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3.1 Introduction

From its inception, the moving image has been a major component in the assimilation of the culture of trauma into everyday life.¹ Today, by means of the veteran medium of television and its

¹ Both the moving image and trauma as a concept are the products of modernity and of the Industrial Revolution. Recognition of trauma on both the scientific and the public levels is, as noted, tied to the strong relationship with the emergence of the railroad and the numerous railroad accidents since its inception. As railroad accidents began to introduce spectacular images of destruction and disaster into the public imagination that are not related to the battlefield, the medical profession began to encounter psychological symptoms among the survivors. Like other scientific developments, the cinema, whose origins date back to the late nineteenth century, is an expression of progress—a machine harnessed for the sake of investigating the world and human beings. If we so desire, we can find an anecdotal connection between railroad accidents, which epitomized the post-traumatic condition, and the documentary film by the Lumière brothers, *The Arrival of a Train at a Station* (1896). The images from this first film to be screened commercially aroused anxiety in the hearts of its viewers, who in their imaginations transformed the train rushing across the screen into a horrifying reality from which they had to flee.

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contemporary digital derivatives (YouTube, Instagram, etc.), individuals in Western society are, more than ever before, exposed to trauma in its various and sundry forms, both on the individual and the collective levels.

It should be noted that the link between the traumatic experience and the medium of television exists only in the cultural-aesthetic sphere. In point of fact, according to the common viewpoint found in both scientific and cultural discourse, when it comes to reality, the traumatic experience and the medium of television are positioned precisely at opposite ends of the equation. Trauma is defined as an anomalous occurrence that takes place outside the symbolic order, making it an experience that is difficult, if not impossible, to report on, bear witness to and become engaged in. In contrast, the popular format and content of the medium of television consistently claim to be an accurate, reliable, and complete reflection of reality (Fiske, 1987, pp. 17–37). Television realism is based on an ongoing attempt to blur and conceal the means by which the message is transmitted. More than anything else, television seeks to incorporate into the hearts and minds of the viewers the belief that the reality visible on the screen is ostensibly “the thing itself” without any mediation, shaping or personal or ideological factors involved in the process. “The view of television realism is often expressed by the metaphors of transparency or reflection—television is seen

either as a transparent window on the world or as a mirror reflecting our own reality back to us” (Fiske, 1987, p. 18). Trauma, then, appears to be the exact opposite of television. In effect, what can be said about trauma is that it denies realism and persistently refuses to find any relationship between the signifier and what it signifies “in reality.” This tension between the television medium and trauma appears to be what has given rise to the entire complex of associations and reciprocal relations between the two.

In contemporary culture and particularly Western culture, the moving image constitutes a major channel for leisure and entertainment. As a means directed at mass consumption, the television medium is umbilically tied to market logic. It is widely considered to be an aesthetic form characterized by contemporary capitalism and as a medium that acts to reinforce the prevailing political-economic system. In effect, television operates in two dimensions: On the one hand, to generate interest, excitement, identification, and ongoing attention as responses from its audience, televised content must present an unstable reality marked by innovation, conflict, and crisis. On the other hand, and at the same time, for both aesthetic and ideological reasons the text presented on television constantly strives for closure: for solutions to the dramatic plot and for a return to order even if this is only an illusion.² This duality is diffused over the role of television trauma. Television as a medium that strives to capture attention mediates trauma to the masses. At the same time, as a medium that works out of and in the name of the prevailing order, television strives in various and sundry ways to process and normalize collective trauma.

This chapter, then, seeks to map the various expressions of the traumatic experience as they

are manifested on television and to consider the major role played by this experience in contemporary television discourse. This chapter is unique in that it positions trauma not only as a popular phenomenon represented in various ways on the screen, but also as a central concept used to decipher the logic behind the operation of the medium itself. The focal point of the chapter lies in the following distinction: On the one hand, it views the culture of trauma as a cultural product shaped primarily by television, while on the other hand it perceives the television medium as a major means of working through trauma, on the personal level and in particular on the collective level.

In an attempt to consider all the associations between trauma and television, I have divided the topic into two arenas for discussion:

1. *Television as a form of traumatic utterance and as a generator of trauma.*

This discussion is based upon the deterministic technological tradition that sees the development of technology as the first and foremost factor in shaping the development of society. It is also based on the doctrine of philosophers such as Bruno Latour (1992) and others, who contend that the contemporary media experience has been established by a unique and independent pattern based on the incorporation of the world of machines into the human space. Accordingly, the discussion focuses on technology per se and on the unique aesthetic attributes of television as machine and identifies how these are associated with trauma. This leads to a discussion of televised content and of how the media represents “Trauma” events and a consideration of what is, in fact, televised trauma.

