Article

Memory as a wound in words: on trans-generational trauma, ethical memory and artistic speech

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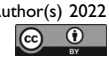
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Magda Schmukalla
Birkbeck College, University of London, UK

Abstract

In this article, I ask how memory of historical trauma, which spreads across generations and which resists the comfort of linear temporality, familiar ritual and narrative, might feel, and what it might look and sound like. How might the memory of trans-generational trauma be shared and expressed? What could be ethical ways of engaging with the presence of such traumatic experiences? The article explores these questions by looking at how experiences of the womb make possible a sensual re-engagement with painful and unacknowledged historical experiences and so allow for a feminine response or sense of 'response-ability' to the presence of trans-generational trauma. It further shows how such a feminine response to trauma is enacted in an artistic speech, which does not strengthen present identities but makes tangible their decomposition. I develop this argument by reading diffractively through a web of conceptual and sensual entanglements, which emerge from excerpts from Karen Barad's quantum theory, Bracha Ettinger's psychoanalytic theory, Joanna Rajkowska's artwork *Born in Berlin* and my personal presence in the text. The article emphasises the importance of affect as a non-discursive source for the memory of unclaimed traumatic experiences, but it also shows how an embodied recognition of such affects leads to ruptures in discourse and to alternative forms of trauma's presence in speech and thought.

Keywords

Art, memory, psychoanalysis, quantum theory, trans-generational trauma, womb/intrauterine

Corresponding author:
Magda Schmukalla, Birkbeck College, University of London, London, UK.
Email: m.schmukalla@essex.ac.uk

Embodied transgressions

Some years ago, I was preparing a paper to present my research on post-communist thresholds and discuss my proposition to think post-communist sites as liminal places, which could trigger ethical and critical encounters with the history of modern Europe. It was an argument which I had developed during the years of writing my dissertation and an argument I knew very well. I would propose that the post-communist space was akin to an in-between place in which Europe's past could not any longer be reproduced in normative constellations and linear temporalities, and which was consequently a place that would allow us to connect to European history in new and meaningful ways. My plan was to use an artwork, which worked with experiences from such post-communist sites, to illustrate my point.

Initially, this plan felt straightforward, but things started getting more complicated the closer time moved towards the date of the conference. When trying to work on the presentation, I found myself blocked and unable to reproduce what I thought had become an obvious string of thoughts. The problem, I felt, was not so much one of cognition but of will, desire – and memory. While I was able to reproduce the general narrative holding my argument together, I was not able to reengage with or remember the meaning I once felt was inherent to it. On top of the struggle with this lost sensual connection to my material and thoughts, the idea of speaking in front of an academic audience felt overwhelming.

I blamed the baby, the months of maternity leave and the physical exhaustion, which came with the care for a newborn; the breastfeeding, the disrupted nights and days and the emotional confusion, love and chaos that the baby had brought to our family. There were just too many of these maternal emotions occupying my thoughts and body, I thought, and not enough cognitive energy to reconnect to a rational argument that I had carefully developed before my second child had been born.

Confused by this inability to remember and function, I decided to turn away from the readily configured argument and instead started asking how the maternal body and the collapse of its bordering contours could be seen as an instigator for a different form of memory and function. Like other theorists, who after giving birth started focusing on questions of ethics, femininity and the maternal (e.g. Kristeva, 1987; Jacobs, 2007; Baraitser, 2008), I redirected the focus away from themes that seemed inaccessible and towards the mess, the fluids, the ruptures and the various types of emotional and physical strains, which I was experiencing so strongly at that time. I started paying attention to the different material configurations and embodied practices of the pregnant or child-caring body and thought of ways to examine what such a feminine body as a body spread across bodies, times and places could disclose about memory and about an ethical relation to experiences and lives that tend to be forgotten. For if maternal subjectivity and bodies were tied, as Lisa Baraitser put it, to 'moments of undoing' and as such inextricably intertwined and haunted by an 'impossibility of knowing' (2008: 6), then they were perhaps also interlinked with and could tell us something about the possibility and impossibility of remembering.

This article then develops by weaving together different ideas and images of so-called im/possible memories, i.e. memories which engage with what cannot be remembered,

and it examines their interlinkage with experiences, subjectivities and the materiality of pregnancy and care. It does this through a diffractive and artistically arranged reading of excerpts from quantum physics, art and psychoanalysis and shows how this specific configuration of feminine remembering becomes relevant in the context of trans-generational trauma.

By diffraction I mean a specific type of theorisation which rejects the idea that concepts, experiences or objects are static, pre-existing entities and instead emphasises that each is created and shaped as a dynamic component in specific constellations with others (Barad, 2014). Quantum physics, artwork and psychoanalysis therefore enter and shape the article's argument not as objects or disciplines with a pre-existing fixed ontology but as related agents that form and are formed by my questions and experiences of feminine remembering, and by the specific interactions of different concepts and images as arranged in this article. By choosing and arranging the argument's components artistically, on the other hand, I mean that concepts and images are selected not according to disciplinary but aesthetic considerations, i.e. according to matters of balance, rhythm and tension, as well as of free association and sensual response (Schmukalla, 2021). Consequently, the artwork, which I discuss in this article, has been shaping the argument from the beginning as a residue of my previous research on post-communist thresholds, which kept haunting me as if requiring further clarification or another response. Quantum physics, on the other hand, became associated with the images and forms of this artwork spontaneously, when digging over a patch at the allotment, but stayed as it made possible to examine the psychosocial effects of the artwork's matter and form. And finally, Ettinger's psychoanalysis has been there in the background since I had read it in relation to my own experiences of pregnancy and post-natal care, and then gradually turned into a suturing component that could hold artwork and quantum physics together.

