



# Introduction

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Recent philosophy is increasingly pluridisciplinary. Philosophers have combined existential phenomenology’s approach to “life” with contemporary neuroscience, psychoanalysis, and, occasionally, aspects of social work. Interdisciplinary work has weakened parochialisms, promoting a perspectival approach to questions of trauma in their complexity. The chapters in this volume combine disciplinary influences. In one case, psychoanalysis and critical theory confront each other. In another, clinical practice is supplemented by social advocacy; in still another, ethnographic fieldwork is analyzed by cultural-formation theories. And yet, each chapter also implicitly commits itself to the assumptions and discoveries proper to its particular disciplinary expertise. Gregg Horowitz’s chapter, for example, works with psychoanalytic theory; this field of inquiry, of course, draws from two principal sources: the psychoanalytic consulting room and the now vast corpus of metapsychology. While Horowitz is not a practicing analyst, he is a sensitive theoretician. His metapsychological exploration of trauma is supplemented by two practicing therapists, Judith Herman and Sandra Bloom. This is one of many textual crossings in the volume. The overlapping and dialogue between the chapters evince clarity and insight. Beyond complementarity, however, we have sought to bring differences and delineations to the multiplicity of voices in the book.

Anthologies have explored trauma from the perspectives of literary criticism and clinical psychology.<sup>1</sup> We find collections of anthropological perspectives on trauma in different contexts.<sup>2</sup> However, no trauma anthology has appeared that is both pluridisciplinary yet philosophical in its primary emphasis. *The Trauma Controversy: Philosophical and Interdisciplinary*

*Dialogues* fills this lack. The chapters in this volume are organized according to the following rubrics:

1. "Trauma and Theoretical Frameworks: Psychoanalysis and Phenomenology"
2. "Trauma and Bodily Memory: Poetics and Neuroscience"
3. "Trauma and Clinical Approaches"
4. "Trauma and Recent Cultural History"
5. "Afterword"

Those who have followed attentively the unfolding of trauma studies are likely aware of the enduring difficulties that have beset the field, resulting in theoretical "localities" analogous to the patchwork of a quilt. We do not presume to have gathered all the areas of this quilt; nor do we claim that the problems posed by trauma can be definitively resolved. Nevertheless, the divisions of this volume explore the crucial areas of the metaphoric quilt's contemporary composition. Findings from divergent disciplines entail contrasting epistemologies and envision different objectives; here, many of them prove interconnected in decisive and surprising ways. Above all, it is thanks to the depth of each contribution that viewpoints arise around shared interstices. These confrontations open to novel appraisals, because the tensions between them are not reduced.

## Part 1. Trauma and Theoretical Frameworks: Psychoanalysis and Phenomenology

The chapters in this first section, by Gregg Horowitz, Sara Beardsworth, and Kristen Brown Golden, evince the necessity and fecundity of pluridisciplinarity. By asking what sort of loss can be identified in the analysis of trauma, Gregg Horowitz and Sara Beardsworth offer pertinent strategies for avoiding the common conflation of trauma and loss. The fortuitous joining points that reciprocally confirm their definitions of trauma, its collapse of present experience, and its fundamental difference from sustained loss amount to an important distinction.

While loss is essential to what is called trauma, the concept has suffered undue inflation recently, with concomitant, sometimes perverse, effects: reactive channeling of grief into violence, promises of ready healing. It is therefore essential to sketch an analytic of loss itself. For the latter is tied to grief and omnipresent in childhood development. But this loss is not comparable to the devastation of trauma.

Working with Freudian theory, Gregg Horowitz examines loss as it relates to the dialectic between the dual authorities of the sufferer, whose

experience only she knows, and of metapsychology, an expertise reserved for the psychoanalyst. Freud's famous patient, Dora, suffered from latent-dream thoughts, "those thoughts we spend our days and nights not believing." These are structured by a dialectic of knowing and not knowing, at whose heart, explains Horowitz, rests an internal authority. The motivating wish of the sufferer is easy to understand: "'I want my mother's love' or 'I must have my father's approval.'" Now, the problem is not that the sufferer does not know this. It is, rather, that her internalized authority refuses to believe it. Horowitz thus shows that in the psychoanalytic situation, the key to suffering lies not in knowing its source, as was long argued, but in reversing the sufferer's resistance to disclosing it to herself.

Horowitz makes a distinction between loss, which "happens to people" and is constitutive of a developmental history, and trauma, which "eviscerates the prospect of any development of a psychical structure that might measure it." By distinguishing trauma, which he calls "the persistence of the injury itself," from loss, the reemergence of a past "in and as fresh experience," Horowitz shows that with loss, one remains bound by a demand that is itself incomprehensible: not to disclose that which one understands but refuses to believe. Trauma, by contrast, is "an all-too-obvious force"—intrusive, overwhelming—that one has seen time and again. It is temporally explosive—unbinding past, present, and future and wrecking chances for experience. Loss may be incomprehensible, but unlike trauma it has available to it the temporal mediations requisite to normal development or recovery.

That we distinguish between losses that threaten the personality and losses typical to normal childhood development and the course of adult life is crucial for understanding trauma. Structural losses like that of the infant–mother bond are generally not traumatic. In most cases, they should be set apart from the persistence of injuries that disable development or everyday well-being. If the problem unleashed by mistaking trauma for a normal disruption is for Horowitz a valorizing "of violence that blunts the demand to see traumatic suffering," the problem for Sara Beardsworth is that, at the level of culture, it cloaks a forgotten loss, whose forgetting catalyzes nothing less than the onset of modernity.

