imagines turning around, taking the stone out of her pocket, going back to the house" (Cunningham 1998: 5). As an author, he can do the same with his fictional character, Virginia Woolf, as she does with her character Clarissa Dalloway, namely, construct her mind. In the 1923 chapters, Woolf's mind is occupied with plans for the novel she is about to write, and she foresees that her heroine will not only "take her own life" (Cunningham 1998: 69) but also have a female lover. The death motif and the lesbian motif are tied together in a flower image that has the character of an ekphrasis, of a described still-life. The girl – Clarissa's love – will in Virginia's thoughts "scandalize the aunts by cutting the heads off dahlias and hollyhocks and floating them in great bowls of water, just as Virginia's sister, Vanessa, has always done" (Cunningham 1998: 82). This image of "decapitated flowers floating" (Cunningham 1998: 83) may be read as an anticipation of Virginia Woolf's floating body after she has drowned but is, at the same time, a flashback, because this scene has already been narrated. Shortly after, in the same chapter, she observes how her servant Nelly "takes a turnip from the

bowl and cuts off its end with a practiced flick of the knife" (Cunningham 1998: 86). Nelly would gladly have slit her throat, Virginia thinks, because of the silent fight between them; the decapitated flowers are simultaneously and unequivocally attached to Virginia and her death.

Even Laura Brown has "failed" (Cunningham 1998: 144). This is what she thinks when driving along the freeway. Her intentions are seemingly not motivated by past experiences but by the book she is reading, *Mrs. Dalloway*, which fills a gap in her present life. The story occupies her mind and creates an illusionary world in which she shapes her alter egos – first, an invisible sister, then, a ghost. However, while there is no singular moment or evident cause in the past that might explain her actions, one important clue to her dissatisfaction is clearly related to her neighbor, Kitty, who is unable to have a child, probably because of uterine cancer. The dormant emotions between the two women become manifest when Kitty tells Laura about the imminent hospitalization, whereupon they embrace and nearly kiss each other. Also, in Laura's case, death and latent lesbianism are therefore metaphorically intertwined, and the near-kiss functions as a reminder of this intimacy when Laura later imagines how she can go on living.

Back home, where numerous nights as a wife await her, she projects her future as a mental image prompted by a quote from Woolf: "It might be like walking out into a field of brilliant snow. It could be dreadful and wonderful. *We thought her sorrows were ordinary sorrows; we had no idea*" (Cunningham 1998: 205). After her return, in the chapter where she very reluctantly goes to bed with her husband, the metaphoric analogy between death and lesbianism invokes an image of the floating body similar to the one we have seen earlier, only now it is empty: "She might, at this moment, be nothing but a floating intelligence; not even a brain inside a skull, just a presence that perceives, as a ghost might" (Cunningham 1998: 215). This ghost imagery turns up towards the end of the novel when Laura visits Clarissa after Richard's death, when Clarissa thinks of his mother as a "victim and a torturer who haunted Richard's work" (Cunningham 1998: 226). She is now identified through Clarissa's point of view as "the ghost and the goddess in a small body of private myths made public" (Cunningham 1998: 221).

Like Laura, Clarissa carries ambivalent memories of romantic kisses and one fatal near-kiss. Her relationship with Richard has been very intense and she recalls a scene thirty years ago: "Richard had called her Mrs. Dalloway, and they had kissed" (Cunningham 1998: 98). However, since Richard loves Louis too, Clarissa struggles with the triangular situation, and the happy moment of the past is overshadowed by a subconscious thought of death: "What lives undimmed in Clarissa's mind more than three decades later is a kiss at dusk on a patch of *dead grass* [...]" (Cunningham 1998: 98, emphasis mine). Her present

life is nevertheless filled with remorse for a kiss she did not return, and she still imagines what a possible common future with Richard would have looked like: "How often since then has she wondered what might have happened if she'd tried to remain with him; if she'd returned Richard's kiss on the corner of Bleecker and MacDougal [...]" (Cunningham 1998: 97). The memory of this near-kiss is revived again in the suicide scene, when Clarissa sits on the ground with Richard's body in her arms and would have confessed to him, had he been alive, how she left him at a street corner in favor of an ordinary life. She would have asked for forgiveness for shying away from "kissing him on the lips, and for telling herself she did so only for the sake of his health" (Cunningham 1998: 203). The dramatic shock of his suicide is foreshadowed in Clarissa's mental recollection of kisses and rejections, and again the novel conceptualizes trauma in the span between haunting memories and frightening anticipation.

5 Anticipations

The Hours is perhaps first of all a precarious concern for the future due to AIDS, and its flashforward imagery serves as a main aesthetic strategy in its understanding of the contextual state of crisis. In her article on the two novels *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*, Kate Haffey focuses on the exquisite moments and the temporality of the kiss. She refers to recent discussions of the kiss between Clarissa Dalloway and Sally Seton in Woolf's novel and claims that this kiss is being interpreted three times in *The Hours*. Among queer theorists, the kiss in Woolf has been read as "a moment that temporarily interrupts her inevitable movement towards marriage and reproduction" (Haffey 2010: 137), in other words, towards conventional heterosexuality. Haffey takes a somewhat different position when she points at the unexpected forms of temporality that emerge from the kiss in *Mrs. Dalloway*; she reads *The Hours* as a text that, in its different representations of the kiss, reveals another temporality at work, "a temporality that does not press on towards closure or conclusion, but that moves in strange and unpredictable ways" (Haffey 2010: 137).

A main argument in Haffey's reading of the moments in *The Hours* is that they represent a certain relation to the future. The three kisses that she analyses are the one between Laura and Kitty, between Clarissa and Richard, and between Virginia and Vanessa in the kitchen when Vanessa visits her sister in Richmond. In each case, Haffey emphasizes the moments not only as cuts in the flow of time, but also as embodying an implied attitude to coming events. According to Haffey, Laura's kiss represents a moment of forgetting the future, of, instead, living in the present, enjoying the desire for Kitty. Clarissa's kiss takes her back

in time to a moment where the future had not yet been decided, where the feeling of "anything could happen" (a quote from *Mrs. Dalloway*) is "a feeling of not knowing the future" (Haffey 2010: 154). Virginia's kiss echoes a moment in her childhood; it breaks "through the barriers of time and collapses the distinction between the child and the adult" (Haffey 2010: 156). In various ways, these kisses posit the woman in her present situation, but simultaneously resist teleological narrative and chronological temporality. Instead of anticipating a heterosexual future with courtship, marriage, reproduction, etc., the kisses in *The Hours* are moments, Haffey writes, "where we linger, celebrating not the possibility of a scripted future but the soaring hope of the moment itself" (Haffey 2010: 159). Haffey's focus on the moment and the significance of temporality in the construction of queer identities opens interesting perspectives, and her emphasis on the future is pertinent. However, what her focus misses is the trauma, which indisputably belongs to the novel's construction of temporality. Many of the "exquisite moments" are in fact characterized by images of the future that are not always unexpected, repressed, or consciously forgotten, but instead projected from a memorized moment of the past.

One such moment is the scene where Clarissa Vaughan, in her first chapter, walks out to buy flowers and meets an old friend, Walter Hardy, on the street. After she has invited him to the party, her thoughts go to Richard, when he was ten years younger. If Richard had not declined, they could have been arguing about "Hardy and the quest for eternal youth, about how gay men have taken to imitating the boys who tortured them in high school" (Cunningham 1998: 19). And if Richard had seen the windblown plastic bag that billowed against the white sky, he would have wanted to talk about the bag, Clarissa imagines, and how it "will blow into the Hudson and float all the way to the ocean, where eventually a sea turtle, a creature that could live a hundred years, will mistake it for a jellyfish, eat the bag, and die" (Cunningham 1998: 20). In both cases, Clarissa's thoughts are not only triggered by memories of the past but are also metaphorically connected, first with future life (a dream of eternal youth, a hundred-year old turtle), second with trauma (boys who tortured them in high school, the turtle eating the plastic bag), and third with death (the turtle dies). Moreover, this imagined story about the floating plastic bag unequivocally resembles Virginia's dead body when she drifts away after her suicide.

In addition to the kisses, other exquisite moments are, in my opinion, isolated temporal islands where the characters can hide from future concerns. In their connections to the past through memories and intertextualities, they systematically foreshadow coming events through parallels, echoes, and poetic images. Maybe past and present moments are imbued with lust, warm emotions, and

happy feelings, but they are seldom free from undercurrents pointing at a frightening future.

The image of a historic city with layers of deceased people turns up in both Clarissa Vaughan's and Virginia Woolf's storylines to act as reminders that influence the senses of present life and that throw shadows onto the future. Echoing Sigmund Freud's rhetoric of the archaeological work of the psychoanalyst, Clarissa sees Manhattan as a place where "you would find the ruins of another, older city, and then another and another" (Cunningham 1998: 14). She imagines how the dead are buried under the cement and the grass that she walks over, while she, at the same time, notices a singer, a roller-skater, a lunatic, and men who offer drugs. Confronted with the AIDS disease, Clarissa envisages future life, but not without including past and present suffering: "Even if we're further gone than Richard; even if we're fleshless, blazing with lesions, shitting in the streets; still, we want desperately to live" (Cunningham 1998: 15).

The way in which Michael Cunningham reinvokes *Mrs. Dalloway* points at recognized similarities between the two epochs and their existential threats. The shellshocks of the past and the idea of a death drive constitute the novel's interpretation of an era troubled by deadly disease. Returning images and traumatic anticipation are basic elements of the novel's cultural constructions of trauma, and the intertextuality to Woolf works as a model for how the current crisis can be addressed. Clarissa Dalloway survives, and so do Clarissa Vaughan and Laura Brown in *The Hours*, but the future itself does not appear so healthy. The narrative strand in both novels ends happily. In Woolf: "It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was" (Woolf 1981 [1925]: 194). In Cunningham: "'Come in, Mrs. Brown,' she says. 'Everything is ready'" (Cunningham 1998: 226). However, the ghosts of the past prevail and throw haunting images into the future.

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László Munteán

Phantomogenic Ekphrasis: Traumatizing Images in Michael Cunningham's *Specimen Days* and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*

1 Introduction

The distressing sight of people jumping or falling out of the World Trade Center has become an integral part of our collective imaginary of 9/11. Photographs capturing their jump and subsequent fall into the abyss have burned into our memories. Although such traumatizing images were quickly taken out of circulation in print media, they have had a long afterlife on the Internet and in the arts. In the realm of literature, a number of texts, especially novels, have addressed 9/11's falling bodies, or "jumpers," as they were also called: Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* (2004), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) are perhaps the best-known. Michael Cunningham's *Specimen Days* (2005), although rarely discussed as a 9/11 novel, and even less so in relation to the falling bodies, also evokes images of the falling people, albeit differently from these novels. This chapter compares Cunningham's and DeLillo's novels on the basis of the techniques they employ to represent images of the 9/11 jumpers.

The notion of ekphrasis will serve as a lens through which to compare the two novels. An ancient rhetorical tool for describing visual images through words, ekphrasis has been defined and applied in a variety of ways (Hagstrum 1958; Krieger 1967; Heffernan 1993; Wagner 1996). Most significantly for my purposes in this chapter, W. J. T. Mitchell (1994) distinguishes three moments of ekphrasis: indifference, hope, and fear, each of which describes the writer's emotional disposition towards the image/text dialectic. After discussing the problematic relationship between image and text in relation to photographs of the jumpers, I use Mitchell's terminology to look at ekphrasis as a means of verbalizing terrorizing images. Subsequently, I introduce the term "phantomogenic ekphrasis" to examine how *Specimen Days* and *Falling Man* approximate images of the 9/11 jumpers.

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2 Falling and jumping

Emphasizing photography's significant role in the public response to the terrorist attacks, Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (2003:13) described 9/11 as the ultimate "Kodak moment." Accordingly, visual representations of the traumatic experience of 9/11 have raised substantial scholarly attention in the past nine years with the works of Marianne Hirsch (2003, 2004), E. Ann Kaplan (2003), Barbie Zelizer (2002), and Rob Kroes (2007) defining the main paths of inquiry. Images of the jumpers, however, attest to a particular category within the photographic archive of 9/11. They present a kind of horror that differs from the sight of carnage. While the hero-cult of the victims obviously serves the purpose of translating trauma into a narrative, whereby loss gains meaning as an act of sacrifice (as the term "hero" suggests),[1] the only deaths that involved agency on the part of the victims were those of the firefighters who were killed in the collapse and the people who jumped out of the towers to escape death by fire. This latter form of intentionality, however, would not pass smoothly as heroism. The terrorizing force of these images lies not so much in their "graphic" content as in their potential to be perceived as a conflation of incongruent narrative schemes.

Frank van Vree (2010: 276) calls these images "grounding images" because they "give proof of and epitomize the atrocious tragedy in its barest form, but as such they are – also in this respect – 'indigestible,' not letting themselves be absorbed by a story that takes the viewer away" (278). These images' indigestibility is underscored by the crisis of language posed by their description in words. For as much as they depict *falling* bodies, they are also imbued with the act of *jumping* that preceded their fall. It is thus not merely these people's deaths that the viewer is compelled to imagine, but also the decision that renders their fall a result of a voluntary act: suicide. Given both the hopelessness of the situation in the burning towers as well as the stigma attributed to the word "suicide" – not to mention, as Laura Frost reminds us, the term's consonance with "the other suicides of that day, the hijackers" (2008: 188) – this interpretation is, of course, highly problematic. As Joanne Faulkner contends in relation to Richard Drew's photograph of the "Falling Man," the image "reveals and embodies a traumatic horror, difficult to encounter: the horror of *choosing* the means of one's own particular death in the face of a less certain but more protracted demise at the hands of another" (2008: 68).

1 As Jürgen Habermas remarked in the wake of 9/11: "But why do they need to be called heroes? Perhaps this word has different connotations in American English than it does in German" (quoted in Simpson 2006: viii).

Simultaneously, however, our contextual knowledge of the hopeless situation inside the buildings cancels out the narrative of suicide. Used synonymously, the terms "jumpers" and "falling people" are pitted against each other once considering their connotations. Frost (2008) registers this crisis of signification in the context of the burgeoning glorification of the victims in the wake of 9/11. She contends that

> [b]oth accounts involve an imposition of an explanatory narrative upon the falling people: "These people were forced out" or "They were choosing to die". Unlike the deaths of passengers on United 93, which sources such as *The 9/11 Commission Report,* A&E's drama *Flight 93,* and the film *United 93* narrated as a proactive deed of heroism, the falling people present a catch-22. If they were victims of horrendous circumstances, driven to act out of blind instinct, then their story is one of pure loss, nightmare, passivity, victimhood. If they had some degree of agency, then there is a possibility of heroism, but also an excruciating choice to jump or to burn. [...] The falling bodies have been seen, but they have not been understood; and their representations, by news sources and artistic forms alike, suggests a general desire that they remain beyond the reaches of understanding. (188 – 189)

To extend Frost's argument, these "explanatory narratives" are not merely imposed for the sake of "understanding" but it is *by virtue* of these narratives that the falling people are produced as subjects in discourse. In this sense, the indigestibility of these visual representations lies, at least in part, with the binary opposition of "falling" vs. "jumping."

3 "Do you remember this photograph?": Trauma and ekphrasis

If ekphrasis consists in the translation of visual images into words, the fall/jump binary marks a lack of a better word, a crisis of semiosis, which manifests itself in the inability of language as a means of description. Although the photographs themselves are nothing more than representations of events, it is through language that they are invested with meaning. Once words falter in describing them, they occupy a blind spot of meaning, a terrain of semiotic indigestibility, which is key to the structure of trauma. Trauma, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992: 102) contend, is an "event without a referent" which the traumatized subject unwillingly relives in various forms of reenactment. The immediacy and inaccessibility of the traumatic imprint is, as Cathy Caruth suggests, inherently paradoxical insofar as "the greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it, that immediacy, paradoxically enough, may take the form of belatedness" (1995: 6). One may rightfully assume that this sense

of belatedness or deferral jeopardizes the potential of ekphrasis as a descriptive tool. However, such a deferral of meaning concomitant with the process of translation from one medium into another is central to the ekphrastic act. The difference between the medial qualities of words and images always renders the former belated or deferred vis-à-vis the latter. "Words can 'cite,'" W. J. T. Mitchell writes, "but never 'sight' their objects" (1994: 152). And citation, we may add, is a performative act that not only describes but also produces its object.

Mitchell identifies three moments of ekphrasis, each marking an affective disposition towards the image/word dialectic. He calls the first phase "ekphrastic indifference," which is predicated on the impossibility of ekphrasis. "A verbal representation," Mitchell contends, "cannot represent – that is, make present – its object in the same way a visual representation can. It may refer to an object, describe it, invoke it, but it can never bring its visual presence before us in the way pictures do" (152). This phase is followed by "ekphrastic hope" when "the impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome in imagination or metaphor, when we discover a 'sense' in which language can do what so many writers wanted to do: 'to make us see'" (152). As a result, "[t]he estrangement of the image/text division is overcome, and a sutured, synthetic form, a verbal icon or imagetext, arises in its place" (154). Whereas ekphrastic indifference dwells on difference, ekphrastic hope is fueled by the imagination, which trustfully embraces the representational power of words. This moment is, in turn, undercut by the third phase, which Mitchell calls "ekphrastic fear":

> the moment of resistance or counterdesire that occurs when we sense that the difference between the verbal and visual representation might collapse and the figurative, imaginary desire of ekphrasis might be realized literally and actually. [...] It is the moment in aesthetics when the difference between verbal and visual mediation becomes a moral, aesthetic imperative rather than (as in the first, "indifferent" phase of ekphrasis) a natural fact that can be relied on. (154)

Thus, this third moment of ekphrasis consists in the realization that, ultimately, both visual and verbal representations are nothing more than representations, and the ontological and hierarchical difference between them is arbitrary.

Associated Press photographer Richard Drew's iconic image of "Falling Man" reveals a peculiar dimension of ekphrastic fear. Showing a man falling headfirst with the vertical girders of the towers behind him, Drew's photograph was not only trimmed to meet the aesthetic criterion of symmetry but, when it appeared in the September 12, 2001 issue of the *New York Times*, it was accompanied by the following caption: "A person falls headfirst after jumping from the north tower of the World Trade Center. It was a horrific sight that was repeated in the moments after the planes struck the towers" (Kleinfield 2001: A7). By virtue

of explaining what the photograph depicts, the caption expands the temporal horizon of the image and transforms it into a headfirst fall. For even if the man never really fell headfirst (except for a fraction of a second), he is *made* to do so by the caption. Thus, both image and text function as performatives that produce, rather than describe, the man's fall as a *headfirst* fall.

The tabooing of Drew's photograph reveals, however, that the realization of the illusory nature of the photograph played little role in its perception by the general public. Rather, the terrorizing force of the image had more to do with its perceived indexicality or what Roland Barthes describes as "this has been" in his work *Camera Lucida* (1993: 96). In this relation, ekphrastic fear gains a new dimension: how to write about images that defy description? Whereas Mitchell bases his three phases of ekphrasis on the radio program *Bob and Ray*, in which listeners had to imagine Bob's photographs of his summer vacation on the basis of his conversation about them with Ray, the caption to Drew's photograph in the *New York Times* is predicated on readers' exposure to the image as they open the newspaper. The image is not to be imagined, but seen. Consequently, the caption's relation to the image is informed by the photo's traumatizing force, which lends an ethical dimension to ekphrasis.

The efforts of two journalists to trace the identity of the man in Drew's photo further illustrate this dimension. Tom Junod, one of the journalists, describes Falling Man in terms of the Unknown Soldier and designates Drew's photograph as an unmarked grave (2003: 199). While instigating bearing witness to the tabooed photograph as an ethical imperative, Junod's ekphrasis constitutes a metaphor, which mitigates the traumatizing power of the image through its contextualization within familiar narratives of war, sacrifice, and heroism (see Munteán 2013). Junod begins his article by asking, "Do you remember this photograph?" (2003: 177). This question is significant in the sense that it renders imagination an act of memory. The article elicits the photograph as a tabooed relic of 9/11 and demands that readers bear witness to it. If ekphrastic hope relies on the power of the imagination, in the case of "Falling Man," as well as in other images of the falling bodies, hope consists in the act of recollection more than in imagination. This mnemonic gesture is key to both Cunningham's and DeLillo's novels, to which I turn next.

4 "Faint but discernible": *Specimen Days*

Caleb Cain, a reviewer of Michael Cunningham's *Specimen Days*, describes the three tales that make up the novel as three interlocking "novellas": a ghost story ("In the Machine"), a detective story ("The Children's Crusade"), and a sci-

ence fiction story ("Like Beauty") (Cain 2005: n.p.). As a form-within-a-form, each novella is built up of recurring images that intersect through multiple intratextual relations in the novel as a whole. Most conspicuously, following in the vein of Cunningham's earlier bestseller, *The Hours* (1998), the novellas in *Specimen Days* are interlocked by three characters that appear and reappear in various disguises and timeframes, with Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855) weaving them together as an overarching intertext.

At first glance, the novel's relevance to 9/11 is most obviously indicated by the second story, "The Children's Crusade," set in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks when the towers' ruins were still visible at Ground Zero. This historical allusion, however, is inserted into a fictional world of teenage suicide terrorists who, inspired by *Leaves of Grass*, randomly blow up people and themselves in the act of a loving embrace. Instead of limiting my discussion to the scope of this second novella, I will focus on the first one, "In the Machine," set about a hundred years earlier, in turn-of-the-century Lower Manhattan. The protagonist of this story is Lucas, a 12-year-old Irish boy traumatized by the death of his brother Simon in an industrial accident.

Nicolas Abraham's (1987) notion of the phantom is particularly useful to explore the dynamics of ekphrasis at work in the first two novellas of *Specimen Days*. Phantoms, Abraham contends, are secreted traumas passed on within families from generation to generation in the form of verbal traces that indicate the phantom's incessant presence in the psyche of the traumatized person. "What haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others" (287), secrets that have not been verbalized. Thus, the phantom embodies secreted traumas and is sustained by what Abraham calls "phantomogenic words [that] become travesties and can be acted out or expressed in phobias of all kinds (such as impulse phobia), obsessions, restricted phantasmagorias..." (292). In what follows, I will demonstrate how such phantomogenic words constitute ekphrastic constellations that recall 9/11's falling bodies.

Lucas's compulsion to recite lines from *Leaves of Grass* is more than mere fascination with Whitman's poetry: "He hadn't meant to speak as the book. He never did, but when he was excited he couldn't help himself" (Cunningham 2005: 4). Indeed, when he quotes Whitman, he does so in the form of an uncontrollable speaking fit. Especially in situations where he cannot find the right words to express himself, Whitman's poem, which he simply calls "the book," speaks through him. For instance, uttered as a sentence, the Whitman line "Every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (5) serves him well to express what remains unspeakable to him: his adoration for his dead brother's fiancée Catherine. His speaking in fits, therefore, has a double meaning. On the one hand, the word "fit" refers to his inability to control "his Whitman,"

while on the other hand, it also denotes his ability to apply Whitman fittingly, albeit unwittingly.

Upon presenting Catherine with a bowl to express his love for her, Lucas utters two Whitman lines in which Catherine "recognizes" Simon's voice addressing her:

> He said, "The spinning-girl retreats and advances to the hum of the big wheel."
>
> [...]
>
> "The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy and pimpled neck. The nine months' gone is in the parturition chamber, her faintness and pains are advancing."
>
> Catherine paused. She looked at him with a new recognition.
>
> "What did you say?"
>
> He didn't know. She had never before seemed to hear him when he spoke as the book.
>
> "Lucas, please repeat what you just said."
>
> "I've forgotten."
>
> "You spoke of a spinning-girl. You spoke of a bride, and ... a prostitute. And a woman about to give birth."
>
> "It was the book."
>
> "But why did you say it?"
>
> "The words come through me. I never know."
>
> She leaned closer, gazing into his face as if words were written there, faint but discernible, difficult to read. (Cunningham 2005: 54 – 55)

The "new recognition" that Lucas's utterance elicits is, in fact, the uncanny recognition of the self in the other. By unknowingly speaking in a fit, Lucas performs a text that "fits" Catherine's own trauma. His speaking fit consequently becomes an interface for Catherine to confront her own repressed trauma. In Abraham's terms, Lucas acts like a "ventriloquist" (1987: 290), a voice articulating not only Whitman but Catherine as well. As a result, Catherine collapses and discloses to Lucas what she perceives as her complicity in Simon's death: "'I told your brother he must marry me. I don't know if the child is his. It probably isn't. But Simon was willing. [...] I suspect. He had his accident because he was unhappy. He may have been so distracted by the thought of our wedding that he allowed it to happen'" (Cunningham 2005: 69). This muted trauma lies in Catherine's haunting suspicion of her own responsibility for Simon's death – a realization of guilt that informs her understanding of Lucas's words.

I want to argue that Catherine's reading of Lucas also teaches us, readers of Cunningham's novel, how to read the text at hand. In the same way that the words "spinning girl," "prostitute," "nine months," and "bride" are (mis)read by Catherine and construed in her reading as reverberations of her own complicity in Simon's death, *Specimen Days* presents us with words "faint but discerni-

ble" exposing the phantomogenic contours of 9/11's falling bodies in the form of a phantomogenic ekphrasis. In order to identify these contours, let me focus on two scenes, one that concludes "In the Machine" and one in "The Children's Crusade." To prevent Catherine from going to work, Lucas self-mutilates by allowing his hand to be devoured by the machine so that Catherine will take him to the hospital. Waiting for treatment with the girl at his side, he suddenly succumbs to the pull of an irresistible drive and, with his mangled hand soaking in blood, dashes out of the hospital and runs to the site where Catherine's workplace, the Mannahatta Company, is already ablaze.

Cunningham's description of the fire at the fictitious Mannahatta Company uncannily resembles the historical event of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of March 25, 1911, which took the lives of 146 female garment workers, many of whom jumped to their deaths from the top floors of the building (von Drehle 2003: 152–156). A scene in the second novella, "The Children's Crusade," further substantiates the connection between the fictitious and the historic buildings. In it, the police psychologist Cat sets up an interview with a Whitman specialist at New York University, the present-day owner of what used to be the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. Upon her entrance to the building, the narration gestures toward a historical reality outside the text (the NYU building is indeed identical to the old Triangle Factory), through the textual coordinates of the horrific fire at the Mannahatta Company:

> One of these buildings, Cat had never been quite sure which, had been that sweatshop, where the fire was. She knew the story only vaguely – the exits had been blocked to keep the workers from sneaking out early. Something like that. There'd been a fire, and all those women were trapped inside. Some of them had jumped. From one of these buildings – was it the one she was entering? – women with their dresses on fire had fallen, had hit this pavement right here or the pavement just down the street. Now it was all NYU. (Cunningham 2005: 156)

Focalized through Cat, Cunningham's description ekphrastically evokes photographs of dead women lying on the pavement at the foot of the building, though it is the story, not the images *per se*, that Cat "vaguely" recalls.

There is, however, another ekphrastic gesture that is even less direct than the above reference to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. The NYU building offers an intratextual gateway for the reader to "recognize" Cat as Catherine and retroactively "re-read" the fire of the Mannahatta Company not only in terms of the disaster of the Triangle catastrophe, but also in terms of 9/11. In this relation, Lucas's apocalyptic vision of the "unspeakable beauty" (Cunningham 2005: 101) of the catastrophe at the Mannahatta Company recalls the symmetry of the "Falling Man" photograph. In the same way that the "words [that] come through" Lucas

allowed Catherine to face up to her own trauma, so does Catherine's reading of Lucas's words give us a model for reading Cunningham's novel as a mnemonic device that evokes 9/11's falling bodies in terms of the Mannahatta/Triangle catastrophe.

The type of ekphrasis at work in *Specimen Days* is essentially different from Junod's application of the metaphor of the Unknown Soldier. Here, ekphrastic hope is anchored on readers' familiarity with images of the falling bodies so that they can flash up as a phantom, in Abraham's sense, from within the description of another catastrophe. The following passage further illustrates the mechanism of this phantomogenic ekphrasis. Witnessing the building on fire, Lucas looks up at one of the workers:

> The woman stood in the window, holding to its frame. Her blue skirt billowed. The square of brilliant orange made of her a blue silhouette, fragile and precise. She was like a goddess of the fire, come to her platform to tell those gathered below what the fire meant, what it wanted of them. From so far away, her face was indistinct. She turned her head to look back into the room, as if someone had called to her. She was radiant and terrifying. She listened to something the fire told her.
>
> She jumped.
>
> [...]
>
> The woman's skirt rose around her as she fell. She lifted her arms, as if to take hold of invisible hands that reached for her.
>
> When she struck the pavement, she disappeared. She'd been a woman in midair, she'd been the flowering of her skirt, and then in an instant she was only the dress, puddle on the cobblestones, still lifting slightly at its edges as if it lived on. (Cunningham 2005: 98)

Another passage of the same event yields an even more distressing configuration of the dilemma of aesthetics in Drew's photograph. As Lucas catches sight of another woman just about to jump out of the building, he visualizes her fall as flight:

> She looked down. She looked at Lucas.
>
> [...]
>
> He returned her gaze. He could do nothing else. His heart raged and burned, full of its own fire. [...] She said (though she did not speak in words), We are this now. We were weary and put-upon, we lived in tiny rooms, we ate candy in secret, but now we are radiant and glorious. We are no longer anyone. We are part of something vaster and more marvelous than the living can imagine.
>
> [...]
>
> The fire woman spread her wings and flew.
>
> [...] He saw the woman cross the sky. [...] He knew that his heart had stopped. He wanted to say, I am large, I contain multitudes. I am in the grass under your feet. (100 – 101)

Cognizant of Junod's 2003 article, it is difficult not to read this passage as a phantomogenic text that evokes the composed posture of the Falling Man in Drew's photograph. "Although he has not chosen his fate," Junod writes, "he appears to have, in his last instants of life, embraced it. If he were not falling, he might very well be flying. [...] Some people who look at the picture see stoicism, willpower, a portrait of resignation; others see something else – something discordant and terrible: freedom" (Junod 2003: 177). What Lucas perceives as an "unspeakable beauty" (Cunningham 2005: 101) once he visualizes the woman's fall as flight, uncannily dovetails with the "terrible freedom" suffused with the unsettling aporia of jumping and falling, in Junod's description of Drew's photograph (Junod 2003: 177).