The argument that emerges from such an approach is then not coherent, nor does it develop in a linear fashion, but emerges in contradictory and fragmentary forms and sections. At times the reader might feel confused by the unpredictability in which the argument turns from one site to another without preparing these turns and connections in a formally adequate way. This methodological and aesthetic element is, however, not coincidental but is itself an effect of the object that is explored here. It is, as will become clear, an expression of the 're-turn' of traumatic experiences as feminine ruptures in the ego's speech.

Trauma without origin

When writing about memory in the twenty-first century, especially in the context of Western societies,[1] two psychosocial conditions have to be considered. Firstly, any form of memory (personal or collective) which engages with historical events is in most cases entangled with the traumatic experiences of the twentieth century. The twentieth century was, as Karen Barad writes, 'arguably the most murderous century in history' (2017: 71). Power, mostly centred around European, Russian and North American institutions (different formations of the imperial West), was exerted in the form of an unprecedented technological and administrative force. It produced militarised

nations, their excessive use of industrialised military apparatuses including atomic bombs, the control and destruction of political enemies in the form of state repression, concentration camps and gulags, as well as the industrialised destruction of minorities in pogroms and death camps. As a result, the beginning of the twenty-first century is marked by communities and individuals carrying 'enormous traumatic weight' (Ettinger, 2020: 393).

This excessiveness of the historical developments of the twentieth century means further that memory in the twenty-first century is characterised by the conditions of a post- or trans-traumatic era, i.e. an era 'where there is no pretraumatic psychic reality' and where the trauma of others is already part of a person's or people's non-conscious scope (Ettinger, 2020: 384). Memory in this sense refers to processes which have been described as post-memory, i.e. as inherited memories of experiences from earlier generations, which are not created by recalling a past experience but, as Marianne Hirsch writes, by 'imaginative investment, projection and creation' (2012: 5); or, as Stephen Frosh (2019) puts it, by an over-identification with the traumatic experiences of others. At the same time, memory in the context of a trans-generational era is also concerned with the dark, unconscious sites of post-memory, namely with memories that cannot be retrieved or recognised. Such mental gaps or 'mental crypts' (Abraham and Torok, 1994) are understood as psychic representations of historical experiences that have been passed on from one traumatised generation to the next generations and that are psychically present but cognitively inaccessible.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, individual minds as well as inter-personal relations are consequently permeated with the workings of foreclosed and unprocessed traumatic experiences of others. Neither second nor third nor fourth generations enter a non-traumatised environment but carry with them affects of destabilising events which, however, cannot be traced back to an experienced origin. In most cases, the option of working through the excessive pain or guilt in conversation with so-called witnesses or survivors is not available any longer, as most of the people who experienced the traumatic events of the first half of the twentieth century have passed away, having turned the two world wars and the genocides, which were committed in that time, into 'events without witnesses' (Felman and Laub, 1992, cited in Ettinger, 2020: 394).

In the twenty-first century, Western trauma is therefore not any longer (if it ever was) an emotionally and rationally overwhelming experience, which destabilises and haunts those individuals or communities who experienced the excessiveness of a specific event; nor is it strictly restricted to the generation that comes after but encompasses a broader, trans-generational and trans-subjective ghostly layer of reality without origin. It does not belong to one person, one generation or one time, but is a psychosocial reality that remains traumatic precisely because it spreads across or transgresses subjects, generations and times – and as such 'becomes unthinkable, a something that exists, albeit in no way mentally accessible' (Yassa, 2002: 83).

This does not automatically mean, as this article will argue, that it cannot be worked through, that it cannot be articulated or addressed, but that this other material formation of traumatic force requires different forms of work, articulation and address. Under such trans-traumatic conditions, how can memory as a reconnection with and processing of historical trauma[2] be made possible?

Cultural memory and ego-time

When in the twenty-first century possibilities for encounters with survivors, who carry embodied traces and personal memories of the experiences of the twentieth century, become fewer, what remains is, according to Jan and Aleida Assmann (2006, 2011), the symbolic forms and rituals of cultural memory. Cultural memory is an institutionalised form of memory which happens when landscapes, townscapes, public ceremonies, buildings and narratives are arranged in a way that they can facilitate a lived connection between those who remember (remembering minds) and those historical artefacts, documents and facts that remind of the respective event (reminding objects). It is different from communicative memory, which is a form of unstructured memory that lives in the everyday interactions of individuals and communities, and which is passed on orally and sensually. In contrast to communicative memory, cultural memory is then understood as an objectified, situation-transcendent and disembodied form of memory, which makes possible that a generation that cannot connect to the historical events through interpersonal encounters can still relate to these events by adopting and cultivating a shared cultural identity. From the perspective of such a cultural identity, the connection to past events is then established in shared rituals, narratives and designs which as social constructions provide individuals and communities in the present with a sense of historical belonging and responsibility.

Accordingly, communities and nations in Europe and beyond have established common rituals to remember collectively and to come to terms with the atrocities of the past. Memorial days, such as Holocaust Memorial Day, have become common events in the annual calendar of public life, usually accompanied by anniversary celebrations. Governments and private companies sponsor programmes and campaigns to direct public attention towards the atrocities committed by imperial, fascist or socialist states. Schools and charities offer educational programmes which teach children to connect to and remember the violent events of the twentieth century, and many cities are equipped with memorial sites, museums or monuments which remind us of traumatic historical events.