Beardsworth sets the question of trauma into cultural criticism. Although Beardsworth agrees with Horowitz that the tendency to conflate trauma and loss is a mistake, she asserts that the confusion of loss and trauma is more than mere cognitive error. Her chapter carefully reveals a hitherto overlooked historical development binding loss and trauma. This, Beardsworth writes, correlates with a sense of unconscious guilt in modern subjects. It exhibits the symptoms of trauma, but is the result of a very peculiar social loss: the loss of a loss, or forgetting of a loss. Grounding her ideas in the social analyses of Freud and Kristeva, Beardsworth asks whether trauma in modern subjects is

a historically conditioned structure, or an originary one innate to the human condition. In a creative rendering of Freud, she argues that the emergence of the modern subject is accompanied by the forgotten internalization of an authority whose loss is suffered unconsciously—only to be acted out.

Using Freud's metapsychology to examine the experience of the "absolute loss" (of the mythical father-prophet) that founded Jewish religion by binding the Jews to the demands of a repressed authority, Beardsworth explains that this bind was made possible by "what religion does not know, what it forgets." These developments are isomorphic with a subject whose past, present, and future are integrated, but which come undone at the threshold of modernity. A "forgetting of the loss" or loss of loss coincides with the beginning of modern subjectivity, in the aftermath of the "death of God." This loss of loss, Beardsworth argues, is a trauma whose structure is not originary, but genealogical. It is triggered by a shift, in the modern subject, away from a premodern faith in God to an Enlightenment faith in science, thus exposing a sense of guilt from a past event to which we are tied, that we have not experienced, and which will not pass.

For Beardsworth and Horowitz, effective approaches to trauma require that we distinguish suffering and depression tied to loss, from those psychic and physical disabilities that find no possibilities for discharge or sublimation. These two authors take important steps toward showing what constitutes the psychoanalytic constant called trauma.

The psychoanalysis of trauma is supplemented critically by Merleau-Ponty's approach to embodied communication. By showing that very simple organisms and simple parts of more complex bodies, such as cells, are a basis of communication, Kristen Golden reveals surprising similarities between a human body's response to physical trauma and its response to psychological trauma. Reinterpreting Merleau-Ponty's earlier ideas of human perception in light of his later ideas on communication, Golden explores the way communication is enacted by animal bodies that are structurally open to their environs and continually renegotiating and signifying their "self" and milieu. Merleau-Ponty's 1957–60 lectures show very simple animal organisms open to their surroundings. This openness, Golden emphasizes, reveals that the boundary of the "oneself" in animals is never static, but actively created in an ongoing negotiation, the very process of which makes possible a continual demarcating—a pointing to and signifying of—an inside and an outside, a "oneself" and a "beyond oneself." This corporeal negotiation of "self" and other shows the body existing as and at the root of communication. Communication happens as "interrogation (movement) and perception (response to movement)," which Golden compares with more complex communication such as human language.

By showing that communication is itself rooted in bodies that are anatomically adapting to changes in their surroundings, including drastic

alterations such as wounds, Golden discloses the relevance of this model of adaptation with respect to complex communication (i.e., human language), when responding to the wound of a psychological trauma.

She draws on insights from contemporary neuroscience to show that the human body's complex systems of temporality and language, normally present in experience, actually shut down during a traumatic event. If it is worthwhile, perhaps even imperative, to create a narrative in the trauma's aftermath, then any attempt to narrate the event "truly" is not a rendering of the trauma as trauma, but a linguistic adaptation incidental to the trauma "itself." To confuse the traumatogenic narrative with the trauma itself is to misunderstand the extremity of trauma, and its contraction of anything resembling experience. Nevertheless, like a blind man who reconstructs the contours of his perceptual body to include the stick, so too the traumatized must newly create himself or herself. This often involves new practices and narratives concerning one's embodied self-regard, one's religious and ethical self, and one's self in relation to human communities. Golden's chapter roots communication in corporeity—in examples of surface wounds, neurological injuries, and traumatic violations of animals and humans. Inspired by Merleau-Ponty's investigations, she shows that psychic and physical injury share a dynamic schema: they struggle, even "want," to renegotiate the borders of "self" and milieu, both in the course of daily life and following its interruption by calamity. Although human language can be differentiated from less complex forms of animal communication, the borders between mind and body, human and nonhuman, self and surroundings are more permeable than is typically believed. On the other hand, the distance between trauma and a traumatogenic narrative is greater than generally assumed.

## Part 2. Trauma and Bodily Memory: Poetics and Neuroscience

Horowitz and Golden introduced the difficult questions, Can trauma be expressed as a narrative? What sort of meaning is required in order that a narrative convey an extraordinary experience—of time (as pure intensity), other people, and circumstances? In trauma, an experience comes to pass that is so extreme that it outrips discursive and representational resources. Nevertheless, we insist, without extensive reflection, on speaking about trauma as an experience, as though it belonged to an existential logic that could be mastered, if not by one, then by several discourses. Clearly, experience as meaningful "collapses" in cases where our ability to symbolize and represent it is severely diminished. Does that mean that, unlike loss, what we call trauma stands outside experience and cannot be justly presented in discourse, much less literature?