While the image of the Unknown Soldier in Junod's article uses ekphrasis as a means of healing, Cunningham's text constitutes a counter-narrative of trauma insofar as it evokes, rather than describes, the falling bodies of 9/11. Cunningham's evocation of the Mannahatta/Triangle catastrophe is not to contextualize "Falling Man"; on the contrary, it functions as a phantomogenic text that beguiles informed readers into recalling the jumpers.

5 "Died by his own hand": *Falling Man*

Inflating "Falling Man" into an overarching image emerging from the open wound of 9/11, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* settles deep into the void that Cunningham's *Specimen Days* pries open. Instead of evoking the falling bodies of 9/11 as an emphatic absence emanating from the iconography of another event, *Falling Man* features the mysterious performance artist David Janiak, who mimics the pose of the man in Richard Drew's photograph by attaching himself to a harness and executing jumps at various locations in the city. Like Lucas in *Specimen Days*, Janiak, known as the Falling Man, "speaks" phantomogenic words that "point to a gap, that is, to the unspeakable" (Abraham 1987: 290).

Pierre Nora (1989) defines *lieux de mémoire* as sites that emerge out of a communal deliberation to "create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally." These sites are significant because "[w]e buttress our identities upon such bastions..." (12). In contrast, as we have seen, Drew's photograph offers a figure that is collectively willed away but nevertheless prevails as a "grounding image" (van Vree 2010: 276), leaving an indelible mark in the memory of those who have seen it. With a twist on Nora's term, one can argue that "Falling Man" is at the very least a counter-site of memory in the sense that it obstructs identification (both by relating *to* the photograph and relating the pho-

tograph as a representation *of* a particular act by a particular person). Paradoxically, it asserts itself as a site by means of refusing to be identified as a site of memory in Nora's sense. Janiak's repeated performances in public spaces attest to an embodied voice of a collectively repressed trauma that, as a phantomogenic performance, wreaks havoc in the city. By choreographically mimicking the pose of Drew's "Falling Man," Janiak builds a three-dimensional model of the photograph every time he executes a jump.

Why does he do this? And why does he choose this particular photograph? Once the novel's female protagonist Lianne catches sight of the artist dangling on his harness at Grand Central Station, she recognizes the "original" of Janiak's model: "There was the awful openness of it, something we'd not seen, the single falling figure that trails a collective dread, body come down among us all" (DeLillo 2007: 33). Janiak not only replicates the "original" but also activates and reconfigures the public space in which he situates his model. In so doing, onlookers are encapsulated in a diorama in which they themselves are made to bear witness to a familiar but repressed aspect of 9/11 through Janiak's mediation. On one occasion, he performs at the subway station at 125th Street. Lianne sees him standing still, preparing for his jump, and ponders his purpose:

> She thought of the passengers. The train would bust out of the tunnel south of here and then begin to slow down, approaching the station at 125th Street, three-quarters of a mile ahead. It would pass and he would jump. There would be those aboard who see him standing and those who see him jump, all jarred out of their reveries or their newspapers or muttering stunned into their cell phones. These people had not seen him attach the safety harness. They would only see him fall out of sight. Then, she thought, the ones already speaking into phones, the others groping for phones, all would try to describe what they've seen or what others nearby have seen and are now trying to describe to them. (164–165)

In line with the dazzling texture of Drew's photograph, in which the Falling Man paradoxically constitutes the only fixed point of reference, here Janiak's performance renders the fall a sequence of still images framed by the windows of the subway. As such, his performance reenacts the dazzling effect of Drew's sequence suspended by the well-known frame. In a paradoxical fashion, while his pose is controlled, the passengers catching sight of him are made to "fall" as they continue their ride irreversibly to the next stop. The setting, in this case, the subway, is thus a screen that Janiak fully incorporates in his model: by way of inscribing himself into public space as a performer, his performance phantomogenically puts Drew's tabooed image back into circulation.

One might be tempted to suggest, as Kristiaan Versluys (2009: 23) has, that in DeLillo's novel, Janiak stands in "for the people who had no choice but to submit to their fate." However, I would like to suggest that Lianne's fixation on the work

of the performance artist demonstrates that, rather, what he stands in for is the ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding their choice to take the fall. In Lianne's eyes, the "flash" of the performance compels her to recall a memory predating 9/11. For her, Janiak's jump is an embodied yet hollow cipher for the suicide of her own father. By watching Janiak's performance of Drew's photograph, Lianne is visually confronted with her own silenced trauma in much the same way that Catherine reads herself in Lucas's Whitman lines in Cunningham's *Specimen Days*. Upon witnessing his jump at 125th Street, Lianne's ponderings are conveyed in free indirect speech: "Jumps or falls. He keels forward, body rigid, and falls full-length, headfirst, drawing a rustle of awe from the schoolyard with isolated cries of alarm that are only partly smothered by the passing roar of the train" (DeLillo 2007: 168). Then she starts running as if losing control over her body:

> She thought, Died by his own hand.
>
> She stopped running then and stood bent over, breathing heavily. She looked into the pavement. When she ran in the mornings she went long distances and never felt this drained and wasted. She was doubled over, like there were two of her, the one who'd done the running and the one who didn't know why. (169)

Similarly to Catherine's reading of Lucas, Lianne reads a text "faint but discernible" into Janiak's performance (Cunningham 2005: 55). In a deferred fashion, the performance activates a repressed memory that surfaces in the form of the fragment "Died by his own hand" (DeLillo 2007: 67, 218) – perhaps written in the coroner's report upon her father's death. As a recurring textual trace, the sentence becomes a catalyst of traumatic displacement evidenced by Lianne's psychosomatic drive to run without a logically comprehensible reason.

For Lianne, as well as for the reader, the phrase "Jumps or falls" gives a thrill when juxtaposed with the conflict of signification in the iconography of Drew's photograph. We have already seen that it is the dilemmatic nature of the man's agency, signified by the words "jump" and "fall," which renders "Falling Man" a site of undecidability and therefore a traumatizing image. This particular problem is addressed by the preceding sentence: "The train comes slamming through and he turns his head and looks into it (into his death by fire) and then brings his head back around and jumps" (DeLillo 2007: 167). It is, therefore, not simply the reenactment of the posture of the man, but rather what remains invisible in Drew's photograph that is at stake in Janiak's performances: the jump. He performs choice, the act of decision that precedes his fall.

As part of her reenactment of this trauma, the term "muzzle blast" (DeLillo 2007: 41, 130), which Lianne associates with the method of her father's death, receives a poignant edge in the context of suicide: "The news of his death seemed to ride on the arc of those two words. They were awful words but she

tried to tell herself he'd done a brave thing. It was way too soon" (41). Like Janiak's public appearances, "muzzle blast" functions as a memory trigger that takes her to "counter-sites" that she has failed to inhabit as narratable memories. Situated in the context of "Falling Man," the expression "brave thing," which Lianne devises as a narrative to contextualize her father's suicide, reverberates the rhetoric of heroism burgeoning after 9/11 and yet falters once applied to the jumpers. DeLillo's novel inhabits this counter-site by mapping the suicide of Lianne's father onto David Janiak's performance, thus turning the traumatic memory of the suicide into a gateway for Janiak's performances to retroactively inscribe the taboo of suicide onto the "Falling Man" photograph. In other words, the suicide of Lianne's father is mapped onto Janiak's performance, thereby reframing the act of the Falling Man in terms of suicide. Consequently, what Janiak models is not so much the photographic image *per se* but, as DeLillo focalizes the performance through Lianne, he addresses *why* the image is inassimilable. To modify Versluys's remark, rather than standing in for those who had "no choice but to submit to their fate" (2009: 23), Janiak's performance problematizes the ambiguity of choice itself.

Although not carried out through words, the act of the performance artist is ekphrastic insofar as it describes what Drew's iconic and tabooed photograph depicts. But rather than bringing the performance itself into the foreground, DeLillo's prose focalizes it from the viewpoint of the passersby and Lianne who, like many of the readers of the novel, are compelled to remember one of 9/11's most disturbing events. Consequently, DeLillo provides a literary description of a fictitious reenactment of a documentary image. By way of reminding readers of Drew's photograph through a fictitious performance, he keeps the object of ekphrasis at a remove. This kind of ekphrasis, not unlike Cunningham's tactics in *Specimen Days,* describes inasmuch as it withholds the healing power of narrative. No wonder that Tom Junod, the "builder" of the metaphoric cenotaph for Falling Man, finds DeLillo's method ethically questionable. For Junod, as he says in a review, the novel is "a portrait of grief, to be sure but it puts grief in the air, as a cultural atmospheric, without giving us anything to mourn" (2007: n.p.). What Junod finds deplorable, however, is perhaps DeLillo's greatest achievement in this novel: a phantomogenic ekphrasis that maintains, rather than absorbs, the traumatizing force of the image.

6 Conclusion

Departing from the conventional understanding of ekphrasis as the verbal representation of a visual representation, this chapter explored the potential of ek-

phrasis to recall, rather than describe, visual images. In particular, I focused on the ekphrastic power of literature to recall traumatizing images of 9/11. While ekphrasis, in its traditional sense, relies on the imagination of readers to achieve its purpose, the kind of ekphrasis examined here builds on readers' memories of a particular event. Owing to the traumatizing nature of these events, such as the sight of people jumping out of the burning towers of the World Trade Center, visual documents thereof had been repressed and censored. Employing Abraham's notion of the phantom, I developed the concept of phantomogenic ekphrasis that recalls the memory of these tabooed images obliquely, as a mnemonic tool that instigates recollection without direct description.

As opposed to the optimism that characterizes the phase of ekphrastic hope in Mitchell's formulation, phantomogenic ekphrasis is ominous and unsettling. As we have seen, in both *Specimen Days* and *Falling Man*, confrontation with the repressed memories of the falling bodies of 9/11 is contingent on readers' familiarity with the photographs. Although the two novels differ with regard to their plot, structure, and style, their technique of recalling these traumatizing images is similar. The way in which images of 9/11's falling bodies uncannily emerge from within the interstices of the layered temporalities of Cunningham's novel is comparable to the figure of the fictitious performance artist in DeLillo's novel who enacts in the form of performance what DeLillo's novel does in the realm of literature: compelling readers to bear witness. Likewise, both novels feature particular characters – Catherine in *Specimen Days* and Lianne in *Falling Man* – whose practices of looking, listening, and reading conjure up the 9/11 jumpers as specters to be contended with.

Although ekphrasis is conventionally text-based, its phantomogenic application is not confined exclusively to literature. For instance, James Marsh's 2008 documentary *Man on Wire* constitutes a filmic counterpart of Cunningham's and DeLillo's novels. The film tells the story of French tightrope walker Philippe Petit's unauthorized walk on a high wire strung between the towers of the World Trade Center in August 1974. Whereas 9/11 is never referenced in the documentary, upon viewing the climactic scene that features archival images of Petit's stunt in midair accompanied by interviews with members of his team, it is difficult not to be reminded of photographs of the 9/11 jumpers that similarly show human bodies with the iconic façade of the World Trade Center in the background. In much the same way that the fire at the Mannahatta Company in *Specimen Days* and the performance artist in *Falling Man* function as memory triggers, so do images of Petit's bold performance in Marsh's film approximate 9/11 without directly referencing it. Although one may dismiss, as Junod probably would, the phantomogenic mechanism of such textual and filmic representations, this

chapter has argued for the creative potential of this technique as a mnemonic device.

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Adriana Margareta Dancus

Reenacting Rape in Édouard Louis's *History of Violence*

1 Introduction

At the core of the French writer Édouard Louis's second novel *Histoire de la violence* (2016) is a traumatic episode experienced by the writer himself: a physical and sexual assault by a young man of Kabyle[1] origin, named Reda, whom the writer met on his way home from a Christmas Eve dinner with his best friends Didier and Geoffroy. As Édouard[2] crosses Place de la République in Paris by foot, a smiling young man starts following him. Struck by his beauty and attracted to his breath, Édouard gives up his initial impulse to ignore the stranger and the two men start a conversation. After a few minutes, Édouard ends up inviting Reda into his apartment and they make love repeatedly. As Reda gets ready to leave Édouard's apartment, Édouard realizes his telephone is missing. When he spots his iPad in Reda's jacket, he confronts him about his now missing phone. This unleashes Reda's uncontrolled anger and violence: Reda first strangles Édouard with a scarf, then threatens him with a gun, and finally rapes him before leaving the apartment at dawn.

Histoire de la violence is constructed as a fragmented, polymorphous, and polyphonic web of renditions of what happened from the moment Édouard left his friends on Christmas Eve to the night of 25 December, when the criminal police left his apartment after securing fingerprints and DNA evidence. Édouard's sister, Clara, recites in front of her mysteriously silent husband what Édouard told her about the fateful hours before, during, and after the rape. In a mesmerizing narrative mixing her own popular vernacular with standardized language, Clara gives direct and indirect quotes from her brother's narration. She also makes digressions in which she narrates episodes from Édouard's earlier life and comments on her brother's personality, decisions, gestures, and reactions.

1 The Kabyle are a Berber ethnic group from Northern Algeria, the second largest Berber-speaking population in Africa.

2 In *Historie de la violence*, Édouard Louis is the main character as well as the author. Given the complexity of voice in this novel, I primarily use "Édouard" to refer to the character in the book and "Louis" to refer to the author's literary persona. This distinction, however, is not absolute as the two roles blend into one another.

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Louis's novel is, however, not simply Clara's narrative. Louis inscribes himself physically into the narrative as an attentive ear overhearing his sister's description of his own story from behind a door. As Clara recounts the story, Louis intervenes in the text, oftentimes in regular roman text, other times in italics, and occasionally in parenthesis. In his interventions, he corrects, elaborates, dismisses, and even attempts to silence his sister. He also delivers a short essay about Temple Drake's inability to flee from her rape scene in William Faulkner's novel *Sanctuary*. How can we understand this intriguing literary project that performs the author's own embodied experience of being raped by weaving together past and present in so many voices?

In this article, I argue that *Histoire de la violence* functions as a reenactment. In psychotherapy, reenactments are commonly seen as spontaneous, unintentional, involuntary, and compulsive behavioral phenomena whereby trauma survivors recreate and repetitively relive the past trauma in their present lives (Freud 1955 [1920], Freud 1958 [1914], Levy 1998). Even in those cases when trauma survivors actively engage in reenacting a pattern in the traumatic experience, psychotherapists warn that the active reenactment is more reflective of a maladaptive defensive strategy than an adaptive process (Levy 1998).

In film studies, we find a different definition of the reenactment. The reenactment is an established cinematic method in documentary and nonfictional media used to reconstruct prior events that have not been captured on camera. Starting with the 1980s, the reenactment has gained increased popularity in film, with directors including the Americans Errol Morris and Jill Godmilow, the German Werner Herzog, and the Danish Jon Bang Carlsen playing important roles in showing how the reenactment can be used to complicate and to question conventional understandings of genre, truth, authenticity, memory, and time, to name a few. Since the 2000s, a new generation of directors have continued to experiment with reenactment in a desire to push aesthetic, political, and ethical borders – for example, American Joshua Oppenheimer, whose 2012 documentary *The Act of Killing* generated heated debates about the what, who, how, where, and when of reenactment.

American film scholar Bill Nichols (2008) argues that reenactments in film are neither historical evidence nor explanations, but rather artistic interpretations with a "fantasmatic" power. Provocatively, Nichols turns to psychoanalysis to theoretically frame his discussion of cinematic reenactment. His starting point is the concept of fantasy, that imaginary engagement that occupied a central place in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Referencing the work of the French psychoanalysts Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis on fantasy (*fantasme* in French), Nichols explains, "fantasy is not the mere retrieval of something past, not the recovery of a real object" (Nichols 2008: 76), but "the

mise-en-scène of desire" in which "the subject becomes 'caught up himself in the sequence of images'" (Laplanche and Pontalis, as quoted in Nichols 2008: 77). Likewise, Nichols continues, reenactments are fantasmatic experiences: they resurrect a past that enlists desires, losses, and longings, making the viewers become emotionally invested in the story (Nichols 2008: 74–78). Further, the filmmaker's perspective and voice is an inherent part of this interpretative process as images ultimately embody his or her fantasies (Nichols 2008: 78). As such, "reenactments are clearly *a* view rather than *the* view from which the past yields up its truth" (Nichols 2008: 80, emphasis in the original). Although reenactments have a partial, constructed, and ritualistic quality, their fantasmatic power to vivify the past and render desire visible make them emotionally appealing and ultimately convincing.

I argue Nichol's definition of the cinematic reenactment is suited to capture what Louis does in *Histoire de la violence* when he sets out to go through the motions of his traumatic past. In his own and his sister's words, Louis is not merely reliving his trauma in an involuntary gesture, as psychotherapists have suggested. Rather, he conscientiously resurrects the ghosts of his rape and reanimates his traumatic past with the force of desire. I want to investigate the fantasmatic force that radiates through this novel and closely investigate how this carefully controlled and highly evocative reenactment functions. For what purpose does Louis reenact, and how does he structure the reenactment? In order to answer these questions, I will closely investigate the sequence of images in which Édouard Louis is caught up, which is at the core of the reenactment.

The novel is packed with media, artistic, and mental images. There are references to films, photographs, and paintings. There is an abundance of mental images such as memories, delusions, visions, hallucinations, nightmares, flashbacks, and foreshadowing. The visuality of these mental images is commonly underscored linguistically in the text when Louis writes that he sees pictures in his head. There are also innumerous ways of looking and being looked at: looking through, looking out, looking away, keeping an eye on someone, watching, scrutinizing, staring, gazing, catching a glimpse of, peeping, observing, peering, seeing oneself from outside, confronting or avoiding glances, overseeing, and not seeing at all.

Starting from three different *topoi*, the first outburst of violence, confiding rape in family and friends, and testifying in front of officials, I investigate the nature of these images and their ambiguous roles, equally traumatizing and healing, displacing and stabilizing. Moreover, I show how the boundaries between these various types of images are fluid. Assembled in a complex fashion reminiscent of the editing techniques available to a filmmaker, media and artistic images mobilize mental images, and vice versa. Finally, I demonstrate how Louis

does not reanimate his personal trauma primarily to carry out the work of mourning and recover truth; instead, he resurrects the past in order to reclaim his story from the forensic, medical, and judicial discourse. He turns the tables not on the rapist, but on his friends, who pushed him to report the assault to the police, the medical staff, who objectified his personal trauma through the scientific gaze, and the police, who asked him to recount the traumatic episode innumerous times and who, in the end, archived his story in a racially charged fashion.

2 The first outburst of violence

The first manifestation of Reda's violence, which then culminates in the rape, is an attempt to strangle Édouard. The novel repeatedly comes back to the strangulation, in fact more so than the rape itself. If the involuntary penetration is described as an olfactory experience, a peach smell that emanates from Édouard's bed sheets, at the core of the strangulation episode are media as well as mental images. The reason Édouard is so preoccupied with his missing phone is because of digital photos he took on a vacation with his best friends Didier and Geoffroy, which are stored on the phone's memory. When Édouard insists on getting his phone back, Reda becomes unexpectedly violent and strangles Édouard with a scarf. In other words, digital images (photographs) of mental images (vacation memories) indirectly trigger a violence not anticipated by Édouard.

Moreover, the fifty seconds during which Reda is strangling Édouard are repeatedly rendered in Clara's as well as Édouard's words as an out-of-body visual experience. In chapter 4, Édouard describes in retrospect how he testified at the police station for the first time. Unable to give a structured testimony during the first meeting with the police, Louis goes through the motions of the strangulation from a fly-on-the-wall perspective. He likens himself to an earthworm that squirms, twists, and turns under a shoe (Louis 2018: 41). He also remembers how the policeman watched him talk: "He wasn't listening, he was watching" (Louis 2018: 41).[3] The policeman's way of watching Édouard is debilitating in two respects. First, it is indicative of the police's power to either drag the interrogation out or to immediately end it (Louis 2018: 42). Second, it is also a condemnation of Édouard's behavior when he decided to bring a stranger up to his apartment in the middle of the night (Louis 2018: 41–42).

3 "Il n'écoutais pas, il regardait parler" (Louis 2016: 55).

In chapter 8, when Clara suggests that Édouard failed to understand that he was actually being strangled, Louis corrects her in an italicized parenthesis that echoes the cinematic voiceover. The choice of punctuation and graphics visually underscores the temporal distance between the past and the reenactment, as well as the difference between Clara's and Édouard's point of view. Once Reda started to strangle Édouard with a scarf, "*nothing passed before my eyes, no reflection, no memory,*" only a concrete image: a close-up of Édouard's own hands gripping the scarf "*out of a purely reflexive resistance to dying*" (Louis 2018: 110).[4] Here, the strangulation is no longer visualized through a pictorial metaphor from above (like an earthworm under the shoe). In the same italicized parenthesis, Édouard explains how he lost his ability to think, reflect, and remember in that perilous moment. As Reda attacked him, the only thing he had left was the fear of death, which then materialized into a weak gesture of physical resistance (his hands gripping the scarf). He had lost language and, allegedly, his humanity. He was no longer like a worm. He had become the worm.

In the same chapter, this visualization incites a new set of images, which are assembled in a very cinematic fashion. First, there are media images that crosscut the close-up of his hands gripping the scarf:

> *I'd thought the imminence of death would have doubled my strength and my courage, would have revealed a power, an ability to shout, to fight, to escape, to run, to defend myself, that even I had never suspected. Of course, in the movies, in newspapers and magazines, I'd seen characters capitulate in their own deaths, and surrender, but I thought I was different, and these images always filled me with a wave of disgust and contempt as I watched them give up the fight so quickly. I thought: I'm much stronger than they are.* (Louis 2018: 118 – 119)[5]

Balancing on a thin thread between life and death, Édouard is unable to fight back and instead surrenders to violence, just like the characters he has seen in movies, newspapers, and magazines.

Second, another mental image, a memory, cuts across the close-up of the strangulation. Writing in regular roman text, Louis now confesses that he kept

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4 "[...] *je ne voyais rien défiler sous mes yeux, ni réflexion, ni souvenir* [...] *c'était un refus purement physique de la mort*" (Louis 2016: 130).

5 "[...] *j'étais persuadé que l'imminence de ma mort m'aurait permis de décupler ma force et mon courage, m'aurait fait découvrir une puissance, une capacité à crier, à lutter, à fuir, à courir, à me débattre, que je n'aurais jamais pu soupçonner auparavant, bien sûr, j'avais vu au cinéma, dans les journaux ou dans la littérature des personnages capituler devant la mort, se rendre, mais je m'estimais différent d'eux, et chaque fois ces images m'emplissaient d'une vague de dégoût et de mépris en les voyant abandonner la partie si vite. Je pensais: Je suis beaucoup plus fort qu'eux*" (Louis 2016: 140).

this memory hidden from everyone he had talked to, "not for reasons having to do with memory or the need to forget certain things, but simply out of shame" (Louis 2016: 120).[6] Hoping to recover his phone, Édouard asked Reda to help him look for it in his apartment. He also suggested a compensation of 50 euros for whoever found the phone first. After a superficial attempt to look after Édouard's phone, Reda burst into a rage and attacked him. Louis recalls this imprudent play "better than the rest of night; these are the images that remain most vivid and robust [...] as if Didier is right and the things we remember most clearly are always those that bring us shame" (Louis 2018: 120).[7]

A fantasmatic power lies in these repeated visualizations, which show the strangulation from various perspectives and in various types of shots that frame Édouard from above or in a close-up. Louis goes through the motions of his inability to resist through the dispersed and polymorphous voices of Édouard, Clara, and himself. Through the reenactment, we see him disqualify his initial contempt and disgust at capitulating in the face of death. Instead, he ends up accepting the work of shame, for he was not simply a passive victim, but, in fact, an instigator of his own misfortune.

3 Confiding rape to family and friends

Didier and Geoffroy are Édouard's best friends and confidants. After breaking the bond with his biological family, they also function as a substitute family for him. They accept who he is, including his sexual orientation, and give him the intellectual stimulation he has always lacked from his working class family. In chapter 13, Louis renders in his own words, in regular roman text, how he remembers sharing his rape experience with his friends the day after he met Reda. He also includes paragraphs in italics in which he reveals his unspoken thoughts during the confession. As in the case of the strangulation, Louis is caught up in a sequence of images with a fantasmatic power. Let us take a close look at these images as well as the various ways of looking and being looked at.

Chapter 13 opens with Édouard arriving at a café, Le Sélect, and watching Didier from a distance. Didier is wearing the sweater Édouard gave him as a Christmas present the day before. He looks distressed. Didier's distress makes

6 "[...] non pas pour des raisons qui concernent la mémoire et les oublis qui en sont la condition, mais tout simplement à cause de la honte" (Louis 2016: 141–142).

7 "[...] même beaucoup mieux que du reste de la nuit, ce sont les images que je garde les plus vivantes et les plus épaisses [...] à croire, comme le soutient Didier, que les plus vifs souvenirs d'une vie sont toujours ceux de la honte" (Louis 2016: 142).

Édouard think immediately of how his sister Clara looked at him when they watched a documentary together on the French TV channel TV5: "when the voice-over said the word *rape* I could feel Clara's embarrassment, I saw her mouth tighten, her eyes narrow, and I hated it, I hated her distress, the way it forced me back into the past" (Louis 2018: 155).[8] In front of the TV, Édouard experiences Clara's distressed way of looking at him as a violation, a reminder of the rape, but also a mistreatment: "I thought: *She will never understand that, as much as I cling to my story, it is also the thing that seems furthest from me and the most foreign to what I am*" (Louis 2018: 155).[9] Clara's inability to understand Édouard foreshadows what will happen in the critical moments Édouard tells his friends about the rape.

Didier advises Édouard to talk, which Louis interprets as an invitation not to forget; more so, an obligation to remember the past without repeating it. This, Louis explains, is possible through a visual engagement with the images of rape, which in turn will allow Édouard Louis to detach himself from his own trauma: "the more I remember and the more I lose myself in the images that remain, the less they have do with me" (Louis 2018: 156).[10] This process of distancing is, however, interrupted when Didier suddenly asks Édouard to report the rape to the police. Édouard is unwilling to do so, and instead anchors his gaze on his friend's sweater in an attempt to take control of the images and the situation. But Didier continues his plea, as does Geoffroy, who joins them at the café later.

When the fleeing of the gaze no longer works as a strategy to suspend his friends' insistence, Édouard seeks refuge in a mental image: a memory of a prison visit Édouard paid to his cousin Sylvain when he was younger. Through a flashback, Édouard transports himself into a past his friends cannot see, neither concretely, because Édouard keeps the memory to himself, nor figuratively, because the vision from prison is simply too foreign for Didier and Geoffroy: "*they've never seen the prison gate* [...] *they haven't seen the brick wall, they haven't seen the shadow of the wall, they haven't seen the families lined up before the wall, begging and grovelling, waiting for the guard to call their name, waiting*

8 "Quand la voix off a dit le mot *viol*, j'ai senti la gêne de Clara, j'ai vu sa bouche se rider, ses yeux se plisser, et j'ai haï cet embarras, j'ai haï cette désolation que me faisait entrer de force dans mon passé" (Louis 2016: 184).

9 "[...] je pensais: *Elle ne pourra jamais comprendre que mon histoire est à la fois ce à quoi je tiens le plus et ce qui me paraît le plus éloigné et le plus étranger à ce que je suis*" (Louis 2016: 184).

10 "[...je cherche à construire une mémoire] par laquelle plus je me souviens et plus je me dissous dans les images qu'il me reste, moins j'en suis le centre" (Louis 2016: 185).

to file inside" (Louis 2018: 157–158).[11] The emotional distance between Édouard and his friends is thus framed as an inability to see, underscored linguistically through the repetition of "*they haven't seen*."

Haunted by the vision from prison, yet unwilling to share this memory with his friends, Édouard invokes instead his fear of the rapist's revenge as a reason not to report him. Didier quickly dismisses this fear as unfounded, which makes Édouard furious. In italicized text, Louis explains how he saw his friends become extensions of Reda and how he experienced their insistence, dismissal, and inability to understand him as acts of aggression: "*They are Reda, they are Reda* [...] *You're begging them to stop but they won't, they're strangling you, they're suffocating you and no matter how you beg them to stop, they won't*" (Louis 2018: 160).[12] By pushing their friend to report the rape, Didier and Geoffroy come to incarnate a form of violence that Édouard cannot fight back, just as it happened during the strangulation. Although Édouard thinks it is the victim's right to choose not to report what has happened, he cannot put forward this argument in front of his friends, and instead looks down in shame (Louis 2018: 161).

