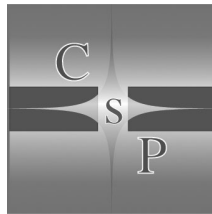


Trauma, History, Philosophy
(With Feature Essays by
Agnes Heller and György Márkus)

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Edited by

Matthew Sharpe, Murray Noonan, and Jason Freddi



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INTRODUCTION

WHY ‘TRAUMA’ NOW?

MATTHEW SHARPE, DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

The topic of trauma was raised to the centre of twentieth century European thought by the work of Sigmund Freud. ‘Trauma’ is central to Freud’s work at both its beginning and its end. Trauma appears as a pivotal concept in his 1890s case studies on hysteria. It returns, at the basis of the later metapsychology, in Freud’s works written after the First World War. Yet the last century as a whole was arguably a century of traumas: the traumas of total war, of global economic crises, of state-sanctioned genocides, of displaced and stateless peoples, the Cold War and the shadow cast by the mushroom cloud. A sense of trauma, unsurprisingly, pervades much of twentieth century European thought, especially that written in the century’s middle decades. The younger Heidegger, adapting Kierkegaard—as Larrea examines in her essay in this collection¹—elevated *angst* to a privileged phenomenological instance in *Being and Time*. Heidegger’s later work, and such darker 1930s essays as ‘Overcoming Metaphysics’, meditate on how the gods have fled the modern epoch, and how only their unfathomable return might save us from the most consummate nihilism. Heidegger’s student, Levinas—while sometimes refusing so much as to write his teacher’s name—also assigns a central place throughout his career to trauma. In Levinas’ earlier work, it is the uncanny *il y a* that threatens to re-engulf the fragile world of sense. After the war, it is the ‘traumatism’ that would attend and upset our everyday encounter with Other(s). Within the Marxian orbit, Adorno and Benjamin—otherwise distant from the phenomenological tradition which Adorno lampooned—each conceived of history as importantly ‘one single catastrophe’, from the Stone Age to the age of total war. In the psychoanalytic field, Lacan’s linguistic re-conception of the Freudian subject sees it as *founded* upon a properly traumatic exigency; the event of

¹ Chapter 4 below.

castration wherein the child comes to know it *cannot* be the mother's fully satisfying Thing. Lyotard and Jameson, later in the century, each tried to document the changes in the 'cultural dominant' in the first world since the wars by pointing to the centrality of the *sublime* in 'postmodernism' or 'the postmodern condition'—an aesthetic notion which responds, as Kant stressed, to the overpowering, unlimited, or even *monstrous*.² Post-war French thought came to address itself more and more to what is exceptional, sublime or different—that which, when it is not expressly traumatic, would be inassimilable to metaphysical, political, or administrative calculation. In the 1960s and 1970s—in the wake of the decline of Marxism—uncovering the irreducible and (quasi-)transcendental status of such exceptional instances was charged with the ethico-political task of pointing us beyond the embrace of modernist universalism. In the more recent work of Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou, by contrast, the valorisation of a rupturous Event or Act is being invoked as the way towards a different universalism to come.

Within philosophy as outside of it, then, trauma remains—for better or for worse—particularly contemporary at the start of the new century. As both Deutscher and Markus point out in their essays³, the term 'trauma' came to psychoanalysis, and thereby to European philosophy, from the medical sciences. Freud first used the term to describe the pivotal causal events that the free associations of his first analysands—hysterics like Anna O—seemed to always return to, whose conscious recollection proved to have therapeutic effects. These events, Freud aimed to suggest, are as fractious in the fabric of individuals' self-understandings as the puncturing of skin or breaking of bones in physical traumas. Yet in the wake of the events of the twentieth century, and with renewed force after 2001, 'trauma' has taken on a wider currency. As in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*⁴, commentators and historians today talk widely about *collective* traumas. The example that primarily comes to mind—one which both Joanne Faulkner's and Daniel Ross's essays differently address here⁵—is the 11th of September 2001 attacks on the United States. It was Jacques Derrida who pointed out how the naming of this event as '911'—almost before the footage of the attacks and falling towers had ceased being repeated—reflected a deeper bewilderment. Around the world, we recited '911' as a mantra to name what had previously been as geopolitically *unthinkable* as it had been uncannily anticipated in myriad

² Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 499.

³ Chapter One and the first Feature Essay, respectively.

⁴ And see Freddi's Chapter Two below.

⁵ Chapters Six and Nine below.

big budget 'disaster films'. In this way, even the political claim that 'on that day, everything changed' is surely insufficient, when it is not politically motivated. There was a violence done also to the West's very sense of what was possible and impossible, what the future might bring, and whether anyone could either anticipate or prevent the very worst.