Many have argued that the metonymous “Auschwitz” refers to a complex, unrepresentable event: the Shoah. But “events” like Auschwitz, “Srebrenica,” “Kigali”—because they surpass categories like unity, plurality, much less simple narrative time—cannot be experienced in the framework of a representational model. Further, they overflow classical phenomenology (Husserl) and its constructivist intentionality. Such events must be experienced according to a different time structure and through continuous enhancements of interpretation. But that implies that extreme trauma, in the form of historic “events,” does not simply pass; it repeats and transforms itself in repeating, much the way Freud’s repetition “complex” evinced a destructive plasticity.

As Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, a philosopher in our second section, has argued, “Auschwitz” is still to come; not past, not present simply, but present and to come like waves or hauntings. Sara Beardsworth showed that the twentieth-century subject lives with an obscure sense of guilt, inaugurated by an unrepresentable past. This event, which we today have yet to “experience,” both passes through us and yet will not simply pass away. For Dobbs-Weinstein the repetitive and overwhelming quality of trauma provokes a host of other responses—some escapist, some sublimatory—all of which show a peculiar obsession: sustained efforts to force the unintelligible toward intelligibility. Her chapter seeks to expose—not resolve—the ambiguity of the terms “trauma” and “experience,” and their relation to poetics and narrative.

Recalling her embodied childhood memory of the poem “City of Slaughter” by Hebrew national poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik (1873–1934) rather than consulting an official published version, Dobbs-Weinstein illustrates a specific or “singularly material” experience. She remembers Bialik’s portrayal of a husband peering “between the cracks to witness female relatives’ sexual brutalization by the Cossacks (during the Kishiniev Pogroms of Easter 1903). Bialik’s poem—or Dobbs-Weinstein’s singular memory of it—describes the temptation to react to a traumatic event by retreating from its material specificity into some form of ideological or legal refuge. Dobbs-Weinstein focuses not on the brutalized women, but on the observer. Witnesses in Bialik’s depictions observe a trauma, and strive to control it by escaping into religious practices or intelligible legal structures. None of these proves adequate to the event.

Through her remembrance of Bialik’s poetry, Dobbs-Weinstein provides a concrete critique of those disciplines and juridico-cultural institutions that lure us to forget unintelligible experience by forcing it into everyday forms of meaning, like the language of neurosis or of simple “torts.” Her work stands in opposition to over-optimistic therapeutic outlooks on trauma as a treatable “condition.” It eloquently conveys the complicity and cruelty of people who “get on with the ‘business of life,’” unaware of the danger and

present barbarism fostered by the failure to remember Auschwitz. In so doing, they ensure that it is not past, and provide insidious nurture to the strange haunting that Auschwitz unleashed.

Dobbs-Weinstein's tone follows Adorno's, and rests on the fact that Auschwitz can and, in a sense, is happening still: people today fail to remember the singular experiences exceeding the understanding on which "all experience today depends." Above all, Dobbs-Weinstein communicates dismay at what is lost of the crime when it is translated into dominant discourses, structured by hopefulness and redemption—or brought before tribunals, whose reparative justice turns on the presumption that human experience is perspicuous. And yet, is there not intimated, in the despair expressed in poetry—or in the narrative remembrance of horror's materiality, some fragile hope, as Charles Scott seems to believe? He wonders whether Dobbs-Weinstein's bare effort to communicate does not conceal more hopefulness, at least in our material life, than, say, the promise of redemption on which the optimism of faith in a world depends.

Upon reading Charles Scott's "Trauma's Presentation," the other chapter in this section, it is difficult to imagine a position more at odds with Dobbs-Weinstein's. We have placed Dobbs-Weinstein and Scott together in this section not because of their approaches, which have little in common—Scott's argument draws on neuroscience while Dobbs-Weinstein's has recourse to "screen memories"—but because they unfold a stark polemic. Dobbs-Weinstein's reflections express steady outrage at the pervasive human tendency to deny the material specificity of horrific ordeals. Scott's chapter presents trauma as modes of indifference—to persons, and by persons to trauma. He sees in the indifference or "anesthesia" of traumatic response, a source of resilience and healthy forgetting, rather than Beardsworth's forgetting of a loss or the work of unconscious guilt evinced by Dobbs-Weinstein.

Scott and Dobbs-Weinstein agree that traumatic experience is senseless and conceptless. However, rather than criticize the modern subject's inability to attend to suffering's specificity, Scott depicts four ways trauma presents itself as a kind of indifference. One mode of trauma's indifference is an insensitivity to the injuries of others made possible by distance. "It's awful but it's not my face being shot away or anyone's in my immediate proximity." He unflinchingly describes this reaction to traumatic events when seen from afar, as in photographs and newspapers or on television.

For Scott, another kind of indifference and senselessness displayed by trauma results from physiological processes arising from trauma's disturbance to the body. When it perceives a life threat, the brain's limbic system, the seat of emotional and survival behavior, alerts neurons "to prepare for drastic action." The hypothalamus sends the autonomic nervous system into overdrive, resulting in signals conveyed "to all crucial organs, flooding

the bloodstream with special chemicals and hyperactivating neurotransmitters. Respiration and heart rate increase and provide more oxygen for muscles.” This survival response typically produces a discoordination between the amygdala (the seat of instinctive memory) and the hippocampal function (which converts short-term memory into long-term memory). That means that traumatic experience “knows nothing of time or place,” and could not begin to do so. In light of this, trauma is neither a loss nor a symbolizable excess.