Here as well, Édouard feels shame, but this time, not on his own behalf, as was the case when he remembered how he asked Reda to look for his phone, instead responding to Didier's and Geoffroy's shamelessness. This new shame does not cut through his flesh as a vivid memory. Instead, it is experienced once again as a disembodiment: "At the end of the meal, we paid and walked towards the police station, but my body was not my own, I watched it lead me there" (Louis 2018: 162).[13] Instead of achieving control by distancing himself from the images of violence, Édouard feels violently pushed back to the center of his personal trauma when he confides in his friends.

Chapter 13 is not simply a reiteration of Édouard's submission to his friends' requests, a compulsive going through the motions of his inability to counter their insistence with good arguments. His silence at the time is replaced in the novel by a dialogical discourse between Édouard Louis's several voices, heard and un-

11 "[...] *eux n'ont pas vu l'entrée de la prison* [...] *ils n'ont pas vu le mur de briques, eux n'ont rien vu, ils n'ont pas vu les familles devant le mur, ils n'ont pas vu devant le mur les familles suppliantes rampantes attendant que leur nom soit prononcé, attendant de pouvoir entrer au parloir*" (Louis 2016: 187).

12 "[...] *Ils sont Reda, ils sont Reda* [...] *tu les supplies d'arrêter mais ils n'arrêtent pas, ils t'étranglent, ils t'étouffent et tu les supplies de s'arrêter mais ils ne s'arrêtent pas. Ils ne s'arrêtent pas.*" (Louis 2016: 189)

13 "À la fin du repas, nous avons payé et nous avons marché en direction du commissariat, mon corps n'était pas le mien, je le regardais m'emmener au commisariat." (Louis 2016: 191)

heard, past and present. Graphically marked by the use of regular roman text and italics, these parallel narratives double up to reanimate Édouard's present inner struggle with the force of desire. The fantasmatic power emerges as an effect of this polyphony and intensifies the novel's emotional appeal to sympathize with the rape victim's need to keep silent. Through the reenactment, Édouard's desire not to report his rapist is finally made visible.

4 Testifying in front of officials

By making Édouard report the rape to the police, Didier and Geoffroy expose their friend to institutional violence that only exacerbates his personal trauma. During the repeated testimonies Édouard gives in front of different police and medical units, he experiences a sense of humiliation and powerlessness. Photographs taken by officials are instrumental in Édouard's experience.

An evocative scene illustrating the officials' insensitive and even violating use of photographs occurs at Urgences medico-judiciaire (UMJ), a medical unit attached to the legal system in France where abuse victims are consulted by a team of experts. In order to issue a medical certificate with judicial leverage, a doctor and a nurse document the assault on Édouard's body by measuring, palpating, and photographing his bruises. In chapter 15, the consultation is narrated in past tense from a third person perspective. Completely absorbed in the process of securing visual documentation, the doctor "talked to himself, for himself: 'I'm going to take one with the flash off, there we go, that's better ... and one more'" (Louis 2018: 176).[14] Through the lens of the camera, the doctor's scientific gaze objectifies Édouard's body to his visible bruises, an objectification amplified by the next step in the consultation. For the doctor subsequently asks Édouard to take off all of his clothes as both he and the nurse "were both watching and waiting, with no pretence of looking away" (Louis 2018: 177).[15] Just as during the interrogation at the police station, when the policeman was watching rather than listening to Édouard give a testimony, the way in which the medical officials are now watching is also debilitating. First, Édouard is reminded of how embarrassed he used to be by his own naked body during check-ups and class trips to the pool in primary school, then he is shocked when he is asked to sit on all fours on the consultation table so that the doctor can push a spatula inside

14 "[...] il parlait avec lui-même, pour lui-même, 'Je vais en faire une sans flash, voilà, c'est mieux comme ça, encore une'" (Louis 2016: 205).

15 "Le médecin et l'infirmière étaient tournés vers moi, ils me fixaient, sans faire semblant de ne pas regarder mon corps" (Louis 2016: 206).

his anus and take more photographs: "*They're photographing the inside of my body*. I heard the little click of the camera every time they took a picture, and the doctor murmuring to the nurse, lesions, haematomas" (Louis 2018: 177).[16]

In front of the doctor, Édouard camouflages his embarrassment and shock by poking fun at his heavy bleedings after the rape: "I said: 'If anyone wanted to find me, they could just follow my trail'" (Louis 2018: 177).[17] If the images from the strangulation scene and the conversation with Didier and Geoffroy fill Édouard with shame, the scene of the consultation leaves Édouard with "a taste of self-loathing"[18] in his mouth caused by his desperate attempts not to act as a traumatized person (Louis 2018: 178).

Why does Louis choose to go through the motions of this invasive and humiliating experience triggered by the medical staff's visual documentation of the rape? I suggest Louis reanimates his humiliation in an attempt to fight back the officials, this time with his own images.

This is particularly evident if we look closer at how, on several occasions, Louis superimposes personal memories with images from the encounter with Reda. The French film critic André Bazin (1946) notes that superimpositions were commonly used in the silent film era to suggest the fantastic, as in dreams, hallucinations, or imaginary characters such as ghosts. In *Histoire de la violence*, Louis uses superimpositions (i. e., the placement of one image on top of an existing one) to bring fantasmatic gratification to the present.

Early in the book, in chapter 2, Édouard recalls how he, after repeated testimonies in front of the police and the medical personnel, had no more tears to give when narrating his assault in front of the UMJ team. He is terrified by his inability to cry, as he fears this will undermine his credibility. In an attempt to control the situation, he draws from his memory images of Reda's face and gun, but his eyes do not moisten (Louis 2018: 26). When the traumatic images from his recent past fail to do the expected affective work, Édouard adds to them some of the saddest and most painful memories from his past. He remembers how Geoffroy gave him the news of the death of his friend, Dimitri, a death Édouard envisioned even before it was confirmed: "I was trying not to think of his body laid out in a stretcher – it was the first thought I had" (Louis 2018: 27).[19] Too distant to make him cry, this older, painful memory of his friend's death de-

16 "*Ils photographient l'intérieur de mon corps*, j'entendais le petit *clic* de l'appareil photo a chaque capture, et le médecin qui murmurait à l'infirmière, lésions, hématomes" (Louis 2016: 207).
17 "J'ai dit: 'On pourrait me suivre à la trace'" (Louis 2016: 207).
18 "[...] un gout de mépris de moi-même" (Louis 2016: 207).
19 "[...] j'essayais de m'empêcher de penser à son corps étendu sur une civière, l'image était tout de suite apparue [...]" (Louis 2016: 39).

nies Édouard fantasmatic gratification at the moment of the consultation. In retrospect, his inability to cry gives Louis a sense of victory precisely because his superimposed memories refuse to perform the affective work commonly expected from a rape victim. Ultimately, as Louis notes to the reader in italics, once the doctor at the UMJ rounds up his consultation, "*[t]here was no need for tears, my body was enough*" (Louis 2018: 176).[20]

On other occasions, Louis superimposes personal memories with Reda's own memories, as he envisions them based on snippets of conversation preceding the assault. In chapter 5, when Reda tells him about his father's experience as a newly arrived immigrant in a French asylum center, Édouard superimposes images of the center's manager with images of an outcast from his local community: "it was images of Ordive that flashed into my mind; [...] and so while I listened to Reda, I thought of Ordive, a woman I hadn't seen in ten years, convinced that this manager looked like her" (Louis 2018: 56–57).[21] As a young adult, Édouard feels compassion for Ordive, but as a child, he knew no better but to hate and deride her, much like everyone else in his community. When Reda describes the manager as widely despised by the asylum seekers, Édouard immediately buys into this image. In retrospect, however, he sees himself as being manipulated by Reda. He corrects this manipulation by superimposing shameful memories of Ordive's bullying with the manager's public condemnation.

Further, in chapter 6, Édouard tells Didier and Geoffroy a story in which he superimposes images of Reda with images of his cousin Sylvain during an episode in school when Sylvain allegedly tried to jump out of the classroom window. To make clear how the superimposition occurs in the text and how Édouard's images of Reda and Sylvain flash onto each other, a lengthier citation from the novel is required:

> I imagine a classroom awash with light. [...] Everyone was quiet when Reda stood and walked over towards the windows. [...] He opens the sash and swings one leg out of the window. It was my cousin Sylvain who did this. [...] It wouldn't be my cousin, in this version, but Reda. I'm transposing. [...] At the same time that the teacher, who had been sitting there as silent and astonished as everyone else, realises what's going on and cries out, Reda cries out too – that's what my cousin did, according to the story I heard and repeated, in turn, many times – [...], I say to Didier and Geoffroy, it's like a tableau with the teacher on the right – hands clasped before her mouth, as well they might be, eyes wide, the only possible response a body can make at the moment of such complete impotence – and Reda on

20 "*Les pleurs n'étaient pas nécessaires, mon corps suffit.*" (Louis 2016: 206)

21 "[...] les images d'Ordive me sont venues à la tête [...] et j'ai donc pensé à Ordive pendant que j'écoutais Reda, cette femme que j'ai vue pour la dernière fois il y a une dizaine d'années, et j'étais sûr que le directeur du foyer du père de Reda lui ressemblait" (Louis 2016: 71).

> the left, the two of them almost perfectly symmetrical, [...] He didn't have anything against the teacher in particular, he just wanted to see her transformed, deformed, transfigured by panic, he wanted to make the other kids laugh, he wanted to show who he was, to embody absolute freedom – Reda or Sylvain, it doesn't matter which – he wanted to be the image of freedom at its most spectacular. (Louis 2018: 79 – 81)[22]

Paradoxically, through his own family stories, Louis makes Reda's violence relatable and familiar. As Louis lets Reda take Sylvain's place in his memory, his cousin, just like Ordive, continues to haunt the text as a ghost of sorts in a tableau that Louis compares to an artistic image (a painting). Through the superimposition, Louis builds an emotional bridge between himself and the rapist and takes control of Reda's story. A fantasmatic gratification emerges as the author fabricates a story for his rapist, a story with which he can paradoxically identify.

In addition to superimpositions, Louis visualizes his own illusory mental images in order to highlight the social and institutional dimension of Édouard's personal trauma. In particular, he is interested in the violence embedded in the social and institutional contexts of which the rape victim is part. These visualizations take the form not only of grotesque distortions, nightmares, hallucinations, but also of liberating delusions, as when Édouard suddenly fantasizes about running away from the police station in the middle of his testimony: "I saw myself get up, splinter the door with my shoulder, run down the hallway to the street, and out into the night, and keep running. But there I was, still sitting in the chair" (Louis 2018: 164).[23] These illusory mental images haunt the text

22 "J'imagine une salle de classe baignée par la lumière du jour [...] ils étaient silencieux quand Reda s'était levé et q'il avait marché jusqu' à une fenêtre [...] Il fait coulisser la vitre et il enjambe la fenêtre. C'est mon cousin Sylvain qui a fait ça [...] Ce ne serait pas mon cousin dans cette situation mais ce serait Reda. Je transpose. [...] En même temps que l'enseignante, qui d'abord est restée muette et étonnée comme les autres, comprend, et qu'elle pousse un cri, Reda en pousse un, c'est ce qu'avait fait mon cousin selon ce qu'on m'avait raconté et que j'avais souvent raconté à mon tour [...] j'avais dit à Didier et Geoffroy, c'est comme un tableau où elle est debout à droite du cadre, évidemment les mains jointes devant la bouche et les yeux grands ouverts comme cela doit se passer dans cette configuration, quand un corps repond à une situation, impuissante, et à gauche du cadre Reda, tous les deux presque symétriques [...] Il n'avait aucun conflit particulier avec l'enseignante, il voulait juste voir la panique la transformer, la déformer, la défigurer, il voulait faire rire les autres, prouver qui il était, il voulait incarner l'autonomie absolue – Reda ou Sylvain peu importe – la figure la plus spectaculaire de l'autonomie" (Louis 2016: 96 – 98).

23 "Je me suis vu me lever, ouvrir la porte d'un coup d'épaule et la faire voler en éclats, et courir dans le couloir, m'enfoncer dans la rue, dans la nuit, et courir encore. Mais j'étais toujours en place sur la chaise [...]" (Louis 2016: 193).

with a fantasmatic power that pursues ideological issues such as medical negligence and police racism, and which I would now like to investigate.

A couple of hours after Reda leaves his apartment, Édouard heads to the emergency room of Saint Louis Hospital where he hopes to receive anti-HIV medication. After sharing his story, first with the receptionist and, twenty minutes later, with a nurse, Édouard is asked to wait for the doctor. It takes more than an hour to see the doctor, an excruciating delay especially when Édouard realizes the doctor was occupied with playing solitaire on her computer (Louis 2018: 140 – 141). The only other person in the waiting room at the hospital is a homeless man who is seeking refuge from the winter cold and whose appearance disturbs Édouard. Édouard has a grotesque vision of the homeless man "biting into a piece of raw meat, the blood on his chin and lips," which, in turn, unleashes a premonition of his own death due to medical negligence: "In my impatience, I tightened my jaws and my fists, I thought: *Now it's too late, you're sick, you're sick because of them*, I got up and started walking around the room in circles again" (Louis 2018: 140).[24]

Made to wait in the corridors of Saint Louis Hospital, Édouard eventually sees himself dead and buried. He has a "horrid vision" of how Didier and Geoffroy embark on a trip from Paris to find their friend's grave, a nightmare Louis narrates in its entirety in chapter 11. Suggestively entitled "(details of a nightmare)," chapter 11 is presented as a parenthesis to Clara's rendition of her brother's story, a nightmare Louis explains he has never shared with his sister. Dreading the legal definition of dependents by which hospitals normally operate, Édouard tells the doctor at Saint Louis Hospital about his nightmare. In this way, he hopes to address a final medical neglect: that the hospital will inform only his biological family about his death, and not his friends, whom he sees as his real family.

In addition to grotesque distortions and nightmares, Édouard also has paranoid hallucinations fed by racism. Already in chapter 1, as Édouard recollects describing Reda's "soft yet rugged, masculine" features to his friend Henri (Louis 2018: 13), he points out the racism implicit in the terminology used by the police when referring to Reda as an "Arab male" in their report: "[...] I can still hear the racism of the police who interviewed me later, on that 25 December, I can hear the compulsive racism [...] because for them *Arab* didn't refer to some-

24 "Je m'impatientais, je serrais les poings et la mâchoire, je pensais: *Maintenant c'est trop tard, tu es malade, tu es malade à cause d'eux, je me levais et je recommençais à marcher en rond, à faire des cercles dans la piece* [...]" (Louis 2016: 167).

body's geographical origins, it meant scum, criminal, thug" (Louis 2018: 14).[25] Towards the end of the novel, in chapter 15, this institutional racism rubs off on Édouard: "I had become racist. Suddenly I was full of racism" (Louis 2018: 186).[26] Édouard describes this experience as an estrangement from his true self, a disembodiment of sorts: "A second person took over my body; he thought for me, he spoke for me, he trembled for me, he was afraid for me, he inflicted his fear on me, he made me tremble over terrors of his own" (Louis 2018: 186–187).[27] Édouard starts fearing all the black, Arab, or potentially Kabyle men he encounters in public spaces and whom he avoids either by looking down or by looking away in a desperate attempt to protect himself. But Édouard is not only consumed by fear. He also rises above it by recognizing its prejudiced, stereotypical, and discriminatory nature. This augments his personal trauma: "I was traumatized twice over: by fear and by my fear" (Louis 2018: 187).[28]

His racial paranoia culminates in a hallucination Édouard has while visiting Istanbul with a friend. While sitting in a taxi on their way from the airport to the hotel, Édouard imagines that the taxi driver shot him dead with "a gun that looked like Reda's" (Louis 2018: 189). The reanimation of this unnerving hallucination is not simply an illustration of the psychic force of racism. More importantly, it allows Louis to take control of his fear at the time by going through the motions of his racist imaginary. Through the reenactment, Louis can re-inhabit that which racism has disembodied.

5 Conclusion

In *Histoire de la violence*, Louis uses a plethora of mental, media, and artistic images to orchestrate a reenactment of his own rape. At times, the images have a healing and stabilizing function, as when Édouard constructs a background for his rapist. At other times, they are traumatizing and displacing, as when he watches a documentary together with his sister Clara or when he has a grotesque vision of the homeless man he meets at the hospital. Yet in some other situa-

25 "[...] parce que j'y entends encore le racisme de la police pendant l'interrogatoire qui a suivi le 25 décembre, ce racisme compulsive [...] puisque pour eux *type maghrébin* n'indiquait pas une origine géographique mais voulait dire racaille, voyou, délinquant" (Louis 2016: 23).

26 "J'étais devenu raciste. Le racisme [...] me remplissait soudain [...]" (Louis 2016: 217).

27 "Une deuxieme personne s'était installé dans mon corps; elle pensait à ma place, elle parlait à ma place, elle tremblait à ma place, elle avait peur pour moi, elle s'imposait sa peur, elle m'imposait de trembler de ses tremblements" (Louis 2016: 217).

28 "J'étais traumatisé deux fois: de la peur et de ma peur" (Louis 2016: 217).

tions, images can be traumatizing and healing at the same time, as when Édouard's paranoia unleashes a hallucination in the taxi in Istanbul, a frightening experience that paradoxically allows Louis to take control of his fear of the ethnic Other.

The novel also demonstrates how the boundaries between various types of images are fluid when reenacted. Photographs taken by the doctor at the UMJ make Édouard think back to unpleasant childhood memories when he was asked to display his nudity in public, while a narrated memory of his cousin defying his teacher is visualized as an artistic image, a painting framing the teacher and Reda in almost perfect symmetry. Cinematic transition techniques such as cross-cuts, foreshadows, flashbacks, superimpositions, and abrupt cuts are used to assemble the sequence of images. At times, images are sewn together in a seamless manner, as when Louis cross-cuts from Édouard filing a report with the police to an image from above of Édouard twisting and turning as Reda was strangling him. Most prominent, however, are the disjunctions in time, voice, perspective, and space through which the night with Reda is reenacted.

Through the reenactment, Louis reanimates his personal trauma with the force of desire in an attempt to reclaim his story from his friends and the officials (police and medical personnel), all of whom betrayed him. He chooses Clara as an invested, yet unreliable, narrator, in addition to himself, in order to underscore the partial and constructed nature of his reenactment and to inscribe ambiguity of voice and perspective.

As an aesthetic experiment, *Histoire de la violence* enthralls its reader with a fantasmatic force. We are mesmerized by and invested in Louis's narrative. As a political project, the novel puts societal violence at its center, as the generic title of the novel so well suggests. Reda is only one of the many faces violence can take. Violence also permeates through Didier and Geoffroy as well as through the doctors, nurses, policemen and policewomen Édouard meets through his testimony. Édouard's biological family, his sister and his local community are also instantiations of that violence, and, ultimately, so is Louis himself when he gives Reda a past he cannot dismiss.

As a matter of fact, in the aftermath of the publication of *Histoire de la violence* in France, Louis was brought to court for the way in which he depicted the rapist in his novel. Four days after the release of the book, the police arrested a man by the name Riahd B. whose DNA profiling matched the DNA evidence collected from Louis's apartment, but who denied having threatened Louis with a gun or having abused him sexually (Le Bailly 2016). Instead, Riahd B. pressed charges against Louis and his publisher for an attack on the presumption of innocence and for invasion of privacy (Le Bailly 2016, Meisingset 2016). The court

dismissed the plaintiff's allegation on the account that Louis's description of Reda was generic and applicable to a large number of individuals, and therefore "insufficiently characteristic" (franceinfo: culture 2016). The turmoil, however, did not stop with the court's decision. The former radical Islamist Omar Benlaala pledged to give Reda a voice by writing a novel from the rapist's perspective (Meisingset 2016). This illustrates how violence is inscribed not only in the judicial, medical, and forensic discourse, as Louis so well exposed by writing *Histoire de la violence*, but also in the literary text. It seems as if there is no way to escape violence, perhaps only in a temporal fold afforded by the reenactment, which fills the reader not with disgust, anger, or guilt, but with a burning shame.

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Stijn Vervaet

Empathic Vision? War Photography, Ekphrasis, and Memory in Bosnian War Literature

1 Introduction

In "Shelter," one of the short poetic vignettes from his book *Sarajevo Blues*, a collection of poems and short prose fragments that he wrote during the siege of Sarajevo, the Bosnian poet Semezdin Mehmedinović notes:

> I'm running across an intersection to avoid the bullet of a sniper from the hill when I walk straight into some photographers: they're doing their job, in deep cover. If a bullet hit me they'd get a shot worth so much more than my life that – at this moment – I'm not even sure whom to hate more: the Chetnik sniper or these monkeys with Nikons. For the Chetniks I'm just a simple target but these others only confirm my utter helplessness and even want to take advantage of it. In Sarajevo, death is a job for all of them. (1998b: 74)

The four-year-long siege of Sarajevo (1992–1995) attracted a lot of media attention. Although the proliferation of media images of the war greatly enhanced the international visibility of civilian suffering, photographs did not stop the war. It is hence not surprising that war photography and its aesthetic and moral effects occupy a prominent but controversial place in Bosnian war literature.

The quote from Mehmedinović suggests that the civil population did not necessarily perceive Western war photographers as allies. To the contrary: Mehmedinović not only calls them "monkeys with Nikons" but also compares them to the Serbian snipers who shoot at civilians from the hills surrounding Sarajevo. Moreover, they are almost worse than the "Chetniks" for whom a civilian is "just a target" – for the Western war photographers, the targeted civilians are a source of income, and in this respect, they, as it were, collaborate with or even depend on the Chetniks: if they succeed in photographing a victim while he or she is being shot, they will make even more money.[1]

1 Historically, the Chetniks were a Serbian nationalist military organization formed from detachments of the former Yugoslav army which, after the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1941, continued to support the King. Initially formed to fight the Axis forces that had occupied and partitioned Yugoslavia, the Chetniks mostly ended up fighting the communist partisan

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Mehmedinović's evoking of the "shooting" metaphor in his description of the war photographer is not accidental; it is a metaphor that has often been used in the history of photography. Susan Sontag mentions Ernst Jünger as one of the first who used the shooting metaphor to discuss photography in direct connection with war (2003: 66 – 67). In his essay about the photographs by Kemal Hadžić, a photographer who fought in the Bosnian army, Mehmedinović himself played with the same metaphor, showing how different associations evoked by the metaphor could be linked to Hadžić's war photographs and biography as a war photographer (1998a: 5 – 11). However, more is at stake here. During the Bosnian war, Western media explicitly espoused a discourse of compassion and human rights, but on the ground, as Mehmedinović claims, many photographers behaved as representatives of any for-profit company, not caring at all about the people they photographed. According to Philip Hammond, the "moral vocabulary" that reporters and intellectuals developed during the Yugoslav wars to encourage intervention in Bosnia and in Kosovo "has since been used as a standby justification for intervention anywhere from Afghanistan to Liberia" (2004: 175). Moreover, this "moralistic media consensus" was "driven by the need of Western societies to discover new moral purpose in the post-Cold war world" (Hammond 2004: 175). In other words, the Bosnian war became the seedbed of a new type of media discourse, including the production and use of visual images.[2] Indeed, journalists' covering of the Bosnian war set a trend that would be soon called a "journalism of attachment" (Bell 1997), a notion coined by BBC journalist Martin Bell, who drew on his experience from the Bosnian war specifically to argue that journalists reporting on war should not remain neutral but side with the victims in order to instigate public action.[3] As Lilie Chouliaraki has pointed out, there is an ambivalent "coexistence of requirements for the objective and the testimonial" in news coverage; that is, the idea that "news narratives [...] should appear both as objective information that respects the values of the news organization and as testimonial accounts that

forces led by Josip Broz Tito and even collaborated with Italian and German forces. In the Bosnian war, the term *Chetnik* was used as a derogatory name for Serbian paramilitary forces.

2 Certainly, the Vietnam War could to a certain extent be seen as a precursor; but the big difference was that that conflict unfolded and intensified largely as part of the Cold War and the struggle of the United States against the spread of communism.

3 For a critical investigation of Dutch journalists' reporting on the Bosnian war in precisely this way, see Ruigrok (2008). Based on the example of Marina Achenbach's *On the Road to Sarajevo* (*Auf dem Weg nach Sarajewo*), Oppen both offers a critique of German reporting and shows how an alternative form of journalism of attachment was possible: one that "recognises its own implicatedness, or attachment, is aware of its own positionality, but which does not abandon the quest to represent the conflict" (2009: 11).

touch their publics into action" (2010: 306, 307). But – and Mehmedinović was deeply aware of this – cases that are covered by the news are also subject to what Chouliaraki calls "distinct 'pathologies' of witnessing: stories of suffering that focus on witnessing exclusively as a fact [and] diminish the emotive capacity of the news, 'annihilating' the human quality of the sufferer, whilst stories that focus on witnessing as horror, 'appropriating' the sufferer as someone who shares our own humanity, may lean towards a commodified sentimentalism that reduces witnessing to voyeurism" (2010: 306). It comes as no surprise, then, that the "pathologies of witnessing" that accompany Western media coverage of the Bosnian war, especially those triggered by war photography, are a recurrent topic in Bosnian war literature, in fiction as well as in non-fiction.

Mehmedinović is not the only Bosnian writer who tackled these issues – a similar critique of foreign war photographers appears in work by other writers, such as in Nenad Veličković's collection of short stories *The Devil in Sarajevo* (*Đavo u Sarajevu*), which mentions an encounter with a Western war photographer similar to the one Mehmedinović describes; in Alma Lazarevska's "Death in the Museum of Modern Art" (Smrt u Muzeju moderne umjetnosti), whose narrator never talks about foreign photographers but mentions that "the reporters who come to the besieged city like taking pictures of ruins" (Lazarevska 2014: 99); while in Aleksandar Hemon's story "The Coin" from *The Question of Bruno*, the main character Aida works for foreign TV companies and has a love/hate affair with Kevin, an American cameraman who seems to be completely indifferent towards the horror he films.[4]

But does the dichotomy between "foreign reporters" and "local photographers" posed by so many Bosnian authors really hold, and if so, does it originate in the mercantile motives of (all?) international reporters versus the noble ethical goals of (all?) Bosnian photographers?

After all, there are many different positions and self-positionings possible within these two categories. In any case, this opposition begs for a closer investigation of how Bosnian authors of war prose describe or embed war photographs and to what effect. Does their embedding or describing lead the reader to different ways of imagining what the war was like, and if so, how? I suggest that the distinction made by the above-mentioned Bosnian writers is also, and perhaps foremost, related to the *way* in which photographers use the medium of photography.

4 For many of the authors and photographers discussed, the (auto)biographical side of their stories and photographs is a factor that should not be underestimated.

This chapter explores the relationship between war photography, ekphrasis – descriptions of photographs or mental images – and the memory of the siege of Sarajevo in essays, poems, prose vignettes, short stories, and novels by Semezdin Mehmedinović, Mira Otašević, Miljenko Jergović, and Alma Lazarevska. After exploring Mehmedinović's critique of "Western" war photography and its commodification of suffering, I show how Otašević invites the reader to ponder the link between the history of (artistic) photography and the role of media representations, how a short story by Jergović points out the potential of photographs to trigger storytelling, and how Lazarevska's focus on embodied knowledge increases a feeling of immersion in the story on the part of the reader, while her almost poetical use of metaphoric associations and involuntary memory leading to pre-war life at the same time slows down and defamiliarizes the reading process.

I argue that, by embedding images of war (real photographs or mental images) in a broader essayistic, poetic or fictional discourse, the authors under consideration move beyond discussions of photography as instances of "regarding the pain of others" (Sontag 2003). Using literature's ability to draw readers' attention to the embodied experience of living in a war as well as to the more insidious aspects of war, the works discussed suggest that the imaginative forces of literature and photography can lead to an increased self-reflexive positioning on the part of the viewer or reader.

2 Towards a critique of (Western) war photography

As Guido Snel has noted, ever since his war classic *Sarajevo Blues*, Mehmedinović's writing has "sought for ways to reclaim space for the written word at a time when it is increasingly challenged by an overpowering visual culture" (2016: 228). In *Sarajevo Blues*, "Mehmedinović's main preoccupation was to find an explanation for the failure of the outside world – Europe, the West – to truly identify with the city's [Sarajevo's] plight" (Snel 2016: 229). One of the main reasons for this failure to identify with civilian suffering in besieged Sarajevo is, according to Mehmedinović, due to the way in which media visually represent the siege:

> Shots of the mass killing at Ferhadija circle the globe; pictures of the dead and massacred turn into an ad for the war. It doesn't matter that these people have names: TV translates them into its cool language, the naked image. The camera disembowels images of their psychological content to create information. And all the massacres that follow reproduce these

> same images. So the world can see what is going on here. But is this really possible when television sees right through the lack of compassion in human nature, just as long as tragedy doesn't hit home? The sense of tragedy arrived with the body bags wrapped in the American flag, and not before then, not through TV reports from Vietnam. Massacres happen to us, we empathize with our own tragedies. (1998b: 83)

This quote comes from a one-page essay in which Mehmedinović makes several claims. Firstly, mass-media coverage of a massacre such as that at Ferhadija (on 27 May 1992), he argues, turns people into "information," stripping them of their names and "psychological content" to the extent that images of all following massacres resemble each other. According to Barbie Zelizer (2010: 4–12, 18), such an understanding of the role of news images that highlights the photograph as "information relay," is a fairly traditional (mis)interpretation that understates the contingency of any visual image; moreover, the recycling or reproducing of images by media to which Mehmedinović refers is also typical of journalistic photography.