In the context of historical trauma, and specifically in the context of a trans-traumatic era, these symbolic and representationalist means of cultural memory pose, however, a set of problems. Firstly, as psychoanalysts and cultural critics have emphasised, routines and routinised narratives can quickly turn into screens, which address the traumatic event in language and symbols but actually serve to prevent sensual and unpredicted encounters with the destabilising psychic energy of the traumatic event (Laub and Lee, 2003: 445). In such ritualised forms of remembering, unclaimed experiences or affects remain active between bodies. They keep influencing relationships and minds with their disturbing force, while the screen narrative suggests to self and others that an engagement with the traumatic experience is actually taking place.

Something similar happens in the context of public ceremonies and narratives. When narratives and ceremonies for remembering the past are constructed to ground and strengthen identities in the present, then memory is at risk of turning, as Paul Ricoeur argues, into forgetting. The construction of plots and the ritualised performance of

commemorative festivals quickly form into actions which do not initiate a process in which repressed thoughts and affects are gradually 'worked through' but primarily serve as a means to avoid unwanted and uncontrollable confrontations with difficult relics of the past.[3] Such enactments of cultural memory are then, according to Ricoeur (1999: 6), characterised on one hand by an absence of memory, and on the other hand by an excess of memory, with both phenomena being signs for or symptoms of the fact that the actual work of memory is being avoided.

The other issue with practices of cultural memory in the context of trauma is the mismatch between the psychic/embodied forms of trauma, on the one hand, and the discursive forms of representative memory, which draws on narratives and identity, on the other. Traumatic experiences are characterised by the fact that they exceed and because of that destabilise self-images and a sense of belonging. The cognitive and social practices of cultural memory, on the other hand, seek to construct and preserve both narratives and identities. This tension arising from the contradiction between the object and the form of memory is, I argue, not exclusive to but particularly strong in the context of today's trans-traumatic era, since it is not only that the return to the event in the form of narratives and rituals is painful and often exceeds symbolic and emotional means, but also that a return to some kind of origin is impossible yet necessary; that a working-through of the trauma does not end in the restoration or healing of a disrupted identity or story, but that such rupture in identity or story never happened in the first place.

Considering these issues, which characterise ritualised and representative forms of remembering in the context of a trans-traumatic era, what could be alternative forms of memory? How could memory be practised as an encounter with the past as the inaccessible yet present trauma, the past as other, as different from yet deeply entangled with what we want or are able to see and know from the perspective of present identities and selves? And how can we avoid banishing the excessiveness of the trauma, the pain and struggle, towards the past, towards the other generation, turning it into a social reality that is not any longer ours but theirs, and with this far away from where we are now?

Memory as trauma in time

If there is no origin to the trauma that continues destabilising 'me',[4] I cannot approach it by trying to return to it. Reversing and seeking to articulate the ghostly affects through the traumatised chronicle of my family, of the nation, the world, is barred to me. With there being no origin, no before or after, there is no path that can materialise, no coherent narrative that could be bound. At the same time, however, another access to time is opened up.

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We are used to thinking and speaking of time and space as fixed parameters along which life, ours and that of others, evolves. We commonly accept that everything changes, yet we think of these changes as developments that happen within a certain sphere of linear time and space. If we, however, look at the characteristics of matter (physical, human, posthuman) from the perspective of a quantum physicist, then no

such laws of fixed time and space can be identified. This is not only the case, as Karen Barad (2007: 85) insists, if we look at the so-called microscopic sphere of atoms and subatomic particles (the sphere that quantum physics is usually associated with), but is true for all life and matter.

A particle that under certain circumstances can be measured as an independent entity, which occupies a specific place and time, can under other circumstances be in a state of superposition. This means that it is not here or there, now or then: rather it dwells in a state in which 'there is no fact of the matter to when it is taking place' (Barad, 2017: 68). Being in a state of superposition then means to be in time yet without a fixed place in time – not only coexisting at multiple times (past/present/future) but transcending any known or predictable laws of time. As such an indeterminate state, time does not precede the events that emerge from such superpositions but is produced in particular phenomena[5] in which particles diffract and interfere each time in specific ways. In each phenomenon, time is created in relation to the specific context from which it emerges, and it depends, among other things, on the thinking apparatus (i.e. the disciplinary and cultural sets of concepts and methods) through which it is measured and identified *as* time – or remembered as a point or event in time. Time as a linear and one-directional duration, which can be divided into past, present and future, is therefore not what is actually 'there' (Barad, 2010: 244), but its reality is multiple and dynamic, and always relative to the specific arrangements of material-discursive components.

Experiencing history from the perspective of a self in the trans-traumatic age is then perhaps similar to the experience of a particle.[6] On the level of discourse, where it is formed by the historical, sociological and physical tools of a modern, Newtonian thinking apparatus, this self is placed in the position of the third or more generation, travelling on a linear time path away from an event whose origin remains in a specific place and time (first generation and past). Outside of this specific thinking apparatus, however, its experience is akin to that of a particle in superposition – here and there, then and now, with no fact in the psychosocial matter that would determine where and when the experienced disturbance and pain is coming from.

This changed perspective on time and matter, actualised in the context of a trans-traumatic era, consequently allows for a different conception of memory. According to Barad, a knowledge of historical trauma, of a past that has not been remembered and continues being missed, is not known when its nature as a definable moment in time can be identified or preserved (either through historical facts or in shared mnemonic rituals), but when the past's unexpected entanglement with other times *as* trauma is recognised; which means, when the past can neither be identified as past nor present nor absent, but is experienced as a *difference* to common arrangements of time and space.