2. *Television as a mechanism for working through trauma; posttraumatic memories on television.*

Here, the discussion focuses on an attempt to consider the extent to which modern media influences the traumatic experience within the individual and in the public sphere. What role does television play in “marketing”

² Researchers who see the medium of television as a transparent means of promoting the values of the dominant culture tend to see the text as “closed,” a text whose interpretation is in line with the prevailing values. Alongside these are those who stress the “openness” of the text and its freedom to be interpreted in different ways by different groups and in different contexts.

trauma and in assimilating it into the public imagination? And how, if at all, has technology been harnessed to work through individual and collective trauma? The possibility of seeing the medium of television as a platform for rehabilitation and recovery, or at least for working through trauma, is examined by means of several aesthetic mechanisms that serve the medium in its operation. Central to this notion are the practices of testimony and reconstruction. The practice of testimony is implemented on television as an inherent part of diverse television texts, ranging from the news and documentary broadcasts to reality shows, talk shows, and commercials, thus marking the medium itself as a mechanism for testimony. The act of televised reconstruction (or televised reenactment) aims at producing an agreed-upon version of reality while exploiting the unique technical possibilities offered by this medium. One method that stands out in this aesthetic-technological process is the use of slow motion, which is discussed in detail. Ultimately, slow motion and other major aesthetic mechanisms seem to lead to a nostalgic aestheticization of trauma and in fact to concealing its threatening essence. This is the stage at which the trauma of television subjugates itself to the economic logic on which the television medium is based and to the consumers' built-in expectations of pleasure. This is the stage at which trauma turns into a commodity, to a paradoxical territory of objects marked by a mixture of terror and entertainment.

3.2 Television as a Form of Traumatic Utterance and as a Generator of Trauma

Traces of symbolic trauma are inherent in every television text. In effect, television is a traumatic form. If trauma can still be defined as an experience that is formulated as the result of an encounter with that which has deviated from the

human experience, with that which radically does not conform to what is expected, the medium of television—"the preeminent machine of decontextualization" (Doane, 1990, p. 225)—can be seen as an effective and sophisticated mechanism that constantly strives to produce trauma.

In essence, this decontextualization can be seen as the core of the traumatic mechanism of television. Every televised representation, whether realistic or metaphorical, contains the potential for trauma. Yet this statement must be clarified as follows: Trauma cannot be identified with televised conflict. While the television text is based on the ongoing structuring of artificial conflicts, trauma is precisely the outcome of the inability to represent conflict. While television conflicts are solved by adopting a coherent, organized, and binary position, trauma in effect denies the binary concept and the basic ability to normalize conflict by means of an organizing principle.

Time, and specifically the time a television consumer spends watching the screen, is television's ultimate commodity. As the first and foremost mechanism of capitalism, the television medium seeks to produce an ongoing viewing experience that will "nail" the television viewer to the screen while creating a continuing experience of decontextualization. Hence, media consumers (of television and the Internet) appear to surf or hop from channel to channel without any connection to space, time, or genre. Narrative, coherence, and rationality often have no significance in the consumer's viewing experience. The result is a random bricolage of pieces of television. The culture critic Raymond Williams (1974) stressed the notion of flow. According to him, the textual content moves from one image to another in an incessant flow of its own. This flow can be seen on the shopping channels and on CNN and MTV. John Ellis (1982) conceives of this as segmentation, contending that television does not represent textual development, but rather a rapid turnover of segments that have been formulated into blocks of images. Neil Postman (1985) maintains that the television text lacks causality, that it is a text without a beginning or an end, and

that its major message is inherent in the words “and now to” The logic of the broadcast schedule and the way it is presented require that the viewing experience be shaped according to a narrative flow, even if it lacks coherence, to make it difficult for the viewer to “escape” to other channels.

The television text, the medium’s basic formative approach, can be compared to the traumatic condition. In essence trauma is anomalous; it deviates from the flow of time and from causality. Like the traumatic experience, an experience that blurs the boundaries between present and past, television is also a paradoxical experience. Its flow is discontinuous and sporadic. Its fragmented, nonlinear text lacks causality, undermining continuity, and normal routine. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the two as distinct one from the other. Trauma is an event that is difficult, if not impossible, to contain within the narrative of life. In contrast, the principle underlying the television medium is based on setting out a series of small shocks, which are sufficiently regulated so as to keep viewers alert but not so shocking as to disturb them.

