

The Horrors of Trauma in Cinema

The Horrors of Trauma in Cinema:
Violence Void Visualization

Edited by

Michael Elm, Kobi Kabalek and Julia B. Köhne

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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

THE HORRORS OF TRAUMA IN CINEMA

JULIA B. KÖHNE, MICHAEL ELM
AND KOBI KABALEK

This anthology is the product of the international interdisciplinary conference, “The Horrors of Trauma: Violence, Re-enactment, Nation, and Film,” that took place at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beer Sheva, Israel, in May 2012. The volume explores the multifaceted depiction and staging of historical and social traumata as the result of extreme violence within national contexts. It focuses on Israeli-Palestinian, (former East and West) German and (US) American film, also examining broad issues of ‘trauma’ depiction in films from other countries (France, Great Britain, the former USSR and others).

Contributors to this volume come from Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Israel/Palestine, Italy, the United States of America, and Argentina. Their research covers a wide array of disciplines including history, sociology, psychology, Jewish studies, Middle East studies, film and media studies, trauma (in cinema) studies and gender studies. The articles are directed toward academic readers of different levels as well as non-academics interested in interpretations of mainstream and avant-garde movies and documentaries dealing with the ‘horrors of trauma.’

In *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960), the film theorist Siegfried Kracauer analogized the silver screen to the shield of the ancient Greek mythological hero, Perseus.¹ To avoid a direct confrontation with the petrifying stare of the gorgonian monster, Medusa, Perseus uses his shield as a mirror. As her horrifying image is reflected in his polished shield, it is – in this mediated form – no longer deadly. Thus, Perseus is

¹ Siegfried Kracauer, “Das Haupt der Medusa,” in: *Theorie des Films. Die Errettung der äußeren Wirklichkeit*, Inka Mülder-Bach and Ingrid Belke (eds.), vol. 3, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 467-469.

enabled to decapitate her. Her head becomes a weapon and is put on an aegis to frighten enemies. The volume, *The Horrors of Trauma in Cinema: Violence – Void – Visualization*, follows both aspects of the mythological tale and its interpretation. Cinema serves as a shield/screen offering pathways to insight into dreadful scenes of actual horror, cruelty and violence without petrifying our bodies. As such, film is a powerful and liberating media because it allows us to ‘incorporate’ unsighted horrific scenes in our memory, to ‘behead’ or distort the horror it mirrors, and to influence the discourse about violent events in real life.

This volume examines these functions of cinema within the quadrat: violence, trauma, nation and self. A variety of films, premiering between the 1960s and the 2010s, ranging from documentaries and feature films to independent cinema, will be analyzed. The approach of the volume is to ask which modes of representation – regarding narration, dramaturgy, aesthetics, *mise-en-scène*, iconology, lighting, cinematography, editing and sound – film holds as a medium to visualize shattering experiences of violence and their traumatic encoding in individuals or collectives, bodies and psyches. What historical insights and cultural perspectives does the medium of film enable in tackling the question of traumatic impact? The contributors analyze the discursive transfer between first, historical traumata necessarily transmitted in a medialized or theorized form, second, the changing landscape of (clinical) trauma theory, third, the filmic depiction and language of trauma, and fourth, official memory politics and hegemonic national-identity constructions. Special attention is given to horror aesthetics and trajectories as a way to re-enact, echo and question the perpetual loops of trauma in the creative artefact film.

Several books similarly approach the nexus of ‘trauma,’ horror and mediatization, for example, Adam Lowenstein’s *Shocking Representation* (2005), Linnie Blake’s *The Wounds of Nations* and Elisabeth Bronfen’s *Specters of War. Hollywood’s Engagement with Military Conflict*. Lowenstein concentrates on the horror genre and its capacity to visualize traumatically affected systems by analyzing horror classics like *PEEPING TOM* (1960), *ONIBABA* (1964), *LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT* (1972), and Cronenberg’s movies and their link to the Vietnam War, Hiroshima/Nagasaki and other man-made catastrophes. Just as Lowenstein, who sees cinematic horror as a vehicle to articulate and communicate the horrors of history in alienated form, Blake retells the history of violence – from the Second World War to 9/11 – via filmic artefacts. Exploring the connection between horror cinema, historical traumata and nation-building, she states that film can be a multiplier, distributing psychological and academic knowledge about “traumatic events such as genocide, war, social marginalization or

persecution.”² Bronfen’s *Specters of the War* makes a contribution to cinematic trauma discourse by stressing the role of Hollywood war films conducing to circulate the fascination with war as certain ideologies, fears and fantasies accompany it on a cultural level. The visual material serves as a looking-glass rendering US-American traumatic war history perceptible in a certain way that depends on the changing political climate.