Since this kind of memory is interlinked with the experience and event of stepping out of common discursive-material practices and consequently with the experience of ruptures in common thinking apparatuses and rituals, it needs to be approached, Barad stresses, as 'an embodied practice of re-membering – which is not about going back to what was, but rather about the *material* reconfiguring of spacetimemattering […] to produce openings, new possible histories by which time-beings might find ways to endure' (Barad, 2017: 63; emphasis mine).[7] In other words, what we can know and articulate

about the past in the present will not help us in recognising and doing justice to the active pain of traumatic experiences, which continue being missed as they transgress the structure of linear hegemonic time. Instead, it is when the material configurations of everyday routines are changed in a way that common compositions of time and space are shifted beyond our immediate comprehension that an embodied encounter with repressed affects can potentially take place.

Memory is then less about coming to know the past and more about making possible a rupture or disturbance in common arrangements of past/present/future. It is not primarily a working-through of past wounds in a traditional understanding of this action, as these wounds do not exist as such fixed entities, but an openness to the experience of disorientation and otherness in the present, which is created when what can be known and articulated about the past and future is confounded/confused. And finally, memory is not an agency that requires a subject or collective or generation but is enacted in the experienced disruption of these binaries and subject positions made possible through material reconfigurations of existing relations between subjects, things and routines.

As such memory is, paradoxically, untimely. It is without time as it emerges in what undoes time as we know it, and as such an untimely act it feels awkward, inconvenient – inappropriate.

What could such a material reconfiguration of spacetimematter as memory, which disturbs common ideas of time and space, and which makes possible an embodied sense of otherness, look like? How could it be enacted and what are the forms (material/discursive/sensual) in which such changes in common patterns of space, time and matter could allow us to recognise timeless victims that have not been mourned, perpetrators that could not be faced or lives that have not been lived, without being further confined to past times?

Born in Berlin

Uncertainty and indeterminacy characterise not only time but also the features of organic matter. Whereas classical physics is built on the assumption that matter exists in the form of particles, which are independent material entities that occupy a specific moment in time and space and are therefore different from waves, quantum physics emphasises that matter can act as either, i.e. that a particle can behave like a wave, or that a wave can actually turn out to have travelled the path of a particle.

If a person moves to a city and acts like a particle, the city's matter is left untouched. If the person acts like a wave, it can disturb the city's entire organism.

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In 2011, Joanna Rajkowska, a contemporary artist known for her multimedia installations and performances in the public space, was working on a commissioned artwork for the 7th Berlin Biennale. In accordance with the Biennale's overall theme of socially engaged art, and in line with Rajkowska's other works, which address social taboos, gaps or wounds in public sites, the artist aimed to conceptualise an intervention that would address the city's historical burdens or struggles and allow for some form of relief or change.

When preparing her artwork, the artist, with roots in Poland and the UK, explored the city on long walks. Her feeling was that Berlin's public places were characterised by a culture of aliveness and creativity that was strictly restrained to the present and split off from traumatic experiences of the past, 'the years of war and post-war trauma' (Rajkowska, 2013: 131). This light-hearted appearance was, according to Rajkowska, made possible due to a set of shared routines and a culture of control. To her, Berlin seemed 'like a middle-aged man, good-looking, well-dressed, but at the same time worn out after years of suffering from a chronic disease that climaxed years back' (2013: 131). Creativity and chaos were desirable but only in places that were dedicated for it. Remembering was practised but incomplete and marked by repeated failures to verbalise the overwhelming affects associated with the war.

In stark contrast to Berlin's everyday culture, the city's buildings and architecture, however, seemed permeated with the historical force and violence of past wars. 'Pre-War Germany', Rajkowska writes, 'managed to charge [Berlin's] architecture with an energy which is tangible even today. There is something about the buildings' proportions, something in their heaviness, horizontality, the distances between them, in the way the streets are arranged. They dominate. It is difficult to position oneself physically near them and feel comfortable' (Rajkowska, 2013: 134). Berlin's classicist public buildings, such as the Reichstag, as well as the Nazi buildings of the 1930s, had been present before and during the war and as cultural objects they were not only built of bricks and mortar but also contained sedimentations of a people's national identity (Bevan, 2016). As such, they materialised the 'violence of hierarchical mass' (Rajkowska, 2013: 134), which was a cultural energy that was deeply entangled with power, war and post-war trauma, but which seemed to be split off from the city's everyday.

To overcome this split and find alternative ways of experiencing and responding to the city's material and cultural life, the artist paid close attention to the responses of her own body and feelings. Being pregnant at that time, she developed a heightened awareness of her pregnancy when interacting with Berlin's public sites, but she also sensed how a vulnerable and deformed body like hers formed a physical and symbolical counterforce to both the city's hierarchical mass and the anonymity and artificiality of its everyday culture. Turning this tension into the starting point for her artistic intervention, she decided to give birth in Berlin. 'I realized', she writes, 'that there would be nothing greater I could offer Berlin. This is exactly how I felt about trauma sites – they can be healed only by casual, human presence' (Rajkowska, 2013: 132). Instead of a traditional art installation in the public space, Rajkowska's artistic intervention hence took shape in the decision, act and experience of giving birth in Berlin as a response to what she felt was the city's silent enduring of historical trauma.

In juxtaposing and interweaving her pregnant body and the intimate event of her daughter's birth with places that were 'burdened with fear, with no element of pleasure', the artist sought to rearrange the routines and boundaries of Berlin's cultural landscapes in order to allow for alternative feelings and responses to emerge. Giving birth in Berlin was then an attempt to 'translate' sites that were associated with 'overwhelming suffering' into sites that were associated with the pulsing energy of new beginnings and care, generating 'a new layer, healing over, so the trauma stops being so naked' and the work of memory can begin (Rajkowska, 2013: 137).