Considering that television is totally embedded within a clearly capitalist context and that broadcasting organizations across the globe are powerful corporations, the medium functions as an anchor of conformity. As a medium operating within and in the name of the system, television acts to preserve and reinforce the status quo. The authoritative text produced in the television workshop proposes a resolution or annulment of the conflict, even if only symbolically and thus strives for an illusionary return to maintaining order. Commercials, sports events, news items, and in essence all television texts are organized around a dramatic format and use a rhetoric of conflict that simultaneously strives for resolution. Hence, every (television) conflict is in essence an introduction to the required lesson, to the desired solution (even if only partial) and to a soothing catharsis. Its appearance signals that additional conflicts will arise and be solved, and so on and so forth.

Television’s intensive focus on terrorism and disasters seems to have reached its peak in the coverage of the collapse of the Twin Towers in September 2001. Images of this incident, which has been described as the greatest event in television history, provided the background for the rapid development of a new research field focusing on trauma generated by watching television (Ahern et al., 2002, 2004; Bernstein et al., 2007; Pfefferbaum, Pfefferbaum, North, & Neas, 2002). Special interest in this field was generated not only by the extreme nature of this event, its dimensions and its position at the core of America’s sense of power. The way this incident was mediated to the public—through a live and developing broadcast to millions of people worldwide glued to their television sets—has led researchers, many from the behavioral sciences, to wonder whether television indeed constitutes a venue for trauma. Is exposure via the television screen to disturbing events, such as incidents of mass terrorism, likely to be traumatic? (Eth, 2002; Putnam, 2002).

It should be noted that most of the studies in the above field have discovered some sort of association between level of exposure to television during broadcasts of catastrophes and disasters and an increase in the prevalence of posttraumatic syndrome. Yet this relation is not direct. Usually another individual factor is needed that loads watching television with the potential for trauma. It should be remembered that exposure is not only measured by the amount of time devoted to watching but also by the quality of the exposure, by the degree of the viewer’s involvement and by various other personality factors that can have an impact on this issue.

One way or another, the role of television in the Twin Towers disaster and other shocking incidents generated renewed awareness of the way in which television helps in positioning trauma, in packaging it as content that can be duplicated and recycled in various ways and intensities and in vigorously marketing it. Awareness of the role of television in shaping public memory as a traumatic memory has also increased.

3.3 Television as a Mechanism for Working Through Trauma; Posttraumatic Memories on Television

As in other discussions considering the nature of the television medium, the matter of working through the trauma also entails two quite contradictory approaches. The first sees television as a medium that does not at all facilitate working through trauma, while the second assigns television a central role in working through trauma, while imbuing it with personal and collective meanings.

3.3.1 Television: An Endless Repetition

According to the first approach, television causes the human experience to atrophy. It does not permit structuring the collective past by means of overcoming the individual past because it isolates the subject from authentic experiences. Thus, instead of private and individual moments, television recycles stereotypical versions of the past, a past that does not belong to anyone in particular. “Instead of experience and memory, television’s past, whether funny or not, evokes laughter and distance; it is a dissociated, dated history, out of synch with the present, with nothing, now, to do with us—it is over and thus, paradoxically, ahistorical and nostalgic” (Mellencamp, 1990, p. 242). Television in effect traps the viewer in a region that is devoid of time, in which authentic experiences are not possible. It merely produces in the present, “a celebration of the Instantaneous” (Doane, 1990, p. 222). Mellencamp sums this up as follows: “TV triggers memories of TV in an endless chain of TV referentiality” (Mellencamp, 1990, p. 242).

Indeed, Mellencamp claims that television synchronizes memories of television, ending with the atrophy of experience. This is the reason that representations of trauma on television do not have a disturbing impact on the viewer; in effect they are not a direct confrontation with the event but rather a repetition of it. Thus, even the

compulsive repetition of horrifying images plays a role in flattening and erasing the trauma. This form of television processing is essentially anti-historical and always belongs to the present. It may not be an exaggeration to claim that this endless repetition is likely to be reminiscent of the repetition compulsion that is often the fate of trauma victims (Arav, 2004).