It is remarkable, however, that manifold other examples of contemporary, collective traumas, historical or imagined, could be cited: the Asian tsunami of December 2004, the terrorist attacks in London, Spain and Bali, Hurricane Katrina, the periodically-renewed panics about global pandemics, new immigrants, fears about ecological collapse, peak oil, and nuclear proliferation. Multiple commentators have observed that today the haunting sense that some catastrophic trauma might be just around the corner seems to be the uncanny flipside of the convergence of parliamentary politics in the first world, and the invariably glowing accounts of the world economy. As quickly as the world's and nations' economies grow, so too seemingly does the widespread sense that somehow, *something*, radically unforeseeable is about to be visited upon us. From risk theory—with its unanticipatable but potentially overwhelming, human-caused dangers—to the actual rolling back of civil liberties because of the *possibility* of future terrorist attacks, today's conjuncture seems *already* traumatised or else to be preparing itself, Stoically, against the inevitable. As Slavoj Žižek once put it, the end of the world as we know it has become much easier to envisage today than any more modest, social democratic or other political reform.⁶ In the meanwhile, there will be acrimonious 'culture wars' fought about people's sexual and religious choices, how to come to terms with the violences hidden in nations' origins and histories⁷, and the rapidly advancing biomedical technologies that seem indeed to be ushering in a set of new, if not 'post-human' (Fukuyama), possibilities. The political, far from giving up the ghost, will instead colonise the cultural realm, trailing advertisements as it goes. And while all this makes for enlivening newspaper copy and big box office takes, Susan Sontag was also surely right when she commented:

... that even an apocalypse can be made to seem part of the ordinary horizon of expectation constitutes an unparalleled violence that is being done to our sense of reality, to our humanity.⁸

⁶ Žižek, 'The Spectre of Ideology', 1.

⁷ See Chapter 7 below.

⁸ Sontag, *AIDS and its Metaphors*, 178-179.

The essays in *Trauma, Historicity, Philosophy* arise, with two invited exceptions, from out of papers delivered at the 2006 Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy Conference at Deakin University. They each differently address the topic of trauma in European thought, its history, its application *to* understanding historical events, and its resonances in contemporary philosophy and theoretical debates. The main body of the collection is divided into three parts, according with the book's title. The collection also features two essays by the distinguished keynotes at the conference, Agnes Heller and Gyorgy Markus. Agnes Heller's essay builds on Heller's earlier work on shame and culture to address the interconnections and differences between our understandings of trauma and shame, examining cases taken from opera, literature, and history. Gyorgy Markus, by contrast, masterfully addresses the philosophical antecedents of psychoanalysis' notion of trauma with a view to possible 'counter-strategies' to today's overwhelming sense of impending doom. To mark the 150th year since Freud's birth (2006), finally, the editors have appended three shorter essays written on the contemporary situation and meanings of psychoanalysis.

The four essays in Part I, 'Trauma', each deal directly with trauma and its history within twentieth century European thought. Chapter One by Max Deutscher provides a wide-ranging and often poetic reflection on trauma focussing on Hannah Arendt's thought. Deutscher draws the etymological link between 'trauma' and dream (*traum*) as a means to reflect on the single most divisive issue in contemporary Australia's 'culture wars': how contemporary Australians are to come to terms with the founding trauma of European settlement in this country, and the violent confrontation and supplanting of aboriginal civilisation. Particular focus in Part I, however, falls on Freud's thought. Jason Freddi's essay (Chapter Two) provides a detailed archaeological account of Freud's developing thoughts on trauma from the early 1890s, before opening on to wider reflections about psychoanalysis, and the provenance of Freud's later idea of collective or inherited trauma. Douglas Kirsner in Chapter Three focuses on the *ethics* of Freud's thinking and psychoanalytic practice. Interestingly, Kirsner proposes a link which Markus' Feature Essay also suggests between psychoanalysis and the ethics of ancient Stoicism. Retrieving this Stoic, ethical dimension to psychoanalysis, Kirsner proposes, will be pivotal if psychoanalysis is to survive and flourish in the new century. In Chapter Four, Annette Larrea addresses the too often forgotten influence of Soren Kierkegaard's thought about *angst* and 'the religious' in 20th century existentialist and post-structuralist writings. Larrea's essay focuses on Kierkegaard's and Derrida's

contrasting readings of one of monotheism's traumatic originary scenes: Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac on Mount Moriah, halted only by the intervention of the angel.

The four essays in Part II address 'Historicity', taken in the philosophical sense given to the term by Heidegger—what it is to *be* reflexive beings, situated at once as the legatee of a tradition or tradition(s), and open to a horizon of future possibilities. It has been widely remarked that the modern period, with its signature conceptions of progress, placed unprecedented emphasis on human artifice and history (as against God or nature) as the legitimating ground of its ideas and institutions. If the 'time consciousness' of modernity is one which looks forward to a better future, it is from out of a confidence born of the backward-looking sense of the invariable progress of human history. In Kant's paradigmatic formulation, the modern enlightenment represents humanity's coming to maturity, leaving behind its 'self-incurred' infancy and tutelage. Or as Hegel put it, the sun of world history rose in the East only to set in the West, in whose dusk-borne light the entire course of human endeavours takes on a single legitimating sense. The centrality of trauma to the thought and experience of the twentieth century and today then—the ruins that Benjamin's back-turned angel sees piling up in his wake—has to reflect a *crisis* in the self-consciousness, if not the wider project, of the modern age. To proffer another observation that might serve to highlight this: today it is not least the scientists, those harbingers of Baconian or Cartesian modernity, who advise us that our ecological end is night. By contrast is generally only figures associated with the political right who advise us that all is well and that this is anything like the best of all possible worlds.