Our volume, *The Horrors of Trauma in Cinema*, deepens the ongoing debate about ‘trauma’ and cinema by paying special attention to the circular structure of horror and ‘trauma’ from a transnational and cross-genre perspective. ‘Trauma’ pervades all genres and national borders. Traumatic histories travel through a multitude of diverse cinematic genres, enriching them with horrific narratives. In this volume, ‘horror’ refers to the intense feelings of fear, shock and disgust that are associated with ‘trauma’ and which the films examined represent as significant moments. In some cases, these films directly adopt or quote rules of the horror genre, while in others, reference to this genre is less obvious, though with markedly similar effect. Horror standards have clearly been an intrinsic part of the greater film culture since the invention of film. Storing and communicating parts of traumatic histories – belonging to singular psyches or the ‘collective unconscious’ – motion pictures from a variety of national backgrounds succeed in rewriting or re-presenting history, transcending their ascribed diegeses, as well as narrative frames and classical interpretative limits. Rather than limit examination of the films herein to their particular national contexts and sociopolitical milieus, this anthology shall portray them as flexible carriers of meaning open to perpetual revision and reevaluation from ever changing interpretative positionings.

Violence – Void – Visualization

The abovementioned countries, in particular the United States, Germany and Israel/Palestine, were ‘impregnated’ by different traumatic experiences, including extreme and overwhelming violence, shock, concussion, and distress, as they were shaped by atrocity, war, genocide, catastrophe, and other man-made disasters. Therefore, they have often been referred to as “traumatized societies,” “trauma cultures,” (E. Ann Kaplan) and “wound cultures” (Mark Seltzer), or otherwise associated with the phrases “politics of terror and loss,” and “pathological public

² Linnie Blake, *The Wounds of Nations: Horror Cinema, Historical Trauma and National Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

sphere.”³ Yet it is rarely reflected in-depth that the term and conception of ‘trauma’ was actually transferred from (clinical) psychology onto the socio-cultural and national spheres. The articles in this volume thus examine the application of the trauma conception as an analytical tool to investigate the production of “cultural meaning” (*kulturelles Deutungsmuster*)⁴ and meaning-making within the social body in light of the connections between traumatic structures and films’ diegesis and between trauma language and film language.⁵ Subsequently, the filmic ways to adopt, imitate, transform, process, or ‘work through’ experiences and symptoms of violence and ‘trauma’ will be discussed in sections referring almost exclusively to the mentioned countries and societies, while reflecting on the historical context of catastrophes and individual or governmental acts of violence connected to them. At the center of this amalgamation stands a reconstruction of the circular structure of discursive elements comprising experiences of violence, traumatization and representation.

A psychic trauma is caused when an intense, often extremely violent situation disables the ability of a consciousness to integrate an experience within the narrative, linear memory of an individual. The psyche is overwhelmed by negative impulses and stimuli to a degree that it cannot react adequately.⁶ A frequent consequence manifests as a representational void and lack of memory; ‘trauma,’ it seems, is unrepresentable and unspeakable. On the level of both the individual and collective, a “trauma process”⁷ may take place – usually accompanied by a variable latency phase – sometimes leading to a repetition of the traumatizing situation on another level or in a disguised manner (*Wiederholungszwang*, Sigmund Freud). As part of the circular structure of violence-void-visualization, events that traumatized individuals or collectives – after a varying period of time – appear as medialized objects: a body influenced by the psyche

³ E.g., Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture, The Politics of Loss and Terror in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick, 2005); Mark Seltzer, “Wound Culture. Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere,” *October* 80 (1997), 3-26.

⁴ Elisabeth Bronfen, Birgit R. Erdle and Sigrid Weigel (eds.), *Trauma. Zwischen Psychoanalyse und kulturellem Deutungsmuster* (Köln/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau, 1999).

⁵ E.g., Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust. History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁶ Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis: “Trauma,” in: idem (eds.), *Das Vokabular der Psychoanalyse* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1972), 513-518.

⁷ Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma. A Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 15-28.

displaying traumatic symptoms, literature, spoken memories of an eyewitness, a photograph, or a motion picture. Filmic representation of the notion of ‘trauma’ will be investigated in this volume concerning their capacity to reenact, reactivate, or re-produce traumatizing situations (as do inner-psychic structures of traumatization) in artistic and playful modes. This is done by use of flashback structures,⁸ leading to so-called “backstory wounds” (Michaela Krützen); the bending, shortening, or destabilization of the intra-filmic timeline; traumatic iconographies; sounds that allegorize the past, etc. Film thereby repeats and reenacts the experienced event, causing or actuating ‘trauma’ again and again on a cultural level – albeit in a transformed, mediatized manner. Apart from its potentially cathartic effects, the loop of traumatizing events, aims to represent them, the production of filmic images and restagings of the past in film may in themselves create recurring patterns of ‘trauma.’