By its very nature, television is a medium based upon repetition: repetition of what is known and safe, of what is “obvious” and of what “we’ve already seen.” Clearly, despite television’s promise of new development and renewal, in practice the medium is inexorably tied to circularity and repetition.

Psychoanalysts like Freud and Lacan devoted a significant amount of thought to the concept of repetition. In their view, repetition has one goal: to not remember. Repetition serves a fixed goal: the transition from knowing to not knowing. What the subject repeats is the trauma itself (Freud, 1914).

Freud referred to the repetition of a traumatic experience as the “repetition compulsion.” In his early writing Freud interpreted this repetition as an attempt to control the traumatic event. Later and in contrast to other theoreticians, Freud did not make do with this explanation and formulated the concept of the “death drive.” According to Freud, repetition is an instinct, “an urge in organic life to restore an earlier state of things” (Freud, 1920, p. 36). “Repetition compulsion” overrides all conscious intentions and objects vigorously to change. In his view, the explanation of repetition as an attempt to gain control over the trauma does not give expression to what he called the “demonic” character of the repeated experience.

However, other psychoanalysts claim that repetition is a spontaneous attempt to assimilate a traumatic event. Russell, for example, believes that “what is reproduced is what the person needs to feel in order to repair the injury” (Russell, 2006, p. 610). Caruth (1995), in contrast, diminishes the centrality of repetition in structuring the trauma and places the stress on forgetting. According to her, only by means of and within inherent forgetting can the experience be felt from the outset. What is recorded in the victim’s

brain is not only what he or she sees but in effect both things: the memory of the event itself and the distortion the event undergoes by means of remembering the trauma. Lacan associates repetition with the symbolic order. According to him, the repetition compulsion results from displacement of the original and initial impulse of some signifier. The repetition brings back to consciousness the signifier upon which the instinct was displaced, while repressing its initial content (Lacan, 1977, p. 50). In contrast, the philosopher Gilles Deleuze considered repetition an expression of difference (Deleuze, 1995). In his view, every act of writing is in effect repetition, but this is a form of writing with a difference. In a situation in which the only raw materials are the set of signs already existing in language, the original has no meaning. History, therefore, is always a reconstruction of the past.

It appears, then, that the notion of repetition is central to the very nature of the television medium. The format of the “rerun” is based primarily on constant repetition, as is the concept of an “open studio” or continuous live broadcast: repetition of what is already known, of a collection of the most dramatic images that can be found. For shocking events of all sorts, repetition becomes the essence. Does the uncompromising repetition of peak events (the explosions of the Columbia and Challenger space shuttles, the Twin Towers disaster in New York, the tsunami in Southeast Asia) turn the event into a visual spectacle, a show seen as something that can be controlled? It can be claimed that repetition creates a sense of continuity and control when confronting a violent event. Yet, against the backdrop of the television medium’s ability to provide context (that is, to present events in their full historical complexity) on the one hand and in view of the compulsive repetition of the chain of images on the other, it can also be claimed that television practically erases the event. It closes off its viewers in an area lacking pain and time, where they cannot confront and work through the past.

Converting remembering into repetition is not, as noted, a major line of thinking in Freud’s discussion of the response to trauma. In his view, repressing events from past memory causes these repressed memories to take the form of actions.

Disregarding these memories leads to expression as acting out these conflicts rather than remembering them (Freud, 1914). According to Lacan, this “acting out” is not only derived from the failure to consciously remember the past, but also from the inability to communicate this failure to the other. The refusal of the other to listen to the subject causes the subject to give up on verbal communication and to channel his failure toward acting out. The subject is not conscious of this acting out. By actively turning the object outward, it becomes an alternative disclosure of the cause, of the repressed memory. Thus, acting out is a fraudulent unconscious pattern of action that compulsively repeats itself and is defensively turned upon the other.

3.3.2 Working Through Television

The second approach is concerned with the encounter between trauma and television. It considers the process through which television reworks the raw material of news into a structured narrative format as a process that essentially resembles the notion of working through. The therapeutic situation engenders the granting of meaning and the generation of structure as the attribute that individualizes the work of the therapist. Working through is a critical interpretive process that enables the subject to acknowledge the existence of repressed elements and to release himself from the suffering entailed in the mechanism of repetition. Ellis (1999) claims that television, in striving to explain and to provide additional information and perspectives regarding the raw material of the news, seeks to grant greater stability to images of disorder. Television refocuses and reframes, turning the items it contains into a narrative. According to Ellis, working through is a diverse process that takes place in a variety of programs and content fields, including talk shows, soap operas, documentary films, dramas, and feature films (Ellis, 1999). In practice, the link between the process of working through on television and the traumatic experience appears to be fully manifested in two major clinical/television practices: testimony and reconstruction.