The essays in Part II of *Trauma, Historicity, Philosophy* address the series of difficult questions which recent history poses to us: are there some historical traumas, for example the *Shoah* (as in Brown's and Rothfield's Chapters) or '911' (as Faulkner's Chapter considers) that are *so* traumatic they can never be wholly integrated into our collective self-understanding without violence? Does the sense that *we*, innocent, have been traumatised, create its own potentials for over-reaction and misrepresenting the Other?⁹ Can we ask for and expect 'reconciliation' from peoples subject to the most atrocious historical brutalities (as Rothfield asks), or would successful reconciliation, paradoxically, mean that the irrevocability of past injustices has been betrayed? Differently, what does the widespread acceptance today of Kojeve's neo-Hegelian

⁹ See Chapter Six, by Joanne Faulkner.

notion of an ‘end of history’, alongside *motifs* from Carl Schmitt, betoken—from Fukuyama to Agamben or Leo Strauss (as Sharpe asks)? In the contemporary conjuncture, is it the height of modernist conceit that speaks in such claims to understand the entirety of humanity’s shared past, or has it rather come to signify a deeply exhausted and *reactionary* terminus?

The essays in Part III, ‘Philosophy’, each address contemporary debates in contemporary philosophy and critical theory, inflected by their engagement with questions surrounding trauma. Ross’ Chapter Nine uses the philosophical thought of Bernard Stiegler to reflect on contemporary terrorism. Ross’ interest, shaped through engagements with Husserl and Freud, falls on how contemporary terrorists deploy media technology to achieve their political and *psychological* ends. Jess Whyte in Chapter Ten presents a powerful exposition of the political texts of Giorgio Agamben, and Agamben’s contention that all legal or political regimes bear what might be called in other language a traumatic heart, in the ‘abandonment’ of subjects to constituted, sovereign power. Geoff Boucher’s Chapter Eleven, a counterpoint, critically challenges today’s *renaissance* of Carl Schmitt’s thought—one of whose key spokesmen Agamben is. Boucher focuses in particular on Schmitt’s reading of Hobbes. His Chapter highlights the necessary, supplementary role religion plays in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, to bolster the social contract, and insure it against free riders. If thinkers on the left return to Carl Schmitt today, Boucher ends by challenging, does this not imply a commitment to a similar theological ground for politics? In Chapter Twelve, finally, Robert Sinnerbrink reflects on the role of experiences of moral injury in contemporary critical theory, focussing in particular on the recent debate on this matter between Bernstein and Axel Honneth.

As an end to this Introduction, the editors would like to sincerely thank all the contributors for their patience, commitment to the project, and hard work. A particular debt of gratitude is owed to our two Feature authors, Gyorgy Markus and Agnes Heller, for their wonderful essays and support. We would like to thank also the many anonymous referees who adjudicated on the essays to be included in the final book, and those which were omitted. Thanks go also to the Arts Faculty at Deakin University for the financial assistance which made the 2006 Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy possible. For his tireless work as conference Treasurer and organiser, a special debt of gratitude goes to Doctor Lindsay

Dawson. On a personal note, I would like to thank my fellow editors, Murray Noonan and Jason Freddi, for their help with editing this book, and in preparing the final document and bibliography. Thanks are also offered to Associate Professor Ian Weeks, Therese Van Wegen, Maxine Haire, Maurice Alexander, Dylan Nickelson, and the Deakin Geelong philosophical community for their help in running the event on the days, and in the final preparations. This collection also would not have been possible without your efforts.

PART I: TRAUMA

CHAPTER ONE

THINKING TRAUMA

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Dreaming traumata

‘Trauma’, from a Greek word meaning ‘wound’, now summons up internal and emotional injury more immediately than it does a laceration or broken bone. A trauma unit in a hospital treats, not simply those with injuries, but those whose injuries have placed them in a state of shock, requiring intensively supervised recuperation. It is a bad trip that has you sent to the trauma unit. You are liable to be left with emotional wound–nightmares. ‘Traumatic stress syndrome’ means the emotional aftershock of serious bodily wounds. Like the original breaks themselves–the *traumata*–it is a serious state, involving patterns of repeated thoughts and feelings that centre upon the occasion of those wounds.

Since Freud, at least, *trauma* has been brought alongside *traum* (dream)–a word with an utterly different etymology. Robert Schumann’s ‘Traumerei’ (‘Dreaming’)¹, in its steady sonorous gravity places, for the night, firm borders against the day’s *traumata*–angry words from the ones you love, collisions with miscomprehension. In the psychoanalytic sense (not restricted now to Freudian theory) ‘trauma’ is a condition that derives from the distress and disturbance caused by some sort of wound, physical or emotional, and then becomes repressed rather than lived through and lived out. When we fail to work our way out of some acute distress and disturbance, trauma, the wound, originates inhibitions, fears and behaviour that are inappropriate to what prompts them. Our thinking is a bad dreaming. This *traumerei* of the *trauma* is closely related, I shall argue, to thinking’s own *trauma*.

Trauma is a live term. Medical and scientific concepts of ‘trauma’ continue to interact with the emotional or psychoanalytic tones of the

¹ No. 7 in the series of piano pieces by Robert Schumann (*Kinderszenen* (*Childhood Scenes*) Opus 15.

word. For instance, *trauma tropism* is a botanical term for an abnormal growth or curvature of a plant that results from a wound. So, *trauma* and *traumerei* have become terms of which we can ask, in the French expression², ‘*qu’est-ce qu’ils auraient à voir ensemble?*’ In German, *traum* has passed through two main different though related senses. The simplest, a ‘sequence of sensations passing through a sleeping person’s mind’, goes back at least to about 1250 CE. In Old English, ‘dream’ was ‘joy, mirth, music’, which does prompt a speculation about a projection onto sleep’s images and sensations of what is ‘dreamy’, as enjoyable in a luxurious and relaxed fashion.