Trauma Theory and Film History

Since its invention, film has been intrinsically tied to the sphere of traumatic wounds and vice versa. What began in the *Grand Café* in Paris, when novice audiences instinctively recoiled from the unsettling images of the Lumière brothers’ production of *L’ARRIVÉE D’UN TRAIN EN GARE À LA CIOTAT* (1895/6), continues today via multiple filmic plots. According to Lorenz Engell, the shock experienced by these early film spectators not only became a myth, but also changed the categories of perceptions, probability, and prospectability for future audiences of film screenings.⁹

Almost at the same time, the establishment of trauma theory and psychological and (neuro)psychiatric research on traumatized patients was founded among medical and other scientific disciplines. John Eric Erichsen, Jean-Martin Charcot, Hermann Oppenheim, Josef Breuer, Sigmund

⁸ The term ‘flashback’ is used in psychology to indicate a sudden, involuntarily re-experiencing of a past event without full awareness or consciousness of what really happened. Its origin lies in the field of cinema and its narration techniques rather than in trauma theory. Cf. Maureen Cheryn Turim, *Flashbacks in Film. Memory and History* (New York, London, Routledge, 1989).

⁹ Lorenz Engell, *Bewegen Beschreiben. Theorie zur Filmgeschichte* (Weimar: VDG, 1995), 107 et seq. and Anna Martinetz: “Filmdramaturgie und Traumaforschung. Eine Betrachtung zweier parallel entstandener Disziplinen,” in: Julia B. Köhne (ed.), *Trauma und Film. Inszenierungen eines Nicht-Repräsentierbaren* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2012), 56-75.

⁹ Thomas Elsaesser, *Melodrama and Trauma. Modes of Cultural Memory in American Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2009), 56-75.

Freud, to name just a few, were among the pioneers and protagonists of nascent trauma theory of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Post-catastrophe or post-combat disorders, dubbed “railway spine,” had been known since the 1860s in relation to railway accidents at that time. Competing terms to describe the same phenomenon in other contexts such as war included: “nostalgia,” “irritable heart,” “soldier’s heart,” “depression,” “demoralization” and later, “neurasthenia,” “combat fatigue,” and “traumatic neurosis.”¹⁰ The terminological chaos and lack of differential diagnoses often “veiled clinical parallels and hindered practice and research.”¹¹ The First World War and the widely spread phenomena of “war hysteria,” “shell shock,” “bomb shell disease,” and “war neurosis” helped to consolidate the recognition, credibility, and ‘lobby’ of the diagnosis traumatic disorder. Although there was weighty insecurity concerning the classification, naming and treatment of what had been diagnosed as “hysteria virilis,” “simulation,” “cowardice,” “inner desertion” or simply “NYD[N]” (not-yet-diagnosed [nervous]), military physicians took up the fight against this disturbing and troublesome “disease” that seemed to destroy the order, regularity, and authority of the army corps.¹² In the Second World War, military physicians’ insecurities returned alongside massive and multiple trauma symptoms.¹³ But it was not until the Vietnam War that the phenomenon of ‘trauma’ – in terms of clinical nosology (“post-Vietnam syndrome”), including depression, flashbacks, delusions, nightmares, panic attacks, sleeplessness, and suicide – was accepted on a larger scale and with greater consensus.¹⁴ Not least,

¹⁰ Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions. Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton, 1995), 13-42; Edgar and Jones, “Post-combat Disorders: the Boer War to the Gulf,” in: Harry Lee and Edgar Jones (eds.), *War and Health: Lessons from the Gulf War* (Chichester, 2007), 5-39.

¹¹ Philip A. Saigh and James Douglas Bremner, “The History of Posttraumatic Stress,” in: Philip A. Saigh and James Douglas Bremner (eds.), *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. A Comprehensive Text* (Boston/London, 1999), 1-17, here 5.

¹² Young, *The Harmony of Illusions*, 51 et seq. Cf. Julia B. Köhne, *Kriegshysteriker. Strategische Bilder und mediale Techniken militärpsychiatrischen Wissens, 1914-1920* (Husum: Matthiesen, 2009); Paul Lerner, *Hysterical Men. War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890-1930* (Ithaca/London, 2003).