One is fortunate if the traumatic disturbance ceases with the incident. Often this is not the case. Trauma’s physiology produces what Scott calls a “prereflective memory trace.” One of trauma’s cruelest and most threatening effects is precisely that trace, when triggered in the aftermath of the event. There it simulates traumatic experience including its own peculiar nontemporal and nonpositional orientation, reissuing the trauma as if it were present. But this is not the trauma that “was then at that place.” This recapitulation joins Gregg Horowitz’s psychoanalytic delineation of trauma.

In Scott’s most uncanny simile, he reminds us that the somatic response to trauma in humans is like that in mice and alligators. Our limbic system’s survival behavior is ancient and closer to “reptilian conditioning than human sensibility.” When a traumatized limbic system dominates, whether during or after the incident, “a measure of sensation that is without [the resources of] reasonable or communal expression” fills us. This fact results in two additional kinds of indifference. The first happens in stress disorders, when intrusive memory traces appear after the event. They display the indifference to time and place discussed earlier, and which appears “in blind inappropriateness to given circumstances and in destructive noncoordination with the abilities of social consciousness.” The second indifference is patent in resilience behaviors including forgetting, according to which a trauma victim cultivates an attitude of indifference to the traumatic event, and its repetition of reptilian limbic awareness. “[T]raumatic memory does not have to make a major difference in our lives,” Scott argues. Despite trauma’s prereflective physiology, its speechlessness, inappropriateness, Scott is not pessimistic about the ineradicability of physical memory. The physiology of trauma not only replicates the claims for the excess of trauma over discursivity, it argues for the efficacy of corporeal memory and the possibility that it can be surmounted. Emphasizing the indifference of traumatic human events to human values, Scott exhorts us not to sentimentalize or anthropomorphize trauma; as a corporeal inscription, the question of its expression and communication is not primary: there is a simplicity to trauma that is lost in its construction as an object of psychological hyperscrutiny.

Just as traumatic memory is itself “without differentiation, neutral in its disposition” and in this sense, is indifferent, “it can be forgettable



and without consequence in processes of living. Its memory is sometimes expendable.” Here Scott forms perhaps the most striking moment of polarity, not only with Dobbs-Weinstein, for whom forgotten trauma jeopardizes all experience, but also with Beardsworth, for whom it distinguished our entry into modernity. In concluding his arguments Scott cites Mark Twain, who “knew, I believe, as he moved on in his life, that there is a diminished future in projects that continually return to past losses.”

The reptile analogy that the human limbic system offers Scott, and the material critique that Bialik’s poetry affords Dobbs-Weinstein, confirm the mal-alignment implicit in the imposition of therapeutic or juridical frameworks on trauma. This attention to the ineradicable, discursive “differend” between victims’ speech and legal or therapeutic discourse was not lost on Lyotard in his discussions of the burden of proof placed on victims by deniers. Nevertheless, phenomenology and psychoanalysis draw their material from everyday practice, are obliged to work with inadequate representation, and are themselves aware that trauma overflows attempts at representation. It is thus the case that both theory and practice confront starkly, if differently, the overwhelming character of trauma. In the matter of trauma “therapies,” psychology and psychiatry are required to revisit certain assumptions, including that of “doing no harm,” which poses a significant challenge to practitioners.

### PART 3. Trauma and Clinical Approaches

Our third section presents the accounts of two pioneers in trauma therapy: Judith Herman, M.D., and Sandra Bloom, M.D. Working critically with the psychophysiological symptoms today called “PTSD” (post-traumatic stress disorder), Bloom and Herman discuss the paradox evinced in the theoretical section. For them it is of pragmatic proportions: how to work through the impasses when the will to know (that of the therapist and/or that of the victim) collides with the abyss of representation and the protean character of traumatized affect.

Herman’s chapter concentrates on the problem of memory in the aftermath of a crime, describing it as a dialectic between knowing and forgetting, which leads to confusion. This confusion besets not just victims, to be sure, but bystanders as well. She compares this with Daniel Bar-On’s study of children of Holocaust survivors and children of the Nazi SS. Parallels between the crime study and the memories of both groups prove striking. Notably, none of the adult children initially remembered any discussion among their families about their parent’s victimization by, or participation in, mass killings. One man, whose father drove a train for the Nazis, insisted his father had never transported humans. When met with skepticism by Bar-On, his interviewer, he asked his father for more information. At their next meeting, the son reported that his father at first denied, as he always

had, transporting Jews, much less having knowledge about Nazi activities. When pressed again, however, his father confessed to having been informed of these activities at the time. And then the father disclosed a tale he had never recounted before: once while on duty, he witnessed a mass shooting of war prisoners on the platform immediately before him. Bar-On interviewed the train driver's son a year later and he had no memory of his father's story of the shooting. With this example, Herman illustrates the conclusions Bar-On draws from this and many similar cases. They evince a "double-wall erected to prevent acknowledgment of the memory of a crime. The fathers did not want to tell; the children did not want to know." This disparity between knowing and wanting to know rejoins Horowitz's distinction between knowing and believing. As an illustration of the psyche's defense mechanisms, it complements Dobbs-Weinstein's censure of the "desire to subdue material experience by reason."

