TRAUMA AND MEMORY

2016/10/11
Outline

• Review & 3 Questions (History & Memory): Caruth vs. LaCapra
• Postmemory and Postgeneration: Discussion Questions
Review – Caruth’s views of Trauma: from Experience to History

• Experience not assimilated, experienced belatedly:
  • “not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (Caruth 1995: 4-5).

• Memory and Deferral/Repetition
  • “Memory originates its own deferral and also its later repetition.” (2014: 21)
Issues (1): Two Kinds of Memory

1) How do the traumatized “remember” their trauma? E.g. the burning child
2) Revisiting the past compulsively;
3) The haunting of an unresolved past history/memory;
   - Traumatic memories
   - Narrated memories

“Traumatic memory is inflexible and replays the past in a mode of exact repetition, while narrative memory is capable of improvising on the past so that the account of an event varies from telling to telling” (Anne Whitehead TRAUMA FICTION 87).
“Acting out” vs. “Working through”

- Applies to **both survivor and secondary witness** (or historian)
- **Acting out**— "undecidability and unregulated différance" [of the middle voice] threatening to disarticulate relations, confuse self and other, and collapse all distinctions, including that between present and past, are related to transference and prevail in trauma and in post-traumatic acting out in which one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes… (LaCapra 21)
- **Working through** – “one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one (or one’s people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future. (22)
“Acting out” vs. “Working through” (2)

• This does not imply either
  • that there is a pure opposition between the past and the present or that
  • Acting out…can be fully transcended toward a state of closure or full ego identity.

But it does mean that the processes of working through may counteract the force of acting out and the repetition compulsion.

Working through--

When the past becomes accessible to recall in memory, and when language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical distance and perspective, one has begun the arduous of working over and through the trauma…(90)
Issue (2) – Caruth’s views of **History as Trauma**

**Crisis in History or Truth:**

- If PTSD must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much **a symptom of the unconscious**, as it is **a symptom of history**. The traumatized, we might say, carry **an impossible history** within them, or they **become themselves the symptom of a history** that thy **cannot entirely possess**. (Caruth 1995: 5)

**History as Erasure + Archive Fever**

- “Between the shock of the memory that effaces and the shock of the discovery of this memory, **is the event of an erasure**, and of **a history**, that carries the name of the **death drive**, which is also archive fever, because it is made up of memory and is about memory, it is about the burning desire for memory and the history of its burning up.” (2014: 21)
Issues (2): LaCapra -- Loss vs. Absence

• the loss is of a specific object caused by, or causing, a historical or individual trauma,

• vs. absence (together with its narrativized forms, such as loss of innocence, full community and unity with the mother), which is more fundamental and “transhistorical” (or structural), signaling the absence “of/at” the origin that appears in different ways in all societies and all lives (Writing History 77).

• Historical Trauma vs. Transhistorical Trauma
Issues (2): LaCapra – Consequences of Confusion?

• “When absence [or lack] is converted into loss, one increases the likelihood of misplaced nostalgia or utopian politics in quest of a new totality or fully unified community. When loss is converted into … absence, one faces the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia in which any process of working through the past and its historical losses is foreclosed or prematurely aborted” (LaCapra 46).
Issues (3): From Trauma to (Others’) Memory

2) How do we understand/witness trauma, or a traumatic event, as by-standers or simply outsiders?

(e.g. Caruth: *Hiroshima mon amour* mediation —— traumatic memories triggered by bodily/verbal connection with another person with another trauma—at the moment of their forgetting

→ testimony as an inter-subjective process; transmissibility of trauma

→ inaccessibility/Otherness of others’ trauma (despite its visibility) [avoiding over-identification with, appropriation of, others trauma]
How does Hirsch define post-memory? What are the two types of post-memories?

What types of “structure” of post-generational transmission of trauma does Hirsch discuss?

How do we read “histories” out of archival photographs? Or photographs of child victims on a newspaper?

How do the theories we’ve read so far shed light on the cultural/literary works you have in mind?
POSTMEMORY

Past Lives, 1987
(Image source), LORIE NOVAK

Marianne Hirsch
1) 31:59
2) school children’s photo
1) HIRSCH, MARIANNE. “PROJECTED MEMORY: HOLOCAUST PHOTOGRAPHS IN PERSONAL AND PUBLIC FANTASY.”
2) “THE GENERATION OF POSTMEMORY.”
“Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy.”

• Main Point:
  • Images of Children not only as victims but also as witnesses
  • (15) “It is my argument that the visual encounter with the child victim is a triangular one, that identification occurs in a triangular field of looking. The adult viewer sees the child victim through the eyes of his or her own child self. ”
  • E.g. Past Lives; Dori Laub’s reading of Menachem S. in Testimony
Three Photographs

Warsaw_Ghetto Boy
Anne Frank
“Past Lives”
Stadium and Punctum p. 10
Note on the Photograph

1. The children of Izieu - the Jewish children hidden in a French orphanage in Izieu who were eventually found and deported by Klaus Barbie.