¹³ See, for example, John Huston’s documentary LET THERE BE LIGHT (USA, 1946) that claims realism, authenticity, and plausibility, despite its depiction of World War II veterans in highly subjective, aestheticizing, and fictionalizing perspectives.

¹⁴ Eric T. Dean, *Shook over Hell: Post Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge/London, 1997), 14; for an analysis of the impact of the Vietnam War on film, see: Raya Morag, *Defeated Masculinity: Post-Traumatic Cinema in the Aftermath of War* (P.I.E. – Peter Lang, Brussels, 2009).

this was due to better orchestration of the disciplines of social psychology, psychoanalysis and neurology corresponding to the field of military psychiatry ultimately involved in the remedy of the problem.

In 1980, these symptoms were described as “post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) in clinical manuals (e.g., the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, DSM-III, a classification system edited by the *American Psychiatric Association*) and were therefore diagnosable with more ease and professional cognizance. Since then, this definition has been challenged and altered by various psycho(tramato)logical approaches that, like Bessel van der Kolk’s psychiatric theory on traumatic memory processes, oscillate between psychogenic and neurophysiological patterns of explanation.¹⁵ As with psychodynamic and interpersonal lenses unto the impact of ‘trauma,’ such approaches have been augmented by contemporary clinical perspectives including neurobiology and neurology. In later wars, e.g., in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Iraq, Israel/Palestine and Kosovo, veterans continued to suffer from “PTSD,” “a loss of ontological security,”¹⁶ or “mild traumatic brain injury” – terms in current use.¹⁷ Military health systems have experimented – and continue to do so – with therapeutic treatment via hydrotherapy, hypnosis, suggestion, electrotherapy and, at a later date, via psychotherapy and “Redekur,” psychological self-management, self-regulation, “neuroimaging” and medication, depending on the prevailing conjuncture of medical schools and their particular therapeutic preferences. Often, the therapeutic scheme to reconcile with ‘trauma’ can be described by the triad: stabilization, confrontation and integration of denied parts of the traumatic memory.

For instance, in 2007, the *Veterans Administration*, the public medical organization for army veterans in the United States, adopted a concept by the Mandatory Palestine-born psychologist Edna Foa. The so-called “Prolonged Exposure Therapy” was supposed to reduce PTSD symptoms in more than 80 percent of cases. This cognitive-behaviorist therapy is based on the idea that a “traumatic memory” is not the enemy of the patient. Rather, the subject is encouraged to retell his/her story in the present tense in order to more directly encounter the “traumatic memory”

¹⁵ Bessel A. van der Kolk: “Trauma and Memory,” in: idem/Alexander C. McFarlane/Lars Weisaeth (eds.), *Traumatic Stress – The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (London/New York: Guilford Press, 1996), 279-302.

¹⁶ Young, *The Harmony of Illusions*, 8.

¹⁷ Cf. Edgar Jones, Nicola T. Fear and Simon Wessely, “Shell shock and Mild Traumatic Brain Injury: A Historical Review,” in: *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 164:11 (2007), 1-5.

and ultimately alleviate one's fear. Foa compares this process with watching a scary film: "It is hard at the beginning, as if you were seeing a very scary movie for the first time. But just like a movie, when you watch it for the tenth time, the fear is forgotten and the movie gets boring."¹⁸

Many other parallels can be drawn between clinical trauma research and the knowledge of practitioners in the field of traumatology and film aesthetics and dramaturgy. Revealing the parallel development of the two fields are the academic termini: "scenic memory," "screen-spectator-technique" (Frank W. Putnam), and "psychodynamic imaginative trauma therapy." In the latter, traumatic memory fragments are projected onto an "inner display screen" or "inner stage" watched by the patient like an "old movie" that can be stopped, fast-forwarded, set to close-up, or switched to black and white via imaginary remote control. Ostensibly, this enables self-comfort and allows for control over the interplay between association and dissociation.¹⁹

Film and Trauma Interface

The simultaneous historical development of the two spheres, film and the symptoms and notion of 'trauma,' results not only in their empirical, heuristic and semantic inseparability, but also in the question of how traumatic and filmic languages may be telescoped and explored within a research scenario that concentrates on their synergetic effects. The present articles not only disclose interconnections between hyper-violent traumatizing historical events and the development of trauma theory as discussed rudimentarily above, but the contributors also analyze the aesthetical, narrative, dramaturgical and diegetic functions of filmic texts that embody traumatic encodings. Further research questions being addressed in this anthology include: How can individual and/or collective wounds be transferred to and popularized by film? How does film communicate forgotten or repressed traumatic inscriptions, be it on a national or international level? How does film affect or catalyze the 'digestion' and 'incorporation' of trauma histories in the official narration of history and national identities built on the conceptualization (and illusion) of a "continuous narrative of national progress, the narcissism of

¹⁸ Interview with Edna Foa in Haaretz 06.08.2010, "Queen of Broken Hearts," by Coby Ben-Simhon, <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/magazine/queen-of-broken-hearts-1.306416>, (Accessed April 15, 2013).