Herman's chapter chronicles the past one hundred years of discoveries leading to what she calls "the common denominator" of trauma: terror. In a discussion that parallels Scott's, Herman argues that trauma is the result of "intense fear, helplessness, loss of control and threat of annihilation" (citing Nancy C. Andreason), a definition also supported by studies in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM IV*. Terror, she explains, is an altered state in which the conditions for perceiving, paying attention, and arousal shift dramatically. People in a state of terror lose awareness of time and "peripheral detail," but become fastened on "central detail"; with the narrowing of attention comes dissociation and "profound perceptual distortions including insensitivity to pain, depersonalization, derealization, time slowing, and amnesia."

Scientific inquiry into, and public openness to, ideas about trauma have flowed unevenly, Herman reminds us, like sets of waves arriving with each major war, forcing the issue; only to recede again, the backwash giving way to scientific or grassroots backlash. With each generation of war veterans, she writes, psychiatrists reencounter the same lesson: when the survivor sets the indelible trauma images and sensations into narrative, their perniciousness dissolves. She credits the women's movement of the 1970s and 1980s for bringing to public awareness the breadth of domestic violence, incest, and rape and for framing these as human rights violations with direct parallels to political crimes that "perpetuate an unjust social order through terror."

A longtime advocate for victims of violence, Herman describes the mid-1990s as the height of controversy over the accountability of perpetrators. Research about adult recollection of childhood memories and a spate of legal cases about incest and rape, based on the integrity of recovered memories, emerged as a heated debate for American citizens, therapists, and scientists alike. Since then, more has been learned about standards for verifying

adult recall of childhood memories in the therapeutic consulting room. Nevertheless, divergent discourses must be acknowledged: standards of evidence for clinical encounters, scientific research, and juridical courtrooms need to remain distinct. This does not make it easy for the therapist or bystander when called on to stand as witness in the courts. Like most persons, writes Herman, “we are not very brave” and would “rather live in peace.” And “like the son of the man who drove the trains in wartime, we are reluctant to know about the crimes we live with every day.”

The writing of this introduction coincides with the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. For every successful event that takes place in New Orleans, like the 2007 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, there are countless other stories of outrage and neglect. When Kristen Golden visited the city recently, she saw a man wearing a T-shirt that said “Screw Iraq. Save New Orleans.” Expressing a local sentiment of desperation and anger, the slogan indicated a perception that U.S. leaders and the country’s general population have largely ignored the city’s ongoing plight, all the while keeping their attention on Iraq and funneling untold dollars toward the war effort. If New Orleans schools are any indicator, it is apparent how far the area needs to come in restoring its health. Two years after the horrific flooding, “less than half of the original public and private schools have re-opened.”<sup>3</sup> In the most impoverished areas blasted by Katrina, the percentages are much lower. However, despite the magnitude of the Superdome and Convention Center crisis, now years ago—and the daily ordeals of those trying to live in New Orleans in Katrina’s aftermath—many across the nation have effectively “gotten on with their business.” If, early on, many were caught up in the dialectic of “wanting to know while unable to believe,” as with so many social disasters, the pendulum of public sentiment has swung decisively toward Horowitz’s “disbelief” and Herman’s “wanting to forget”—even as the event persists, like an imperfect tense, like a future. As philosophers Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Luc Nancy have done, Herman urges therapists and bystanders to envision the discursive enactment of trauma as a moral and aesthetic call, however difficult, and to “accept the honor of bearing witness and [to] stand with [patients]”—despite personal and institutional frustrations.

Sandra Bloom is also a psychiatrist and a longtime advocate for victims of violence. Her chapter begins with a compendium of statistics such as: one in two Americans will undergo an event widely experienced as “traumatizing”; 25 percent of those traumatized will develop PTSD; 50 to 70 percent of persons who are raped (and one among every eight American women are) or physically assaulted (one among every two women are) will sustain PTSD. Given the pandemic exposure of Americans to traumatizing experiences, Bloom asks why more attention is not paid to trauma, which opens a parallel between individual and social psychology. She hypothesizes

the likely interconnection between individuals organized by their traumatic experience and larger social contexts (groups, political events, institutions of employment); that is to say, the probability that these become replicated on a broader scale. These “trauma-organized systems,” she indicates, reenact “for individuals the very experiences that have proven so toxic for them.” Is there too much speculation involved in mapping how trauma affects individuals onto broader social contexts? The question was put to Freud, as Beardsworth is aware. Nevertheless, given the pervasiveness of trauma in our culture, it is clear that insights emerge when we view social groups through Bloom’s lens of “trauma systems.” She argues that not to pursue the parallel is like ignoring “an elephant in the middle of a small room.”

In a fascinating account of the evolutionary biology of the human response to stress, Bloom shows that the benefits it provided humans over most of our evolutionary existence now appear as a source of great harm to us in our recent species history: an industrialized global society. Using paradigms of neuroscience and human stress studies similar to those provided by Kristen Golden, Charles Scott, and Judith Herman, Bloom discloses further aspects of a nonvolatilizable core to trauma; notably, the action of the limbic system, responses from the autonomic nervous system, and the cancellation at a physiological level of time-consuming activities such as speech and reasoning, even of the temporality of the body itself. Hyperarousal is an evolutionary adaptation that protects even as it isolates persons, and perhaps groups, from therapeutic communicative options.