3.4 Testimony

The developing discourse regarding the role of testimony and the status of eyewitnesses has become a major part of contemporary discussions of trauma and posttrauma. “To testify is (thus) not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative, to others, to take responsibility—in speech—for history or for the truth of an occurrence, for something which, by definition, goes beyond the personal, in having general (not personal) validity and consequences” (Felman, 1991, p. 39–40). Testimony is discourse in practice, the pledge to tell, to generate a speech act as tangible proof of the truth. The ability of testimony to exist relies upon the presence of an event and on a later, though reliable, report after the event. Yet 70 years after the Holocaust and in view of the traumatic history of the second half of the twentieth century, recognition of the crisis in testimony is growing. Researchers such as Felman and Laub see trauma as an epistemological crisis that extends beyond individual therapy and points to the difficulty accessing our historical experience (Felman & Laub, 1992). Laub ties this crisis to the question of the witness and testimony. According to him, the Holocaust led to “the collapse of testimony,” for the history of the Holocaust ostensibly took place “without any witnesses.” Its terrible circumstances made it impossible to be “part of the event” and to survive as well, so that the historical commandment “to bear witness” could not be carried out (Laub, 1995).³

In opposition to this dual viewpoint focusing on the tension between the commandment to testify and the crisis of testimony, the testimony of television is positioned as a major component of the

practice customary in this medium. An “eyewitness” is a key actor and a basic component of the television text. Moreover, the television text claims the status of a testimony that carries unequivocal proof of factual truth. In essence, it can be said that in view of the massive use of eyewitnesses on television and considering the perspective that sees the text itself as testimony, discussion of the role of the witness and consideration of the status of testimony in culture have become extremely relevant and urgent.

Like the status of the eyewitness in legal practice—which is based on investigating the truth—media, and in particular the moving image, sing the praises of eyewitness testimony: the one who was out there “in the field” and who saw the events with his or her “own eyes.” This close and direct contact, and yet, at the same time free of any real involvement in the event, is captivating to a medium that proudly waves the flag of reality. The growing trend toward using testimony “from the field” can be seen as part of the conventions of the news genre, which seeks—through its format—to signify control and the return of order. The witness provides his version and thus reorganizes the shattered reality into a more or less coherent story that binds the exceptional event into the symbolic order. And indeed, testimony given directly to the camera can be seen in news broadcasts, documentary films, historical feature films, police reconstructions, reality shows, commercials, and other formats as well. Witnesses are everywhere. They all contribute to creating the illusion of direct knowledge of reality, without any externality interests.

In view of the power of personal and ostensibly unmediated testimony, often given in revealing and moving close-up photos, considerations regarding the validity of eyewitness testimony are often pushed to the side. What, in effect, is the witness giving testimony about? Does being present at an event actually bring someone closer to the “truth”? Or does being there, close to what is happening, conceal the “big picture” from the witness and limit his or her understanding of the event? And what about the validity of testimony given after some time has gone by? The idea that time is liable to blur and weaken the witness’s

³Another expression of the crisis in testimony brought about by the Holocaust is inherent in the representation plane: the absolute philosophical distance between the language of the murderers and the language of their victims (Agamben, 1999; Lyotard, 1983, 1989), the inability to talk about death while using customary language and the claim that Auschwitz is “an historical fact” even though it has no place in the language—all these make historical testimony virtually impossible, for it demands breaking through rational thought itself.

memory is pushed to the side. Is it even possible to consider testimony as “authentic” in view of the fact that testimony is mediated by other testimonies and representations of the event? And what is the fate of testimony when it is given a second and third time? Does repeating the testimony guarantee that the story will be preserved, or does it lead to change? In particular, to what extent is the testimony subject to the representational regime, to the set of preliminary expectations built by its representational context? How are general and market interests involved in the process? None of these questions are apparent to the television viewer.