A second important claim he makes is related to the hoped-for result of journalistic war photography: the worldwide circulation of images of suffering does not necessarily result in the creation of an (international) audience that would feel sympathy with the victims. To the contrary, news media's use of shock effects can easily give way to "compassion fatigue" (see Garber 2004: 19; the concept was coined by Susan Moeller in 1999). Most audiences, Mehmedinović argues, are only concerned with their "own" tragedy – and here he draws a parallel with U.S. reactions to media reports about the war in Vietnam. Because of the way in which they are (mis)represented by the mass media, the lives of the Sarajevo civilians, he seems to suggest, are not "grievable lives" – lives that are considered valuable, and, hence, worth mourning (Butler 2009).

Mira Otašević's novel *Zoe* (*Zoja*) seems to echo some of Mehmedinović's concerns regarding war photography. The novel makes ekphrasis the explicit starting point of her novel. Narrating a highly fragmented history of modernist photography, each chapter of the book starts with an ekphrastic description of a photograph by famous photographers such as Berenice Abbott, Diane Arbus, Vivian Maier, and Henri Cartier-Bresson. Importantly, none of these photographs is included; that is, they are included only implicitly, through descriptions in words, surrounded by a frame. It is only in the last chapter that photographs are reproduced. This chapter is set in Sarajevo, where the main character, Zoja Klajn, meets Susan Sontag, who is preparing Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* with local actors. The novel depicts Sontag as an engaged intellectual: the narrator lets her cry out "Sarajevo is the Spain of our time! Martha Gellhorn claimed that one has to love the war to which one bears witness. Absurd and – correct!"

(Otašević 2012: 96). Presenting Sontag as being unreservedly adored by the actors with whom she is staging Beckett's play and generally as a Western public intellectual who lives the life of all other Sarajevans under siege, the novel does not seem to problematize Sontag's engagement at any point. However, not all inhabitants of Sarajevo perceived Sontag's presence in Sarajevo in such an idealized way; some authors, such as Miljenko Jergović (*Transatlantic Mail*, 14), have noted her blindness to her own material and existential privileged position as compared to the living conditions of the local population.[5] In this context, Lauren Berlant's definition of compassion as "*an emotion in operation*" seems to be relevant: "in operation, compassion is a term denoting privilege: the sufferer is *over there*" (2004: 4, original emphasis).

More disturbingly, Otašević's final chapter contains some of the iconic news photographs of the siege of Sarajevo that circulated all over the world – some of the images to which Mehmedinović refers: people crossing the street or intersections running to avoid being an easy target for snipers, people queuing for bread and water, killed adults and children on the city's asphalt. One reason the author included those photographs, some of which are quite shocking, could be the wish to make a political statement. As the book was published in Serbia, where mainstream public and political opinion still does not acknowledge the country's ugly role in the wartime destruction of Bosnia, those photographs could be interpreted as a warning: "Do not forget the facts! – This really happened." As Otašević is also a theater director and playwright, one of the sources of inspiration that comes to mind is Brecht. However, her use of photographs here does not, in my view, lead to a sophisticated process of *Verfremdung* on the part of the reader. The photographs are not really embedded in the narration, but seem to function as mere illustrations of the narrator's descriptions of war-torn Sarajevo, turning the pages in question into a distressing collage that reiterates the cheap and quickly saturating shock effect that characterized much of the international news media's reporting on the Bosnian war.

At the end of the novel, Zoja – a photographer herself – decides to visit the tunnel that connected the besieged city with the outside world. The tunnel was dug manually under the airport and was approximately 800 meters long; it was constructed because the UN, which controlled the airport, denied citizens of Sarajevo permission to leave or enter the city. Ivana Maček, an anthropologist who did field research in Sarajevo during the war, notes that "before the tunnel was

5 For a discussion of Sontag's role as a Western public intellectual in Sarajevo during the war, as well as reactions by local authors such as Jergović and Mehmedinović to her presence and engagement in Sarajevo, see Snel (2016: 229 – 231). For a thorough discussion of Sontag's staging of *Waiting for Godot* in besieged Sarajevo, see Abazović (2015).

dug, Sarajevans had to run across the runway hiding from the UN searchlights and the hail of bullets from Serbian snipers to reach the road into and out of Sarajevo" (2009: 27). Delighted to see that the tunnel really exists, Zoja starts running over the Sarajevo airport landing strip:

> The boy shouts behind me. I don't hear him. I run straight towards the landing strip of the airport, despite the prohibition. An unexpected, violent and sharp pain throws me down. [...] In the last gleam of consciousness, I clearly see that someone photographs me. (Otašević 2012: 102)

The novel ends with the realization of the fear faced and expressed by Mehmedinović: the narrator is shot and photographed at the very moment of dying. She is killed and at that very moment turned into a piece of information, into a commodity with which someone will earn money. The chapter's – and the novel's – ending seems to suggest that the history of artistic and engaged photography ends with the reduction of the art of photography to the mercantile work of war reporters. By setting up a dichotomy between media photography and artistic photography, Otašević's novel does not seem capable of escaping some of the pitfalls that Chouliaraki and Mehmedinović mentioned, but she might help resolve the dichotomy that Mehmedinović put forward in his texts: that between foreign and local photographers.

3 Bosnian war photographers: Slowing down perception

Mehmedinović contrasts foreign and domestic photographers and highlights the moral integrity of the Bosnian photographers, because they do their work without getting paid for it, amongst other reasons:

> The photographers of Sarajevo – as opposed to their colleagues who come from abroad to collect their fees from dailies, weeklies and art magazines by trading in death – are the only chroniclers of war in this city; they run out of film and supplies and get no compensation for their work. This doesn't make them any different or their job more distinguished than that of surgeons, for instance, or firefighters. But their engagement is marked by an *intellectual morality*, something so rare in our parts both before and during the war. (1998b: 57)

Certainly, we have to take seriously the emotional reaction of people who were confronted with the (well-documented) ugly side of Western media reporting

on the conflict.[6] But we have, at least theoretically, to allow for the possibility that there were foreign photographers who took their task to witness seriously while also taking their own implicatedness with equal seriousness.[7] At the same time, the question remains whether someone looking at a war photograph, not knowing its history, could tell whether the photograph was made by a Bosnian or a foreign photographer.[8] Calling local Sarajevan photographers "the only chroniclers of the war" seems to imply that Mehmedinović nevertheless believes in the need and sense of documenting and collecting evidence, but also that there are ways of photographing human beings caught by war that are qualitatively different from those of war reporters.

Three Sarajevan photographers figure quite prominently in Mehmedinović's work: Kemal Hadžić, Mladen Pikulić, and Milomir Kovačević. He mentions all three of them in his prose vignettes in *Sarajevo Blues* and also wrote an accompanying text for an exhibition by Kemal Hadžić (Mehmedinović 1998b). But how can we recognize and describe the moral quality to which Mehmedinović refers in a specific photograph? (And is getting no compensation a criterion to define someone's morality?) And if this "intellectual morality" can be isolated and formally described, is it something that would be characteristic of *Bosnian* photographers only? As Andrea Lešić has pointed out, Kovačević uses

> specific methods of inserting the viewer into the picture, of working with the subject as an act of collaboration, of juxtaposing series of similar and contrasting images, of framing and filtering the image shown, and of presenting what is shown as an art-historical reference: all of these for Kovačević have been the means of *slowing down the process of perception* of what is shown, of preventing merely a shocked, knee-jerk reaction, of making sure the viewer asks questions of the photograph that lead to a reaction not just of human sympathy, but also to an active understanding of the circumstances, the broader context, to which the depicted scene refers. (2016: 141–142, emphasis added)

Even though Lešić refers to Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarization (*ostranenie*) only in a footnote, this reference is crucial to her reading of Kovačević's work. In her commentary on her recent translation of Shklovsky, Alexandra Berlina re-

6 The discussion could also, at least to some extent, be related to the question of who has the right to represent someone's trauma. The strong division between victims, bystanders, witnesses, and vicarious witnesses is an issue that appears time and again in discussions of historical or collective trauma; for the Holocaust, see Rothberg (2009); for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, see Auestad (2017).

7 On the notion of the implicated witness, see Rothberg (2013).

8 To test this, a detailed analysis of the "control group" – photographs made by Western media reporters – would be needed, something that was impossible to do within the limits of this essay.

minds us that, although Shklovsky used *ostranienie* mostly related to "language" and "readers," "he also refers to film and sometimes visual arts, and seems to be assuming a similar distinction between images as sources of information and images as art" (Shklovsky and Berlina 2017: 23). "Slowing down the process of perception" is indeed important here: as Shklovsky writes in his much-quoted text "Art, as device":

> The goal of art is to create the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing, things; the device of art is the "*ostranienie*" of things and the complication of form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception, as the process of perception is its own end in art and must be prolonged. Art is the means to live through the making of a thing; what has been made does not matter in art. (Shklovsky 2017: 80)

Much of what Lešić notes about defamiliarization in Kovačević's work also applies to Hadžić's war photographs. For example, one of his photographs shows a recent cemetery on which one of the gravestones carries the inscription "Kemal Hodžić, 1950 – 1992" (Hadžić 1998: 87) – as if suggesting to the reader that the grave inscription might have read "Kemal Hadžić," giving a hint that the grave on the photograph could just as well have been the photographer's (or, for that matter, the viewer's) own grave. Kovačević's photographs sometimes include the shadow of the photographer, for example in the photograph showing the killed journalist Željko Ružičić lying on the ground (Kovačević 2012, photograph no. 76).[9] As Lešić points out, the shadow could be "read metaphorically as the shadow of death [...] but it can also be seen as the device which forces the viewer into the position of the photographer as a direct witness" (2016: 142). By integrating a reference to the photographer into the depicted setting, the photographs invite the viewer "to live through the making of a thing," thus "de-automatizing things" (Shklovsky 2017: 80, 81). One of the effects of this is, as Lešić has pointed out, that "the use of the shadow disables our desire to gaze away, or just to feel a generalized sympathy; we have to look, and imagine what if it were us in that situation" (2016: 142).

9 The photograph of Željko Ružičić has the caption "Željko Ružičić, journaliste à Radio Sarajevo, tué par une bombe quelques instants après m'avoir annoncé qu'il avait enfin obtenu la permission de rendre visite à sa famille à Zagreb, 2 février 1992": "Željko Ružičić, journalist at Radio Sarajevo, killed by a bomb a few moments after I told him that he finally had obtained a permission to pay a visit to his family in Zagreb, 2 February 1992"; other photographs with the photographer's shadow include photograph no. 108, "Autoportrait devant la CEDUS, au 44 de la rue Titova où j'ai habité avec Mladen, Nermin et Fićo jusqu'en septembre 1992, avant de déménager à Sloga": "Self-portrait in front of the CEDUS, 44 Tito street, where I lived with Mladen, Nermin and Fićo until September 1992, before moving to Sloga."

In one way or another, many of Hadžić's and Kovačević's photographs trigger the imagination of the viewer, urging him or her to linger rather longer than usual on the image and inviting him or her to ponder what it shows, as well as the context in which it was produced. A photograph by Hadžić shows a large UN tank in front of a completely destroyed skyscraper; beneath the open door of the vehicle, we see two human legs in soldier boots, but not the rest of the body, nor what the soldier is doing (Hadžić 1998: 22). The UN vehicle seems to appear as a tank with legs, a kind of friendly anthropomorphic animal, one eye closed, the others half-open, protecting itself against the sharp sun. At the same time, the image could be read as a metonymy for the presence of the UN in Sarajevo: while their declared mission was to protect the city's citizens, they often had to hide themselves from the heavy shelling of the city by Serbian troops from the surrounding hills. One of Kovačević's photographs shows a destroyed tram, covered by rubbish that, due to the perspective from which the photograph was taken, turns it into the shape of an angel-like figure (Kovačević 2012, photograph no. 80).

Some photographs also point out the insidious sides of war, such as the photographs showing two old men working on a parcel of ground in the midst of the city (Hadžić 1998: 77). By a viewer unaware of the place and time where the photograph was taken, this image could have been interpreted as a very quotidian scene: two men working in their vegetable garden on a sunny day. But in the context of the whole book, the viewer might as well wonder about the peculiar location the men had chosen for their garden – in the midst of apartment blocks in an obviously very urban part of the city – and perhaps arrive at the conclusion that cultivating a garden did not amount to a hobby but rather a way of surviving in Sarajevo under siege. By including the signature of the photographer into the image, by activating the imagination of the viewer, the war photographs of Kemal Hadžić and Milomir Kovačević defamiliarize images of war and slow down the viewer's gaze.

By fostering imagination on the side of the viewer, Kovačević's and Hadžić's photographs seem to achieve something more than "prolonging the process of perception": they also draw the viewer into the world of the photograph. In doing so, Hadžić and Kovačević require the viewers to reflect upon their own position as a viewer of an image of war suffering or destruction and to ponder the historical context in which the photograph was taken. In imposing such demands on the viewer, Kovačević and Hadžić engage in what Ariella Azoulay has called the "civil contract of photography," as their work creates a contract of "partnership and solidarity" that evolves from the triangular relationship between the three parties involved: "the photographed person, the photographer, and the spectator" (2008: 22–23). Thus, they seem to be giving back agency to

those portrayed, or, at the very least, to redirect the way(s) in which audiences relate to the human beings (objects, buildings, spaces) represented in a war photograph. This slowing down/prolonging of the reader's perception is also characteristic of certain literary works dealing with the siege of Sarajevo. In the next section, I will explore how the link between prolonging the duration of perception and imagination is also pointed out in a short story by Miljenko Jergović, and then move on to demonstrate how short stories by Alma Lazarevska simultaneously draw the reader into the narrative and keep her at bay, achieving an effect of estrangement on the reader.

4 The story behind the picture: Ekphrasis and imagination in Bosnian war fiction

Miljenko Jergović's story "The Empty Bird Cage" ("Pusta krletka za ptice") published in *Sarajevo, Map of a City* (*Sarajevo, plan grada*) does not imply the same distinction between news photographs and artistic photographs that is at the heart of Mehmedinović's argument, but instead focuses on the imagination triggered by any photograph. The story opens as follows:

> With that photograph, which was first published in *Oslobođenje* and later also in many newspapers all over the world, the war started. Before the war, it could not have happened that something was published in *Oslobođenje* and that the whole world would be interested in it. (Jergović 2015: 224)

The opening lines evoke a narrator (who is actually a kind of anthropomorphized city telling stories about his past to a 'you' that greatly resembles Jergović, or his fictional alter-ego) who either shows an image to his collocutor or talks to him about a well-known image: "with *that* photograph, the war started." The narrator's description of the photograph is actually rather brief, and more focused on imagining what happened before the photograph was taken than on what is actually caught in the image and how it is caught:

> In the image are people, they had run out their house that just had been set on fire. A grenade that had fallen on the roof and the dry, wooden attic flared up and all four floors burned down. [...] Running out of the house, the inhabitants took what they could find. Or they took that which a person considers the most important when they wake him up unexpectedly, or when they tell him that he's got left maximum seven moments of his life in his apartment. [...] That's why the woman, running out of her flat, took an empty bird cage with her. That preposterous, empty bird cage [...] made this photograph so

> good, unforgettable and important, that with it, one era ended and another began. (Jergović 2015: 224)

Taken at the end of April or beginning of May 1992, the photograph becomes a symbol of the beginning of the war to the narrator. The next day, "newspaper readers all around the globe would watch her picture, *wondering* about the cage she held in her hand" (Jergović 2015: 231). Jergović writes that it is the detail in the photograph that triggers the imagination of viewers that makes a photograph stick; and that this imagination, in turn, could give birth to a true war novel about Sarajevo:

> That which each of them thought at that moment [while looking at the photograph] and how they would explain to themselves and their near ones why this unknown woman from Sarajevo, running out of the flames, had taken with her an empty bird cage – that would have been the best war novel about Sarajevo, which would, in several thousands of installments, happen from Rio de Janeiro to Vladivostok, around the whole world. (Jergović 2015: 231)

By closing the chapter in this way – after delving into the history of the two streets at whose corner the famous photograph was taken – Jergović's narrator touches upon the link between defamiliarization and imagination, but apart from its narration in the second person, the story itself plays with neither of them, instead reading as a rather dry historical chronicle of Sarajevo.

In their insightful reading of the link between immersion and defamiliarization, which are traditionally seen as opposites, Anderson and Iversen argued that "the experiential emphasis associated with immersion and the more reflective stance associated with defamiliarization in our making sense of narratives are intertwined cognitive phenomena" (2018: 578). Along these lines, they also propose to understand Shklovsky's concept of *ostranienie* more broadly – as a scalar process, so to speak:

> while defamiliarization describes reading experiences that differ from that of feeling transported into another world, it does so by offering different possibilities, some leading back to a more real reality, some leading to experiencing and appreciating the artwork's metaperceptional laboratory, and others again pushing the reader to experience not the reality but the unreality of what lies beyond the text. (Anderson and Iversen 2018: 582)[10]

10 Robinson's "somatic reading" of Shklovsky (2008) can be seen as a predecessor of the current interest in linking Shklovsky to cognition.

A number of cognitive studies have foregrounded the embodied nature of immersion (for a good overview, see Anderson and Iversen 2018: 572–579). These insights help us understand how Alma Lazarevska's story(telling) works. In what follows, I will look at a story by Lazarevska that invites the reader to think through the tension or relation between imagination and defamiliarization. Lazarevska is one of the finest prose-writers of contemporary Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature, but unlike what was the case with her male colleagues Mehmedinović and Jergović, whose work was quickly translated into English and German, it took a long time for her work to be translated, which explains the relatively small amount of attention it has received outside former Yugoslavia. Lazarevska's story "Death in the Museum of Modern Art" (Smrt u Muzeju moderne umjetnosti, 1996), from the collection of short stories with the same title, opens *in medias res* with the question "How would you like to die?" The question is asked by someone who, as the story proceeds, turns out to be the narrator's partner, who reminds her that she should fill out the questionnaire they had received from an American magazine, together with 98 other inhabitants of Sarajevo under siege. All interviewees had previously been photographed at a site in the city:

> On the little table in front of us lay a photograph of me. Taken in front of the ruins of the old hospital. The reporters who come to the besieged city like taking pictures of ruins. The hand I write with was still unharmed then but I had thrust it deep into my pocket. I had drawn my neck and hunched my shoulders, as though I was cold or uncomfortable. It seemed that I was stepping out of the photograph. Or should one say: stepping down? (Lazarevska 2014: 99)

The narrator's ekphrastic description of the photograph zooms in on the material setting (the ruins) and on her own bodily position that suggests that she was cold and uncomfortable. At the same time, her reading of the photograph directs the reader's attention to the sensory perception that she has now: to the pain of her injured hand, which prevents her from writing the answers to the questionnaire herself. The detailed description not only slows down the perception of the reader, but also seems to draw her into the story and closer to the narrator.

As Guillemette Bolens has argued, textual references to bodily movements and sensations trigger "sensorimotor perceptual simulations" in the reader that invite her to adopt the position of the narrator (Bolens 2012: viii; on sensorimotor response, see also Spolsky 1996). But even though "kinesthetic empathy," an act of internal perceptual simulation that enables us to understand and to a large degree infer another person's intentions, emotions, or state of mind (Bolens 2012, ch 1: 3, 6, 13, 18, 40) might enable or increase the reader's identification with the narrator or protagonist of the story, the form of perspective-taking –

or *readerly empathy* – that Bolens describes is still several steps removed from *social empathy* ("sympathy" or "compassion," the lack of which Mehmedinović criticized in Western media reporting on the Bosnian war). Importantly, "empathy" can mean very different things – in colloquial speech, it is often used as a synonym for sympathy, fellow-feeling or altruism, but it actually stems from the field of aesthetic theory, from where it moved to psychology – a translation of the coinage *Einfühlung*, it originally described "a spatial understanding of forms" in art.[11] The question of whether readers' responses to narrative lead to empathy as pro-social behavior is still being tested in empirical literary studies (see, for example, Koopman 2015, 2018). At the same time, a new branch of embodied narratology is developing that "brings to the fore the role of the body in shaping and reading narratives" and "places an emphasis on bodily experience as the meeting place of bodily states and perceptions [...] and the body's cultural reflections and images" (Caracciolo et al. 2016: 437).[12] Lazarevska's story can be read in this vein.

Lazarevska also uses some narrative techniques that counter or even dispel the immersive effect. The narrator's evoking of her embodied experience of life during and before the war (e.g., in her reading of her own photograph but also in other places in the text) is in sharp contrast to the use and intended afterlife of the photographs by the magazine: "The answers, illustrated with our photographs, would be published in a luxurious magazine with shiny covers. Part of the edition would be kept in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. [...] What did they want from us?" (Lazarevska 2014: 100). Urged by her partner to give a response to the question "How would you like to die?," she replies "At Kristina Verček's!" (Lazarevska 2014: 101). The narrator then associatively harks back to her memories of pre-war Sarajevo in a way that disrupts narrative progression, at the same time drawing the reader's attention to the constructed nature of the story and of memory. Kristina Verček was a cosmetician who had a popular column in the newspaper where the narrator worked as a proofreader. Verček had the habit of inserting in her column the sentence "It is well known that everyone wants to live long, not grow old." When the narrator discovers that the sentence is being repeated, she on one occasion purposely changed the final three words of the column into "not die," prompting Verček to invite her to a free treatment. Her partner's question "Are you afraid of death?" evokes in her

11 For a genealogy of empathy, see Weigel (2017). For the relation between compassion, sympathy, and empathy, see Garber (2004). For an exploration of the link between research on empathy in neurosciences and in literary studies, see Lux and Weigel (2017). For the concept of empathy in cognitive literary studies, see Caracciolo (2014, Ch 5.3.3).

12 See also essays in Kukkonen and Caracciolo (2014).

a series of involuntary memories of situations in which she felt overwhelmed by feelings of horror and anxiety (with her mother at the dentist) as well as of cases in which she was called upon to do something she didn't feel like doing (the usual question "Who wants to come first?" at a collective medical screening in primary school; an impatient shop assistant hurrying her to make up her mind in a shoe shop). For it is those feelings – being compelled to answer or act when you don't feel like doing so, and a feeling of horror emerging in reaction to this interpellation – that the question from the magazine elicits in her. Moving back to her treatment at Verček's, she recalls that while they were reclining with the mask on their face, the woman lying next to her said: "It would be good to fall asleep like this" (Lazarevska 2014: 114).

This is, then, what she lets her partner write in answer to the question: "In my sleep." The association between beauty mask and death mask becomes clear in the story, and so is the line that runs from being treated by the magazine as a commodity to being buried alive in the MOMA. Later, when the first copies of the magazine reach the still-besieged city, the narrator muses: "Maybe one should not answer such questionnaires any more, even with the promise of the appealing possibility that our face, photographed, will be displayed to the gaze of the whole wide world. [...] and afterwards those answers lie like involuntarily purchased shoes in a wardrobe" (Lazarevska 2014: 121). The story ends, again, with a strong sense of embodiment:

> Besides, the hand I write with has healed. If any new questions should arrive, I shall write my answers myself. I'm writing all of this with my own hand. I have placed the *Times Atlas of World History* under the sheets of paper. It is night. Tonight, in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the answer extorted from me keeps me vigilant. (Lazarevska 2014: 122)

However, Lazarevska's story does more than criticize the commodification of human (hi)stories of war suffering that is often a corollary of commercial war photography. And she moves one step further than Jergović by not only telling the story behind the picture and triggering the imagination of the viewer but also weaving a whole story out of a complex web of memories (mediated by metaphoric associations) from pre-war life relating to embodied feelings of coercion, horror, and anxiety. In Lazarevska's work, readerly empathy is not triggered by images of suffering (or their realistic and detailed descriptions), but by the embodied cognition and perception at work in the story: the reader's understanding of how the protagonist feels is fostered by the detailed descriptions of her tactile and corporeal experience. The story "Death in the Museum of Modern Art" (as well as the other stories in the collection with the same title) depicts a life in the "city under siege" that is in stark contrast with the culture of shock-

ing media images; they both defamiliarize mainstream views of war experience and slow down the narrative significantly. Do they increase empathy in the reader, and is it precisely empathy from the reader that her stories are after? As Ann Jurecic wrote, perhaps we should put more modest claims on narrative as a stimulus for empathy: "literature" – and photography, we could add – "matters not because it changes our brains, hearts, souls or political convictions, but because the practice of reading literature slows thought down" (2011: 24). Perhaps more importantly than triggering social empathy in the reader, Lazarevska's stories invite us to rethink the limits of empathy, the constructed nature of memory, and the role of narrative in both.

5 Conclusion: Empathic vision

All the authors and photographers whose work has been discussed above either experienced the siege of Sarajevo themselves or had friends and family living there. Confronted with the often ethically problematic sides of the intense media coverage of the siege of Sarajevo, they offered a sustained critique of the ambivalent role of (Western) news photography in representing human beings affected by war. The different ways in which authors and photographers use and reflect upon photography/ekphrasis related to the siege of Sarajevo can be seen as different levels of criticism, ranging from a political critique of the commodification of images of suffering to the photographic and narrative use of strategies of defamiliarization and immersion that invite the reader to rethink empathy with victims of war-torn areas.

I examined, first, how Mehmedinović and Otašević's prose offers a critique of news media's commodification of Sarajevo's suffering civil population, and singled out some of the contradictions in their thinking about and use of photography. In a second step, I briefly discussed how and why Mehmedinović perceives the work of Bosnian war photographers such as Milomir Kovačević 'Strašni' and Kemal Hadžić as an alternative form of war photography and presents their work as an ethical antidote to the media images produced by international war reporters. I have argued that rather than a dichotomy between foreign and local photographers, what characterizes their work is a tendency – also pointed out by Lešić (2016) – to slow down the perception of the viewer, a process that can be described in terms of Shklovsky's *ostranienie* (defamiliarization). In the third part of this chapter, I looked at ekphrasis – descriptions of photographs or mental images – in a short story by Alma Lazarevska, whose narrative techniques highlights the narrators' embodied experience of the war, combining immersive and defamiliarizing strategies.

Mehmedinović's criticism of TV and news reporters' approaches to the inhabitants of the besieged city, unscrupulously hunting for shocking photographs of human suffering and turning those images into a commodity, lays bare some of the sore points characteristic of what Chouliaraki (2010) has called the "pathologies of witnessing" – the tension between objective (and objectifying) reporting and a more empathetic response. At the same time, Mehmedinović doubts the possibility that images of suffering can affect international audiences and instigate them into action, as each public is occupied with "their own" victims.

Instead, he values the work of Bosnian war photographers, such as Kemal Hadžić and Milomir Kovačević. Even though they do not shy away from showing images of death and destruction, rather than just shocking the viewer, the photographs by Hadžić and Kovačević aim mostly to trigger the imagination of the viewer as a precondition for understanding human trauma; they defamiliarize viewers' perception of war and urge them to contextualize the destruction, death, or suffering that is depicted. Drawing the spectator into the picture, their photographs reconfigure the relation between the depicted (suffering) subject or (destroyed) object, the photographer, and the audience (cf. Azoulay).

What Mehmedinović values in the photographs of Kemal Hadžić and Milomir Kovačević, it seems, are precisely those aspects that photography has in common with fiction. The ways in which works of fiction deal with war photography show that literature, not unlike the photographs of Hadžić and Kovačević, aims to give back agency to the subjects in the picture; at the same time, by contextualizing the war against the backdrop of which the (fictional) life stories are set, literary works act against depoliticizing trauma. Otašević invites the reader to ponder the link between the history of (artistic) photography and the role of media representations; Jergović's short story points out the potential of photographs to trigger storytelling; Lazarevska's focus on embodied knowledge increases a feeling of immersion in the story on the part of the reader, while her almost poetical use of metaphoric associations and involuntary memory leading to pre-war life at the same time slows down and defamiliarizes the reading process. If ekphrasis makes photographs concurrently both strange and familiar, then the same could be said about the effect literature has on the memory of the siege: narrative fiction both immerses the reader in and defamiliarizes her from the story that is told.

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Charles I. Armstrong

Remedial Intermediality: Ekphrasis in Sinéad Morrissey's "The Doctors"

1 Ekphrastic poetics and the "paragone"

The idea of a "paragonal" struggle has been repeatedly referred to by critics as a key characteristic of the genre of ekphrasis. "Words and image," W. J. T. Mitchell has claimed, "seem inevitably to become implicated in a 'war of signs' (what Leonardo called a *paragone*) in which the stakes are things like nature, truth, reality, and the human spirit" (Mitchell 1986: 47). When literature responds to visual images, it is hard to avoid a struggle for supremacy or the workings of an implicit teleology: where the image was, the word shall be. Nevertheless, ekphrasis is complicated: as some sort of representation of the visual given is typically enacted, this opens for power relations that can rarely be summarized in simple terms. The ekphrastic poem may seldom describe the image in a totally subservient gesture, but it does not usually erase it either. Yet a suspicious, critical reading will tend to identify some sort of appropriative gesture between the lines of even the most innocuous of ekphrastic poems.