A silent film, *Born in Berlin* (2011), and a series of collages, *A Letter to Rosa* (2011), document this artistic life project, each capturing images and compositions of the artist's pregnancy merging with the city's places and townscape; each portraying the artist's vulnerable, pregnant body against the city's skyline, buildings and sites, and each documenting in an imaginary way the unexpected encounter between vulnerability and violence, or happiness and death. One collage, for instance, shows a monumental depiction of the artist's womb, beaming abstract circular shapes towards the miniaturised image of the city's buildings and seemingly encircling or softening parts of the urban landscape with its intrauterine vibes. The film, which is shot on a Super 8 camera and which tells the story of Rosa's birth from the family's move to Rosa's first steps on Berlin's ground, contains scenes in which the heavily pregnant artist swims in the Olympic Pool or immerses herself in the swamp of Teufelssee, both sites associated with the trauma of Nazi Germany. In a different scene, the artist is filmed in her flat, waiting for the birth process to start. She and her partner project slides of the city's buildings onto her womb, making the buildings adjust to and visually merge with its round shape. The buildings bend. Their static and strong surfaces diffract with the soft edges of her body's profile, taking on the soft and intimate contours of late pregnancy.

Both film and collage series capture images of this encounter between vulnerable, deformed body and the hierarchical mass of Berlin's city life. Yet this encounter is not only of a symbolic, visual kind, but is material as well. The artistic decision to give birth against the grain of history, to give birth where an overwhelming presence of unmourned deaths is sensed, rearranges, I argue, on a microscopic level, the city's space-timematter. It plants a stranger's or foreigner's child as a gift in a place that continues struggling with the effects of a violence directed against strangers, against vulnerability and difference. It further rearranges the boundaries between intimacy and politics by turning the event of a single birth into an act of forgiveness and collective mourning and hence redirects routinised thoughts and feelings about Berlin's history towards unusual and unknown territories. And it creates the material and cultural frame for a single life story to be potentially told and lived as a response to the silencing of trauma, and which as such could influence other life stories as well. This artwork can therefore be seen, I argue, as a material rearrangement of objects, sites and routines, which produces openings in common narratives and images to make possible a felt encounter with historical trauma as a difference in present time, space and matter. As such an intervention it seems, however, not only too small to be seen or noticed but also formed by a feminine subjectivity and structure, which challenges usual forms of thought and action.

Matrixial memory

A quantum entanglement is a material configuration in which the state of one component cannot be described independently of the state of other components that constitute and emerge as such in phenomena. These components are therefore neither completely separate nor are they the same. Instead, they form a whole, which is divided but cannot be split into separate entities. A quantum entanglement is therefore a configuration of matter

which disrupts existing binaries (and their structures). It is 'more than one, no more than one, impossible to count. […] not the intertwining of two (or more) states/entities/events, but a calling into question of the very nature of two-ness, and ultimately of oneness as well' (Barad, 2010: 251).

Pregnancy, and with this the womb, can be seen as an embodiment of this ambiguous yet real state of being in which one (the becoming mother) is neither separate from nor fused with the other (foetus) – nor the other way around – nor can either (becoming mother/foetus) be seen as an independent and clearly defined entity. The womb is then a manifestation and experience of an embodied entanglement which is not none, one or two, and which consequently cannot be placed within the parameters of common Western subject positions.[8]

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The subject of Western culture forms around the idea of an autonomous mind and body, both of which are seen as being separate from others – other bodies, other minds. Such a subject is formed by and consequently depends on a symbolic order which arranges reality around identifiable entities which then form the basis for categories and laws that organise and give meaning to events and relations in social reality. When born, the infant does not possess a psychic apparatus that is able to detect boundaries between entities, subjects or times. Instead, their experience of reality (internal and external) is fragmented, overdetermined by the tensions created from their inner drives and deeply entangled with the emotional and physical state of other bodies. The infant's experience is therefore closer to the non-binary environment of the womb than to the sphere of a symbolically organised mind. For the infant to become able to enter the symbolic order of modern subjectivity, to become a subject with the ability to speak and think, it has to leave behind its entanglement with the intrauterine environment and it does so in processes of psychic development which allow the infant to build a sense of self as different from others.[9]

In patriarchal societies, this transition towards an independent and symbolically organised subject position is mostly associated with male bodies as well as with the signifier of the phallus, with either of them symbolising a difference from and with this a distance to the intrauterine, birthing, feminine body. The womb, the maternal, as well as the infant, on the other hand, are all associated with the pre-symbolic, non-identical sphere of unordered and entangled psychosocial formations, i.e. with experiences and states of being that precede and contradict the symbolically organised psyche. In patriarchal societies, where masculine bodies and structures claim a supremacy over feminine bodies and structures, the womb, as a site and experience in which neither becoming mother nor becoming infant exist as independent selves, has therefore to be denied, since a return or potential coexistence with the realities of pregnancy and early infancy threaten the authority and rule of an order, which arranges the world along independent entities.

But instead of being simply chaotic or psychotic, these so-called pre-symbolic experiences of entangled being can, psychoanalyst and artist Bracha Ettinger argues, provide an alternative access to language and with this an alternative knowledge of realities which are usually foreclosed, occluded or repressed by a phallic culture – to be more specific,

these trans-subjective and non-phallic states of being can provide, Ettinger argues, an alternative access to and knowledge of trauma.

This alternative, intrauterine entry to a symbolic organisation of experiences is facilitated by what Ettinger calls the Matrix. The Matrix, Ettinger writes, 'corresponds to a feminine dimension of the symbolic order dealing with asymmetrical, plural, and fragmented subjects composed of the known as well as the not-rejected and not-assimilated unknown' (2020: 99). As such, the Matrix can be understood as a trans-bodily net of entangled sensual-material-discursive strings (or waves) through which phenomena can be known as changes in psychosocial energetic configurations. This means that the Matrix is a trans-subjective energetic field of communication and exchange, a specific thinking apparatus, which makes possible a sensual awareness and knowledge of entanglements without dissolving them into binary categories (Ettinger, 2020: 238).