Private Thought, Public Privation

As processes that each summon up an epithet like ‘hidden’, dreaming and thinking (like *traumata* and *traumerei*) ‘see something’ in each other, too. Norman Malcolm³ used to ask how dreaming could be a process. To announce that one is dreaming is already to have come out of sleep that contained the dream. He might have said almost the same about thinking. You ask me what I am thinking about, and to answer I must immediately use the past tense. This fact doubles the sense of thinking as being, like dreaming, a *hidden* process – if it is a process at all. Arendt quotes Epicurus the Stoic’s injunction to be a philosopher by ‘living in hiding.’ From earliest childhood, in learning to speak we learn of the dangers of speech.⁴ Thinking is a response to these dangers. It is part of our privacy – in thinking we learn to keep speech to ourselves. Until we learned this trick we voiced thoughts without their being first a separate activity. Thought was simply ‘in’ our utterance. The subsequent adult and philosopher dreams of a child’s mind as a state prior to innocence itself, prior to the wound that divided thought from speech. Since it is out of our need for privacy that thinking becomes inaudible, audible thought is bizarre – ‘*Talking to yourself!*’ Though, we might voice a conversation in our car as we drive to work, trialling what we are going to say at a meeting, perhaps. (The car—a capsule of privacy moving in the interstices of public ways.)

² See Jacques Derrida’s *Given Time*, for a story about what the gift and time ‘have to do with each other’.

³ I evoke the heydays of that brand of conceptual philosophy that had an ear for ‘what we would normally say’.

⁴ ‘...from the moment I could speak, I was ordered to listen...’ (Cat Stevens, ‘Cats in the Cradle’).

Thought's absence from view is understood by what the *thinker* has in view. That is to say, 'I' understand that, in its absence from 'my' eye or ear, still, thought occurs. 'I' do this by, 'myself', thinking of what 'you', the thinker, has in view. A bifurcation between mind and body is the philosophical mythology concerning this fact. Absorbed in the nature of time, difference, and identity, perhaps, one is 'lost to the world', but these absorbing objects drop out of intellectual sight in the instant of re-involvement in everyday business. This sublimation⁵ of thought's own *trauma*—its break-off of world and thought as if thought had its own time and space – generates the sense of two worlds of 'mind' and 'matter'.

In locating the attractions and pitfalls of thinking, Arendt calls attention not only to thought as hidden and withdrawn, but, equally, to the rupture it creates within the world of life. If, for Hegel, the philosopher lives in the 'land of thought', remarks Arendt, it is thinking makes it seem as if the world 'outside' thought has a deep lack⁶—a 'withdrawal of being'. 'Only the Ideal is Real' says Hegel, finally. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger, too, senses an 'oblivion of being' in the world if that world is bereft of thought. Only in thought is there a true 'presence of being', an 'opening up' of it, he declares (*Life of the Mind*, 88).⁷ Thus, Heidegger associates the recovery of truth with *aletheia*—an awakening from the forgetfulness ('*Lethe*') that flows between the world of the living and the spectres in Hades. Arendt is inspired by the underworld as a figure for philosophy and proceeds to use it to recast the problem of thought and its disassociation from the world, along with its negotiable relation to the social involvement of daily life. She depicts thought as a departure from the social world and the re-entry to the world as the forsaking of that *thinking*. The succinct words of David Hume sharpen the sense of the world as 'blown away' by the wind of thought—and how social life returns to prevail over those arguments that disturb everything we take for granted in life:

Where am I or what? From what causes do I derive my existence? ... What beings surround me, and on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me. I am confounded with all these questions. ... (N)ature herself ..cures me of this philosophical melancholy. ... I dine, I play a game of backgammon, .. and when I wou'd return to these speculations they

⁵ A change from gaseous to solid state, bypassing the 'intelligible intermediary' of the liquid form.

⁶ Arendt is considering the Hegel of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* ([1807] 1967).

⁷ There is something of this in Sartre when he observes, 'Only in absence, when the Other becomes my object of thought, can I think of him as a true subjectivity' Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 286-7. See Deutscher, *Genre and Void*, 153-156.

appear so cold and strain'd that I cannot find it in my heart to enter into them any farther.⁸

Within a tradition that can include classical Stoicism and Thomas Nagel's *View from Nowhere*, thinking attempts to get ahead of time – to regard the world from the position of one already dead – unaffected by public issues, regarding death with equanimity as if already on intimate terms with it. To break with this 'objectivity',⁹ Arendt speaks hyperbolically:

While thinking I am not where I actually am; I am surrounded not by sense-objects but by images that are invisible to everyone else. It is as though I had withdrawn into ... the land of invisibles, of which I would know nothing had I not this faculty of remembering and imagining. Thinking annihilates temporal as well as spatial distances. I can anticipate the future ... as though it were already present, and I can remember the past as though it had not disappeared.¹⁰

Like Orpheus, whose Eurydice relapses into Hades when he turns back to look at her (*Life of the Mind*, 86), such thinking is gone in the blink of an eye when I turn back towards it to write it down in a public gesture. Only thought can traverse the indefinitely extended temporal distances' of a time continuum that stretches from the nearby into the distant .. past or future.'¹¹ But it is thought itself that converted the 'no longer' and the 'not yet' into the 'far distant'.