¹⁹ Luise Reddemann, *Psychodynamisch Imaginative Traumatherapie* (Pfeiffer bei Klett-Cotta, 2005), 172.

self-generation, the primeval present of the *Volk*”?²⁰ How do the acoustic, aesthetic, dramaturgical and narrative means of film operate together in signifying the phenomenon ‘trauma?’ How can the polysemic filmic text created in this process be decrypted via academic-analytical means? Does the aestheticized presentation of ‘trauma’ in film undermine or contradict its historical content and references to real catastrophes?

To address these questions, a diverse selection of films and film ensembles, from genres such as melodrama, thriller, horror, documentary, and art-house film, will be explored. All of the nominated films deal with historical traumata – ranging from the Second World War, the Holocaust/*Shoah*, the *Nakba*, the Paris massacre of Algerian demonstrators in 1961, and the on-going Israeli-Palestinian conflict – that continue to haunt affected individuals and communities. Said traumata are mirrored in the topics, plots, settings, trajectories, figures, *mise-en-scène*, sound, and music of the discussed films, with the traumatization of the films’ characters semantically intertwined with the catastrophic issues of the collective, in particular within the national sphere. In some cases, as in the depiction of Adolf Hitler in German cinema, a historical figure may be charged with the traumatic events of an entire nation and thereby transformed into an icon of evil.²¹

This volume is based on the credo that film serves as a medium that activates and deconstructs taboos associated with traumatic wounds in a unique way – wounds that, because they are sometimes so painful and incomprehensible, cannot be comprehensively integrated into the psyche or narrations, history, mythology or ideology of the nation. Within the notional “dialectic of trauma,” Judith L. Herman casts the oscillation between traumatic oblivion and intrusion.²² Film can render otherwise hidden traumatic wounds visible and perceptible, and therefore debatable and negotiable. Film is capable of visualizing ‘traumata’ because it can most effectively depict irregularities and anachronisms. Film can transport images repressed or denied by the social body, forgotten iconologies and intense flashbacks intruding upon the consciousness back into the social discourse – albeit in an alienated manner. Traumatic memory fragments

²⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, “Narrating the Nation,” in: Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *The Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 1 et seq.

²¹ Michael Elm, “Man, Demon, Icon: Hitler’s Image between Cinematic Representation and Historical Reality,” in: Karolin Machtans and Martin A. Ruehle (eds.), *Hitler – Films from Germany: History, Cinema and Politics since 1945* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 151-167.

²² Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 1, 47.

cannot be easily reintegrated into the individual or national master narrative, which may be the cause of stress disorders and uncontrollable anxiety attacks.²³ Derived from what trauma theorist van der Kolk says about “traumatic memory,”²⁴ it can be stated that film translates sensuous triggers, affects and sudden visceral sensations – such as particular smells and sounds – into film language, alongside other references to the traumatizing situation that are not decoded, such as interaction between the acoustic level and the camera angles, the diegesis with the acting. The latter transforms the face in close-up into a physiognomic landscape of affects. The close-up has been described by film theorist Béla Balázs as the most potent symbolic meaning-maker that abstracts all time-space-coordinates and causes a standing-still of time. A dynamic room without limits is thereby created,²⁵ whose aesthetic aptly corresponds with the aim to signify traumatic structures.

In combination with music, facial expressions alter non-readable traces of ‘trauma’ into cultural encodings that might be more easily interpretable and digestible. Thus, film functions as a medium that witnesses, remembers and is haunted and obsessed by traumatic historical events that can neither be seen in clear light nor be fully decoded. While film does not provide an absolute decoding of the traumatic experience, this medium comes, in a way, close to this goal, if only as a depiction of that which defies representation.

Film not only stores and replays traumatic energies in a sort of ‘cultural container’ viewed by the public, it oftentimes also processes and transforms these energies into even more complex cultural material. It gives them a new, altered shape, a symbolic, more readable form that might arouse less of a society’s fear than the historical event itself. The transposed ‘trauma’ comes in the garment of distortion, as translating traumatic language into film language often implies moments of deformation, disfigurement, fracture, breakup, dislocation, or transmutation that are not easy to decipher. ‘Trauma’ obviously does not lose its special characteristics by switching the medium. Trauma theorist Shireen R. K. Patell states that there is inherent danger in an “epistemological

²³ Anke Kirsch and Tanja Michael et al., “Trauma und Gedächtnis,” in: Günther H. Seidler, et al. (eds.), *Handbuch der Psychotraumatologie* (Stuttgart, 2011), 15, 20.