In this sense, the Matrix is not to be understood as the negation of a phallic order and its tendency towards universalism and abstraction – it does not simply add to the sayable the realm of the unsayable but extends the symbolic order towards experiences in which no clear distinction between one and the other, or between one and two, or before and after, can be determined. Or to put it in the language of a quantum physicist, if the phallic apparatus is able to capture and make sense of human bodies and minds as separate particles, then the Matrix is a thinking apparatus which allows us to feel and know human bodies and minds as superimposed, dynamic and ambiguous entanglements – or as waves that are also characterised by the im/possibility to act as particles.

A matrixial knowledge of difference, or a matrixial encounter with trauma, does then not depend on the rationalisation of a transgressing or foreclosed experience. Nor does it depend on an ego which can turn what is unconscious into conscious thought. Instead, matrixial knowledge or memory as an 'a-knowledgement' of trauma, is, according to Ettinger, felt-known: it is sensually recognised as a *difference* or sensual demand (affect) that strains the order which could put it into words – articulate/rationalise it. Or to put it in other words, it is a knowledge that is gained from a sensual encounter with those realities that strain the symbolic means of an ordered ego-time and narrative and leave their structured arrangements in disarray. This emerging affect is then not simply destructive, it does not replace order with chaos, but is an epistemic encounter with the borderlines or thresholds of the symbolic, which from the perspective of the phallic mind are thought as nothingness or void.

According to Ettinger, the subject, independent of its gender or identity, who surrenders herself to the matrixial sphere and its trans-subjective dynamics, i.e. who does not entirely repress its entanglement with others and because of this lives close to its own non-existence (death as an independent subject), or as Ettinger puts it, who does not repress its entanglement with the m/Other but lives close to their '*ab*presence',[10] preserves a connection to the edges of matrixial thresholds and with this an ability to acknowledge the presence of historical trauma (Ettinger refers to those matrixial thresholds as 'transport-station of trauma' [2020: 341]). While such closeness to matrixial thresholds does not make possible a knowledge of trauma as a translation of the unsayable into words, it makes possible a felt knowledge of superimposed experiences, which transgress the categories and identities of the present world, and which allow for a shared

sense of a 'deep body' (Soreanu, 2018: 22) that spans across times, bodies and generations.

Contemporary art and psychoanalysis, Ettinger argues, make such metramorphic encounters possible. By putting herself in the position of transubjectivity, by living close to the threshold, the artist and viewer, the analyst and analysand, is not beyond life and death but suffers 'from the no-memory or the immemorial of the Other and of the world' (Ettinger, 2020: 344). She allows the *ab*presence of trauma to affect her, touching both trauma and destabilised self as they emerge in ruptures of organised matter. Art and psychoanalysis then mean to suffer or be affected by the oblivion of trauma. They mean touching, sensually acknowledging, matter, which forms the crypts of psychic and social life, and attending its destabilising presence.

Memory as ethical response-ability

As a 'woman-artist' (Ettinger 2020: 339), who surrenders herself and the audience to the trans-subjective, matrixial sphere, Rajkowska connects with Berlin's hidden yet active scenes of destruction, steps into trauma as part of her own trans-subjective (pregnant) state and thus creates through her artistic response a path to the 'dimension of non-living in life' (2020: 344). In *Born in Berlin*, images and experiences of the womb merge with the symbolic and material formations of the city's present identity. The ego of Berlin's present, together with its material-discursive rituals, bends or softens while routinised formations and dimensions of spacetimematter, of buildings, bodies and sites, are being disturbed through the return of intrauterine experiences and arranged into shapes and constellations in which they would have been expected least.

By destabilising the symbolic environment and image of the city as a place and symbol of German identity, *Born in Berlin*, in the form of life project, film and collage series, triggers a transgression of the thinkable and offers a changed material-discursive arrangement as well as an alternative thinking apparatus for remembering and making sense of the city's past and present struggles. This temporary suspension of the denial of the womb, or of phallic subjectivity, which suddenly reactivates sensations of impotence, interconnectedness and maternal dependence, placing them close to images and sites associated with the war, brings to the fore affects that are usually repressed or foreclosed – untimely pain, loss, fear, resentment – 'transporting' them towards the borderlines of language, and initiating, I argue, potential encounters with what is continuously held back or misread. And the way in which this connection with and acknowledgment of foreclosed trauma is made possible can be illustrated along yet another detail of the artwork's particular form, or better along the film's unexpected and difficult ending.

Whereas the visual narrative of the film is composed 'with no words, no explanation of the context, no historical footnotes' (Rajkowska, 2013: 140), the film ends with a short and sober note that nine months after her birth Rosa was diagnosed with a rare type of eye cancer. While the act of being born in Berlin was composed as a break with the destructive practices of control and denial, and with the aim to initiate some form of healing, the last slide seems to grapple with the fact that the trauma has spread. In seeking to transgress and transcribe the crypts guarding the trauma of the war, trauma

is once again resuscitated as a force without origin – without boundaries – and painfully affecting the artist's family while placing the audience in the distressing position of a witness to a painful reality (Rosa's illness); a reality one would have not expected and preferred not to be confronted with.