Thought–Lost and Blind

'Where are we when we think?' asks Arendt. She might well have asked 'When are we where we think?' Thinking relates in a peculiar way to time because it is 'out of order'—internally disordered and out of phase with the order of events 'in the world'. The time of thought relates to the time of worldly events in the way that the time frame of a play relates, in shocking contrast, to the clock at which I glance to check that I will not miss the last train:

⁸ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, O.U.P., Oxford 1978, 269.

⁹ I would argue that it is a spurious objectivity. Cf. Deutscher *Subjecting and Objecting*, 1983, Ch. 1.

¹⁰ Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 85.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 85.

[T]he thinking ego .. summon(s) into its presence whatever it pleases from any distance in time and space ..-(from this point of view its everywhere) is a nowhere. (A) nowhere .. by no means identical with the twofold nowhere from which we suddenly appear at birth and into which .. we disappear at death.¹²

Arendt reads this figure of the ‘thinking ego’ into Valéry’s epigram ‘*Tantôt je pense et tantôt je suis*’; when we think, the ‘thinking ego’ places us as *anywhere* and thus *nowhere*. In the same figure, the thinking ego travels instantly to whatever region it thinks of—the ego is no-when.¹³ By thinking we ‘wound’ the temporal and causal order, but to think is not to step out of that order. To proceed, I would say that freedom in relation to time is a power of temporal thinking, which is, itself, an event ordered in time like any other event. It is our power to bring ‘before the mind’ events from any location in time and space. This freedom involves a ‘dualism’ of ‘thinking ego’ and ‘human body’—a figurative one. By metaphor we describe our escape from a strict temporal and causal order. Our descriptions build up, as a phenomenology, a world of thought.

Arendt writes that the site of thought is a precious place where the ‘ungraspable whole’ of one’s existence from birth to death can be pondered. This site has to be occupied as if by ‘an enduring presence in the midst of the world’s ever-changing transitoriness’, she says. It is when we dwell in these lands of intellectual dreams (territories and dwellings not to be despised) that we need the fiction of a ‘sheer continuity of the I-am’. If this ‘ever-present’ *I think* is itself but an Augenblick it is, nevertheless, within that blink that I position myself with respect to past and future. I must accept the disappearance of that position itself when, in the instant of blindness necessary to my use of past and future, I turn to do what falls to me at that very moment.

¹² Ibid., 200.

¹³ In Kant’s ‘time [as] the form of inner sense – of the intuition of ourselves and of our inner state’, time is our apprehension of events as ‘in the future’, happening now’, and as ‘long ago’. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B49, B50, cited in Arendt’s *The Life of the Mind*, Vol I, p.201. There is no immediate sensory intuition of the unchangeable historical relations of ‘earlier’ and ‘later’, but the old ‘flow of time’ from future towards the past and a fixed relation of all events ordered by ‘earlier than’ and ‘later than’ take on a different slant within Arendt’s frame. One’s changing relation to an event as future, then dealt with and finally recalled, is itself a series of events ordered as earlier or later than each other.

Dreaming Trauma into the Land

The Australian Dreaming makes a material connection between *traumata* and *traumerei*. In each of the Pintupi, the Pitjantjatjara and in the Aranda languages, the one word is widely used for ‘word’, for ‘mark’, for ‘singing’, and for ‘law’. The land becomes ‘settled’ and ceases to be ‘wild country’¹⁴ when a song-line deals with major trauma, creates a new Dreaming, and inscribes the result into recognisable and usable landforms. It is by certain practices of singing that the terrain is constructed as significant country, as a social area, as a place to dwell.¹⁵ The singing of the land is a vital practice. It is not just singing *about* the land. In this ‘singing’ of the land, a cluster of ideas and facts are grasped together—how to find your way about, how to get to recognise marks in or on the land which otherwise are too faint, how to tell the land of your own group from that of another, how to feel at home in the land to know it as being familiar with it. It is vital to succeed—not only to find water or to find your way back to camp, but to be able to find your way through other terrains—already marked by other groups of Aborigines as significant to them. The land is marked by words that are formed and memorised in songs, whose insistent repetition of narratives produces confident recognition of the features that comprise what the ex-European (etc.) Australians tend to call ‘landscape’. Getting hold of these narratives involves getting involved in the *dramatic theme*¹⁶ that is translated as the ‘Dreaming’.

The marking of country is achieved by this learning how to name its features, by the same process in which those names come to life in the narratives of the Dreaming. The singing that thus marks the land also marks the people who are inscribed by the process. In prodigious feats of memory the songlines are inscribed in the brain, and the body itself is inscribed in the ceremonies of admission to the Dreaming of the land. The stories mark the ethical life of the people who sing them to each other and who, in a sort of Derridean ‘relève’, raise up the country for themselves and others, by these iterations. The figures in the narratives, whose

¹⁴ In *Reports from a Wild Country*, Deborah Bird Rose elaborates the notion of ‘wild country’. Aborigines said that James Cook and those with him, as they ‘settled’ the land, turned it into ‘wild country’.

¹⁵ I am thinking of how Heidegger intensifies the sense of the word in ‘Building, Dwelling, Thinking’, in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Krell, Routledge, London 1977, 343-363.