²⁴ Bessel van der Kolk, “The Body Keeps the Score: Brief Autobiography of Bessel van der Kolk,” in: Charles R. Figley (ed.), *Mapping Trauma and its Wake: Autobiographic Essays by Pioneer Trauma Studies* (New York/London: Routledge, 2006), 211-226, here 301.

²⁵ Cf. chapter on the close-up in: Béla Balázs, *Der sichtbare Mensch: oder, Die Kultur des Films* (Deutsch-Österreichischer Verlag, 1924), 73 et seq.

destabilization of the traumatic (non)object/event” because it would be “unaccountable.”²⁶ The destabilizing powers tend to be passed-on when ‘trauma’ changes its representational medium: from the body to the psyche or, vice versa, to scripture, images or film. Following Patell, we can also add that film “conceals the productive intimate tension of mimesis and diegesis [in an interplay of image and text] [...] always relying on the other as metaphorical support and epistemological buttress [...]”²⁷

Film feeds on the phenomenon that individuals or collectives afflicted by traumatic catastrophes evoke fascination and repudiation, attraction and aversion in an antagonistic interplay. Film translates tense interactions into characters and dramaturgical conflicts. Film can be seen as a provisional patch that is pasted over the traumatic abyss appearing as a result of the absence of narrative, meaning-making and rational memory. It makes the spectator forget the forgetting – Cathy Caruth said about a traumatic event that it was “not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it.”²⁸ Film has the capacity to build metaphorical and metonymic images that, as a matter of fact, artificially and temporarily cover old wounds that are pried open in a delayed manner. By staging its non-representability, film overcomes and challenges the vision of ‘trauma’ as non-representable and turns it into an artistic creation. Thomas Elsaesser has argued that in order to reach an “adequate” level of representation, film needed to invent a particular “negative performativity,” which is only partly and transiently achievable.²⁹ Film seems a powerful means to depict the “unresolved tension” between mimesis and anti-mimesis that Ruth Leys examines in her fruitful re-reading of the canonical texts of Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth.

As a consequence of Caruth’s interpretation of the role of ‘trauma’ in relation to history, one could say that shocking, overwhelming trauma-incidents and people’s constructions and conceptions of the official version of history tend to overlap in larger areas. Following Caruth’s thesis, history seems to feed on ‘trauma,’ which affects its course through traumatic “infections.” Thus, history is reformulated as traumatic non-

²⁶ Julia B. Köhne (ed.), *Trauma und Film. Inszenierungen eines Nicht-Repräsentierbaren* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2012), 30.

²⁷ Köhne, *Trauma und Film*, 32.

²⁸ Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma. Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4 et seq.

²⁹ Thomas Elsaesser, “Postmodernism as mourning work,” in: Susannah Radstone (ed.), *Trauma and Screen Studies: Opening the Debate, Trauma Dossier*, Screen 42, 2 (2001), 193-201.

representability – in other words, postmodern historiography is replaced by traumatology.³⁰ This is not considered a conscious and deliberate process, but rather a result of a decades-long conceptual exchange between trauma theory and perceptions of reality. Here, history is often substituted by a model of generation and sequence characterized by traumatization; ‘trauma’ is sketched as a universal, anthropological constant, as cultural scientist Sigrid Weigel pointed out in her critique of Caruth’s dictum.³¹

Film can be embraced as an artistic attempt to communicate what can neither be transformed into a shared experience nor transmitted in an undisguised manner. As such, film functions like a “prosthetic memory” (Alison Landsberg), because it is a particularly apt medium to vicariously experience global catastrophic events:

If the mass media [...] can become transferential arenas in which we learn to wear the memories of such traumas so that they become imaginable to us, thinkable, and speakable to us, then these mass cultural technologies of memory deserve our most serious consideration.³²

Landsberg states that modernity introduced a “new form of public cultural memory,” coined “prosthetic memory,” which “emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past,” for example when attending the movie theater. “In this moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history [...]. In this process [...] the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person’s subjectivity and politics.”³³ Yet, film does not serve as a cultural machine that produces immobilizing metaphors – it does not universalize or ennoble powerful, hegemonic meaning-makings in the context of traumatic public histories.

³⁰ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 24.