2. Ethel Rosenberg's face -- a mother of two young sons, was convicted of atomic espionage and executed by electrocution together with her husband Julius Rosenberg.

3. In the background of Novak's composite image is a photograph of a smiling woman holding a little girl who clutches her mother's dress and seems about to burst into tears. This is the photographer Lorie Novak as a young child held by her mother. Novak was born in 1954 and thus this image dates from the mid-1950s. (Hirsch 5-6)
Interpretation of the Photograph

• “If it is a drama of childhood fear and the inability to trust, about the desires and disappointments of mother-child relationships, then it is also, clearly, a drama about the power of public history to crowd out personal story, about the shock of the knowledge of this history: the Holocaust and the cold war, state power and individual powerlessness” (Hirsch 6)

• It reveals memory to be an act in the present on the part of the subject who constitutes herself by means of a series of identifications ... It reveals memory to be cultural, fantasy to be social and political.

• The second-generation memory of Holocaust
Post-Memory

• Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through projection, investment, and creation. This is not to say that survivors’ memory itself is not mediated but it is more directly connected to the past.

• Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth ...
Post-Memory(2) – Lines of Relations

• It is a question of adopting the traumatic experience of others as one’s own life history. It is a question of conceiving oneself as multiply connected with others of others of the same, of previous, and of subsequent generations, of the same and of other-proximate or distant-cultures and subcultures. It is a question, more specifically, of an ethical relation to the oppressed or persecuted other for which postmemory can serve as a model: as I can “remember” my parents' memories, I can also “remember" the suffering of others, of the boy who lived in the same town in the ghetto while I was vacationing, of the children who were my age and who were deported. (Hirsch 9)
Post-Memory(2) – Lines of Relations — Issues

• -- Can identification “resist appropriation and incorporation, resist annihilating the distance between self and other, the otherness of the other” (Hirsch 9) ?

• -- heteropathic identification (identification at a distance) in which the self and the other are more closely connected through familial or group relations.

• -- e.g. Camera images: past received in present tense

• e.g. “Past Lives?”
Identification but not Over-Identification

• The challenge for the postmemorial artist is precisely to find the balance that allows the spectator to enter the image, to imagine the disaster, but that disallows an overappropriative identification that makes the distances disappear, creating too available, too easy an access to this particular past. (H 10)
Testimony

• ...as Laub's own account demonstrates, the image projects the viewer, the subject of “heteropathic" memory, into the position of the child witness and thus into speechlessness. (20)

• As my reading of Felman and Laub's texts suggests, in the right intertextual context, in the hybrid text, the image of the child victim can produce the disruptive emotion that prevents too easy a resolution of the work of mourning.(21)

'This essay will be based on this enigma of one child's memory of trauma"
“The Generation of Postmemory”

1) not structure of identity, but structure of transmission of memory

Definition: “The “post” in “postmemory” signals more than a temporal delay and more than a location in an aftermath. …We certainly are, still, in the era of “posts,” …Postmemory shares the layering of these other “posts” and their belatedness, aligning itself with the practice of citation and mediation that characterize them, marking a particular end-of-century/turn-of-century moment of looking backward rather than ahead and of defining the present in relation to a troubled past rather than initiating new paradigms. Like them, it reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture. And yet postmemory is not a movement, method, or idea; I see it, rather, as a structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a consequence of traumatic recall but (unlike posttraumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove.” (2008: 106)
1. Memory & Postmemorial work

1) Why Memory? [Is memory transmittable? Can we empathize with “the pains of the others”?]

-- post-memory defined

-- “Postmemorial work …strives to reactivate and reembody more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression.” (111)

-- photography as an indexical link, or “living connection,” to the past (111)

2) Why the Family? Maus as an example – the use of public image/memory

• Familial structures of mediation and representation facilitate the affiliative acts of the postgeneration. (115)
Outline

3) Why Photographs (archival, as an inscriptive memorial practice that retains an incorporative dimension 117)

“We look to be shocked (Benjamin), touched, wounded, and pricked (Barthes’s punctum), torn apart (Didi-Huberman), and photographs thus become screens—spaces of projection and approximation and protection” (116-17)

4) Why Sebald? (Maus & Austerlitz) – the gazes of familial and affiliative postmemory

• “Austerlitz: as a German, he also shows how the lines of affiliation can cross the divide between victim and perpetrator postmemory.” (119)
Photo as Authentication

The maternal image and the “Prisoner” insert solidify the familiality of Maus’s postmemorial transmission and individualize the story.
Perfomed Screen Images

From a Nazi propaganda film The Fuhrer Gives a City to the Jews.

- The familial aspects of postmemory that make it so powerful and problematically open to affiliation contain many of these preformed screen images. What more potent such image than the image of the lost mother and the fantasy of her recovery?
Punctum and Stadium

• Barthes’s discussion of a picture by James van der Zee

“[Barthes] realizes that ‘the real punctum was the necklace she was wearing; for (no doubt) it was this same necklace (a slender ribbon of braided gold) which I had seen worn by someone in my own family.’” (123)
Works Cited