¹⁶ We have to make our best judgement about what concept to choose in this context.

trauma is enacted upon the landscape, switch in size as the story requires, and form a *country* within what early (neo-) Australian explorers described as an empty land.

Like the people themselves, the inscribed country is ‘from the Dreaming’ (*tjukurrjanu*), the ‘ground of being’.¹⁷ ‘Dreaming’ may refer both to the specific stories and to the whole creative epoch. When they describe events, Pintupi contrast The Dreaming (*tjukurrpa*) with those events and stories said to be *yuti*, which signifies visibility or some other form of sensory presentation to a subject. Directed to an axe, someone says ‘There it is over there, visible (‘*yuti*’). A kangaroo emerges from the bushes, becomes visible (‘*yutirringu*’). Or a person listening for an approaching car says the sound of the motor has become *yuti*. They question and make clear whether they are talking about the Dreaming. ‘Not *tjukurrpa*, but what really happened—*mularrrpa*.’ ‘*Mularrrpa*’ has its standard or usual most everyday meaning as ‘real’ ‘true’ ‘actual’ as opposed to ‘untrue’, ‘fictitious’ or ‘lie’, but though strictly contrasted with it, the Aboriginal word *tjukurrpa* (‘the Dreaming’) is not its negation.

The Dreaming as Law exists within its ‘form of life’.¹⁸ Singing is an essential element in most ritual performances¹⁹ because the songline follows in most cases the direction of travel of the beings concerned and highlights, if cryptically, their notable as well as mundane activities. Most songs then, have a geographical as well as mythic referent, so by learning songlines men become familiar with literally thousands of sites even though they have never visited them: all become part of their cognitive

¹⁷ Thoughtful philosophical anthropologists search for various alliances of the language of the Dreaming, such as with those of Greek mythology and Platonic Forms. Various such connections are made by figures as diverse as Strehlow *Aranda Traditions* (Melbourne U.P. 1947), *Central Australian Religion* (Australian Association for the Study of Religion, 1978), Fred Myers, *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self* (Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1986) and Nancy Munn, *Walbiri Iconography* (Cornell U.P., Ithaca), ‘The Transformation of Subjects into Objects’, *Religion in Aboriginal Australia* (ed. M. Charlesworth et. Al, UQP 1984). Also, use is made of contemporary notions such as Derrida’s ‘trace’, ‘relève’ and an enlarged sense of ‘writing’ in, for instance, *Of Grammatology* (Johns Hopkins U.P. 1974) *Writing and Difference* (R. and K. Paul, London 1978) and *Margins of Philosophy* (Harvester Press, Brighton). These ideas of textuality and reality are juxtaposed with Aboriginal practices of ‘singing the land’.

¹⁸ Here, of course, I am alluding to Wittgenstein’s approach to meaning, in his *Philosophical Investigations*.

¹⁹ Myers’ description of Mardudjara practices would seem typical of most Aboriginal groups.

map of the desert. The importance of the Dreaming in dealing with the land can be gauged from some notes from an explorer's journal which conveys what an abyss of nothingness that land appears to be, without that poetic, inspired and yet also practical imagination, by means of which aborigines see and move in the land, in terms of its sung/dreamed significance: -

Words can give no conception of the ghastly desolation and hopeless dreariness of the scene which meets one's eyes from the crest of a high ridge.²⁰

Stephen Muecke remarks that the mistake of the 'neo-Australian'²¹ eye is to see the land as a failed landscape. The song cycles of the dreaming, he suggests, are not constructing a landscape at all which (he cites Lyotard) is more a matter of 'transporting visual expectations from one physical environment to another ... trying to bring a sensory organisation appropriate to the first, and making it apply to the second.' (Bruce Chatwin, in *Songlines*, quotes D.H. Lawrence's similar perception of the 'peculiar, lost, weary, aloofness' of Australia.) The newcomers are unable to match their 'picture-postcard' imagination of a 'landscape' with anything they can discover by culturally unaided sight alone. It is that *absence* in vision that they express as if they *could* see something – 'ghastly desolation'. Muecke explains in this way what was invisible to the explorers:

Song cycles ,, work with memory in that they progress nomadically, going from place to place across a stretch of country, literally following the footsteps of the ancestors who first walked their and created the forms. Knowing the performance text means also to know the country .. in terms of water and game, as well as [in] historical and spiritual significance.²²

Through the songlines of the Dreaming, the *word* (*name, mark and law*) creates the difference between a desolate nothing and a world within which one can be at home. Myers discusses at length the complex word

²⁰ Carnegie, *Spinifex and Sand*, 251.

²¹ My term is one convenient way in which to signal the continent and life of the 'great southern land' before the most recent large influx of people that began in the late eighteenth century. Perhaps 'australian' without the capital can signify all of us at any time who are born in or naturalised to this country, and 'Australian' is the word that signifies being an australian 'national'—a notion in process and flux since the federation of the States.