When exhibited in the context of the 7th Berlin Biennale, *Born in Berlin* was criticised for being unethical.[11] There was a sense that the artist had violated her daughter's right for privacy and decency when exposing her gestation, birth and disease to the public.[12] But the life project and film, and especially the form in which the film asks the audience to witness the traumatic encounter with an untimely and life-threatening illness, make possible a felt encounter not only with trauma but also, I argue, with a response, or better, a response-ability to trauma's existence – i.e. they produce a symbolic acknowledgement of material-sensual realities that slip through the means of language and comprehension, and in such a way enact a deeply ethical form of memory and speech.

According to Barad (2010: 265), memory, as an acknowledgement or embodied touch of the indeterminacy of past and future, is a form of risk-taking and with this a taking of responsibility for a transgression of what is known as order, or as ethical boundary. Taking this risk and responsibility therefore means dragging memory beyond the order's commands. It is a risk-taking that is not configured to satisfy the present's demands but to remain in touch with the unfulfilled and unrepresented demands of the present's other – its othered times and bodies. Such memory then does not seek to represent trauma in common discourses nor does it drop trauma back towards the unthinkable crypt, but it facilitates a felt encounter with trauma by disrupting and rearranging discourse and speech.

This ethical response-ability to trauma is, I argue, captured not only in the content of the film's last slide but more so in its form. The film's last slide addresses Rosa's illness in a short caption, written in the language of neutral diagnosis: 'Nine months after Rosa was born, she was diagnosed with bilateral retinoblastoma, cancer in both eyes' – i.e. in a symbolic form that is at odds with the film's visual, mute and intimate composition and therefore with the artist's initial intentions and conceptual decisions. This means that although the last slide seems to be formed by the language of a rationalist and clinical self, it is not formed by the speech of a mastering ego. Instead, the last slide captures publicly the voice of a dispersed, partial self that not only acknowledges the difference of the other/daughter but also exposes the limits of her own means – artistic, conceptual, human. Or to put in other words, in including the last slide the woman-artist does not affirm her ego as an artist and mother but expresses and accepts her own dissolution and powerlessness. She does not draw on language to speak universal truth, but utters through language the rift that trauma tore into her life, work and art.

Born in Berlin therefore destabilises the artist's, the viewer's and the city's ego in multiple ways. First of all, it overturns a common sense of time and space by exposing matrixial thresholds in close conjunction with phallic structures. Common material and aesthetic arrangements of the city's sites and bodies are temporarily reconfigured by placing the womb and the event of a single birth at the centre of Berlin's townscape. In addition to this, the grammatically configured and symbolically represented pastness of the destruction and pain caused by the war is overturned by the public having to

respond to bodies whose vulnerability (the artist's and Rosa's body) merges with and revives the active and unprocessed experiences of the war in the present, moving affects associated with the past towards sites and bodies in the here and now.

Furthermore, the artwork troubles common ideas of agency based on human will and ratio. One common protective mechanism of social imagination, which constructs the war, fascism and the Holocaust as events of a closed past and with this of a different time, is the idea that these events were made possible by a large number of individuals who at that other time took ethically and politically wrong decisions. Analysing and knowing the political, social and cultural configurations that have led to this catastrophe feeds the belief that a repetition of the same mistakes can be avoided. Yet, what emerges through this artwork is a different form of agency, namely an agency which is cut loose from its traditional human and rational orbit. It is not, as Barad (2007: 177) stresses, simply aligned with human intentionality and subjectivity but is a complex, material, trans-individual force, which transgresses the sphere of the independent subject and acts through and in between bodies in unexpected yet nonarbitrary ways.

And finally, the artwork enacts an alternative form of speech or symbolisation. It becomes the site and agent of a speech which does not structure and foster cultural identity but which symbolically acknowledges identity's limits and turns into a gathering place for the foreclosed affect. Instead of repressing the knowledge of Rosa's illness or using it to rearrange the artwork, the artist/mother allows Rosa's difference to have an effect on the artwork's ending, acknowledging publicly the artist's/mother's limits. The artwork as an encounter with and memory of personal and historical trauma then speaks by moving between matrixial and phallic spheres of symbolic orders. In allowing for a rift in the artist's/mother's speech and identity to be exposed, the artwork captures a material-discursive trace of the unknown without forcing it to become like 'us' – without normalising it and using it for the purposes of present identities and interests.

In *Born in Berlin*, life and death, past and future, are not separated but are deeply and physically interwoven. Rosa's illness is not an effect of Berlin's matter, not a logical consequence of the decision to give birth in Berlin, but, in this specific constellation, physically and emotionally entangled and interacting with the trans-generational sensations of loss, pain and guilt, which were left active after the war. In *Born in Berlin*, the personal recognition of Rosa's illness merges with re-cognitions of the city's occluded affects. And the form of this re-cognition is crucial. In *Born in Berlin*, the trauma of Rosa's illness is not met with absence but with presence; it is not met with silence but with speech. A speech, however, which does not confirm the speaker's ego but articulates and enacts its dissolution; a speech that does not cover up but incorporates the wound into the formation of its symbols; a response that does not remain within the responsibility of the mother, the artist, but transgresses towards the viewing and wit(h)nessing audience and city. In *Born in Berlin*, memory is not practised by connecting a present self/identity to past trauma but by creating the material-discursive space for the trans-subjective, collaborative witness. It is not the success of a heroic subject, which transgresses the boundaries of an order, but the trans-subjective, shared experience of this subject falling into pieces. The question is not any longer whether we can listen or respond to the trauma of others, but what trauma does to a shared sense of 'me' and 'us'.