Bloom assumes that all human systems, whether of individuals, small groups, or nations, are structured by parallel trauma processes. In times of cultural stress, decision making and political leadership adapt their forms according to what resembles the physiological fight-and-flight response. Rallying around a figure who appears to be decisive or strong, the group allows decisions to be made more unilaterally, experiencing “pressure . . . to conform to standards of cohesion.” Bloom then argues how, in stressful situations, the strategies devised to benefit a group become systems that simulate the rapid, prereflective response behaviors seen in hyperaroused individuals. To illustrate this, Bloom examines the social and political trauma around the World Trade Center’s destruction and its aftermath. Defining the post-9/11 context of the American population besieged by political rhetoric as a “trauma-organized system,” Bloom shows how the proliferation of media images and hyperbole not only fostered mass fear, but aborted the difficult process of grieving, and thrust it into a two-stage war that served the economic interests of a minority.

Bloom’s examination of the manipulation of discourse and images, which foreshortens the work of grief, returns us to the question of the overdetermined nature of trauma and the search for intelligibility raised by Horowitz, Beardsworth, and Dobbs-Weinstein. While Bloom’s observations preceded

debates that have since become more widespread, her parallel examination of personal and public trauma, and the relationship between mourning and the manipulation of our urge to escape its suffering, are pertinent.

The question of trauma's social ramifications and its use by political and economic institutions also poses the question of the determinations of trauma itself as an "epistemology." There is little doubt that trauma has multiple cultural determinations. But are we entitled to argue that the very concept of trauma is itself determined by contemporary Western culture? If we take a cultural-anthropological tack (itself a creation of the nineteenth-century West), we must acknowledge the contemporary growth of a symbolic-cultural industry of trauma. Does that justify arguments that something like a trauma-constant evaporates when we recognize the relativity of cultural symbols and practices? Is there no core to trauma, then? Horowitz already cautioned us against inflating trauma, showing how we can avoid mistaking developmental loss for traumatic loss. Scott warned against a drive to symbolize that overlooked the adaptability of the body. What insights can we gain from cultural anthropology? In the first place, it is attentive to the social varieties of response and sublimation, not to mention their limits and specificity. But cultural anthropology, beyond its attentiveness to the specific societal conditions that mediate traumatic experience, confronts the question of how to think that to which diverse societies are responding. If there is no eluding the paradox of discursive reenactment of traumatized affect, then there is no escaping the necessity of symbolization and restructuring of groups' traumatic experience.

#### PART 4. Trauma and Recent Cultural History

Some anthropologists make the opposite claim. A conceptual and disciplinary monolith, trauma must be dismantled. Yet contemporary discourse about physiological "memory" and arguments for extradiscursive, yet psychic, memories are the products of late capitalist cultural constraints. Their source calls for critiques of the kind Foucault addressed to psychiatric practices and institutions. Anthropologist Michael Lambek argues that the "experience" of trauma makes little sense outside this particular cultural configuration. If North America stands as the apogee of medical and objectivist constructions of traumatism, the deployment of North American discourses creates insuperable tensions when imposed on cultures whose traditional practices are delegitimized in the process. The violent histories that form the context of many anthropological endeavors oblige anthropologists today to approach "trauma" from a critical and nondeterministic perspective. What would a logic, broader than that afforded by trauma as a medical or therapeutic object, require to study the lived experiences, say, of Cambodians who survived the Khmer massacres?

Archaeologists Michael Galaty, Sharon Stocker, and Charles Watkinson show that the repeated invasions, politico-cultural hegemony, and collective suffering that characterize recent Albanian history offer us an example of resistance and partial healing. While the Communist Albanian Party of Labor under Premier Hoxha essentially refashioned Albania's landscape architecture, with an uncanny proliferation of more than seven hundred thousand concrete bunkers reinforced by layers of steel, they did not foresee that these bunkers would be reappropriated to form the most apparent symbol of an Albanian recovery of the past. The spontaneous popular transformation of the mushroom landscape includes the preservation of memory and a surprising reflex toward humor. Bunkers have been turned into cafés, others demolished, while still others are preserved as miniature museums.

With the bunkers, the authors also analyze a large, eighteen-centuries-old Roman-period block. They trace the block's architectural and symbolic history from its origin as part of a Roman-period *bouleuterion* in Apollonia, a Greek colony in ancient Illyria (modern-day Albania), to a position of prominence in the nineteenth-century church of Shëndelli in the Shtyllas valley. It was rediscovered, fortuitously intact amid the rubble, when the church went the way of most churches and mosques in Albania in the 1960s and 1970s: razed by local communist parties. By the time Galaty, Stocker, and Watkinson visited the site of Shëndelli in 1998, the block had become the centerpiece in an outdoor sanctuary for worship and religious practice by Christian and Muslim villagers living in Shtyllas, a mile away. Many of the villagers were related to or themselves political dissidents forced by Hoxha to resettle in this rural area. The block's heritage, connecting its Roman and then Christian ancestry with religious practices outlawed by Hoxha, combined to make it a symbol of popular survival. Galaty and his coauthors suggest that the block has "become a key element in an invented local tradition, one that joins the past to the present and, in the context of resistance, refers back to local, rather than central, systems of government." Like the bunkers today, the block, surviving significant mutations in tradition, has become a material symbol of a societal history of trauma and resistance.

On the basis of fieldwork, Galaty, Stocker, and Watkinson have tried to ascertain how much these symbols preserve cultural memory. They show the efficacy of adaptable architectures to combine resistance, memorialization, and irony. Is this not a unique cultural therapy directed toward the undeclared condition we deem "trauma"? The multilayered symbolic status of the bunkers and the block—two examples of mnemonic "emblems" scattered across cultural geographies—is in transition. Everything suggests that the transition is not gratuitous. But to what extent can they be said to be monuments to a collective traumatic experience? How can their evolving status be characterized justly if anthropologists, theorists of diverse

stripes, and therapists insist on a North American model of trauma and determine the appropriate measures for its “redress”?