Even more problematic criticism of the reliability of eyewitness testimony has been raised by the post-Freudian school of thought, which has gained prominence in recent years. This movement has challenged the view of individual memory as something sacred and immune and has rejected the very existence of repressed memory. For example, the American researcher Elizabeth Loftus (Loftus, 1996; Loftus & Kitchum, 1994) stresses the structuring of memory by means of information acquired after the fact. According to her, memories of events that are perceived as difficult when they occur will be easily recalled. If indeed the testimony of an eyewitness is likely to be based, in whole or in part, on implanted memory, it may be that the media also behaves in a similar manner. An eyewitness, like the general public, is exposed to versions of the past that are vigorously marketed by the media, seen here as a powerful creator of false and implanted memories.

Television, then, is deeply involved in the question of the status of testimony today. In effect, the medium has played a major role in undermining the status of the witness and of testimony as a major element in the effort to establish a collective memory. Today “the aesthetics of testimony” appears to be replacing testimony itself. Before our very eyes the genre of testimony and confession is being transformed into ritual and media convention. When the witness becomes a permanent resident on the television screen, his testimony, rather than testifying to an event, in essence testifies to a new cultural condition.

In this new era, testimony is tantamount to truth, and personal confession is the passionate object of the confessor and of the audience as well. In this medium, whose underlying principle relies on the illusion of the intimacy it generates among its recipients, generates “easy conditions” for the witness. These conditions transform the testimony into an object of temptation, a basic component of the economics of televised images. The witness and the medium of television are engaged in a relationship of symbolic exchange. By virtue of appearing on television, the witness is glorified. In the eyes of the viewers he is seen as someone whose testimony is important. Television also benefits from this relationship. In appearing on television, the witness enhances the halo on which the broad acceptance of television is based: the direct and unmediated contact it sells, the strong belief that television testifies to what “really” happened.

3.5 Reconstruction, Reenactment

In essence, the photographic image contains within itself a reconstruction of the past. Every photograph testifies to what already was, bears witness that the event occurred (Barthes, 1980). Every testimony, photographic or otherwise, is a text of reconstruction. The trauma victim can also be seen as someone who carries within himself a reconstructed version of the past—one that is partial, complex, and inaccessible.

To reconstruct is to create anew. Reconstruction is the renewed construction of some order of things, usually of what has gotten out of control and requires repair. Reconstruction assumes that it is possible to discover the true reason, to recreate the approximated order of things, to reliably, and accurately revive the past. In effect, both on the personal and on the social level, reconstruction—in the media, in law, in art, and in other fields of endeavor—can be seen as an agreed upon social ritual relying on sophisticated technology and intended to stimulate a sense of faith and control over reality. It is also a ritual, entailing an effort to restore the social order.

In being faithful to its “obligation” to provide viewers with a reliable and accurate picture of reality, the medium of television frequently offers them artificial reconstructions. When the natural order, that is the ongoing supply of images from an event, is disrupted, when there are no “real” pictures from the scene of the event, the medium employs simulations, by means of hyperrealistic technologies and familiar aesthetics, that transform the reconstruction into an undisputable picture of the truth. A central aesthetic component of televised reconstruction is slow motion. This deviation from the “normal” pace of life, i.e., the representation of time at a slower pace, creates an effect of conspicuousness, distinction, and deviation (Madsen, 1973, p. 185).

Slow motion thus simultaneously serves to realize two goals of television: One is the attempt to take things out of context—removing an event from the ordinary order of events in order to signify it as exceptional. The other is the restoration of order—the moderation of the event and the slowing down of its visual (moving) images in order to break it down and examine it, and thus to moderate it and return it to the symbolic order (Arav, 2004).

Slow motion has two ostensibly contradictory dimensions. Alongside the extreme sense of realism that stresses the medium’s “investigative” abilities, slow motion, which suspends cinematic time for the sake of imaginary and unrealistic time, also provides an almost contradictory feeling: the sense of artificial reality, expropriated from the precise context of time and place. Hence, in addition to its investigative and disassembling role, slow motion serves to enhance and glorify the moment by generating a flood of feelings of longing and fond remembering.

From this, it should be understood that slow motion is an aesthetic form that corresponds with—and perhaps even dictates—the symbolism of trauma. Images in slow motion have already been assimilated into the public imagination as an aesthetic platform for the representation of an extreme event experienced on the personal or public level. Thus, when the victim of a trauma describes the instigating event, more

often than not he or she will describe it as an experience absorbed by his or her senses in slow motion.