Conclusion

'Memory is what allows us to construe an image or narrative of the past and, by the same process, to develop an image and narrative of ourselves' (Assmann, 2011: 15). Identities and narratives are crucial for communal life and for the ability to share and preserve stories about the past, whether in informal or in institutionalised, cultural forms. Especially in cases when past events and experiences are not captured by hegemonic narratives, storytelling and shared cultural rituals are important for keeping a connection to past events that were crucial in shaping communities, bodies and life. This article, however, has turned this common theory of memory on its head. Instead of examining memory as a practice that constructs and fosters identities, it explored memory as a sensual-material practice that disrupts identities and familiar narratives and in such a way makes it possible to feel and acknowledge the past as an active yet non-representable and trans-subjective force in the present. I arrived at this alternative theorisation of memory through a diffractive reading of Barad's concepts of superposition and entanglement, which I read in relation to Rajkowska's artistic interventions in Berlin's spacetime-matter and Ettinger's theory of matrixial subjectivity. This configuration allowed me to identify the womb and with this the maternal body as a feminine and trans-subjective apparatus through which affects, which are associated with historical trauma, can be felt and thought, and I demonstrated the importance of such disruptive memory in the context of trans-generational trauma.

In addition to this, the article has shown how art can provide forms in which we can live with and speak through trauma's ghostly presence. Although disruptive and painful, traumatic experiences, their ghosts and present formations, are operative forces, which escape the apparatus of phallic forms of symbolic orders, of narrative and identity, and because of that require alternative forms of communication to be heard and acknowledged. Acknowledging and speaking to ghosts does not, however, require their positive representation in words – at least not as rationalisations of what has become unthinkable. When remembering trauma, the aim is not to turn 'tragedy into triumph' (Eyerman, 2004: 161), not to adjust the traumatic to the structured spheres of identity and then use it to form a positive identity around experiences of violence or loss. Instead, the aim is to pass agency to the unmediated experiences of othered (excluded/submerged) times and allow them to form constellations (emotional, conceptual, material) with present experiences, narratives and identities in unexpected ways. This is the ethical in memory as a response-ability *through* ghosts.

In this context, such de-centring of an individual or collective self makes possible, I argued, a different, feminine and aesthetic relation to language and knowledge – a relation that is not static and solidified within the symbolic, nor entirely outside of it, but dynamically falling out and bouncing back into it (one central characteristic of the intra-uterine state is that it is temporary!). In ethical memory, when what happened but was missed becomes active as past-other, affect and thought are not separated from one another but in dynamic interaction. The affect, emerging from the matrixial borderspace, does not replace cognitive thought; it is not in itself a separate act or entity, but a sensual-material formation which changes thought – its content and form. Such wounded speech

does not colonise experience but responds to and acknowledges experience's transgressive, beastly and creative force – without containing or taming it. It then speaks beyond what is manageable, but by doing so brings to life those whose suffering is otherwise forgotten.

Ethical memory or witnessing, then, requires not only an attention to and connection with the unexpected, foreclosed affect, but the 'veering movement of form/unform, shape/unshape, frame/unframe' (Armstrong, 2000: 74). It is not realised in the total refusal of representation, but in a struggle *in* representation. It consists of a trans-subjective, trans-generational voice, which does not confirm but destabilises the ego and consequently absorbs the *ab*presence of trauma into its form.

Experiences and images of the womb are tangled up with the unlaid ghosts of trauma, which lingers between subjects and generations – the prehistoric, the prelinguistic, the primitive, the excessive and the new – with all of these being facets of life's matter, which in modern societies are usually overseen, repressed. The failure of language, or the tremor or block of speech, as the trans-subjective, matrixial voice irritating phallic speech, embodies and with this creates the space for ghosts. We should not hide these cracks or struggles or holes, or try to cover them up, or silence their shrieks, but rather learn to listen to these untuned and disturbing sounds, which create space for those who are at risk of being forgotten.

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ORCID iD


Magda Schmukalla https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4420-350X

Notes

1. By Western societies, I mean societies formed around a Judeo-Christian culture associated with European and North-American life and structures.
2. Historical trauma refers 'to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people who have achieved some degree of cohesion' (Eyerman, 2004: 160).
3. Like, for example, the ceremonies performed in Germany on the German Day of Unity (Tag der deutschen Einheit) on 3 October, which celebrates the end of Germany's political division into West and East Germany but evades a confrontation with and working through of the controversial and, for many people in the former East, painful experiences of this process.

4. The 'me' and 'I' here refer to the Christian Enlightenment subject of European modernity in the trans-traumatic era (third generation plus) which is deeply entangled yet never identical with my personal self.
5. Instead of using objects and their interactions as starting points for observations and analysis, a quantum theoretical perspective uses 'phenomena' as 'basic units of reality' (Barad, 2007: 33). Phenomena are understood as specific nondeterministic but nonarbitrary compositions of intra-acting agential components (Barad, 2007: 139–140).
6. I owe this idea of identifying with the experiences of a particle for the purposes of theory to Karen Barad herself.
7. Spacetimemattering is one of Barad's neologisms which stresses that there is no pre-existing ontology of matter and things, but that both are defined by their dynamic relationality with other matter and things.
8. Unless, as is commonly done, the entangled components are forcefully separated into two different entities: woman and baby.
9. See Sigmund Freud on the Oedipus complex and the distinction between primary and secondary processes.
10. '*Ab*presence' is one of Ettinger's neologisms which seeks to express a specific relationality characterising the matrixial sphere where Is and non-Is are never clearly apart nor fused. They are 'relations-without-relating on the borders of presence and absence' (Ettinger, 2020: 388).
11. Here I refer to the artist's own description of the audience's response, as presented by Rajkowska at the event 'Where the Beast Is Buried: In Search for the Public Space' at UCL (University of London) on 15 January 2014.
12. The same critique would apply to this article.

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