²² Muecke, *Textual Spaces*, 44.

ngurra whose simplest sense, he claims, is that of extension in space. But this is not an empty extension, measured in some number of paces or days of travel. To attempt to live in such a space would be the attempt to possess the land by one whose mind is still constructed elsewhere. It is for them that this land is ‘ghastly desolation’ in which the explorer is ‘lost, weary and aloof’. For those who have raised up the land within a Dreaming, whole tracts of this ‘unmarked and wild’ country become a living space. They have made *ngurra* out of earth, rocks, trees and animals. The word refers to socialised space, both as the area of a temporary camp, and as enduring and extensive ‘country’. The ‘homeliness’ of this *ngurra* is at once the *human* creation of a ‘camp’ and the creation within an objectified Dreaming, of *country*.²³

Dreaming and Inscribing the Land out of Trauma

Within the details of the Dreaming narratives, we find how trauma is embedded within Australian traumerei, ‘Dreaming’. In the story of ‘Native Cat’²⁴, a Tingarri revenge party have become possums with extraordinary powers of crossing vast areas of the land. They are chasing a man who had eloped with his mother-in-law. In their pursuit they transgress Native Cat’s territorial borders, and suffer fatal consequences. The song of their wide-ranging pursuit is now included in the cycle of songs that permit and enable Aboriginal travel across tribal lines. The lines of the Tingarri’s pursuit of the eloping man map large areas of terrain and help to define borders.

Native Cat sees emu fat on the ground and knows the Tingarri men have sneaked into the country. It is not their land. Worse, the Tingarri have not shared the emu with him. Native Cat pursues the Tingarri, who have now transformed themselves into wild dogs.²⁵

Native Cat approaches and frightens the Tingarri women. He thrusts his throwing stick into the earth.

Suddenly the figure of Native Cat becomes enormous. This is typical of the figures that will become land formations. They may be present in the

²³ Myers does speak in terms of ‘landscape’, which is not appropriate according to Lyotard’s explanation of it.

²⁴ I have abridged this story as related by Fred Myers in *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self* (University of California Press 1986, 61-4).

²⁵ One has to read the translations of these spare stories somewhat as one would a libretto for an opera-ballet.

story as dancing with or pursuing human beings, having much the same dimensions as us. But then their dimensions change as they engage in their traumatic acts so that, in their death, these ‘ancestral’ figures occupy the space of rock-pools, fissures, or mountains. In their agonistic finality they attain the dimension of landforms:

Native Cat opens up a huge hole with his throwing stick. Many of the Tingarri young men are killed. The remaining Tingarri men come up his throwing stick like ants.²⁶

Native Cat is sitting on the edge of the hole, crying because of having blasted the young Tingarri men away.²⁷

Native Cat takes the remaining Tingarri men and women to Lake MacDonald, hunting and performing ceremonies along the way.²⁸

There, the remaining Tingarri are killed by hail and lightning produced by Native Cat’s two sons. But, exhausted in this production of the elements, Native Cat’s two sons die. They turn into snakes.

Stricken with grief, Native Cat bashes himself in the forehead with a stone axe, and his body becomes a stone formation still visible in the lake.

This lake of tears might signify the permanent grief of a powerful figure at his destructiveness. We find the figure of the personalised force that forms the landscape, presented as overcome with remorse and loss, striking himself in the head with his own axe and ‘bringing himself to earth’.²⁹

In comparison with Native Cat, the Dreaming figure of Blind Snake³⁰ is presented as frail – physically and emotionally. Eventually, as a figure of blindness, as one who must live out that trauma, Blind Snake achieves a kind of power.

²⁶ It is as if the storyteller had regarded ants crawling up his throwing stick and imagined them as men, so that the narrator himself is suddenly immense.

²⁷ The figure of this Dreaming takes no satisfaction in revenge. He grieves at the results of his excess of anger.

²⁸ Here, the song provides further details of getting from one place to another.

²⁹ These figures are neither like the Greek gods nor like the Christian One. They are not perfect – not even exemplars. They act violently, destroying young initiates, and then are overcome with remorse. The *Yahweh* of the Hebrews, who repents after sending the devastation of the Flood, is most akin to what we read here.

³⁰ A songline of the Ngalia and Walbiri, described by Charles Mountford in *Winbaraku and The Myth of Jarapiri* (Rigby, Adelaide, 1968) p.14-15.

The blind snake, Jarapiri Bomba, usually stayed in the camp of his wives and children who cared for him and provided him with food. Whenever the snake-man heard any of the other Winbaraku people performing a ceremony, he would find his way to their dancing ground. He would cause confusion by trying to take part in the rituals.

As time went on, the various Winbaraku people left their individual dancing grounds. They assembled on an open plain to the northeast of the present hill of Winbaraku to perform their ceremonies together. But the blind Jarapiri Bomba could not be persuaded to return to his camp. He was always getting under their feet. The Winbaraku people sneaked away from the dancing ground, leaving Jarapiri Bomba behind.

Becoming aware of the silence the blind snake-man groped his way from place to place searching for his wives, his children and his old companions, realizing after a long search that he had been deserted, he sat down on the plain and mourned from loneliness. The body of Jarapiri Bomba is a large spherical boulder at the foot of a low bluff.