Indeed, many remain unaware that a philosophy contemporaneous with the greatest ethno-social cruelty in the twentieth century contains elements influenced by early trauma theorists. Reviewing the context of Heidegger’s complicity with National Socialism, Eric Nelson shows that Heidegger’s 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics*—the standard readings of which agree it endorses, or at least provides the philosophical resources for promoting, a policy of social violence—requires a more complicated reading. Nelson first outlines Heidegger’s unpardonable alliance with National Socialism at its apex between 1933 and 1935. But he argues that the lectures of *Introduction to Metaphysics*, which were given after Heidegger resigned from his Nazi appointment as rector, mark a hitherto overlooked turning point in his thinking about violence. In writings such as *Beiträge (Contributions to Philosophy, 1936)* and others from the later 1930s, Heidegger’s philosophy attempts to take distance from the values of National Socialism. Recoiling before the German drive to war, he decries the “biologism, gigantism, racism, worship of power, [and] frenzied commitment to the total mobilization of society.”

Nelson reminds us that the theoretical source of National Socialism’s momentum were the ideas of Ernst Jünger and Carl Schmitt, the basis for which was a romanticizing of the “traumatized life.” Jünger valorized soldiers who had endured traumatizing experiences under fire, during World War I, and envisioned mobilizing the masses of an entire nation based on the soldiers’ example, as having existed in a state of constant mobility, homelessness, and threat to their lives. Jünger’s vision parallels Bloom’s social psychology discussion of traumatic systems: their unbridled reenactment of physiological mechanisms of shut down and response, and unwitting simulation in larger organizations. With Jünger, the replication is romantic, and for us, unacceptable; but it points to the impact on philosophy and literature of large scale traumatization.

Schmitt, who became the Third Reich’s leading jurist, theorized creating a state of emergency on a national scale by hyperbolizing the external and internal threat of enemies. This macrocosmic parallel to the terrorized individual facilitates the rise and acceptance of an overbearing leader. Like that which Bloom mentions, the emerging leader, preeminent symbol of protection, is permitted to make rapid decisions for the populace, conveniently circumventing democratic deliberative processes.

If Bloom has grave misgivings about the adequacy of our evolutionary stress responses—adaptive mechanisms with an astounding success story for tens of millennia—to do much else, in an industrialized global context, than harm us when surreptitiously stimulated in large groups, Heidegger, Nelson suggests, had increasing doubts, through the 1930s, about the compatibility

of his reflection on violence and that of the National Socialists. By divulging a generally overlooked aspect of Heidegger's view of *polemos* in Heraclitus and Nietzsche, Nelson shows Heidegger conceiving strife as an originary mode of human being. If the source of the sense of alienation and overwhelming rests in the experience of the human individual, then Heidegger provides the "basis for a critique of the self-assertion of egos and races." By indicating that the source of our unease is constitutive of human existence per se, Heidegger "throw[s] into question" the motives for intrahuman conflict and positions his reflections on violence in opposition to Schmitt's, for whom conflict between human groups "is always justified as the essence of the political."

Nelson's striking reading of Heidegger's view of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* as a genealogy of trauma highlights Heidegger's growing rift with the National Socialist agenda. National Socialism's response to violence is like Nietzsche's life-denying priest, who fails to respond to the wounds of violence or trauma, except to reinscribe and deepen them by leaving them "unencountered and unquestioned." For Nelson, Nietzsche's genealogy traces the transformations of trauma, or one might say a series of traumatic origins. One such traumatic origin is human beings coming to understand themselves as things. In this sense of self-reification they see themselves constituted by a certain unchanging rational nature. After citing a history of torture and cruelty that makes humans into calculating beings, and the legacy of revenge and resentment convoluting trauma, violence, and love, Nelson cites Nietzsche's "gruesome paradox of a 'god on the cross', that mystery of the inconceivable, final, extreme cruelty and self-crucifixion."<sup>4</sup> For Nietzsche, the permutations of suffering and trauma, Nelson argues, are rooted in human "practices and institutions." Thus, Nelson joins Beardsworth's social genealogy.

The celebration of the human "traumatized life" by Ernst Jünger and Carl Schmitt presupposes self-reification as a cultural practice, something that Heidegger's philosophy of being—typified by uncanniness, strife, and dispersion—ultimately put into question. Nelson argues that, in the 1930s, Heidegger was searching for ways to "let the wound appear as a wound." He was asking philosophically, "Could being wounded call forth a response that recognizes its wounded character?" The blind reactions, specific to many violent behaviors, appear perpetrated against a falsely constructed enemy by a falsely reified self. According to Nelson, if Heidegger's conception of existence is characterized by anguish and conflict, overwhelming a coherent human subject, then Nazi war and genocide, made possible by imagined selves and enemies, exposed Heidegger and others' failure to respond appropriately to the strife following World War I and the demise of Weimar. Nelson's study brings to light the reactivity that Heidegger's philosophy embodies, and then questions. Now, while Nelson and Beardsworth link trauma



to social and institutional developments dating back centuries, Bettina Bergo focuses on its emergence in the recent history of psychoanalysis.

