

Book Review

Peter Leese, Julia Barbara Köhne and Jason Crouthamel (eds). *Languages of Trauma: History, Memory and Media*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021. Pp. 408. \$75.00. ISBN 978-1-4875-0896-8 9 (cloth).

This fascinating edited collection sets out to advance and define the ‘third wave’ of trauma studies. It seeks to move discussion beyond the definition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) arrived in 1980 towards a wider and more holistic analysis that includes film, art, letters, theatre, diaries and music. Thus it considers how traumatic memory is articulated within medical contexts and within immediate personal contexts, but also encompasses wider cultural and social contexts and mass media.

Chapters explore trauma articulations in various historical and national contexts from the First World onwards, particularly within Europe, the USA, Asia and Africa. The aim is to advance how trauma as a defining preoccupation of our time is understood, to make space for contributions from outside the Anglo-American academic community and for greater interdisciplinarity. Another key desire is to give systematic attention to the perspective of the traumatised and to the social, communal and therapeutic significance of artistic interventions that speak to those perspectives. Part 1 focuses on individuals and small groups, Part 2 on public performance and community engagement. Parts 3 and 4 look at key aspects of what has justifiably been called the ‘trauma boom’ and at how a discourse on trauma and psychological disruption has now entered the mainstream and become part of creative language.

Some of the most valuable essays in this collection take the reader to new, complex and ambivalent intellectual spaces. Film scholar Raya Morag examines the difficult question of ‘perpetrator trauma’—the traumatic effects that stem, for example, from the ethical self-injury of violence carried out on others; Dyah Pitaloka and Hans Pols consider the extent to which performance can help ‘work through’ traumatic memories using as a focus the Dalita choir in Indonesia. Bridget Keown usefully expands thinking by examining the private writings of British and Irish nurses during the First World War; Robert Dale reads the memoirs of Red Army veterans and Jennifer Bliss analyses the graphic novel, in particular the disjointed representations of subjective memory found in Art Spiegelman’s work. Thomas Elsaesser, who sadly passed away during the completion of the manuscript, examines ‘being traumatized’ as ‘the new normal’. His chapter unearths and then reconsiders a question first posed by Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin—whether trauma can under certain circumstances be usefully thought of as a ‘solution’ rather than a ‘problem’. The lens through which this is expertly addressed is the dark comedy *Nurse Betty*, directed in 2000 by Neil LaBute.

Whilst all of these contributions are extremely strong, two contributions merit special consideration. First, Adam Lowenstein’s examination of George A. Romero’s lesser-known horror work, *Martin* (1978). This essay powerfully connects individual trauma and collective trauma and shows the imbrications that link the two. Although much better known for *Night of the Living Dead*, his debut 1968 film that explored US collective trauma in the wake of Vietnam-era atrocities, Romero’s 1978 horror remains powerfully resonant and deserves further study. Lowenstein’s analysis signals how the

horror genre has much to contribute in future to the discourse and understanding in analytical terms of trauma across history.

Finally, this volume contains a fascinating coda written by the distinguished scholar E. Ann Kaplan. Here the question of how the humanities over time have related to trauma as a phenomenon is unpacked for the reader and they are introduced to the future-orientated question of climate trauma in the current era of the Anthropocene. Four approaches are considered in this regard: the pain of mourning for nature lost or what Glenn A. Albrecht has dubbed 'solastalgia'; ecophobia or antipathy to nature as an explanation for how we have arrived at climate crisis; 'Anthropocene Disorder'—the sense of loss of proportion that emerges because environmental change and damage are now occurring at a scale humans find difficult or counter-intuitive to comprehend, and lastly, what Kaplan identifies as 'pre-traumatic stress syndrome' (Pre-TSS) or ecosickness. This is psychological trauma triggered not by the events in the past, but by anticipation of inevitable climate-related disaster in the future. Kaplan's contribution is a beginning for further sustained thinking around this topic, and for future careful consideration of how Indigenous experiences of trauma relate to the arguments advanced.

This collection significantly advances trauma studies, a field destined to continue to grow, expand its intellectual purchase and deepen the extent and complexity of its interdisciplinary reach. Three thoughtful and talented editors have each contributed important individual essays to this work and they deserve the profound thanks of colleagues across disciplines.

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