Televised representations of horrific events will often appear to be slowed down. That which is extreme and deviant more often than not is represented as an artificial, unnatural, and fantastic form of reality. Hence, the extreme aestheticization of the process or event that generates the trauma (the collapse of the Twin Towers shown over and over again in slow motion) is intensified to the point of transforming it into a purely aesthetic experience that attracts attention by virtue of its performative qualities, which have been enhanced by the medium. The viewer’s yearning for these aesthetic images signifies the beginning of a process in which what is traumatic seeps into what is nostalgic and entertaining.

3.6 Nostalgia

The exhaustive blending of the private and the public, between repetition and reconstruction, between eyewitness reports and the commercialization of testimony, penetrates and influences the content and form of collective memory. Currently the place occupied by trauma seems to be taken over by nostalgic sentiment. The pattern of acting out, as described above, that is derived from the inability to provide a representation of the object (in this case, the traumatic experience) and is based upon the element of repetition, is found in the sense of nostalgia based on the repetition of what is known, a fitting framework for its operation. If acting out aims at an excess sense of vitality that denies the wound and the unprocessed pain, nostalgia transforms the reality of the past into something alive in the present. Like acting out, nostalgia also refuses to work through the past in order to transform it into a meaningful memory. The mechanism of nostalgia focuses on excess activity, on virtual activity in the present, as a substitute for the inability to remember. The nostalgic image produces a sentimental substitute whose entire mission is to deny the fact that this is a matter belonging to the past. Addiction to

nostalgia creates a sense of excess vitality and, with respect to reality, thus withholds from the individual any thoughts of denial or criticism.

The notion that television speeds up the transformation of traumatic memory into a type of melancholic nostalgia certainly has major psychopolitical significance. The repeated and nostalgic representation of war through the ritual of fixed media images can be seen as a process of denial that operates continually and efficiently to blur the factor generating the collective trauma, i.e., the state of ongoing war. It may be that the disturbing association between traumatic experience and an exhibitionist, nostalgic television culture instills within us dangerous illusions, because of the idea that the discourse of trauma will lead us to redemption and serenity. It is precisely the popularization of the use of the concept of trauma that is what covers up the condition of political helplessness and despair.

3.7 The Moving Image as a Clinical Means

We cannot conclude this essay without wondering at the use of the moving image as a possible practice in therapy with the victims of certain types of trauma. The television archives and the medium's diverse techniques are often turned into therapeutic tools by the therapist in order to confront the patient with the trauma-generating experience (Moore, Chernell, & West, 1965).

In order to achieve emotional relief intended to release the individual from the memory of the traumatic experience, Freud introduced the concept of abreaction, a therapeutic method based on recalling and reenacting the traumatic experience in a controlled environment. Abreaction is designed to lead the patient to undergo the emotional experience which was suppressed in the original incident, which thus leads to catharsis. When the victim experiences crying, anger, a desire for revenge, and the like, the emotion that accompanied the traumatic experience is released and the memory of the traumatic experience is moderated and can be contained. Freud believed that abreaction could be achieved through hypnosis, which ensures

suspension of the patient's defenses. Later he claimed that the ordinary psychoanalytic process based on conversation and free association could also result in the patient achieving abreaction.

Thus, if, as argued above, watching television is liable to arouse trauma, at the same time the medium is likely to serve as a means of abreaction. Watching a televised documentary or feature film focusing on an incident similar to the one generating the trauma is likely to flood the trauma victim with the repressed emotions and to bring him to catharsis. This can take place in the therapeutic space or under any other viewing conditions.

At this point the circle is closed. Television as a medium and an instrument mediating the private and public spheres blurs and shapes the traumatic experience as a televised commodity subject to the medium's constraints of content, format, and socioeconomic context. On the other hand, under the sponsorship of the television medium, a shocking private event is transformed into a public spectacle and is ultimately returned to the individual in the form of a televised reconstruction intended to heal him.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to describe the central mechanisms that integrate trauma into the contemporary television culture. The traumatic experience—an experience that ostensibly cannot be conceptualized—is translated into the prime raw material for producing attractive content. Major practices of the televised text, among them testimony and reconstruction, emerge as essential in the establishment of the contemporary culture of trauma.

The question of the extent to which television is likely to function differently remains open. The basic rules of the medium, its customary regime of images and its economic logic will not change in the near future. Television's promise to provide a clear picture of reality and the public's yearning for a "happy end" and for closure and order—even if these are merely an illusion—will continue to accompany contemporary society for many years to come.

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