Some ethnographic epistemology relativizes psychiatric and psychological aspects of trauma. Part of the self-critiques of Western theories of experience and knowledge, it negotiates a path between a suspicion about trauma as experience *eo ipso* and a critical nuancing of trauma as an epistemic object. Above all, it is not clear that the ethnographic critique dissolves the possibility of trauma having a dual, psychic and physiological, core. Because cultural practices exert a determinant impact on the interpretation of experience and its transmission, understanding this impact calls for a critical history of psychoanalysis and psychiatry. Bettina Bergo's study of Freud's evolving approach to trauma as hysteria complements the ethnographic chapters by adumbrating Freud's own struggle—first to dissociate hysteria from gender and anatomy and place it within a traumatogenic context; thereafter, to distinguish hysteria from war trauma. Freud's deliberations were based on his work with Charcot at the latter's veritable trauma factory, the Hôpital de la Salpêtrière in Paris. It was Charcot, then Freud, who first revealed the cultural conditions sufficient for trauma to appear in women and in men as hysterical paralyses, aphasia, and lesionless "epileptic" attacks. Bergo argues that the contemporary diagnosis of PTSD resulted from historical transformations in the medical conception of male and female physiologies. Paradoxically, Freud gradually left hysteria behind him as a disorder tied to traumatism to return ultimately to more traditional gender distinctions following World War I. The strange career of the nineteenth-century condition called "hysteria," the displacement of traumatism (in women) from wombs to memories (in men and women) fostered a thirty-year debate around the differences between neurosis, "shell shock," trauma, and genders. In so doing, it had transformative repercussions first on the Central European cultural imaginary, and thereafter on the discourse of contemporary psychiatry.

Bergo's chapter shows trauma requiring that certain cultural ideas about human psychology and biology be in place in order for it to appear conceptually and experientially. If this is true, then what can we learn about trauma from the mutations in its interpretations?

## PART 5. Afterword

The collection has brought to light three major themes, which it approaches pluridisciplinarily. First, it presents and evaluates arguments for the persistence of a dual core in trauma; that is, a physiological and psychological core. Criticism from ethnographers and psychiatrists working with trauma victims raise questions concerning the social variations in and translations of this traumatic "core." Second, despite difficulties in the construction of

trauma as an object of knowledge and clinical practice, the chapters show that there is a dialectic between individual and social trauma. This dialectic cannot be reduced to developmental or cultural experiences of loss. Third, the volume presents arguments against the appropriation of trauma by discourses of redemption or reductive impositions of “meaning”; some chapters show how these blunt the extremity of trauma. Nevertheless, without psychologizing literary expressions of or philosophical approaches to it, we can study symbolic responses and compare cultural sublimations of trauma.

The afterword by Michael Lambek critically reviews each of the chapters in the volume from a cultural-anthropological analytic of discourse. Taking a broader stance than either Bloom or Galaty and his coauthors, Lambek investigates the conditions under which scientific and literary ideas unfold and spread. In his view, a concept and experience of trauma can hardly make sense independent of a particular cultural configuration, North America’s, for instance, with its scientific, medicalized, and objectifying approach to suffering. “Objectifications, like Frankenstein’s monsters, sometimes take on a life of their own and may even contribute to the very effects they were designed to suppress,” he writes. It was in order to check such a “Frankenstein effect,” that we invited Lambek to write the volume’s postscript. Lambek’s fieldwork in Madagascar has shown how memory, often traumatic, is a cultural and moral practice. Its great interest lies in the flexibility with which Lambek moves between ethnographic specialization and epistemologies of practices in many cultures.

Perhaps the most striking of his commentaries comes in a story of Canadian aid workers in northern Uganda. Lambek describes workers “busily diagnosing and treating PTSD among children” who had been torn from their families and forced to participate in brutal massacres. The irony is that PTSD presupposes a return to social conditions whose “normal” state is stable and secure. While stability is culturally important, such a therapy is irrelevant to cultures caught in cycles of civil war and economic disintegration. By concealing the unrest, do aid workers unwittingly “collude in its effects and possibly even with the structural forces that lie at its origins?” Lambek underscores the looping effect that occurs between a subject being “kinded” (i.e., categorized as “traumatized”) and what a subject believes about how he or she is treated due to being so kinded. Wary of literal “trauma,” Lambek urges theorists and practitioners of trauma to ask how a discourse of “trauma” spreads. Combined with Bergo’s historical approach, Lambek’s argument shows that, without a secular, medicalized conception of suffering in therapy—and a cultural imagination capable of receiving it—PTSD could not congeal into a class of disorders set apart from its symbolic context.

The volume thus begins with Gregg Horowitz specifying trauma, not to reify “it” but to explain its distance from developmental losses. It closes with

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Lambek, skeptical about unilateral historic and epistemic categorization. Our purpose throughout is to open unanticipated dialogues between disciplines and encourage stances that encompass conclusions drawn from psychiatry, philosophy, ethnography, and therapy.

## Notes

1. See Linda Belau and Peter Ramadanovic, eds., *Topologies of Trauma: Essays on the Limit of Knowledge and Memory* (New York: Other Press, 2002); and Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

2. See Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler, eds., *Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, eds., *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

3. Amy Liu and Allison Plyer, "A Review of Key Indicators of Recovery Two Years after Katrina," in *The New Orleans Index* (New Orleans, LA: The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program and Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, 2007), 13.

4. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maude-marie Clarke and Alan J. Swensen (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1998), 1:8. The first number refers to the treatise, the second to the section.