Again, the vulnerability of the ‘ancestor’ is the theme, but here the weight of the ancestral figure that forms the centre of the story is reversed in relation to those at whose social margins he lives. For Native Cat, vulnerability arrives at the end of the action. In contrast, Blind Snake is a figure of vulnerability from the start. Like a child trying to join the games of the others but blind to the rules they already know, he finds himself always on the outer edge – a primordial story of marginalisation. His final ‘power’ upon the land is achieved without violence, and yet it is significant and permanent. He becomes a memorial, beyond erasure, ‘at the foot of a low bluff’ - at that point where one might begin to ascend into the dramatic terrain raised up by other more obviously powerful ancestors. The blindness of the stumbling figure that lived on the margins of society is matched by the social blindness of those ancestors endowed with sight.³¹

Settlers, Unsettled: *Living Out One’s Dreaming*

Someone describes their hair-raising experience in seeing rock-paintings that include the themes of the European arrivars/invaders. That electrifying experience is empathy with the new trauma in the traumerei, *tjukurrpa*, of the inhabitants. The paintings, done on rock, mark a response at the time and place of the trauma. They evoke for those of us who are the

³¹ For all that the story lends itself to interpretation as a sort of morality play, the spirit of such stories is very different from the Greek idea of the Fates that determine the course of events even while we humans, in hubris, take ourselves to be working out our own destiny.

descendants of the arrivistes, the trauma not only of the inhabitants but also of those arrivistes themselves, and thus of our inheritance of it. We live in the consciousness of being the dispossessors, and can hardly, hardily, possess the land.

For neo-Australians to possess the land is a trauma for them/us – the dispossession must be continually repressed even as it is enacted and re-enacted. In *Dancing with Strangers*, Inga Clendinnen describes one of the sweeter of the *traumerei* of the arrivistes. A dream of reciprocal enjoyment of each other's difference while in their company is expressed in the figure (as trope) in the fact of the dance. They were dreaming of their arrival as an act of innocence. Perhaps the Australians (the as-from-the-origin-al ones) were not dreaming in that way. They are more likely to have been already uneasy about what was going to happen. Or they simply did not know. Perhaps they could not have imagined the extent of the designs upon their land that lay within the bodies of the dancers who for the time were in reciprocity with them. As to the arrivistes, perhaps their dancing was a dreaming of a new world that would escape the material conflict their settlement was bound to precipitate.

It is a thought whose status is dangerously commonplace that *waking life* may be lived as the enactment of a dream. We do have such an idea of living one's dream as the object of life is not yet degraded – biodegradable as it is bound to be.³² To live out one's life in the dream of finding or achieving something, sustains and structures life even when nothing of the dream is realised – and one scarcely can hope that anything might be achieved. To live life as framed within such a dream is to risk degrading the specificity of whatever one does and experiences. Yet, to the dreamer, those specificities are raised up as if to a higher level. Within such a lived dream, the gritty details of what one actually does and experiences must be bracketed out if the dream is to retain its eminence. At the same time, that awkward actuality is given a glow, a reliably recurrent evanescence, as we live towards the object within the framework of the dream.

One might hesitate to judge that this 'living out' of a dream' is bound to be a traumatic *life*. Visibly and sensibly it may be lived without constant anguish or shock, depending on the luck of the game. If a trauma is the permanent mark left from an experience, a mark that generates a living dream, then a traumatic life is not essentially a *bad* dream. In acting out one's life as a kind of dream, one is liable to become unable to take life seriously and to fail to feel either the pleasure or the hurt caused by what

³² Such 'dreaming-in-life' may be closer to an Australian *tjukurrpa* than it is to what occurs in a Cartesian sleep.

one does or by what happens. Such a life, though still the expression of trauma, is not therefore defined as one of suffering or shock.

There are resolved and resolving ways of rendering a trauma into life. When he was seven years old, a child who was to become the painter Frank Auerbach was sent from Germany to England. His parents he was never to see again – murdered by the Nazis. In a videotaped interview he says, in even tones, that he has never felt anything much about that. He became a painter whose life turned out to consist of a certain iterated practice. On each of a number of days each week he would paint a different person; the person who came on that day would continue to come each week for thirty years or more. He produced, not obsessive or fixated results, but paintings that are extraordinary both as explorations in painting's possibilities and as portraits. The paintings are layered traces of the years of painting, scraping back and repainting, and of the growth and changes in his subjects over the years. Such is one possible response of thought to trauma – to embed separation and loss into something that gains a life and impetus of its own.³³

One may think more lightly about 'living a dream'. One of the characters in David Williamson's *Emerald City*, a Sydneysider 'knows the meaning of life' – to live in a house with a waterfront. His life is his living out of this dream. Less dangerous, perhaps, than the older one that the Marxist living-ly dreamed.³⁴ Traumata of social injustice become a Dreaming of the emergence of a classless society. Less drastic than our contemporary religious devotee who living-ly dreams too, but of a self-explosion that would catapult him to bliss, and project the living remnants of his adventure to realise the degradation of their life.

These ways of dreaming living-ly also connect *trauma* with *traumerei*, but in a direction opposed to resolution or catharsis. Daydreaming may be despised as useless activity. But Auerbach's painting – like aboriginal *tjukurrpa* – is closer to the daydream than to acting out in response to a wound. Even Williamson's more benign neo-Australian who *lives out* the

³³ If this dreaming-in-life is far removed from what we experience in sleep, it has even less to do with daydreaming than it does to does thinking. A revolutionary who lives out the dream of an ideal society will despise daydreaming about ideals becoming reality. Our contemporary member of a terrorist cell will not spend his or her precious time in daydreaming of murder by self-immolation as the ultimate form of social criticism.

³⁴ It is not enough to say 'lived and dreamed'. The suggestion that for all the practical sound and political reality of Marxist practice, it was the living out of a dream. Perhaps it would read better as '... that the Marxist dreamed, livingly.' The 'livingly' then becomes a punning neologism for 'lovingly'.