The contrastive attitudes underlying this situation exemplify more general trends concerning the power relations of literary influence. It is no coincidence that important work on ekphrasis was done in the 1980s and 1990s, when literary criticism became increasingly inclined to identify power relations in intertextuality and other relationships of influence. Where Harold Bloom's (1997) anxiety of influence presents a narcissistic process of self-empowerment, correctives such as Christopher Ricks's (2002) view of allusion as being a generous homage to one's predecessors opened up for more mutual relations. A turn from the former to the latter – from appropriation to mutuality – has an obvious ethical attraction, as it potentially brings with it the promise of a movement, within aesthetic practices, from self-regarding acquisitiveness to a more open-handed altruism. In an article entitled "New Ekphrastic Poetics," which attempts to use a collection of essays on French examples of ekphrasis to identify a major sea-change within the genre, Susan Harrow approaches the promise of such a turning of a leaf with infectious enthusiasm. She writes of a "desire to develop the ekphrastic beyond traditional assumptions of linear influence, mimetic translation, and textual incorporation," conceiving of the arts not as rivals but as representative of "reciprocal visual and textual cultures" (Harrow 2010: 257). Whereas she derides traditional conceptions of ekphrasis as being charac-

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terized by "imperialism" and "old binaries," the texts addressed in the volume introduced by Harrow are said to "eschew the struggle for mastery" (Harrow 2010: 257). Ringing in the demise of a traditional view whereby ekphrasis is seen as "writing *on* art, a top-down suggestion that implies that the battle for mastery is already won (by the writer)," Harrow instead celebrates a "more generous lateral engagement" (Harrow 2010: 259). Part of this new openness is, it would seem, a global reorientation of the relationship between words and images. Harrow points to instances of Welsh-French poetry, Franco-Tunisian literature, as well as Western engagements with Chinese drawing, to claim the "intercultural implications" of a new poetics that will displace "possession or colonization" (Harrow 2010: 259). Given the French context of Harrow's article and the volume it introduces, it is perhaps not surprising that Jacques Derrida is invoked – alongside other post-structuralist thinkers such as Luce Irigaray, Michel Foucault, and Michel Butor – as an inspiration for her new poetics. At the same time, it is nevertheless somewhat disquieting that such a skeptical, probing thinker as Derrida – who always questioned claims of sudden breaks with tradition – is taken to validate what amounts to a rather simplistic and uncritical heralding of a new beginning.

Derrida's complex understanding of signification will be important to how this chapter will question the grounds of a new ekphrastic poetics and intermedial relations in the poetry of Sinéad Morrissey. Can poetic ekphrasis be conceived of as a simple celebration of the visual medium's riches? Or is the coming together of different media – such as literature and visual forms of representation – inherently marked by power relations, even in the apparently most benign and generous situations? Harrow describes the quest for a new ekphrastic poetics as an attempt to "rethink the intermedial relationship" (Harrow 2020: 259). Framing this issue in terms of different media, rather than just visual and verbal representations, may have a variety of consequences. In an influential article, Peter Wagner has conceived of intermediality as a bringing together of linguistic and visual signs within a more or less homogenous cultural system of representation (Wagner 1996: 36). Here the friction and force of all processes of mediation, evident even in Hegel's totalitarian systematics, risks being erased. Such stakes are, however, tacitly present in Asbjørn Grønstad's recent formulation of how remediation involves literature in ethical relations with other media. Like Harrow, he opens for a form of mutuality: "At play in acts of remediation is a dialectical force by which the host medium is affected by the remediated work and vice-versa" (Grønstad 2017: 215). The "force" referred to here, however, suggests less than superficially benign relations.

Remediation and intermediality are very much evident in what will be the main focus of this chapter, Sinéad Morrissey's poem "The Doctors," published

in 2013 in her volume *Parallax*. The poem contains five stanzas of eight lines each. The opening of the poem brings into focus the historical manipulation of photographs in Stalinist Soviet Union. The middle section combines concrete mentions of particular photographic motifs with a deliberation on the aesthetics of photography and a meditation on purified language, and the poem ends with a vision of "a nation's girls and boys" (l. 38) engaged in continuing the state's practice of editing photographs. My reading will initially dwell on the poem's dealing with a concrete set of historical images stemming from the Soviet Union. In the first section of this chapter, I will identify how the poem enters into a dialogue with a form of historical witnessing that seeks restitution of images and faces erased by history. This dialogue facilitates, in turn, a remedial relationship whereby the iniquities suffered by both photographs and historical individuals can be redressed by poetry. The latter is the focus of the third section of this chapter and involves a traditional appraisal of the image as having a sensory richness and immediacy unequalled by verbal communication. But that originary power is also associated with vulnerability and lack of independence according to a mechanism that Derrida identified as the logic of the supplement (Derrida 1992: 76–109). Already here we can see why a counter-movement will have to be undergone, whereby the poem's embrace of what Harrow calls a "new ekphrastic poetics" is subject to question and doubt. As Derrida pointed out in "Plato's Pharmacy," the *pharmakon* – the supposed remedy – is not immune from contributing to, or exacerbating, the condition it seeks to amend (Derrida 1981: 61–171). In the third and final section of my chapter, the poem's movement towards the others of history, the visual medium of photography, and the Soviet Union, will be seen to come about only through a close interaction with its own historical present, a relentless self-consciousness about its own literariness, and Irish contexts of both literature and politics – including Seamus Heaney's conception of the "redress" of poetry, which we will see influencing how Morrissey configures the remedial logic of her poem. This return is part of a process of recontextualization whereby the poem's loosening of links to an original historical given brings about a proliferation of possible recastings of its content.

2 Restitution: Stalinism and historical erasure

The opening pages of Sinéad Morrissey's volume *Parallax*, where "The Doctors" is collected, include part of the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of its title word, defining *parallax* as the "Apparent displacement, or difference in the apparent position, of an object, caused by actual change (or difference) of position of the point of observation" (Morrissey 2013: 9). If one applies this to "The Doc-

tors," the poem does indeed feature an ekphrastic change of perspective, moving from the visual to the verbal. Another form of displacement occurs on the thematic level of the poem, which fastens on the physical doctoring – or "desecration" as it is described in line two – of pictures in Stalinist Soviet Union. The poem itself practices a partial erasure of this historical context: although it is perhaps possible to make the inference based on other parts of the text, only the reference to "the Urals" in the second stanza provides a clear reminder of a specific geographical location. Morrissey has, however, reconstituted the elided context in one of the short, paratextual notes published at the end of *Parallax*, where she explains that "'The Doctors' is inspired by David King's *The Commissar Vanishes* (King 2014 [1997]) – a study of how photographs were systematically falsified in Soviet-era Russia" (Morrissey 2013: 69).

King's work performs a meticulous act of restitution in restoring original images that were occluded through an unnervingly clinical process of historical erasure. His gesture is one that counteracts a historical act of repression that is part of an encompassing collective trauma. If one compares the poem to King's book, some concrete images and motifs are recognizable. The reference to someone "who pointed the way / down some rickety steps as though He needed help" (ll. 21–22), for instance, refers to a doctored photograph involving Stalin at the Sixteenth Party Congress in 1930. As King writes, in the original photograph "an attendant is seen pointing his finger, helpfully directing the 'Boss' (Vozd), as he was often known. When the photograph was printed in 'Projector' magazine [...] soon afterwards, no humble worker was there to tell Stalin where to go" (King 2014 [1997]: 153). Although King includes an image of Lenin relaxing with his sister in Gorki in late August 1922 (King 2014: 108–109), I have been unable to find the specific image involving "Our Great Leader / on holiday in the Urals" in the second stanza. This may either be poetic license or a reference to some other source. But the second stanza's reference to "one-whose-name-we-dare-not-whisper" who is "idly grinding his teeth / in a dim committee room, his glasses like miniature / headlights reflecting the flash" appears to be based on a photograph taken in the Kremlin on October 17, 1918, where the glasses of Trotsky – sitting a little to the right of Lenin in a crowded room – do indeed cast an eerie glare (King 2014 [1997]: 48–49). Interestingly, the figure of "Our Great Leader" in stanzas two and three appears not to have such a straightforward reference, as it amalgamates images of Lenin and Stalin in *The Commissar Vanishes*.

Morrissey's use of the imagery of the book is both flexible and far-ranging. Another concrete visual trigger is identifiable at the end of the next stanza, which speaks of the cropping of an image featuring "a handful of survivors ranged around a chess table" (l. 24). Coupled with the next stanza's reference

to "the power to transform a conspirator into a pillar" (l. 29), this alludes to a 1908 image of Lenin, Maksim Gorky, and other Russian expatriates in Capri. As King points out in his discussion of the various versions of this image, one of the doctored renderings has Vladimir Bazarov replaced by a "ghostly pillar" (King 2014 [1997]: 24). After the picture was taken, Bazarov became a political opponent of Lenin – and was both expelled from the party and incarcerated for his views. As such, he is only one of thousands whom the authorities tried to erase from the historical record. At a political level, the "doctoring" that Morrissey addresses is thus linked to the ways in which information is filtered and revised in a totalitarian society.

Writing from a contemporary U.S. perspective, W. J. T. Mitchell has recently observed:

> The main weapon of terror is the violent spectacle, the image of destruction, or the destruction of an image, or both, as in the mightiest spectacle of them all, the destruction of World Trade Center, in which the destruction of a globally recognizable icon was staged, quite deliberately, as an icon in its own right. (Mitchell 2011: 64)

As the Stalinist manipulation of photographs and paintings was, in many cases, rather crudely executed, leaving behind an open wound or blot in the visual image, it too can be said to have provoked the disciplining fear of terror through the creation of paradoxical images that represent the very power to destroy the image. One of the key characteristics of a totalitarian society is that new generations are indoctrinated through the careful handling of propaganda and airbrushed versions of historical narrative. David King is alert to the pedagogical dimension of this process:

> In schools across the country, children were actively engaged by their teachers in the "creative" removal of the denounced from their textbooks. The writer Sylvia Darel recounted her childhood in a Soviet classroom: "We loved dipping our fingers in the inkwell filled with diluted soot and were sometimes overzealous. I once inked out Comrade Kaganovich himself because his name sounded like an exiled one to me. I was lucky that I was only eleven years old." (King 2014 [1997]: 10 – 12)

As Kaganovich was a doctrinaire figure and an insider throughout Stalin's reign, Darel's testimony not only mocks the internalizing of the visual discipline of the era, but also alludes to its terror-evoking threat. The final lines of Morrissey's "The Doctors" echo this anecdote, imaging a "nation's girl and boys" who have "their fingers stained with soot" as they deface images (ll. 38 and 39).

Collective trauma is here experienced as something internalized and insidiously routine. The importance of this image for Morrissey can be gleaned by the

fact that she effectively uses it in another poem in *Parallax*. In "Shadows," the speaker imagines: "I could be a dissident in a textbook in Soviet Russia / discovered after the print run / and painstakingly blackened out by each teacher" (Morrissey 2013: 13). The difference between the two poems' treatment of what is more or less the same motif is nevertheless significant: "The Doctors" starts and ends with schoolchildren, as even the first stanza describes the photographs as "naïve as schoolchildren" (l. 4) before embarking on an extended conceit. In this respect, the poem elaborates upon what is only a passing reference in King's book. Here a more local context is at work, drawing Morrissey's poem back from Soviet images to an Irish, and literary, influence.

William Butler Yeats's "Among School Children" is an underlying intertext here, but Yeats's poem differs from Morrissey's in trying to formulate a positive alternative to limiting educational practices, where "body is not bruised to pleasure soul" (Yeats 1997: 221). Morrissey's, on the other hand, is less forthcoming with an affirmative ideal. Yeats begins where "The Doctors" ends – with an encounter with schoolchildren submitting to a new, repressive, and disciplinary regime. Where Morrissey's children cut and paste, Yeats's learn to "cut and sew, be neat in everything / In the best modern way" (Yeats 1997: 221). The latter activity is presented with wry humor, but nevertheless the children's cuts and sutures are to be read as transgressions committed against the traditional sacredness of the living body, where the "body is not bruised to pleasure soul." In Yeats's poem, historical distance and deprivation is conquered (among other things) by a transcendent image, whereby the poet's long-lost love suddenly "stands before me as a living child." In "The Doctors" the living children are on the contrary transformed into automatons of repression and perpetrators participating in a large-scale trauma, ensuring the more-or-less total erasure of whatever does not fit in with the party line. Morrissey has formulated an inversion of Yeats's revelatory images: while Yeats's most celebrated poetic visions seek to enact the sudden manifestation of images before (in the words of "The Second Coming") "darkness drops again" (Yeats 1997: 190). Morrissey here is interested in a kind of institutionalized fall into darkness that obstructs access to the human visage.

3 Remedies: The ethics of intermediality

"The Doctors" suggests something approaching an ontology of photography. This is particularly evident in the second stanza's thesis of the medium's "inherent generosity of outlook" (l. 10). This enthusiastic response to photography might strike one as counter-intuitive, given that the medium often is interpreted as

being factual in a cold and unimaginative manner. The way Morrissey's poem addresses photography entails that it is not merely an instance of ekphrasis but also one that scrutinizes intermedial relations between literature and another medium. Where others have seen in photography an automated, curtailed response, Morrissey's poem identifies an inherent, overflowing richness. If one couples this with the second line's previously mentioned use of the word "desecrating," one can see photography being imbued with an almost religious sense of divine immediacy in "The Doctors." The image is radically inclusive, and to tamper with its gifts is akin to a form of heresy or sacrilege. The perspective is here related to Susan Sontag's thesis that photographs of suffering might approach the status of "objects of contemplation to deepen one's sense of reality; as secular icons" (Sontag 2003: 107).

Morrissey's poem suggests that photography is linked with the sacred prior to any sense of suffering or deformation. There is perhaps something a little hyperbolic going on here. One possible reading is to interpret "The Doctors" as implicitly linking communism's dealings with photography with its stance on Christianity. Another option, however, is to see this in light of the poem's handling of the ekphrastic poem's traditional trap or lure of staging a paragonal contest between word and image. It is also interesting to compare the motifs of sacredness and generosity with the quick reference early in the poem, previously mentioned, to how the photographs are "naïve as schoolchildren." If "The Doctors" presents an attack on the image, then one way of avoiding a surreptitious amplification or echoing of that attack is to perform a kind of eulogy to the resources of photography and the visual sense. One might think of the Victorian cult of the Angel of the House as a kind of compensatory act of putting woman on a pedestal, which of course is a gesture that can only be fully interpreted in the context of the real marginalization of women. Victorian women were of course also seen as both naïvely childlike *and* elevated beings.

As scholars such as Heffernan, Hollander, and Cheeke have pointed out, the figuration of the visual as feminine is a staple of much ekphrastic poetry. Morrissey's poem ends with a specific reference to "women's faces" being covered by "black balloons" (l. 40). David King's book of photographs has several such images, where the heads of dissidents and out-of-favor communists are obliterated by rather violent means. There is one of Djakhan Abidova, an Uzbekistan party figure who fell from grace after being named during the third Moscow Show Trial in 1938 (see King 2014 [1997]: 177). It has a form which might indeed suggest a balloon. Most such images are, however, of males, so Morrissey's gender reference needs to be framed as a selective, strategic intervention. It appears at the end of what is presented as a final afterthought of visual destruction: "And should anyone be missed – turning up / in textbooks before the grave extent / of

their transgression's been established" (ll. 35 – 37). The use of the word "missed" is poignantly ironic here, not only indicating that these women have, for a moment, been overlooked by the ideological *autodafé*, but also tacitly acknowledging that they will go "missing" from the official history. Perhaps also the more general, casual eradication of women from the "textbooks" of history is hinted at here, a form of silencing that goes beyond what we normally classify as totalitarian regimes.

Morrissey cannot, of course, change the fates of the many who lost their lives, and the poem is also devoid of a roll call that might function as a kind of compensatory inscribing of the erased back into history. There is no possibility of undoing the acts of defacement that erased the faces of Abidova and others; poetry simply does not have such restitutive power. As a response to collective trauma, "The Doctors" does not adapt a straightforwardly therapeutic position. Although some of the ethical force of the poem might be gleaned from the pathos of the erased human visages – one thinks of Levinas's formulation of the responsibility owed to the face – words cannot reverse this historical violence. There is, however, a kind of remedial intermediality at work – a kind of compensatory concern for the medium of photography, whereby poetry is being deployed as a source of redress for the other artistic form. With the term "redress" I allude to Seamus Heaney's 1989 lecture as a Professor of Poetry at Oxford, "The Redress of Poetry," which remains one of the most influential formulations of a poetics for the Northern Irish Troubles. There, Heaney spoke of poetry's ability to provide "redress" in the sense of reparation or restoration. Including references to Eastern European poets and the Gulag, he referred to poetry's capability of providing a "glimpsed alternative" to an oppressive situation, "a revelation of potential that is denied or constantly threatened by circumstances" (Heaney 1995: 4).

If there is such a glimpse in Morrissey's poem, it is mainly of what has been erased and excluded from the visual library of history. It mentions the officials and family members whose presence has been surgically removed from the photographic record. Heaney does, however, have a double sense of "redress" in his talk. He not only refers to poetry as an "agent for proclaiming and correcting injustices" but also provides a defense of what he calls "poetry *as* poetry," with its ability to "set it up as its own category, an eminence established and a pressure exercised by distinctly linguistic means" (Heaney 1995: 5). This latter dimension explains why Heaney, in another text (the poem "Out of the Bag"), has playfully interpreted the term "poeta doctus" – which really means "learned poet" – to refer to a form of doctoring that provides "the cure / By poetry that cannot be coerced" (Heaney: 2001: 7). Heaney's "redress of poetry" is thus also a defense of poetry's autonomy, a kind of care for the self, or self-doctoring, of poetry. Here one can compare his stance with that of Morrissey's poem, which not

only deals with the loss of images, but also – particularly in the fourth stanza – elaborates upon a kind of implicit poetics or ethics of poetic language: "It is addictive," she writes, "the urge to utter a language / both singular and clean" (ll. 27–28). This ironic extrapolation of a kind of purified language has of course historical precedents, including for instance the Newspeak of Orwell's *1984* as well as Louis MacNeice's critique of modernism.[1] Most important, in our context, is how one here can identify a counter-movement to the elevation of the photograph in "The Doctors," a kind of rebound where the poet tries to extrapolate a literary lesson outside of the purely visual language of the photograph. By entering into a remedial relationship with photography's desecrated images, the poem embraces a stance that is neither "singular" nor "clean." Poetry becomes a thoroughly mediated form, ready to dirty its hands in the ethical business of witnessing the desecration and coercion subjected upon both another medium and the victims of history. The resulting remediation is, however, something markedly different than the restitutive desire for the resurrection of lost images or subjectivities.

4 Recontextualizations

Once one has moved from the apparent immediacy of the face and image to the more generalized landscape of mediation, then the multiplicity of the poem's range of meanings becomes evident. The way in which the defaced image is supplemented by a multiplicity of words and contexts can be exemplified by the work of Jacques Derrida. In "Restitutions," an essay included in *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida traces the complex stakes involved when two authorities – a philosopher, Martin Heidegger, and an art historian, Meyer Shapiro – sought to identify the true ownership of the boots depicted in a painting by Vincent Van Gogh. These acts of identification were experienced by both parties as a "debt or duty" to "speak the truth in painting" (Derrida 1987: 282). Derrida wrote of how Shapiro – provoked by what he took to be Heidegger's erroneous identification of the boots as belonging to a rural peasant – sought to return the boots to their truthful origin in a determinate subjectivity: Shapiro believed the boots were Van Gogh's own. In the process, Derrida implies, the art historian

1 See MacNeice, *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay*, which criticizes modernism while making an alternative "plea for *impure* poetry, that is, for poetry conditioned by the poet's life and the world around him" (unnumbered preface).

sought to "snatch" the pair of boots from "the common discourse of the common enemy" of Heidegger's right-wing, rurally fixated ideology (Derrida 1987: 273).

Although "The Doctors" does not attempt a full restitution of the subjectivity of the images of those marginalized or executed during Stalinism, it too manifests a responsibility or "duty" to make amends for an obliteration of the underlying subjectivity of the image. In the absence of a restitution of the obliterated faces and images, the poem seeks to redress matters on a generic, intermedial level. This supplementary gesture provides, however, no simple consolation or resolution. The open-endedness of the poem can be compared to the effects of the "detachment" Derrida detects in Van Gogh's painting (Derrida 1987: 283). According to Derrida, Shapiro is – like Heidegger before him – subject to "a sort of excess of interpretation, a supplement of reading" (Derrida 1987: 268), whereby it becomes impossible to perform a restitution of the image to a simple origin.

One of the ways in which such "excess" comes to light in "The Doctors" is the manner in which the text resonates with many other of Morrissey's poems. Notably, "Flu," in her preceding volume of poems *Through the Square Window* (2009), depicts a sick speaker struggling with related Russian imagery: "Anastasia's chocolate frown. Lenin on his stack. / Lily Brik with her horseshoe teeth and headscarf" (Morrissey 2009: 43).[2] The speaker refers to these and other images as "unreadable scenes," thematizing both the epistemological and historical challenges offered by photography. In *On Balance* (2017), the poem "Colour Photographs of Tsarist Russia" addresses Prokudin Gorsky's early experiments with colour photography, pondering over the surprising effect of discovering "so much colour [...] / where we least expect it" (Morrissey 2017: 46). How photography can communicate the unpredictable strangeness of the past, which always has more vitality than our reductive comprehension, is an important theme in both of these poems.

Implicitly, "Colour Photographs of Tsarist Russia" acquires pathos from the fact that Tsarist Russia was so decisively cast aside by the imminent revolution, and these poems – as well as several others by Morrissey on Russian matters – show a persistent engagement with history. At the same time, though, it is possible to read "The Doctors" and Morrissey's other related poems as indirectly dealing with the Northern Irish conflict. "The Doctors" is not a straightforwardly allegorical work of poetry, as the parallels between the totalitarian state of Soviet Russia and modern Northern Ireland are not sufficiently clear and systematic for

2 The sixth line of the poem refers to a book titled *A Century of Russian Photographs* as its source. No such publication exists, however, making it likely that a variety of sources have been used.

such an effect. Yet, the poetry evokes a looser set of analogies. There is, for instance, a parallel between the situation described in the poem and the way in which the strong dividing lines between sectarian communities have led to a form of a silencing of alternative and impure visions of identity. More compellingly, perhaps, the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 has been interpreted as an institutional act of historical amnesia. As Graham Dawson has pointed out, although encouraging the warring parties to be positive and to look hopefully to the future might be taken as sound advice, the actual rhetoric of reconciliation in Northern Ireland can be seen as demanding "a forgetting of the past," which "amounts to a denial of the psychic and political realities of those communities most affected by the war" (Dawson 2007: 61). A concrete example of how such "denial" functions with regard to visual images can be found in contemporary Northern Irish photography. Colin Graham has written perceptively about how Eoghan McTigue, for instance, has created images of whitewashed walls that previously featured partisan images of the communities that were in conflict. As Graham writes, McTigue "pursues the visual blankness of walls which are in the process of being repainted," thus highlighting the "defacing of the 'traditional murals' [...] at that awkward moment when the choice seems to be one between the horrors of the Troubles and the 'new dawn' of the Peace" (Graham 2013: 173).

The visual purges of the Soviet Union thus find an echo of sorts in the post-agreement context in Northern Ireland. Yet the drawing of such parallels does not fully exhaust the riches of "The Doctors," as the poem is not simply a historical document. Earlier on in this chapter, it was remarked how Morrissey muted the historical particulars of the Soviet history of doctoring images. While Stalinism worked with "scissors, / nail files, ink and sellotape," the poet too transforms the historical given: details are omitted, names are erased, and different images are blurred into one another. The elision of any concrete mention of figures such as Trotsky, Bazarov, and Abidova – let alone the whitewashing of walls and history in contemporary Belfast – has the effect of making the poem's appropriate contextual frame fuzzy. This can be interpreted in paragonal terms, as minimizing the poem's dependence on its visual basis and instead emphasizing the autonomy of the text. Pursued further, the poem's use of a kind of cut-and-paste technique, whereby several images are edited and conflated, tacitly acquires an uncanny similarity to the Soviet techniques of visual repression. The guilty conscience, as it were, of this ekphrastic poem may be that Morrissey the poet cannot quite fully distance herself from the defacing schoolchild tracing black balloons over the faces of others. Rather than being herself "a dissident in a textbook in Soviet Russia" (as imagined in "Shadows"), the poet might be cast as an accomplice of the measures perpetrated by totalitarianism. Ironically, the

denunciation of "a language / both singular and clean" cannot vaccinate the poet of committing impositions of her own. As Anne Karhio has shown in her reading of this poem's deployment of space, poetry cannot "simply offer truth, innocence or transparency" (Karhio 2015: 240).

Rather than transparency, we have refraction or parallax, as the poem invites interpretive displacement through changes in perspective. As argued above, there is no doubting Morrissey's strong interest in Russian history and photography, and at a certain level "The Doctors" works perfectly fine, like many of Morrissey's texts, as a kind of poetical equivalent to a historical novel: It provides a vivid immersion into the world of the Stalinist purges and into the fates of citizens who often had little choice but to internalize the totalitarian methods of Stalin's regime. At the same time, the pull of the poet's contemporary context can be read as also leading to a hermeneutical dialogue between her own historical horizon – including the post-agreement context of Northern Ireland – and that of Soviet Russia.[3] Another contextual frame is also at hand if one reads the poem as tacitly commenting on the contemporary vagaries, spanning the globe rather than merely just Russia or Northern Ireland, of the internet and digitalization. The *Parallax* volume ends with a poem entitled "Blog," which comments rather ironically on internet dating. Reading between the lines, "The Doctors" may suggest that we are all being schooled in a regime of digital reproduction where concerns with ethics and authenticity all too easily fall by the wayside. As W. J. T. Mitchell has pointed out, the invention of digital media has created images that are "violent dismemberments of the biopicture" in the sense of veridical representations of life. These images "can be cloned indefinitely and circulated globally" (Mitchell 2011: 99). If the "proper parlance" of our virtual lives is inherently related to the desecration of images executed by the accomplices of Stalinism, this should be cause for concern.

The indefinite cloning and circulation of digital images is only the last of a series of frames that have been encountered in this chapter, making sense of how Sinead Morrissey's poem "The Doctors" engages with visuality. While digital images, Russian history, the Northern Irish conflict and poetry's own self-reflective processes are all centrifugal processes spiraling out of the "excess" of this poem's encounter with images, the photographic images that were first disfigured and then recovered by David King's *The Commissar Vanishes* provide a centripetal focus and starting point. The latter might be also said to be the material from which the poem creates the open-ended forms of the former. Even while the

3 On the hermeneutical dialogue of horizons as a framework for interpreting literature, see for instance Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*.

poem seeks remediation, redress, and restitution, it creatively transforms and prolongs the injury documented by King. The trauma continues and is repeated. While the remediation in "The Doctors" seeks to understand and contextualize the transgressions of the past, it is nevertheless a necessarily melancholy and guilt-laden effort, since the terror of the images it engages with cannot be laid to rest or transcended in one fell swoop. Similarly, the apparent internationalism of the poem is shadowed by more local concerns, as Morrissey's consistent concern for Russian history cannot be completely disentangled from aesthetic debates (involving, for instance, Heaney and Yeats) of a more local nature.

This chapter started with a look at Susan Harrow's conception of a "new ekphrastic poetics," and there, of course, intercultural relations were of primary importance. The interpretation given of "The Doctors" has also indicated other problematic aspects of this poetics. Just as Morrissey's speaker cannot leave behind her complicity with historical violence, a new ekphrastic poetics cannot leave behind intermedial violence. The very act of entering into a remedial relationship with photography and photographs involves the speaker in a gift economy, where even the call for an unconditional generosity towards and care for the other cannot prevent ambiguity and transgression. The complexity of this relationship of remedial intermediality has been analyzed in this chapter, which has negotiated on the one hand between the restitutive desire to acknowledge and restore the face to its untouched state before historical violence, and the proliferating excess of interpretive frames opened up by the poem's detachment from any immediate context on the other. The intertwined nature of these aspects shows that ekphrasis is not a concern simply isolated from others, but rather operates in manifold interaction with other literary devices and stances. The subtlety of Sinéad Morrissey's verbal art allows us to enter into this complexity, as well as into a web of historical complicities, even as we feel the tug of desire for simpler and more immediate relations.

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Stephanie Schwerter

Traumatizing Images of Belfast in Mary Costello's Novel *Titanic Town*

1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on mental images of traumatic experiences in Mary Costello's semi-autobiographic novel *Titanic Town*, published in 1992. The action is set in Belfast in the 1970s, during the most violent period of the Northern Irish conflict somewhat euphemistically referred to as *the Troubles*. In the novel, the city of Belfast is described as a place in which "trauma is the shared reality" (Costello 1992: 227). While the plot is inspired by the author's adolescence in Republican West Belfast, the book was actually written in Melbourne, where Costello has lived since her emigration to Australia in 1981 (Caterson 1994: 6). The action is told from the perspective of Annie McPhelimy, a young girl growing up in the midst of the Troubles with her younger siblings Sinead, Thomas, and Brendan. The novel shows the different ways in which the city, as the center of violence, enters the life of children and adolescents. Its focus lies on the traumatic images that are generated in the protagonist's mind.

In the following chapter, a traumatizing image or picture will be conceived as "a picture of the mind" (2005: xiv). According to W. J. T. Mitchell, a mental picture is "the imagination or memory of an embodied consciousness" in which "a state of affairs" is projected (2005: xiv). Mitchell's perception of a picture as a mental image can be seen as an extension of Heffernan's reading of an image as "a verbal representation of a visual representation" (1993: 3). Mitchell explains that the word "image" is "notoriously ambiguous" as it can denote both a "physical object" such as a painting or a sculpture, or a "mental, imaginary entity," which he calls a "psychological image" (2005: 2). This mental image he sees as the "visual content of dreams, memories and perceptions" (2005: 2). Mitchell further states that a picture does not present the world as is it, but the world as it is "conceived and grasped" by its observer (2005: xiv).