³¹ Sigrid Weigel, “Télescopage im Unbewußten. Zum Verhältnis von Trauma, Geschichtsbegriff und Literatur,” in: Elisabeth Bronfen et al. (eds.), *Trauma. Zwischen Psychoanalyse und kulturellem Deutungsmuster* (Cologne, 1999), 51-76, here 56 et seq.

³² Alison Landsberg, “America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory: Toward a Radical Politics of Empathy,” *New German Critique*, No. 71, Memories of Germany (Spring–Summer, 1997), 63-86, here 86.

³³ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia UP, 2004), 2.

Instead, film can rewrite elements of the past retrospectively and retroactively without laying claim to an objective truth, instead pointing to irritations, disguises, and contortions included in this process.

This anthology also offers room for a debate between psychoanalytic, sociological, political and cultural perspectives on the questions of how and to what extent the terms of trauma theory and psychotraumatology can be transferred onto the social sphere,³⁴ as well as how this is reflected in trauma films. Recent clinical studies have shown that experiences of harsh violence do not necessarily result in “post-traumatic stress syndrome” or the collapse of narrative memory. Evidently, the ability of the individual and societies to cope with immeasurable violence and traumatizing acts can vary stunningly from case to case, depending on the factor of resilience. To what extent can this be detected in film? Which meaning does the filmic medium take on in this process? In which specific films does the trauma notion turn out to be productive in the revelation and discussion of social conditions and problems that transcend the question of ‘trauma?’

Horror Cinema and Trauma

Adam Lowenstein states that the pain in cinematic horror “has everything to do with the world in which we live in” (THE AMERICAN NIGHTMARE 2000).³⁵ Following Linnie Blake, one can say that horror films allow international audiences to both reflect on and cope with the horrors of recent history – from genocide to terrorism, war to persecution, nuclear catastrophes to natural disasters. Blake considers horror movies a disturbing, yet highly political and therapeutic genre that capacitates its audience to deal with the traumatic legacies and horrific incidents of reality in a productive way, on both an individual and collective level.

³⁴ Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. (eds.), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); José Brunner, *Holocaust und Trauma: Kritische Perspektiven zur Entstehung und Wirkung eines Paradigmas. Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte/Tel Aviv Yearbook for German History* 39, co-edited with Nathalie Zajde (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011); José Brunner, *Die Politik des Traumas: Gewalt, Gesellschaft und psychisches Leiden* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2014 forthcoming).

³⁵ Cf. Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (Columbia University Press, 2005). The documentary, THE AMERICAN NIGHTMARE (USA, UK 2000), dir.: Adam Simon, an examination of horror films of the 1960's and 1970's, involved artists' reflections of the horrific experiences of contemporary society.

Blake sees horror films as a unique medium to “re-open” national wounds that have been suppressed, overlooked or only superficially addressed:

[H]orror film [...] is uniquely situated to engage with the insecurities that underpin [...] conceptions of the nation; to expose the terrors underlying everyday national life and the ideological agendas that dictate existing formulations of ‘national cinemas’ themselves.³⁶

From this perspective, the process of turning ‘trauma’ into film becomes a productive moment in dealing with haunting pasts.

The horror genre in many cases embodies subgenres like body horror, hillbilly, supernatural, fantasy, vampire, and zombie movies, each with its discrete creatures, tropes and various political and social issues. For example, what is the legacy of the undead as the personification of the aggressive, consumption-oriented US-American, or that of the Godzilla-monster as an embodiment of Japanese dread of natural catastrophes? Thus, as can be seen in the present anthology, popular and cult horror movies do not necessarily contain distinct figures of horror. In fact, in contrast to filmic environments set, for example, in the American backcountry, the ‘horror’ in horror movies may also derive from ‘normal’ milieus, like the familiar nuclear family of white, US-American suburbs, unalarming, per se, at first glance from the outside.

This volume traces the question: in what way can the term “horror” be applied as an analytical category to explore the history of “trauma cultures” and narrations? Can “horror” be seen as an ingredient or an effect of “trauma” or, conversely, “trauma” as a (horrifying) subject that recounts the unspeakable horrors of history? Can the “horror of trauma” be seen as the result or the beginning of the triad: traumatizing event, phase of non-representability, filmic images or: violence-void-visualization? Does the filmic horror or display of horror in film initiate, increase or generate cultural traumas (like a *perpetuum mobile*)? Are the “horrors of trauma” rooted in the need to constantly repeat and vary traumatic figurations on an individual, inner-psychic or cultural/collective level? Why are filmic horror scenarios a beloved dramaturgical form of trauma knowledge? How can the interconnections between traumatic and horrifying histories and their filmic adaptations in horror movies and other film genres – like melodramas or documentaries – be described? Which narrative and aesthetic characteristics can be detected as simple representational practices in national cinema traditions relating to and coping with

³⁶ Blake, *The Wounds of Nations*, 8-16, 9.

experiences of ‘trauma’ and horror, as well as actions of terror and violence? How does the cultural engagement with ‘traumata’ in horror films affect the question of self-definition and the ‘othering’ of collective identities? What role does the metamorphosis of ‘traumatic energies’ into moving images play regarding national ways of self-perception and self-reflection?