Apart from Mitchell's "picture of the mind," Kevin Lynch's concept of "mental maps" (1983) will guide our analysis of *Titanic Town*. Lynch's "mental maps" can be compared to Mitchell's "pictures of the mind" (1983: 1–2). However, they differ from Mitchell's concept in the sense that they specifically refer to the cognitive perception of urban space. According to Lynch, citizens have personal "mental images" of their environment, which are "soaked in memories and meanings" (1983: 1–2). In the context of Costello's novel, the traumatic "mental

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images" are linked to particular areas of Belfast, which in the protagonist's mind are connected with traumatizing experiences.

Through the protagonist's juvenile point of view, Costello presents the Northern Irish conflict from an innovative angle. Given the unusual perspectives from which the novel portrays the troubled life of Belfast, Viktor Shklovsky's theory of defamiliarization will serve as a lens through which we shall explore Annie's "mental images." Shklovsky argues that in order to achieve an alienating vision of a particular state of affairs, it has to be presented in a "strange" – that is, in an unhabitual – way. In the case of *Titanic Town*, this alienating perspective is achieved through the perception of the Troubles through the eyes of a young girl. Annie's state of mind, shaped by a warlike situation, serves as a filter through which these violent incidents become transformed into personal mental images. In *Titanic Town*, the verbal representation of traumatic events echoes the visual picture of the consequences of political violence. In the following, we shall explore the young protagonist's mental images of troubled Belfast, focusing on Annie's reading of urban space, her individual perception of what is considered to be normality in a war-torn environment, as well as her cognitive picture of specific traumatizing situations.

In his seminal book *The Body Keeps the Score*, the psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk claims that trauma is not "just an event that took place sometime in the past" but "the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body" (2014: 21). He further explains that traumatized individuals feel suddenly "hijacked by images, feelings, and sounds from the past" (2014: 40). Van der Kolk draws attention to the fact that one of the most effective ways to access one's inner world of feelings is through writing. He claims that trauma victims who put their emotions into words experience an intense feeling of peace after having mentally returned to painful events of the past (2014: 238).

In this sense, it is not unlikely that in *Titanic Town*, Costello attempts to overcome her own traumatic experience of growing up in West Belfast during the Troubles. The writing of a semi-autobiographical memoir seems to allow her to revisit disturbing events of her childhood. In the preface to her book, she establishes a clear connection between herself and the teenage protagonist:

> Along with thousands of my fellow citizens I was witness to the absurd as well as the despicable and this account is drawn partly from memory and partly from imagination. I don't pretend that *Titanic Town* contains all the facts of my life and times, but Annie McPhelimy is certainly part of me (Costello 1992: author's note, n.p.).

In an interview, Costello states that while living in Belfast, she was unable to write about her traumatic experiences: "When you're there, you get caught up

in what's going on. You're so absorbed in it and appalled by it. It fills you with such despair when you see the brutality and the killing that nothing is worth doing, certainly not writing a crappy book about it" (Caterson 1994: 6). Only after having gained an emotional and mental distance in relation to the place where sectarianism and political violence were part of everyday life could she detach herself from the past and write about her experience. According to Aleida Assmann, "images and writing have been linked with memory ever since Antiquity" (1999: 210). In the light of Assmann's statement, we could argue that Costello attempts to overcome painful events by means of writing and through the exploration of traumatizing images. Mitchell claims that trauma is supposed to be "unrepresentable in word and images" (2005: 60). However, he states that trauma is increasingly represented in literary and visual ways. Mitchell underlines that some works of literature or art intend to transmit trauma as directly as possible in order to "rub" the spectator's or reader's "face in the unspeakable and unimaginable" (2005: 16). In this light, we may say that in *Titanic Town*, Costello depicts the trauma suffered by young people living in Belfast during the Troubles through the protagonist's teenage vision of her violent environment, while her own childhood trauma serves as a source of inspiration.

2 Interpreting Belfast's territoriality

Since the outbreak of the Northern Irish conflict in 1968, a remarkable body of literature on the situation in Northern Ireland has been produced. To date, more than 800 novels and short stories dealing with the impact of political violence on Northern Irish society have been published (Kennedy 2005). Most of them are set in Belfast and depict the traumatic influence of the conflict on the city's inhabitants. As the urban center of the Troubles, Belfast represents a microcosm of Northern Ireland in which the region's sectarian problems are found in their most concentrated form. Even today, numerous peacelines,[1] about 300 murals, and several kilometers of curbstone paintings in the colors of the Union Jack or the Irish Tricolor still separate Catholic and Protestant territories from each other. Belfast's urban space resembles a patchwork of religiously segregated areas, something that contributes to making the city a meto-

1 The so-called peacelines occur in different forms and shapes. According to the findings of the Interface project, the following barriers dividing Catholic from Protestant areas can be found: 20 mesh fences, 16 steel fences, 4 palisade fences, 13 walls, 14 walls with a fence above, 5 walls with a gate, 12 gates and 13 buffer fences ("Interface Barriers, Peacelines and Defensive Architecture").

nym for division and conflict in its various literary representations (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006: 61–81).

The action of the novel takes place in Republican West Belfast against the backdrop of the Women's Peace Movement, in which Bernie McPhelimy – Annie's mother – becomes one of the leading figures. This fictional movement is modeled on the Peace People, a peace initiative founded by Betty Williams and Mairead Maguire in the mid-1970s. The organization was started up by a group of local women who initially protested against the shooting between the security forces and the IRA in their area. Eventually, their initiative turned into an internationally supported peace movement for which Williams and Maguire received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1976. It is likely that Costello's interest in the Peace People springs from the fact that her own mother was involved in the organization (Kennedy-Andrews 2003: 189).

Whereas Bernie McPhelimy becomes a peace activist, her daughter Annie tries to live the "normal" life of a teenager between school and her various love interests. The novel's focus of attention lies less on the world of politics than on the concerns of a teenage school girl, who has to deal with, as Elmer Kennedy-Andrews puts it, "a mother who has taken to both politics and Valium [...] a shortage of discos and boyfriends, not to mention the terrors of 'O' and 'A' levels" (2003: 189). While the story is told in a rather linear way at the beginning of the book, towards its end, the narrative mode becomes more and more impressionistic. The disruptive manner of narration echoes the way in which trauma influences an individual's body and mind. Van der Kolk explains the effect of trauma as follows: "trauma is primarily remembered not as a story, a narrative with a beginning, middle and end, but as isolated sensory imprints: images, sounds, and physical sensations that are accompanied by intense emotions, usually terror and helplessness" (2014: 70). Thus, it could be argued that in her writing, Costello imitates the succession of images and sensations that haunt the mind of a mentally wounded person.

Gerd Hurm states that "fictional city images" are shaped "by the particular issues chosen for treatment" (1991: 9). In this sense, Belfast receives a specifically teenage perspective due to Annie McPhelimy's viewpoint. In order to realistically render the protagonist's mental picture of West Belfast, the author chooses a first-person narrator. The space in front of the family home is described in a detailed way and takes on the appearance of a battlefield. Whereas the political violence restricts Annie's movements through Belfast's urban space, the bedroom window offers an ideal lookout from which she is able to observe the interactions of the security forces and the paramilitaries:

> Violence alone enlivened my girlhood, for I was allowed out only to go to school and mass. But from my bedroom window, under a ceiling black with night and creeping mould I could see the goings-on. The boys and the Brits, the RUC. The dim, indistinguishable figures crawling damply through the neglected gardens, or running in cautious relays across the roads. And the sky above all of it, clear and brittle with stars, though more often clouded and changeful, fitfully illuminated by a dangerous moon. The moon could be a killer: a black balaclava an essential accessory. The black balaclavas of the IRA. (Costello 1992: 3 – 4)

Through the eyes of the protagonist, violence is clearly presented as the key element of her youth. The territory in front of the family's house takes on the form of a battlefield. The dark light and the indistinguishable characters from antagonistic political sides create an alarming atmosphere. Images of danger connected to dilapidation render Belfast an unpleasant and frightening place.

In the context of the given scene, Kevin Lynch's concept of "mental maps" provides a helpful device to understand Annie's interaction with her violent environment. Lynch draws attention to the importance of cognitive geography in the interpretation of an urban complex by its inhabitants. A "mental map" is created in the observer's mind through the subconscious selection of specific elements of the city, which for him or her contain personal meanings. In the above-mentioned scene, the reader enters the protagonist's mind and is confronted with Annie's personal "mental map" of Belfast. This cognitive representation of her area is dominated by dark and menacing images, while positive aspects of the city are entirely absent. Due to the disturbing experiences she has lived through, Annie seems to be incapable of integrating cheerful impressions and memories into her cognitive map of Belfast. Speaking in Mitchell's terms, her "psychological image" of the city is shaped by her individual interpretation of, and negative perspective upon, Belfast's sectarian geography.

Lynch underlines the importance of mental maps in the process of "way finding," and explains that the "environmental image" held by an individual is "used to interpret information and to guide action" (1983: 4). In the same vein, Liam Kennedy argues that places are charged with "emotional and mythical meanings; localized stories, images and memories" (2003: 27). For this reason, they can provide meaningful cultural and historical bearings for "urban individuals" (2003: 72). This applies in particular to the inhabitants of Belfast, who interpret their environment according to existing boundary markers such as peacelines, murals, flags, and curbstone paintings. A. T. Q. Stewart even goes so far as to claim that local knowledge is essential for people living in Northern Ireland to such an extent that they carry an almost innate "religious geography" in their mind (1977: 180).

Annie is guided through the city's urban maze with the help of her individual cognitive geography. On her personal mental map, the area in which she lives

with her family is clearly marked out as Catholic territory, belonging to Republican West Belfast. The protagonist refers to the people who creep through the garden at night as the "boys," "the Brits," and the "RUC." While with the "RUC" she refers to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the police force in Northern Ireland, she uses the term "the Brits" to allude to the British Army. Belonging to the British establishment, both organizations were seen by Northern Irish Catholics as instruments of the British "colonizer" who merely acted in the interests of the Protestant community and therefore were regarded as enemies. Through her choice of words, Annie not only expresses her disapproval of the presence of the RUC and the British army in her front garden, but also presents both organizations as intruders who are not welcome on Catholic territory.

Referring to the IRA, on the other hand, she uses the almost endearing term "the boys." The scene shows that even as a young girl, Annie is tuned into the sectarian discourse of her community. Her utterance illustrates her awareness of Belfast's sectarian geography and her ability to interpret the violent events happening in her direct environment along ethno-religious lines. The perception of the IRA as the defenders of the Catholic community becomes further illustrated through the image of the "dangerous moon" which turns into "a killer." With its bright light, the moon reveals the identity of individuals present at night in the garden. In this way, it presents a particular danger to IRA men: as members of a counter-hegemonic paramilitary organization, it is in their interest not to be recognized. Therefore, a "black balaclava" becomes an "essential accessory" in order to remain unidentifiable. Through the description of the moon as a threat to "the boys," the reader is yet again reminded of Annie's positive attitude towards the IRA and her perception of the paramilitary organization as the protector of the area. On Annie's "mental picture" of her area, the IRA shows as a positive element. Thus, using the words of Mitchell, the world is not represented in an objective or neutral way, but as it is "conceived and grasped" by its observer (2005: xiv).

The scene continues with a further traumatizing image. It is not only the nightly events on the ground that endanger the young protagonist's life, but also the goings-on in the sky. Annie's account of army surveillance from the air presents an additional source of anxiety: "The army began to use helicopters with searchlights. Powerful. They would light up my room like broad daylight as I crouched below the window, not wishing to be mistaken for a sniper" (1992: 4). The fact that Annie is afraid of being taken for a gunman can be seen as a reaction triggered by the traumatizing influence of the omnipresent political violence on Belfast's population. Whereas in a peaceful environment this kind of consideration would seem absurd, in West Belfast during the Troubles, however, any person behaving in a supposedly suspicious way could run the risk of being mis-

taken for a sniper. On Annie's "mental map" it is not only the ground that is invaded by the British army, but also the space above it. The protagonist's comment emphasizes that even her own house does not provide shelter from the violence being acted out on the streets.

As the action continues, the family becomes intimidated by their neighbors due to Bernie's peace initiative. As the head of the Women's peace movement, Bernie tries to fight for the end of the daily shooting between the IRA and the security forces in the area. This means that she has to get in contact with British government representatives as well as with the IRA. For several of her neighbors, her negotiations with the British government are seen as a betrayal of the Republican community, as interacting with British politicians is interpreted as being tantamount to turning against the IRA. For this reason, the family home is violently attacked, and Annie's brother, Thomas, is injured by a thrown brick. After this incident, the parents decide to move out of the area in order to avoid further aggression. Despite the traumatizing events Annie lived through in West Belfast, she is still emotionally attached to the area in which she spent part of her childhood:

> My tears salted the champ. I didn't want to leave Bunbeg. I loved Bunbeg. And now it was all ballsed up. I knew for definite now that life wasn't fucking worth living. Nothing would ever be normal again. It emerged later that the parents had been down to see the Housing Executive, who would attempt to find us somewhere suitable as quickly as possible. For the moment, we would have to stay where we were. But we could rest assured, we were on the top of the Emergency Housing Intimidation list. (Costello 1992: 226)

For Annie, the worst thing about being intimidated by her neighbors is the fact that her family is attacked on territory which, on her cognitive geography of Belfast, signifies "safe ground." The McPhelimy family feels endangered not only by the British security forces but also by members of their own community. The sensation of being under attack from both sides creates a particularly destabilizing situation for the teenage protagonist. Ralph Willet's perspective on cognitive perceptions of city space is again helpful. He claims that a city is always an "observed and imagined environment" (1996: 19). In the given scene, Annie's "observed" and "imagined" environments clash. While she imagines Bunbeg as a safe haven, she has to realize that the situation has changed and now she and her family live on hostile ground. This state of affairs explains her inability to integrate positive aspects of Belfast into her personal mental map: even Bunbeg, the area she used to love, is now "totally ballsed up", leading Annie to the conclusion that life is not worth living. Due to Annie's interpretation of the city through the lens of her cognitive geography, Belfast becomes represented on her "picture of the mind" in the darkest colors.

3 Depiction of normality in war-torn Belfast

In the following, we shall concentrate on what Annie McPhelimy perceives as normality in her violent environment. Mitchell states that every history "is really two histories": whereas the first kind of history is the one of "what actually happened," the second one is "the history of the perception of what happened" (2011: xi). Mitchell further explains that the first kind of history focuses on the facts and figures, while the second concentrates on the images and words defining the framework within which those facts and figures make sense (2011: xi). In the context of *Titanic Town*, "the history of what actually happened" is the Northern Irish conflict, with its death rate at its peak in the 1970s, and the numerous clashes between the two communities and the government forces.[2] The "history of the perception of what happened" is Annie's tale of her youth in West Belfast perceived from her individual perspective.

With the intention of presenting the traumatic events for herself and the reader in a bearable way, Costello employs humor and irony as literary means. Through the use of humor, the author does not aim to downplay the gravity of the events, but rather wishes to sharpen the reader's view of the situation. According to Bakhtin, laughter does not "deny seriousness but purifies and completes it" (1984: 112). The following humorous scene demonstrates the absurdities of everyday life in troubled Belfast as perceived by the teenage protagonist. Here, Annie describes a "typical" Saturday morning in West Belfast in the 1970s:

> For the fortieth time that day army vehicles rumbled past the house causing the nest of Tupperware bowls to shudder one inside the other. It was Saturday and the fine weather brought the young fellas out in force. There had been intermittent riots all morning and still the odd stone or chunk of paving bounced off the armour plating of patrolling Saracens. But it was basically the lunch-hour lull. (Costello 1992: 222)

Annie's "mental picture" of the "lunch-hour lull" might seem surprising to the reader. It takes on an ironic dimension, as the presence of army vehicles and the flying chunks of paving would appear as disturbing in a peaceful environment. Annie, however, sees the situation as a relief from the omnipresent violence. The army vehicles are regarded by her as a mere everyday occurrence, which is so common that the only thing she feels worth mentioning is the fact

2 The most violent period of the Troubles was the period between 1971 and 1976, with 1752 killing in six years (171 in 1971, 479 in 1972, 253 in 1973, 294 in 1974, 260 in 1975 and 295 in 1976). After 1976, the death rate declined with 111 killings in 1977, 82 in 1978 and 121 in 1979 (Sutton http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/chron/index.html).

that they make the kitchen cupboards shake. Annie's illustration of the "peaceful" Saturday morning is given a humorous overtone when she mentions that the good weather encourages young men to come out and engage in rioting in front of her window. As Annie is only allowed to leave the house in order to go to school and to church, her possibilities of getting in contact with boys of her age are fairly limited. The fact that the majority of schools in Northern Ireland are either all-girl or all-boy restricts her chances of finding a boyfriend even more. Considering that outside the two institutions, it is almost impossible for Annie to encounter young men, the riots in front of her window are a welcome occasion to meet them, or at least to look at them. According to Bakhtin, laughter caused by absurd situations amounts to "the word's second truth" (1984: 112). Thus, we could say that through the subversive humor employed in the scene, the novel attracts attention to the erosion of normal daily life due to the Northern Irish conflict.

For Annie, the Troubles signify a considerable constraint on her personal autonomy: British soldiers, police, and the IRA – all male representatives of the patriarchal social order – are in control not only of her community but also of her private sphere. The imminent danger of being attacked by the paramilitaries or arrested by the security forces limits Annie's freedom of movement within the city. Through a comical depiction of parental restrictions imposed on young females, Costello renders the dangers of political violence for Northern Irish women during the Troubles by means of humor. In the following passage, Annie describes a "normal" evening out for a teenager living in Belfast in the 1970s:

> A typical night out in Titanic Town. There were the parents to be persuaded. We would not be late, we would not drink, not smoke or indulge in impure acts. We would not be set up by gangs of rapists, bag-snatchers or drug-pushers. Nor would we get arrested, or involved in a riot or related incident. We would not travel on a bus which would be hijacked. We would not place ourselves in the path of any bomb, bullet or simple incendiary device. We would not be induced to get into cars full of paramilitaries, especially not if they clapped hands over our mouths and placed bags over our heads. We would not, in short, be assassinated. We would not be persuaded to give up our studies and run away to join the IRA. My parents between them thought of everything. Hilda's mother was merely anxious that we should remember to take an umbrella. (Costello 1992: 270)

Annie's comment receives a comic dimension through the juxtaposition of the "dangers" parents of teenager are afraid of in "normal circumstances" – such as their children smoking, drinking, or having sex – and the dangers feared by Mrs. and Mr. McPhelimy. Noël Carroll has claimed that the key to "comic amusement" is the deviation from a presupposed norm. For that reason, the in-

congruity created through a digression from an assumed standard serves to generate laughter (Carroll 2014: 17). Against the background of the given scene, we could say that Mrs. and Mr. McPhelimy's concerns depart significantly from more typical parental worries. The irony of the situation is, however, that the dangers feared by Annie's parents are not imaginary, but real. In working class Belfast in the 1970s, buses were regularly hijacked, burned, and used to build barricades. In the same way, bombs, shootings, and stray bullets were everyday occurrences. Abductions were also frequent and young people were prone to be recruited by the paramilitary organizations in their community. According to Vivian Mercier, humor springs from the absurd, which is laughable because it is "untrue or irrational or, at the very least, exaggerated" (1962: 1). The humorous counterpoint is, however, provided by Hilda's mother, who is only concerned about potential rain. Through Annie's defamiliarizing perspective, the reader perceives the city from a different angle and becomes aware of the danger of everyday life in Belfast in the 1970s.

In Troubles novels, Belfast is frequently referred to as "Titanic Town." In this context, the term has to be read on different levels. First and foremost, it refers to the fact that the Titanic was built in Belfast. As Harland and Wolff, the shipyard in which the Titanic was constructed, almost exclusively employed Protestant workers, the ship is frequently used as a symbol for Protestantism, and in a larger sense, for Protestant domination of Belfast's Catholic community. A further connotation of the Titanic is the sinking of the ship. In this sense, the Titanic is repeatedly used to allude to the "sinking of Belfast." Thus, the city becomes portrayed as a place in which survival is impossible, in particular for members of the Catholic community. Through the dark imagery evoked by the Titanic, Costello alludes to death and decline despite the humorous tone in which the "typical night out" is narrated.

4 Images of political violence

Shklovsky claimed that in order to attract attention to societal shortcomings, the "habitual" has to be represented in an unusual way: "The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to render objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception" (1965: 3). Following Shklovsky's theory, we can say that *Titanic Town* draws attention to the consequences of sectarianism – specifically, traumatizing events generated by political violence – through the alienating perspective of the young protagonist. Annie's perception of the Troubles differs considerably from the habitual readings of the

Northern Irish conflict, usually conveyed through an adult, frequently male, point of view.

In the following paragraph, the narrator describes a particularly traumatizing situation. As mentioned previously, Annie's brother Thomas is badly wounded by a brick when the family home is attacked by the neighbors. When Annie perceives her brother's injury, the image of the wound turns into a mental picture. In Maurice Halbwachs's words, Annie's memories of the scene become "reduced to a series of successive pictures" (Halbwachs 1992: 55):

> Once inside I saw the wound for the first time under the light. It was wide and deep and gory; the red of flesh, the white of bone. Flesh of my flesh. Thomas was very pale, I imagined the blood draining from his head, pouring out of the wound, running down over his sky-blue shirt and metal buttons. I snapped. I screamed and screamed and screamed. It rose and filled the house. It reached outside and filled the street. Like Mrs French's siren I could be heard all over Andersonstown, down the Falls, across the bogs, over Belfast Lough. One of the primal screams. But it wasn't enough. I broke away from Rosaleen who was trying to calm me; I rushed into the hall, threw open the door again and screamed in the face of the crowd. (Costello 1992: 254)

Even if Annie's glance at Thomas's wound takes only a few seconds and could be compared to a "snapshot of a specific moment" (Mitchell 2005: XVII), its subsequent effect is rendered almost in slow motion. The extended description of Annie's reaction to the event underlines the traumatizing influence of the omnipresent violence. The haunting image of her brother's split-open head lets Annie imagine Thomas's blood draining from his body. She sees her brother already dead and mentally connects Thomas's blood to her own. Considering her brother as "flesh of my flesh," she feels personally wounded by her neighbors' attack. Through the biblical image "flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood," Costello subversively points at the costs of the Northern Irish conflict, often interpreted as an ethno-religious conflict.

Annie expresses the horror felt in the situation through a scream travelling beyond the boundaries of the city, reaching "across the bogs over Belfast Lough." In her cognitive picture of the situation, the volume of her scream is not only amplified, but also prolonged. The extended scream directed at the crowd highlights the trauma experienced by the protagonist. In Annie's narration of the events of her childhood, her mental representation of the scene could be compared to a photograph providing a momentary glimpse of a past event. Assmann has argued that in traumatizing situations, "images arise in memory especially in those areas that cannot be accessed by verbal procession" (1999: 209). Annie's scream communicates her inability to put her traumatizing experience into words. Words become replaced with images of the situation and

remain engraved in her mind. Through the teenage protagonist's perception of the situation, the author depicts the Northern Irish conflict in a non-habitual way and thus, to use Shklovsky's words, manages to "make it strange" (1965: 3). The defamiliarizing view of the Troubles intends to encourage the reader to reflect on the impact of political violence on Belfast's youth.

The last chapter of the book functions as a postscript narrated from Annie's perspective as an adult woman. The following lines are the closing lines of the book:

> For the cause, for queen and country, or peace, with justice or at any price. For there will be no surrender, fuck the pope and queen both the same. Sons, sisters, fathers, daughters, husbands and brothers will not be grudged, though they go out to break their strength and die. We will not give an inch and shall not be moved, till the last drops of blood, orange, green, run down the street, through our four green fields, one of them in bondage, to mingle with the rivers of ceaseless rain, seep into the brown sucking bog, and piss, peacefully at last, out into Belfast Lough, in the wake of the Titanic. (Costello 1992: 340)

In the last lines, dark images are created through the quotation of slogans from both political sides. While "no surrender" and "not an inch" are slogans used by the Protestant community to underline their determination to remain on the island, "four green fields" refers to an Irish nationalist folksong. "Fuck the Queen" and "Fuck the Pope" were slogans used by militant Catholics and Protestants, respectively, expressing their dislike of the opposing community. Both slogans are ingrained in Belfast's urban space, as they appear on numerous walls in the form of the acronyms FTQ (for "Fuck the Queen") and FTP (for "Fuck the Pope"). According to the sociologist Robert Park, each separate part of the city is "stained with the peculiar sentiments of its population" (1968: 6). This applies in particular to Belfast, a place in which certain areas are clearly associated with specific political allegiances. Through the references to the omnipresent slogans on Belfast's wall, the author underlines the ethno-religious division of the city. Through the use of gloomy images, Costello paints a dark picture of the situation. Furthermore, she suggests that men from both ethno-religious sites are ready to lose their lives for a meaningless cause. Letting the "green" and "orange blood" metaphorically mingle, Costello attempts to draw attention to the absurdity of the fighting, as the ultimate result is not peace, but death.

In this context, the image of "blood" echoes the bleeding head of Annie's brother discussed previously. The allusion to "blood" refers to the protagonist's continuing trauma caused by the memory of her brother. According to Halbwachs, memories "occur in the form of systems" that means that over time they become connected to other memories (1992: 53). Consequently, the memory of one particular traumatic event triggers a whole network of traumatizing asso-

ciations. In the same vein, Assmann argues that traumatizing pictures become engrained into the "landscape of the unconsciousness" so that they turn into an "internal 'vision' that takes on a life of its own." Thus, they cease to be "object[s] of observation" and become transformed into "agent[s] of haunting" (Assmann 1999: 217). In this sense, it could be argued that Annie's vision of her brother's split-open head turns into a haunting "mental picture." This very image reoccurs in Annie's above-mentioned retrospective description of Belfast through the allusion to "blood." The image becomes magnified so that it comes to stand for the political violence acted out on the city's streets. The "ceaseless rain" suggests a never-ending flow of blood, implicitly pointing at the brutal consequences of sectarian fighting. By referring to the "wake of the Titanic," Costello ends her book with the evocation of death and destruction. Through an apocalyptic image of Belfast, the author lays the blame for the persisting violence on both communities. Annie's adult voice, which stands in contrast to that of her as a teenager, lets the novel end on a tragic tone. This tone could be seen as the expression of the author's personal disillusionment about the conflict, which, in 1992, was far from over.

Our analysis has shown that Costello strives to address traumatizing historical events through the incorporation of verbally represented images into her literary text. The images become vivid in the novel by means of a narrative account rendered from the perspective of a teenage girl. *Titanic Town* sheds an innovative light on the clashes of the two ethno-religious communities through use of humor and the defamiliarizing perspective of a young girl. The author deploys the protagonist's traumatizing mental images in order to demonstrate Annie's perception of Belfast's urban space, her interpretation of what is seen as "normal life" in a warlike situation, as well as her cognitive images of certain traumatizing events. Thanks to the unusual point of view, *Titanic Town* gives rise to innovative readings of the Troubles, which differs from the adult's perspective from which the Northern Irish conflict is traditionally depicted. *Titanic Town* draws its readers into an intense engagement with the realities of the region's politics and intends to encourage them to adopt new ways of seeing life in Northern Ireland, which go well beyond established one-sided readings of the Troubles.

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Christine Berberich

Ekphrasis and the Holocaust: Traumatic Images in Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones*

1 Introduction

On its publication, a German reviewer of Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones* (2006; 2009 in English) referred to the author as a "pornographer of violence" (Burke 2009). By now, the novel has become one of the most notorious examples of Holocaust perpetrator fiction: 975 pages of Nazi perpetration as depicted from the viewpoint of an SS Nazi officer, Max Aue, who helps to implement and carry out the Nazi Judeocide. On first publication, Littell's work was met with immediate critical acclaim – the novel won, for instance, both the Grand Prix du Roman de l'Académie française and the Prix Goncourt in 2006, was translated into a number of languages, and made international bestseller lists – but it was also met with hostility. David Gates, in the *New York Times*, for instance, claimed that the novel and its author "dance on the edge of impertinence" (Gates 2009). The main point of contention for most readers, as well as critics, is its explicitness: its excessive descriptions of bodily functions; its reveling in detailed and problematic depictions of sex; but, in particular, its graphic representations of violence that are, despite the subject matter, not commonly found in Holocaust writing. Littell's diligently researched, sweeping narrative firmly focuses on the brutal crimes committed by the Nazis by depicting them – in great detail – from the point of view of the actual perpetrator. Yet it also intersperses this narrative with different viewpoints in order to, as Erin McGlothlin points out, "provide alternative perspectives on the events" and to offer "an ethical counterweight to the perpetrators' myopic views of them" (McGlothlin 2016: 253). This chapter will, as its starting point, focus on the accusation leveled at Littell for being a "pornographer of violence" by differentiating pornography from the narratological device of ekphrasis.

In its basic understanding, the term *pornography* refers to "books, magazines, films, etc. with no artistic value that describe or show sexual acts or naked people in a way that is intended to be sexually exciting."[1] Without wishing to embark on a defense of pornography, it has to be stated that the definition of

1 https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pornography

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110693959-011

this cultural form having "no artistic value" is simply too limiting. In recent years, the term *pornography* or *porn* has been applied more liberally in other areas: "food porn," for instance, an informal expression referring to "images that portray food in a very appetizing or aesthetically appealing way."[2] Here, the shift has been made from the original meaning of porn as having "no artistic value" to something that has become "aesthetically appealing." In both cases, though, "porn" is something that involves and even invites a look, a glance – a potentially furtive and secretive one in the first case, a more directed one in the second. It seems to be produced to compel the audience to *look*, for a variety of reasons. Cue, then, the expression "pornography of violence," which seems to suggest, taking into account both definitions above, a cultural production that is either without aesthetic merit or that is produced in an aesthetically pleasing way, despite its subject matter. "Pornography of violence," potentially, could be accused of merely trying to aestheticize violence. In an article on the pornography of violence from 2014, the novelist Will Self recounts his personal experiences having written a piece that imaginatively recreates the last moments in the life of a hostage held by the Islamic State movement before the individual's execution. In the article, Self ponders our willingness to watch and engage with horror on an almost daily basis without, however, meaningfully engaging with it – and I will come back to this further on in this chapter. Violence, in some cases, is presented in an entirely unmediated form – as just that, the uncommented depiction of violence – and, in others, in an aestheticized form that aims to frame it as a work of art. This is where both pornography of violence and the aestheticization of violence differ from the ancient concept of ekphrasis.

2 The meaning(s) of ekphrasis

Ekphrasis, according to John Heffernan, is "the verbal representation of visual representation" (1993: 3). This can be a textual or spoken description of, say, a painting, a photograph or a scene in a film. In fact, for most contemporary critics, *ekphrasis* is the verbal depiction of a piece of art. Giddon Ticotsky, for instance, asserts that "ekphrasis is the practice whereby one work of art, mostly literary, is inspired by and significantly refers to another concrete, musical, or plastic artwork, such as a sonata, painting, statue, or building (in Greek, *ek* means 'fully' and *phrasis* means 'explicate')" (Ticotsky 2014: 7). This definition of *ekphrasis* might make its inclusion in a study of a Holocaust text questionable:

2 https://www.google.com/search?q=Dictionary#dobs=food%20porn

as a rule, Holocaust texts do not focus on descriptions of art, music, or sculpture. But, and as Ticotsky explains, "the original meaning of the term is 'accurate description'" (2014: 7). This reference to the "original meaning of the term" is of particular importance for this chapter. As Ruth Webb, one of the leading scholars on ekphrasis, has shown, contemporary definitions of the term have become quite fluid and largely ignore its ancient meaning and usage. She explains that "as far as the [ancient] rhetoricians were concerned, *ekphrasis* could be a description of a person, a place, even a battle, *as well as* of a painting or sculpture" (Webb 1999: 8, emphasis mine). From the nineteenth century onwards, as she shows, it is this latter meaning of ekphrasis as a representation of a painting or a sculpture that has taken over and been given more prominence, in particular by thinkers such as Roland Barthes who, in "L'effet du reel," focuses mainly on "des oeuvres d'art," ignoring the ancient category of events altogether (Barthes, as quoted in Webb 1999: 12). Webb, in contrast, highlights in particular ekphrasis's ancient focus on battles, which, she explained, would traditionally "progress from an account of what preceded the battle to the event itself, and then to its aftermath" (Webb 1999: 12). This suggests that, in its original usage, ekphrasis would manifest itself in lengthy verbal descriptions of battle preparations, the actual fighting, and its often very gory aftermath, which would have been a true gift to the rhetoricians of the day.

In this sense, it is important that ekphrasis fills a void: it describes something that might not actually be present at the time, and thus makes it accessible to more people than the original visual representation had been. Ekphrasis tries to relate between different artistic media – not just by describing something, but also by investing what is described with feelings and emotions, with an interpretation. A battle scene, in ekphrastic terms, would thus not merely be the literal description of the fighting, but take in and assess the feelings and emotions, potentially even the pain of the parties involved. Consequently, it often triggers affective (i. e., very personal and sensory) responses in the reader or listener. It is, then, this ancient use of ekphrasis in particular that this chapter will focus on. *The Kindly Ones*, as will be argued, focuses in great detail – and with much attention to graphic detail – on *events* from the Holocaust, including mass shootings and massacres. Traditional Holocaust writing generally shies away from being overly descriptive, instead often focusing on matter-of-fact listing of events and procedures. In the process, an iconography of Holocaust writing has developed, an almost unspoken code of conduct, of "dos" and "don'ts" that should be adhered to for an ethically and morally correct representation of the Holocaust that is respectful to the victims. More recent Holocaust writing, however, has become more experimental, with some stylistic shifts towards more descriptive narratives that seemingly push the boundaries of Holocaust narrative. This chapter

thus contends that these graphic depictions of violence in *The Kindly Ones* should be read as an ekphrastic narrative strategy that aims to paint pictures of actual and very distressing historical events for the reader in order to force a far more in-depth engagement with the violence perpetrated during the Holocaust. They are not an aestheticization of violence; nor are they pornography of violence. They are provided to critically engage the reader and make him or her think about why they want to read such graphic violence in the first place.

3 The Holocaust and cultural representation

Since 1945, Holocaust representation has gone through a number of stages. Bernhard Giesen has termed these different "institutional arenas," highlighting that Holocaust representation has moved from the initially public (through the first few trials) to the private (through the conspiracy of silence that denied opportunities for public engagement) to the more specialized arenas of academic and expert engagement to, finally, a wide-ranging public arena addressed through monuments, museums, and, increasingly, cultural output such as film, TV productions, and, in particular, literature (Giesen 2004: 141).

For Giesen, cultural representations of the Holocaust have "transferred the issue [of commemoration] to a new institutional arena that tends to overcome opposition and conflicts by the ritual construction of communality" (Giesen 2004: 141). Films, he argues, "present a story and not an argument" – which means that nobody in the audience would argue with the fundamental content and evaluation of the Holocaust (Giesen 2004: 141). There is, however, fierce resistance to cultural representations of the Holocaust in film and literature, with critics such as Berel Lang in particular focusing on the very fact that they "present a story." They argue that only facts can speak for the events of the Shoah and that literature cannot and should not attempt to represent it (see, for instance, Lang 1995: 84–89). Despite their resistance, though, writing about the Holocaust widely has, potentially, had the same effect as the one that Giesen commented on in the context of film. Survivor memoirs have contributed enormously towards shedding more light on the plight of the victims of the Holocaust. In the course of this, though – and this is by no means a criticism of such memoirs – they have contributed towards an iconography in representations of the Holocaust that is, for obvious reasons, victim-focused and that has, by extension, allowed for readers' and viewers' ready but problematic identification with the victims. Identifying with the victims inevitably results in an affective and empathetic response that does not allow for a critical engagement with "the other side," with the causes that led multitudes of Germans to willingly

participate in mass atrocities and genocide. Critics such as Gillian Rose (1996) have, in a provocative response to this, called for "Holocaust impiety": for different forms of Holocaust representation, be it in film or literature, that problematizes and challenges the overly simplified "good" vs "bad," "victim" vs "perpetrator" dichotomy. Literature, and here, in particular, Holocaust fiction, lends itself to do just that: to approach the Holocaust from a variety of angles. This does not mean, as critics of Holocaust fiction have alleged, that "to write Holocaust fiction is tantamount to making a fiction of the Holocaust" (Vice 2000: 1). Rather the opposite. Of course, fictional representations of the Holocaust also "present a story," but they aim to present different "stories," different approaches and perspectives to the Holocaust. Recent years have seen an increase in perpetrator narratives – a term that, in my interpretation, encompasses fiction of actual Holocaust perpetration but also narratives about the "ordinary German bystanders." Prominent recent examples in the latter category are Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room* of 2001 and Audrey Magee's *The Undertaking* of 2014, as well as the both highly acclaimed and critiqued German mini-series *Generation War / Our Mothers, Our Fathers* of 2013. Novels about actual real-life perpetrators of atrocities against the Jews are probably a lot more contentious and consequently still scarce. Prominent examples here would be David Albahari's *Götz and Meyer* of 2004 or Hubert Mingarelli's evocative A *Meal in Winter* of 2012. These narratives depart considerably from the more traditional, victim-focused narrative by offering up accounts about those complicit in the crimes of the Holocaust. They do so not in the spirit of offering exculpation of the perpetrators, but to provide different perspectives. McGlothlin has convincingly argued that "such texts emphasize the humanness of their Nazi protagonists and in doing so complicate the reified image of Holocaust perpetrators that has developed in the decades since the war" (McGlothlin 2016: 253). These narratives can have a destabilizing effect on their readers, conditioned by decades of representations showing Nazis as over-simplified and caricatured Pantomime villains (Rau 2013). Perpetrator texts, in contrast, urge readers to assess both their own motivation in reading Holocaust accounts, and their moral universe. In Rose's words, Holocaust perpetrator accounts leave readers "unsafe," forcing them to look at the events of the Holocaust through different eyes (Rose 1996: 48).

These texts have an additional value: they address the Holocaust head on and do not offer their readers a chance to hide behind generalities. The Israeli political sociologist Ronit Lentin, who has written at length about the fact that the Holocaust tests conventional representational categories, has explained that, for most people, the Holocaust has become a "euphemism, a metaphor, a code," "standing for something that one does not want to hear mentioned" (Lentin 2004: 5 – 6). This means that, while most people have a basic knowledge

of the Holocaust, it is not something that they want to deal with at close range. Matthew Boswell has similarly argued that people are "broadly unwilling to face the horrific content of what happened" – we might know the basic facts, but we do not want to look at them in more detail, and certainly not in a way that asks uncomfortable questions of ourselves (Boswell 2012: 32). And this is where the use of ekphrasis can be such a valuable tool in Holocaust studies: by conjuring up images of the Holocaust – painful, brutal, uncomfortable – it forces the reader to *look*, to address the very thing rather than just think about it as a euphemism or as an abstraction. For Pablo Gonçalo, the importance of ekphrasis lies in the "aesthetic and sensory effects triggered by [...] shifts between languages, media and different materialities" (Gonçalo 2017: 85). Detailed verbal descriptions of gruesome events or atrocities stop us from looking away; they direct our gaze and force us to engage with what is being described for us. As Webb has explained, ancient rhetoricians "define[d] *ekphrasis* first and foremost as a type of speech (*logos*) that has a certain effect upon an audience. An *ekphrasis* appeals to the mind's eye of the listener, making him or her 'see' the subject-matter" (Webb 1999: 11–12). Through ekphrasis, the reader effectively becomes a spectator (Gonçalo 2017: 85) – and, by extension, a participant. The result is that formerly clear-cut identifications are challenged, and, often, the reader has to confront the uncomfortable question, "What would I have done?"

4 Traumatic images in *The Kindly Ones*

Littell uses ekphrasis in his extremely graphic depictions of violence, leaving the reader with terrorizing images that remain long after the novel has been finished. These cover diverse events of the war, such as the traumatic siege of Stalingrad, the execution of civilians and resistance fighters, and mountains and mountains of corpses. But Littell also turns the focus of ekphrastic description on his protagonist Max Aue: readers are constantly confronted with detailed imagery surrounding Aue's bodily malfunctions – descriptions of vomit and shit abound – as well as his sexual preferences, which include anally raping his twin sister on a guillotine or impaling himself on a tree branch while out for a walk. The most prominent and detailed example of ekphrasis comes early in the novel, where ten pages of Aue's narrative are dedicated to a graphic depiction of the massacre at Babi Yar. Between 29 and 30 September 1941, 33,771 Ukrainian Jews were systematically murdered by the Nazis just outside the city of Kiev, with many more Jews, as well as Roma and Russian prisoners of war, murdered

over the following months; estimations now run up to 100,000 victims in total.[3] Babi Yar has become notorious as one of the largest massacres of the Second World War, and, as such, it has been commemorated in a variety of ways: in 1947, the Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg published the novel *Burya* (*The Storm*) which describes the massacre, but his efforts, along with those of fellow Soviet writers and artists who called for a memorial at Babi Yar, were brushed aside in the Soviet anti-Semitic purges of the late 1940s.[4] In 1961, Yevgeny Yevtushenku wrote his celebrated poem "Babi Yar," whose oft-quoted line "No monument stands over Babi Yar," immortalized in Shostakovich's 13th Symphony from 1962, challenged the lack of official Soviet commemoration (Kinstler 2016).[5] D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* from 1981 contains an account of Babi Yar that leans heavily on the eyewitness account of Dina Pronicheva from 1946.[6] While there are, in fact, a number of cultural commemorations of Babi Yar, the massacre is nevertheless not commonly known, nor widely taught – and, in fact, there still is no dedicated monument to mark the site. This is what makes Littell's engagement with Babi Yar so remarkable. In *The Kindly Ones*, the reader is taken, step-by-step, through the build-up to the massacre, following "the flow of Jews" as they line up and slowly walk to the ravine that will become their mass grave (Littell 2009: 123). Littell here plays heavily with imagery to describe the gathering Jews as a "stream of people," as "human streams," "pouring out of all the side streets," and as "streams merging into the river" (Littell 2009: 123). This repeated stream metaphor is an ekphrastic device that helps to draw a picture for the reader: the sheer numbers of Jews assembling, gathering momentum, moving inexorably towards their own destruction, is depicted as an increasing swell of water that rushes unstoppably towards a precipice. However, it also helps to depersonalize the soon-to-be victims. Rather than looking at them as individuals, they are being depicted as a faceless mass. This detached attitude is further emphasized by Aue's focus on the almost clinical procedures he witnesses – "the Jews had to hand over their papers, then their money, their valuables and jewelry, then the keys to their apartments, legibly labelled, and finally their clothes and shoes" (Littell 2009: 124). In the process, the Jews are not only stripped of their possessions but also their individuality. With descriptions such as these, Littell follows the well-trodden part of historical narratives and films, outlining procedures that have become well-known and documented parts of

3 Information taken from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum webpage.

4 See http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/babi-yar.

5 See also http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/babi-yar.

6 See http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/learning_environments/babi_yar/written_testimonies.asp.

the Nazis' machinery of mass destruction. But this is juxtaposed with more evocative imagery – and this time, imagery that literally uses photographs as its starting point. Outside the ravine checkpoint, Aue finds "torn passports, workbooks, union or ration cards, family photos" that lead him to reflect on the "happiness and normality of their lives before all this" (Littell 2009: 125). The "snapshots, studio portraits, of men, women, and children, grandparents and chubby-faced babies; sometimes a shot of vacation scenery" makes him recall his own troubled childhood and his fervent wish for "normality" then (Littell 2009: 125). The photographs remind Aue of the humanity of the very "stream of people" he had tried to strip of their individuality earlier. It is probably unsurprising that his mind wanders. Instead of forcing himself to look at the humans in front of him, he retreats into childhood memories and a traumatic event in his own past. His personal trauma thus effectively overwrites the current traumatic events he experiences and becomes a problematic escape mechanism that stops him from understanding or even engaging with the trauma that he and his fellow soldiers inflict upon the Jews of Kiev.

The focus shifts again: as soon as Aue enters the ravine, the almost industrialized violence that is being perpetrated here stands in the foreground:

> [T]he ravine stretched out in front of me [...]. Boards had been placed over [the] stream so the Jews and their shooters could cross easily; beyond, scattered pretty much everywhere on the bare sides of the ravine, the little white clusters were multiplying. The Ukrainian "packers" dragged their charges to these piles and forced them to lie down over them or next to them; the men from the firing squad then advanced and passed along the rows of people lying down almost naked, shooting each one with a submachine bullet in the neck. (Littell 2009: 126)

Aue paints a quasi-cinematic picture of what took place in the ravine: it provides a distanced description, almost from above, and certainly disembodied, of what went on. Aue's tone is detached and impersonal. At this point, although the descriptions are distressing, they are still within the realm of traditional, realist, and matter-of-fact historical accounts. As in the traditional definitions of ekphrasis, Aue here details what could be seen as the run-up to the actual "battle," the moment when Aue himself will inevitably have to take an active part in the shootings. Yet the detached tone changes as soon as Aue himself starts to take part in the executions and his language reflects his personal experiences: "A very young man was sobbing in pain, I aimed my gun at his head and squeezed the trigger, but it didn't go off, I had forgotten to lift the safety catch, I lifted it and shot him in the forehead, he twitched and was suddenly still" (Littell 2009: 128). The punctuation in this sentence is telling – commas instead of full stops do not allow either the narrator nor the reader to "pause" and contem-

plate what they are seeing/doing/reading; the merging of the very emotive – "sobbing in pain" – with the pragmatic – "I had forgotten to lift the safety catch" – shows the narrator's attempt not to focus on the human aspect of what surrounds him but to turn himself into a machine. He focuses on his task – "to finish off the wounded" (Littell 2009: 128) – even though "to reach some of the wounded, you had to walk over bodies, it was terribly slippery, the limp white flesh rolled under my boots, bones snapped treacherously and made me stumble, I sank up to my ankles in mud and blood" (Littell 2009: 128). Again, there are commas instead of full stops to prevent the narrator from pausing to take stock. The traumatic experience fills Aue with self-confessed "disgust" (Littell 2009: 129) – he refuses to assess the situation he finds himself in and, instead, escapes to a traumatic childhood memory that saw himself assaulted by masses of swarming cockroaches in a small, enclosed space. Aue's narrative becomes increasingly hysterical, reflecting the chaos of the massacre, firing "almost haphazardly at anything I saw wriggling," with other soldiers and officers around him "shaking and drinking between batches," "laughing insanely and emptying [their] cartridge clip at random" (Littell 2009: 129). This scene perfectly encapsulates what Webb outlines as the ancient usage of ekphrasis as a "form of vivid evocation" (Webb 1999: 13). Webb relates this to the ancient form of *energeia*, which she sees "at the heart of *ekphrasis*": an energetic, vivid narrative that results in "a mental impression in the mind of [the] audience" (Webb 1999: 13). Aue's unpunctuated narrative sweeps the reader along; his unmediated trauma at what he takes part in is passed on to the reader. "A successful orator," Webb explains, "must move his audience, must make them feel as if they were present at the events described" (Webb 1999: 13). Littell's ekphrastic narrative strategies succeed in making his reader walk alongside Aue at Babi Yar, and this is particularly prominent in a final example from this section:

> [M]y gaze met that of a beautiful young woman, almost naked but very elegant, calm, her eyes full of an immense sadness. I moved away. When I came back she was still alive, half turned onto her back, a bullet had come out beneath her breast and she was gasping, petrified, her pretty lips trembled and she seemed to want to form a word, she stared at me with her large surprised incredulous eyes, the eyes of a wounded bird, and that look stuck into me, split open my stomach and let a flood of sawdust pour out, I was a rag doll and didn't feel anything, and at the same time I wanted with all my heart to bend over and brush the dirt and sweat off her forehead, caress her cheek and tell her that it was going to be all right, that everything would be fine, but instead I convulsively shot a bullet into her head, which after all came down to the same thing, for her in any case if not for me, since at the thought of this senseless human waste I was filled with an immense, boundless rage, I kept shooting at her and her head exploded like a fruit, then my arm detached itself from me and went off all by itself down the ravine, shooting left

> and right, I ran after it, waving at it to wait with my other arm, but it didn't want to, it mocked me and shot at the wounded all by itself, without me. (Littell 2009: 129 – 30)

This paragraph, with its problematic juxtaposition of the empathetic – the beautiful young woman, her terror and pain – and the distanced – Aue's focus on his own bodily response to disengage himself from the horror he is committing – is deeply affective; it has the exact opposite effect on the reader than it has on Aue. While Aue is trying to distance himself – the fact, for instance, that he describes her head as a mere piece of fruit – this is impossible for the reader. The ekphrastic, vivid description of the scene involves the reader too much. At a personal level, this is the section of the book where my own affective response to the text began to dominate and I stopped reading during my first attempt to get through *The Kindly Ones*. Firmly entrenched on my own ethical and moral high horse, I could not deal with the graphic depictions of blood, guts, and violence in Aue's narrative that seemed unnecessarily detailed. Like the German reviewer, I too, felt that it was almost pornographic in its seeming reveling in violence. Although I had read countless examples of Holocaust memoirs and fiction prior to reading *The Kindly Ones*, I had not been confronted with the same level of sheer violence. Although all of the other texts had engendered a deeply emotive response in me, most were restrained in their depictions of violence, using more factual language, moving on swiftly instead of lingering on blood and violence, or else leaving gaps for the reader to fill in imaginatively. Littell uses no such gaps – he forces his readers to, literally, look and take in everything: the violence, the smell, the hysteria. But, as readers, we do not simply consume this horror – we engage with it; we recoil from it. And it is these processes that make us think.

In the shooting scene of the beautiful young woman, we are not confronted with a "faceless" victim; we get a detailed description – of her looks, of her pain, and of Aue's response to the atrocity he commits. *The Guardian*'s Jason Burke celebrates Littell's use of "narrative photo realism" (Burke 2009: n.p.) that uses text instead of actual images. This "photo realism" perfectly encapsulates ekphrasis in its ancient usage: Littell describes, in painstaking detail, scenes of actual historical atrocity, thus painting a picture for the reader which, in turn, affects the reader and engenders a deeply emotive response. Importantly, Littell also fills a void with these descriptions: after completing the massacre, the Nazis dynamited the site of the ravine to cover up the bodies – but then came back months later to exhume the corpses and incinerate them in mass pits on site. The site of Babi Yar is now a recreational area easily accessible by tram from Kiev. There are no visible markers of the atrocities, no monuments, no memorials, no plaques commemorating the names of the dead (Kinstler

2016). Littell's narrative strategy enables his readers to, in Gonçalo's definition of ekphrasis, "visualize scenes, places, occasions and historical events" (Gonçalo 2017: 85). In the midst of bloodshed and carnage, Littell brings Babi Yar back to life and, in effect, creates a monument to its victims.

5 Aestheticizing violence, or readerly engagement?

Despite this, Littell's overtly graphic violence is troubling. As readers, we are encouraged to walk in Aue's, and, consequently, the perpetrator's, shoes, accompanying him on his killing sprees in what, naturally, makes for very uncomfortable reading. When Aue pulls the trigger, we are right by his side; when he describes the scenes of mass murder, we "see" them with him. Through these ekphrastic images, Littell renews the debate on the "Grey Zone" that Holocaust perpetrator fiction inhabits: it challenges questions of ethics of representations, of what is, and what is not, ethical to depict in Holocaust fiction. This is exacerbated by Aue's repeated assertions to the reader that he is "a man like other men," "a man like you," that he is, in fact, "just like" us (Littell 2009: 24). Many critics have focused on Littell's narrative strategy of presenting Aue as an "everyman," and on his constant interactions with the reader.[7] But it is, in particular, the many appeals to the reader, alongside his affecting depiction of violence, that makes Littell's text so remarkable, and there are a number of possible readings of this.

Reading one might simply be that Littell aims to aestheticize violence in a similar way to other postmodern and experimental novels, such as Ballard's *Crash* or Ellis's *American Psycho*. Critics have commented on Littell's liberal use of graphic violence, and in many instances have seen this as the novel's shortcoming compared to its historical accuracy and painstaking research. For example, Roman Leick, a reviewer for the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*, asks whether Littell's use of graphic violence, often with a sexual undertone, provides "added literary merit? Or [mere] pornographic voyeurism?" (Leick, as quoted in Kuon 2012: 34). For Peter Kuon, it seems to suggest that Littell is caught "between two poles – a commitment to historical precision and the desire for artistic creation" and that he "opts for aesthetics over documentation" (Kuon 2012: 34). This "aesthetics" can take the form and shape of a late twentieth-century splatter movie – the earlier quoted passage, of soldiers "laughing insanely and

7 See, for instance, Hutton 2010: 1–15; Michaels 2013: 915–930; or Meretoja 2016: 371–404.

emptying [their] cartridge clip at random," could be taken straight out of a Tarantino film. As Kuon says, "aesthetics and ethics are in conflict" (Kuon 2012: 42): Littell makes aesthetic decisions – to stage and literally depict violence in a certain way in order to enhance his narrative – that tap into contemporary society's fascination with violence and spectacle. Some critics argue that these decisions could ultimately impact the ethical representation in a Holocaust-based narrative, and thus open up the novel to severe criticism from readers and scholars alike who, in many cases, decry the very fact that the Holocaust is presented in fictional narratives at all. Alternatively, though, Littell's graphic descriptions might get the reader to ask uncomfortable questions about their own readiness to confront traumatic images. Will Self, in his article on the Islamic State executions referred to earlier, states:

> We witnessed the emaciated corpses piled up like broken manikins beside the train tracks that led to Sobibór, Treblinka and Auschwitz-Birkenau; we saw the Vietnamese girl running along the muddy road, naked save for a cloak of napalm; we goggled at the poor souls who flung themselves from the smoking flanks of the twin towers – we've endured an entire lifetime of silence and passivity in the screaming face of annihilation, so naturally we're well prepared to watch a video of a man having his head cut off. (Self 2014: n.p.)

This quote suggests that, as readers and viewers, we have become so accustomed to seeing horror that we do not flinch anymore, that we can distance ourselves and detach from the narrative depicted or described to us. Littell tackles this preconception head-on by confronting us with horror about a topic that has, traditionally, always been approached cautiously.

A second potential reading might explain the focus on violence as an attempt to gain readerly empathy for the protagonist Aue. In her book *Séductions du bourreau, negation des victims*, which predominantly focuses on Littell's *The Kindly Ones*, the French critic Charlotte Lacoste argues that books such as Littell's form part of a perverse new fashion in that they focus on a dangerous equation: if perpetrators are ordinary, as we all are, then we are all, effectively, perpetrators (Lacoste 2010). Lacoste's work looks at the empathy Littell's work could create, which, potentially, would force us to identify with the perpetrators and even exonerate them, a reading which certainly highlights the inherent dangers in over-empathizing with fictional characters. The opening section of *The Kindly Ones* serves as a starting point for this kind of reading: throughout the first 24 pages of the narrative, Aue constantly addresses the reader with uncomfortable questions – "So who is guilty? Everyone, or no one?" – culminating in his provocative statement "but don't think I'm a devil. [...] Those who kill are humans, just like those who are killed, that's what's terrible" (Littell 2009: 19; 24). While this section of the book certainly aims at creating a complicity with the

reader, I would argue that Lacoste's reading is too reductive. It is a provocative opening, certainly; I would also agree that Littell's novel plays with the notion of reader empathy. But I would contend – and I will expand on this below – that this empathy is not necessarily aimed solely at getting the reader to identify with Aue or to exonerate his crimes.

Rather, and this is the third potential reading of the novel, empathy is used to make the reader *question* their own motives in reading the novel in the first place.

In this final reading, the reader asks him or herself a number of troubling questions: Why am I reading this? And, importantly: What would I have done? McGlothlin has stated that texts such as *The Kindly Ones* allow "us to investigate the ways in which texts construct and compel readers' empathic and identificatory responses to their protagonists" but simultaneously warns against oversimplifying this (McGlothlin 2016: 254). Most readers, she has argued, seem to believe that empathy always and inevitably has to be positive, resembling compassion for a character – and this would, of course, be highly problematic when applied to readings of Holocaust perpetrators. As Suzanne Keen has pointed out in *Empathy and the Novel*, "the opportunity to think and feel with those from whom we would ordinarily recoil in horror provides one of the much-touted advantages of fictional world-making" (Keen 2007: 131). Novels foregrounding perpetrators and the violence they committed during the Holocaust thus allow their readers different perspectives and insights. For McGlothlin, the crux of *The Kindly Ones* is "not that such narratives elicit our sympathy in order that we forgive the perpetrators' participation in genocide, but that they ask us to align in various and often uncomfortable ways with their perspective even as we become aware of their violent actions" – and this is certainly a view I would concur with (McGlothlin 2016: 258). For many readers, the violent scenes in *The Kindly Ones* are a deterrent, or something that makes them stop reading halfway through, as I myself did on my first reading. The violence in the novel has the potential to morally enrage, as it does not fit into our preconceptions of what Holocaust writing should and shouldn't do. But that in itself is reductive, too. Of course the use of violence is disturbing and repellent, but it is never an attempt to raise empathy for or understand the perpetrator. Rather, in the words of Emily Miller Budick, "*The Kindly Ones* [...] holds up a dark, distorted, and yet frightening revealing mirror to the field of Holocaust studies itself, which has everything to do with our sometimes prurient interest in other people's suffering and with how we do and do not see ourselves reflected in narratives of the Holocaust" (Budick 2015: 15). The traumatic images in *The Kindly Ones* are important because they force the reader to confront the reality of the

Holocaust instead of dealing with it in an abstract way to protect our own sensibilities.

6 The impact of ekphrasis

Littell's *The Kindly Ones* then indeed "complicate[s] the reified image of Holocaust perpetrators that has developed in the decades since the war" (McGlothlin 2016: 253). It complicates the whole concept of Holocaust representations through its explicit use of graphic violence that appears to break various and probably largely unspoken codes of ethical narrative representations of the Holocaust. Aue, as Margaret-Anne Hutton has commented, "is an *actor* in the Holocaust, but he is also a *spectator* of both others and of himself" (Hutton 2010: 6). But this assessment can be extended to the reader. As Webb has outlined, ekphrasis is characterized by the "psychological impact of the word and the imaginative contribution of the listener" (Webb 1999: 18). Aue *describes* the events of the Holocaust that he himself participates in; he paints a picture for the reader that, of course, includes him. By extension, though, the reader becomes spectator – by reading the novel, by looking at the traumatic images Aue paints for us – and actor – by engaging with the horrors of the Shoah through the very process of actively engaging with the images Aue describes. So, in response to the three potential readings of the novel offered earlier – the anesthetization of violence, the aiming at readerly empathy that could also be a negative empathy, or the focus on readerly engagement with and responses to the novel – I would suggest that there is a combination of all three. In using an ekphrastic narrative to vividly describe violent scenes and by offering us "mental images" and "word[s] as dynamic force" (Webb 1999: 18), Littell certainly *does* frame his violence aesthetically and with artistic embellishments; he certainly tries to put the reader in a position where he or she *has* to engage with the perpetrator's actions in an uncomfortably close manner. Most importantly, though, he addresses us, the readers, directly and questions our very reading of his novel in the first place. As Jason Burke pointed out in *The Guardian*, Littell's "opening sentence – 'O my human brothers, let me tell you how it happened' – recalls, especially in the French original, Charles Baudelaire's: 'Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère'" (Burke 2009: n.p.). Tell me, hypocrite reader, my mirror image, my brother – why are you reading my book?