Structure of the Anthology

The first section of the anthology pertains to the nexus between trauma and horror in movies. The second to fifth sections examine various foci in the depiction of ‘trauma’ as they appear in four distinct national trauma (film) cultures, namely the United States, Germany, and Israel/Palestine and their coproducing countries. What impact have the nations in which the movies were produced had on the filmic depiction of the interconnection between traumatic catastrophes and filmic visualization? What do their interfaces with the notion of ‘trauma’ look like? The trajectory of such questions as related to these diverse fields can be demonstrated in the following passages.

I – Horror in Trauma Cinema

The first part of the anthology deals with descriptions of the interconnections between the logic, powers and horrors of trauma language and film language. Is there a specific affinity of the film medium to represent (inner-psychic) structures, especially post-traumatic stress or psychotraumatological disorders and their specific time structure of latency, delay and reiteration? Which aesthetic features and narrative shapes are produced while making a film about trauma notions and ‘trauma nations?’ Which genre-specific characteristics can be found in melodramas, history movies, thrillers, documentaries, and horror movies that bear a connection to ‘trauma?’

Since violent experiences are, without a doubt, represented most strikingly in the horror genre, this section will trace the connection between historical traumata, the “wounds of nations,”³⁷ trauma depiction, and horror movies by means of two essays: *Thomas Weber’s* text on director Michael Haneke’s *CACHÉ* (2005) and *Michael Elm’s* contribution on Roman Polanski’s film oeuvre. As one might deduce from the topics of these two essays, in this anthology, ‘horror films’ are not conceived solely

³⁷ Blake, *The Wounds of Nations*.

as films commonly associated with the genre of horror, but also include films that make feelings of horror, persecution and haunting trauma their main concern. By incorporating the insights of studies that deal with the “classic” horror genre, new and important understandings of a broad array of filmic depictions can be gained. Weber’s article is concerned with the representation of media in *CACHÉ* within an aesthetic of uncertainty and alienation linked to precarious, repressed traumatic memoirs in the cinema. In Weber’s eyes, Haneke not only manages to reorganize traumatic memories, but also to uncover how they are repressed and repudiated in and by the social body. He detects the symbolic connection of *CACHÉ*’s protagonists and characters to the French Resistance and the Algerian War. In *CACHÉ*, Haneke’s fascination with horror is detached from his personal and national context.

Elm traces Polanski’s characterization of the world as an “uncanny,” absurd, dangerous and traumatized place. The plots of films like *THE FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS* (1967), *ROSEMARY’S BABY* (1968) and *THE NINTH GATE* (1999) can be seen as an acting-out or reenactment of painful, traumatic experiences (of persecution), drawing also on Polanski’s own pool of traumatic experiences and cultural critique of Western societies. The last section of the article investigates the sophisticated narrative and visual structure of staging the transition process from an authoritarian to a post-authoritarian regime through the conflict of the main characters in *DEATH AND THE MAIDEN* (1994).

Both articles ask what the rather weird and distressing atmospheres and psychological constellations of figures in these horror movies tell us about the relation between violence and social trauma in (Western) culture – decades before mirroring issues like the ‘War on Terror’ in Afghanistan and Iraq. Real life horror echoes in artistic horror.

Concluding the first part of this volume, *Christiane-Marie Abu Sarah* examines how Hollywood horror movies such as *SHE DEMONS* (1958), *FLESH EATERS* (1964), *BLOOD CREEK* (2009), and *RATLINE* (2011), have since the 1940s staged the figure of the Nazi in ever-changing ways. Throughout the previous century, the Nazi villain and Nazi iconography have become master signifiers that not only denote social deviant malevolence in its purest form, but can be loaded with diverse and even antagonistic symbolical contents. In the author’s opinion, horror film plays a prominent role in the memorialization and fluid rewriting of national traumata – the Nazi monster is a dynamic sign in the grammar of horror cinema.

While the tropes of the horrors of trauma and/or filmic horror are embraced throughout this anthology, the following three sections delve