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Karin Sanders

White Oblivion: Antarctica and the Suspension of Trauma

Trauma is often seen as the accumulation of several events incited and experienced generations apart. In *Trauma Culture* from 2005, E. Ann Kaplan notes, for example, that the shock experience of the twentieth century, with the Holocaust as the crucial event, has prompted a ripple effect of trauma experiences in the personal lives of those born after the fact. The past haunts the present, sometimes as an uncanny repetition, but almost always as a delayed response. At the other end of the temporal spectrum, *anticipation* of a future trauma in the form, for example, of the aftershocks of a global ecological disaster can have ripple effects in reverse. The all-too-predictable climate catastrophe of the future is already ascertainable in a generation that has not yet fully experienced it. Instead of a delayed response to a past event, we find an advance response to a future event.

1 White oblivion

A memoir by English author Jenny Diski (1947–2016), *Skating to Antarctica* from 2005, offers yet a third possibility: the suspension of the effect of trauma in the present. Diski makes use of trauma circumvention by searching for a space of deliberate forgetfulness. To do so, she employs two central images: the first is whiteness and ice connected to a trip to Antarctica, and the second is the so-called Schrödinger's box and the possibility of a *superposition of states*. A suspension of knowing!

The memoir starts with this opening line: "I'm not entirely content with the degree of whiteness in my life. My bedroom is white, white walls, icy mirrors, white sheets and pillowcases, white slatted blinds.... / when I wake, I can open my eyes to nothing but whiteness" (Diski 2005: 1). We soon learn that white is not only connected to Diski's preferred color of interior decorating, but also to her childhood experience of practicing in an ice rink, her incidents of institutionalization in psychiatric hospitals, and finally to a longing for the ultimate whiteness that she hopes to find in Antarctica: "I wanted white and ice for as far as the eye could see" (Diski 2005: 5). Whiteness frames a dark and traumatic childhood, as the past is searched for clues to piece together an acutely painful mother-daughter relationship. It becomes a kind of non-image, an image of ultimate

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(albeit failed) forgetfulness, but also, as the memoir proceeds, a powerful mnemonic. In fact, Diski's obsession with whiteness "seemed to hold out the promise of what I really wanted: a place of safety, a white oblivion" (Diski 2005: 2).

"White oblivion" turns out to be a rather paradoxical image throughout the book, one that is meant as an empty space, un-inscribable, yet one that nevertheless serves as a sponge that draws the forgotten and repressed memories into or onto the book pages. It opens for a particular negative inflection of ekphrastic power, a kind of defiant or reluctant imagery that resists easy or overt visualization. Said differently, the ekphrastic desire to offer some form of clarity by making things visible is troubled by the very restrictions that Diski attaches to her use of imagery. She seeks a whiteout that is, in some sense, also a blackout. Her writing illustrates how images of white suggest not only numbness and absences, but also how this whiteout as blackout makes things sentient and present, not unlike marks of writing on a blank page. Both "whiteouts and blackouts," as Werner Bigell has shown in his essay "Fear and Fascination: Anti-Landscapes between Material Resistance and Material Transcendence," can be seen as "limitations imposed by the material world" (Bigell 2014: 9) and for Diski the white sheets in her bedrooms both at home and at the psychiatric hospital are certainly limitations of a material nature. But what she seeks in the journey to Antarctica is perhaps closer to another kind of limitation inherent in what David E. Nye has called *anti-landscapes*, "[where] human control over the world is limited" (Bigell 2014: 137); Antarctica appeals to her because there is a promise of letting go of control and of searching for answers, a promise of blissful forgetfulness and anesthetizing not-knowing.

To Diski then, white oblivion is a paradoxical space of being, a limbo that is the result of trauma. We learn, for example, about severe psychological and sexual abuse by a mother who emotionally crushed the child until she was saved (as a teenager) by a classmate's mother (none other than the author Doris Lessing, a detail that is omitted from the book). We also learn of a deceased, charismatic, but troubled father, who, like the mother, had violated the daughter.

Much of this information is told by Diski describing her younger self in third person as "Jennifer," a kind of fictional character: "I remember Jennifer with about the same clarity that I remember the young Jane Eyre, Mary from *The Secret Garden*, Peter Pan and Alice" (Diski 2005: 81). Jennifer "retains only a dim inner illumination" to the reminiscing Diski, and is fuzzier than the fictional characters (Diski 2005: 81). Indeed, "she [Jennifer] is far less substantial than Tinkerbell, who can be brought back into existence through the will of others" (Diski 2005: 81). The author's childhood self, then, is precariously porous and difficult to grasp, not least because Diski is missing witnesses or "corroborating evidence for her existence" (Diski 2005: 81).

It is a part of *Skating to Antartica*'s mission to provide these missing witnesses, or at least some of them, as Diski cuts between childhood memories, interviews with old neighbors who knew her (as Jennifer) in childhood, the trip to Antarctica, and finally her own daughter's detective work to find out whether the mentally unstable grandmother, Jennifer/Diski's mother, now absent for three decades, is in fact still alive. The answer is found on the last pages of the book.

2 Wide white horizons

The white is pursued in the extreme, and to reach the optimal effect, the Arctic to the north is not extreme enough:

> The Arctic would have been easier, but I had no desire to head north. I wanted white and ice for as far as the eye could see, and I wanted it in the one place in the world that was uninhabited (never mind the penguins, seals and base camp personnel for the time being). I wanted my white bedroom extended beyond reason. That was Antarctica, and only Antarctica. (Diski 2005: 5)

Antarctica, then, is to Diski the ultimate imaginary, endless and deserted, a place that seems to be the end of the world, a place out of human control, but also one that functions as a foil for the "lost continent of emotional paralysis and disconnection" in her own life, as Maria Flok noted in her review in *New York Times* (Flok 1998: n.p.). In this sense, the ice works as an extended metaphor for Diski. She comes to realize that "oblivion is a place that has no coordinates in time or space" and that "wilderness is not merely a phenomenon of rugged terrain and hostile elements" but can be "a forbidding world within the mind" (Flok 1998: n.p.).

Diski, of course, is not the first writer or artist to see the possibilities in the whiteness of ice and snow as a foil for endless projections. Most famously, Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein, lost on the ice, reflects in ways that must have inspired Diski. At a time of much despair, the icy landscape gave comfort to the troubled scientist:

> These sublime and magnificent scenes [caused by glaciers] afforded me the greatest consolation that I was capable of receiving. They elevated me from all littleness of feeling; and although they did not remove my grief, they subdued and tranquilized it. In some degree, also, they diverted my mind from the thoughts over which it had brooded for the last month. (Shelley 1994: 119)

As Eric G. Wilson suggests in *The Spiritual History of Ice*, "the glaciers are to Victor oblivion, the *absence* of human thought. Their icy movements decenter human cares. They calm anxious men to unthinking stones" (Wilson 2003: 131). Diski, too, seeks to decenter her human cares and turn to the absence of reflection and the numbness that the cold landscape promises. Like Victor, she seeks an "excuse to avoid awareness" (Wilson 2003: 132).

It is possible to track an evolution in human encounters with ice from a spiritual experience to psychological and finally traumatic experiences, with the ice rapidly melting into shock points of our present. In antiquity and up until the Romantic age, ice predominately connoted something demonic, hellish, and deadly. The ninth circle at the very center in Dante's fourteenth-century *Inferno* exemplifies this. Here we find the devil imprisoned in ice with the worst of sinners, condemned and unable to move in their frozen states. Enlightenment's scientific probing of the material world promoted the study of ice crystals in the form of mechanical laws to reveal the extreme delicacy of nature's work, and soon the Romantics discovered in ice a spiritual dimension, and ice started to resonate in works like Mary Shelley's, such as Coleridge's, Emerson's, and Melville's. According to Wilson, ice was seen by many of the Romanticists as a substance not only alive, but in constant tension between transcendence and immanence. Chaotic and calm, centripetal and centrifugal, ice seemed to hold mysterious powers with its own particular vitality.

When Diski makes use of the white ice as a kind of oblivion, this "ultimate otherworld" is already full of images and myths and not just a blank page to be inscribed. For centuries, the Arctic and Antarctica have been seen as beckoning places; the poles became sites for man (rarely woman) to conquer. The sublime chaos of the Arctic and the Antarctic had to be colonized, tamed, named, and checked off as yet another victory for mankind. Nevertheless, the poles remained for many white blank places where "nothing happened" and therefore posed a challenge in their very passivity to the activity of humans, as Robert McGhee has shown in his study of the Arctic as *The Last Imaginary Place*.

To Diski, however, past expeditions to Antarctica remain more mental than physical, and she quotes from a description by a survivor of the doomed Robert Scott expedition to the South Pole in 1912, Apsley Cherry-Garrard, who, in his account *The Worst Journey in the World*, recounts Scott's peevish, depressed, and moody temperament, which was not up to the challenges of his quest – a fact that was silenced in the aftermath of the tragedy. Clearly, the heroes of previous Antarctic quests are not exempt from human weakness. Diski's own journey is decidedly non-heroic and can easily be read as an insistence on questioning or even expunging culturally entrenched celebrations of man's courageous capturing of places that continually and constitutionally (the dangerous coldness)

resist human interference. She does not travel to the vast white continent because of its promise, but because it holds no promise for her – except oblivion.

3 Passivity, abstraction, and anticipated failure

Diski's depiction of the vast continent is not one of clichéd sublimity. In fact, by using irony and caustic dryness, she mostly avoids the risk of turning Antarctica and ice and whiteness into complacent and restorative metaphors for mental pain. While trauma can be seen as a facet of the sublime, Diski rejects the opportunity to use the Arctic sublime as an image of pain. Rather, she expects disappointment in advance, an anticipation of failure and disenchantment rehearsed during her childhood practices at her local ice rink where her mother wanted to make an ice princess of her, but where she instead turned into a very different sort of "ice maiden" (her own term) who retrospectively notes that:

> An ice rink is as a cruel reminder of reality as any that has been devised. It is a surface artificially constructed to be as friction-free as you can get it. [...Yet] [a]n ice rink is a promise made purely for the pleasure of creating disappointment. (Diski 2005: 8)

The ice rink only allows the skater to go around in circles. But the ice, the whiteness, and the repetition also allow for a meditative concentration and forgetfulness. And it is this forgetfulness – *white oblivion* – that Diski seeks to use as recuperation in Antarctica:

> I wasn't in search of life and death, but of what there is or isn't before and after. Changeless stuff. Empty stuff. Oblivion. (Diski 2005: 49)

What she is looking for is not a sense of meaning or purpose, nor some concrete resolution, but the kind of abstraction that Maurice Blanchot has linked to passivity in his *Disaster of Writing*. Writing her memoir is seen not so much as an active recuperation of physical and sensual mnemonics, but as an unclear and ambiguous desire to write in ways of white:

> My motives were as indistinct as the landscape I was wishing to travel to. There was simply an irrational desire to be at the bottom of the world in a land of ice and snow. I wanted to write *white* and shades of white... (Diski 2005: 120)

On the cruise ship that brings her to Antarctica, Diski is thrilled to find that her cabin is entirely white – sparse and undecorated, allowing her both literally and symbolically to sail to the end of the world in her white bedroom. Here she reads

Melville, of course, and cites this well-known passage from "The Whiteness of the Whale" from *Moby Dick* (1851) with its crucial question about whiteness as negation and absence:

> Is it that by its definiteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and intensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation when beholding the white depth of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a colour as the visible absence of colour, and at the same time the concrete of all colours; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows – a colourless, all-colour of atheism from which we shrink? (Diski 2005: 181)

Diski's answer to Melville's question is "yes." But if white is a blankness full of meaning and a color full of all colors, the ice and whiteness of the Antarctica, Diski suggests, becomes both an "intolerable blankness" and a "blank reality" that necessitates a "toying with the void that finally toys with us" (Diski 2005: 183).

It turns out, however, that to travel into this space of passivity and abstractions takes some cunning planning. In fact, just as the urge to travel to Antarctica in the first place is not only deeply inconvenient – as inconvenient, she says, as a "sexual compulsion" (Diski 2005: 4) – actual access to this desired place turns out to be almost impossible to gain for non-scientists. As a last resort, she must turn to a cruise trip filled with aging tourists who are filling their bucket lists with snapshots of the precarious continent.

The arrival at and entry into Antarctica is described via an image of violence. When the cruise ship, after a long passage, finally sails into the ancient, more than ten-thousand-year-old ice sheets, it is seen as an unjustified destruction, a dreadful disturbance of nature's own design, a kind of fractured and violent ekphrastic moment:

> There is something terrible about this, about breaking up the pattern just because we wanted to get beyond it. No real damage was done, but something artful in nature was dislocated. The design was spoiled. (Diski 2005: 215)

The artful patterns, the icy landscape's self-visualizing or self-representation, broken so cruelly by a ship full of photo-clicking and sight-hungry elderly excursionists, is both a poignant image and a sad commentary on the meeting between man and nature. The spoiled design of a heretofore unspoiled nature "pattern" is violent and frightening, a dislocation that folds the narrative of personal trauma together with the narrative of climate change. We do not believe that "no real damage is done" just as we do not believe that Jennifer is not "damaged" by her traumas. Rather, we experience what the American Earth Art pio-

neer Robert Smithson called "that area of terror between man and land" (Smithson 1996: 238). When the land is fluid, malleable, unstable, and risky, "the world is slowly destroying itself," Smithson predicted; in fact, the "catastrophe comes suddenly, but slowly" (Smithson 1996: 250). It is this potential for suspended cataclysm that Diski mines for possible importance. Yet, although Diski feigns a commitment to non-recovery of past trauma, her utterances are soon seen to be (deliberately) unreliable, contradicted by the narrative itself.

4 Superposition of states

The journey to Antarctica is continually cross-cut in the narrative with another journey, a return to the apartment building in London where Diski grew up in a troubled home, gradually stripped of everything: father, furniture, books, until nothing remained but the child's white gloves and an evicted and mentally disturbed mother, whom she loses contact with as a teenager. Throughout the memoir, Diski explicitly pronounces to the reader (and to her inquisitive daughter) that she has no desire to find out what happened to her mother; the grandmother that the daughter has never met. Yet the book is, not surprisingly, crafted precisely around the suspense of what happened. Was she dead? Or was she still alive?

Diski's insists on putting a "lid on" the past, and her refusal to find out about her mother's existence is described by way of the so-called Schrödinger's box:

> Imagine a box, inside which is a flask of hydrocyanic acid, some radioactive material, a Geiger counter – and my mother. The apparatus is wired up so that if the radioactive material decays, the Geiger counter will be triggered and will set off a device to shatter the flask and therefore kill my mother. We set the experiment up, shut the lid of the box, and wait until there is a precise fifty-fifty chance that the radioactive decay has occurred. What is the state of my mother *before* we open the lid to look? (Diski 2005: 22)

The thought experiment points to the so-called superposition of states from quantum theory. It works here as a powerful literary metaphor for suspension of knowledge about the key agent of her trauma. As long as the lid has not been removed and the content has not been observed, the possibility that the mother is alive or dead is equal. As long as the box is unopened, the mother is, in other words, both dead and alive.

Diski prefers this hypothetical model to the psychoanalytical practice that wants to excavate and bring into view the repressed trauma she has endured by her abusive mother. Her desire to travel to Antarctica's whiteness suggests

that she prefers an extended superposition of states. She wants to avoid knowing (avoidance is a classical trait in trauma). No lids are to be opened in a state of white oblivion by this reluctant traveler. "I wanted to be unavailable and in that place without the pain. I still want it. It is colored white and filled with a singing silence" (Diski 2005: 227). Diski's daughter, on the other hand, sets out to open the lid in her mother's absence, as we learn toward the end of the book.

When the author arrives in Antarctica, she is unsure whether she should even set foot there. It is the not-arriving she sees as freedom. Like the not-opening of the lid, not (yet) knowing the fate of her mother, the reader is not told and will never fully know if the author did, in fact, set foot on Antarctica or if she remained in her white cabin. While Diski explicitly insists on a superposition of states, her memoir implicitly leaves it to the daughter to do the work, not in a psychoanalytical opening of the trauma box, but more palpably by opening the archives and finding, at last, the grandmother's death certificate. This transference of power to her daughter to clear the path to the past takes place while Diski herself is ensconced in her white cabin on the cruise ship amongst white icescapes.

As mentioned, Diski makes a point out of navigating clear of conventional psychoanalytical explanations of trauma; she does not subscribe to Freud's so-called royal road to the unconscious, as he calls it in his *Interpretation of Dream*s, nor does she believe in what she sees as an all-too-predictable Freudian notion of trauma effects and affects. Her manifest refusal to see personal trauma as something psychoanalytically recoverable, and her voluntary displacement to a place of white oblivion, are not meant to crack open any kind of trauma to be placated, but rather to maintain the sense of numbed nothingness that is also the consequence of the unopened lid on her own personal Schrödinger's box. Not-knowing gives a sensation of nothingness, an almost narcotic pleasure.

Yet, in spite of this refusal to acknowledge trauma, Diski's narrative, I want to suggest, does the work that the author says she wants to avoid: in spite of the intended *white-out* of the mother, the book gradually lays bare the painful past and, ultimately, offers some kind of resolution. The memoir is quite meticulously structured to allow someone else (the reader, the daughter) to take control over the author's propensity for excesses of white oblivion.

This is perhaps most clearly seen in Diski's explanation for her turn from fiction to nonfiction. She seeks, she writes, another language for the suppression of the painfully remembered. Fiction, as common psychoanalytical wisdom holds, allows us to dip into the subconscious by producing imaginary trials that restore the order of things; that is, fictions can resolve what seems otherwise unresolvable. Yet, traumatized persons, as trauma research (from Freud to Caruth, Fel-

man, and LaCapra) also implies, cannot control their own mental fictions. Diski discovers that nonfiction (and the use of actual agents like her daughter, or previous Antarctica travelers used as historical proxies) allows her to let go of the authorial control that fiction asks from its writers, frees her from the demands of choice and action, of a kind of witnessing from within the very experience itself – as trauma scholars, such as Caruth (see 1995: 10) would say – and permits her to allow someone else to open the lid on the box, trouble the clichéd echo of the silence of whiteness, and finally let the cat – her mother – out of the box.

5 Historical contingencies and visual overlay

There are no deep ecological thoughts to be found in Diski's narrative, but a clear concept of contingency. The way we see and treat nature, she argues, is historically conditional. When the wealthy tourists on the cruise ship hiss at a documentary about whaling followed by "oohs and ahhs of love for nature" as they watch "pictures of whales gloriously breaching, blowing, diving, swimming with their young" (Diski 2005: 131), she sees it as mere hypocrisy and entitlement:

> I like a whale as much as the next person. I'm entirely in favour of animals as well as people being let alone if at all possible. I do not like our ravening *Homo sapiens* way with the world, though of course our *Homo sapiens* way is only more effective ravening than other species can manage. But we had there a boatful of rich folks booing at their wicked forebears for killing something dramatically large [...]. We no longer need whale bones for our underwear or for anything which plastic makes for better. Take away our electricity and petroleum by-products and we would be in the dark and much inconvenienced (Diski 2005: 131).

Therefore, the self-righteousness of the comfortable and privileged cruisers leaves Diski to see them as "a lot uglier" than the whalers "stripping whale blubber with their flensing knives" (Diski 2005: 132).

Onboard the cruise ship, film viewing, like the whaling documentary mentioned above, serves to entertain the travelers. But the projection of historical footage also serves as a kind of dramatic visual overlay of the present polar experience (the cruise ship) with past ones. Here Diski produces a series of suggestive ekphrastic moments. Scenes from former expeditions, such as Ernest Shackleton's to the Antarctic, implicitly invite the comfortable spectators, snugly cuddled in the safety of a well-stocked luxury vessel, to imagine a far riskier endeavor provided by the filmstrips of the ill-fated expedition in the past.

The historical scene, projected from a video version of a brittle film strip by Frank Hurley of the famed *Endurance* expedition, makes Diski reflect that the

film "looked so fragile that we might have been looking at moving, barely moving, pictures of the court of Elizabeth I" (Diski 2005: 132). The footage of the *Endurance* tragically crushed by the ice captures Diski's imagination: "Hurley's moving pictures only got as far as the moment when the *Endurance* finally sank and they took off on the ice floe," but Hurley "kept the moving film of the early part of journey as best he could, but even with modern restoration it looked as ancient as papyrus" (Diski 2005: 132–133).

This simile is telling. It serves both to create a sense of a deep past (as ancient as papyrus) and offers a visual image that echoes her own past, as we shall soon see. Although Diski repeatedly voices ambivalent feelings about visual reproduction, sometimes bordering on disdain, she crafts an ekphrastic image that has all the earmarks of a sublime icescape uncannily similar to the one we know from Caspar David Friedrich's fêted painting *Das Eismeer* from 1823–24:

> The ship beset in the ice was covered with rime, grandiose and monumental, like a sculpture – it's a famous picture, but the movie version of the *Endurance* breaking up, creaking, wailing, sometimes seeming to scream as it buckled at the centre, with the main mast crashing to the deck and the whole thing finally sinking beneath the ice, is heart-stopping. (Diski 2005: 133)

The soundtrack that Diski here adds to the *Endurance*'s demise, the wailing and screaming, obviously does not belong to the original filmstrip, but is either added later in the video representation that she and her fellow travelers watch, or by her own imagination. It adds not only pathos and drama to the scene on the screen, but also anthropomorphizes the ship's pain! Her dramatic audio-ekphrastic description suggests a strong sense of residual and shared trauma with the doomed ship, but also a melancholic pulling of the heartstrings that is deepened when she continues,

> [...] the crew desperately trying to find a way through the closing of the ice. While some men hacked at the edges of the pack to make a split in the floe, others hauled on a rope to drag the ship through the narrow way that had been cut. The film was so frail at this point that the line of the men and the rope between them seemed to bleed darkly into each other, blurring the individuals until they appeared to be umbilically attached to their own shadows. (Diski 2005: 134)

The umbilical cord between the doomed men and their shadows offers an almost ghostly connection to the spectators, who the very "next morning [...] would arrive at the place where, just days later, he [Shackleton] were buried" (Diski 2005:

134).[1] In fact, there is a constant preoccupation in the narrative with a kind of elasticity of time found in photographic capturing. Footage, as Diski shows, can pull the past closer to the present, as happens here, but can also, as seen with the earlier papyrus comparison, make it seem positively prehistoric.

The melancholic scenes from the fragile filmstrip are implicitly juxtaposed with the sad face of a fellow English female traveler, who seemed chronically depressed and with whom it was difficult to have a conversation: "Her face was set as if in perpetual mourning – the first time you saw her you thought she must have learned something catastrophic, a death in the family, and you wondered whether it would be fitting to go and try to console her" (Diski 2005: 134). This "uncomfortably familiar and frightening" visage is etched in the readers mind when Diski, gazing at the infinite reach of the horizon from the cruise ship's deck, is suddenly jolted back to a superposition of states. Reflecting on her daughter's possible discovery of her mother's death certificate, she feels nothing "[...] and then a shock: if she is dead, then she has been alive all those years intervening years, living breathing, sharing the same air on the same planet. Her death would indicate her previous life, and this was quite a disturbing thought" (Diski 2005: 137).

In a single existing childhood photograph of herself and her mother (bringing obvious associations to Roland Barthes's late theories on photography's affecting possibilities), she finds the same blurring of humans and shadows that she saw in the Shackleton images: "Her shadow and mine blur together into a unified shape, as umbilical as the creaky film of Shackleton's roped-together men trying to pull the *Endurance* through the ice floe" (Diski 2005: 149). This deliberate ekphrastic overlay of the *Endurance*'s filmstrip with her own mother-daughter photo adds a historical dimension that pulls the past to the present, and vice versa. It creates proximity, but also distance.

Unlike the emotive singularity of the two umbilical images (the fragile filmstrips and the photograph with her mother), the relentless photo shooting by her fellow tourists of anything and everything they observe is presented as a crass disruption of the visual silence that Diski craves. Although she admits that *not* taking any photos on such an astonishing journey would be "perverse," she nevertheless shudders at the constant "snapping off film like there is no tomorrow" by everyone else. The apparatus is quite simply in the way of vision. You "can't see if you're always composing what is in front of you" (Diski 2005: 145). This explicit suspicion, even hostility, toward photography (she sees it as a form of col-

1 Shackleton did not die in connection with the *Endurance* calamity in 1915, but of a heart attack on a later expedition in 1922.

onizing) is ultimately embodied in the "most offensive person on the trip," (Diski 2005: 146) a tactless Scandinavian professional photographer, who rudely elbows and commandeers everyone around while aggressively shooting off his camera. His constant recording leaves no possibilities for white oblivion.

Diski's resistance toward the visual noise of her co-travelers and their over-eager and aggressive picture-making echoes her expressed reluctance toward fixed imagery in general. It seems that aggressive picturing is a way of "colonizing" emotion. Consequently, the affects that are attached to her painful and traumatic memories of the past cannot be visualized in a stabile form. It cannot be a crude snapshot, nor a simple ekphrastic representation. There is a slipperiness in the use of images that indicates a hesitation in committing to picturing the past in any manifest way. Instead, the erasure and quietude suggested in "white oblivion" points to a kind of transparency, a ghost-like shadow-play like the umbilical images where the unified shape of the mother and daughter echoes Shackleton's stranded men on the ice floe, holding on to their mothership.

6 Out of whose womb came the ice?

It is telling that Diski includes in her narrative the stanza, written on a single page, that Shackleton saved from his bible after sacrificing all excess equipment in order to travel as lightly as possible. On the page, the words of Job read:

> *Out of whose womb came the ice?*
> *And the hoary frost of Heaven, who hath gendered it?*
> *The waters are hid as with a stone*
> *And the face of the deep is frozen.* (Diski 2005: 133)

The icy womb would appear to take on a three-layered meaning here, including not only the biblical foreboding and the Shackleton calamity, but also the cold womb that Diski sees herself deriving from. Such a relatively heavy-handed symbolic reading, however, seems at odds with the memoir's insistence on the far more elusive and complex metaphor of Schrödinger's box and the dogged assertions of ambivalence.

Diski's childhood trauma is a disaster that cannot be written, but must be written nonetheless. "The disaster," as Maurice Blanchot proposes in *The Writing of Disaster*, "is related to forgetfulness – forgetfulness without memory, the motionless retreat of what has not been treated – the immemorial, perhaps" (Blanchot 1986: 3). Diski seems to agree. Yet even if disaster, pain, and trauma cannot

be articulated, we are obliged to, indeed we must and we do, write (about) it, as Blanchot also implies. It is this paradox that Diski enunciates so eloquently in *Skating to Antarctica*.

The Antarctic remains a paradox: it brings pain by extreme coldness, but also numbness and relief. Being there, in this space of ice, is like being on drugs, we read; it offers a narcotic immobility in which Diski cannot remain, but nevertheless must seek out. Although she explicitly and deliberately tries to stay detached, Diski's stronghold and reserve is ultimately softened during her journey to the cold continent, and she is ready to acknowledge on her return, when her daughter asks her, "'Good to know about your mother at last, eh?'/ 'Mmm. Yes, I think it is'" (Diski 2005: 240).

Ultimately, Diski's dogged insistence on whitening out the dark story of childhood abuse is futile. What I initially called a third possibility in relation to trauma, the suspension of its effects, is seriously troubled at the end of the memoirs when the not-knowing of the fate of Diski's mother finally turns to knowing and the lid of the Schrödinger's box is opened. The mother can no longer be both dead and alive. In fact, as her granddaughter finds out, she died on March 28th 1988, and thus had lived more than twenty years after Diski last saw her: "that is, been alive all the time while I had been living my life" (Diski 2005: 232).

The shock for the author is not the realization of her mother's death, but the fact that she had been alive for so long: "it was as if the painting of my past had acquired a shadow, a new presence, separate but lurking darkly around corners in the doorway [...]. And instantly the past looked darker and more cluttered than I had pictured it up till then" (Diski 2005: 232). Subsequently, the image of white forgetfulness turns out to be a rather speckled and polychromatic textual tapestry brimming with heretofore repressed or untold stories. White oblivion, then, is not a functional non-image after all. It cannot suspend the narrative of trauma; it cannot maintain the superposition of states.

At the finish line, the "retrospective possibility that she [the mother] *might have* made contact" (Diski 2005: 233, my emphasis), and consequently *might have* continued to traumatize the daughter for another two decades, is deeply disturbing. But the excavated death certificate finally brings some measure of clarity and ultimately purges the desperate need to not-know, eliminates the suspension of trauma, and prompts a curative ending: Diski can finally conclude that to be "really orphaned" is also to be "really safe" (Diski 2005: 233).

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