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Contextuality and the transmission of trauma: *Nightfather* by Carl Friedman

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“Context” plays an important role in any discourse about trauma. Not only does it serve as a precondition for the manifestation of trauma in the first place, but also determines the way in which trauma is received, interpreted and represented. The sensitivity of the reception context towards the represented traumatic events also determines whether only knowledge about the events are mediated or whether the uncanny nature of trauma is transmitted. If the latter occurs, a secondary trauma manifests itself as result. In the Dutch novel *Talievader* (translated as *Nightfather*) by Carl Friedman the transmission of the Holocaust trauma within a particular family is represented. This transmission can be seen as the result of the impact of one context on another—that of the parent on that of the child. With the complex issue of the transmission of trauma kept in mind, specific dangers in the interpretation and transmission of trauma in a collective sense are identified. Suggestions are also made on how to deal with trauma in a productive way. **Keywords:** contextuality, Holocaust, mediation of trauma, narrative.

The contextualisation of trauma

Introduction

The consensus today is that trauma originates as a result of the inability of the victim to meaningfully experience and represent the given “traumatic” event. This inability in effect merely is the result of the inadequacy of the subject’s particular discursive context which allows the individual to meaningfully interpret, i.e. assimilate, represent and eventually mediate the traumatic incident to others. Since it would then by its very definition be impossible to represent any trauma within the parameters of the discursive context or symbolic order at the time the actual “traumatic incident” occurs, it is important to explore the dynamics and boundaries of trauma discourses which *do* follow after the event (Van den Berg).¹ To interpret trauma from the outset as a unique, sublime and therefore unrepresentable event denies any semantic relation whatsoever between trauma and its representation.² The fact is that representations of trauma abound: this article endeavours to investigate the role(s) context plays in the representation and mediation and/or transmission of trauma.

Context and contextuality

In this article “context” and “contextualisation” are used in a rather general way.

Despite clear differences between concepts such as “paradigms”, “frames of reference”, “contextual discourses”, “symbolic orders” and the like contextuality, in accordance with all these, refers to that within which the experience of the self, the Other and reality is embedded.³ One of the roles of “context” is to enable subjects to orientate themselves. Some theorists believe that it has an even clearer performative and active function in that it filters (organizes, models) events *during* cognitive processes. The boundary between the human mind and that which is cognitively assimilated fades in light of the argument that the only knowledge human beings are capable of generating is shaped by the context which inherently determines their entire cognitive process. That which determines this process is furthermore not static—contexts evolve and often differ dramatically in terms of their cultural, ideological, religious, socio-political and other perspectives.

Theories on the interpretive abilities of human beings, their cognitive ability to dynamically structure reality, and the interrelatedness of both these, have a long tradition: the role of “context” is an underlying aspect in the work of various philosophers such as Foucault, Derrida, Hayden White, Richard Rorty and Paul Ricoeur. Rorty points to history as the reservoir of stories due to the “contingency” of contexts; in his work Foucault examines paradigms or *epistēmē* in depth; Ricoeur converts the experience of the self to a narrative “emplotment” (Antze 6); and White’s work regarding emplotment within the historical context is widely known (Roth 5–9, 75). A shared objective of these theories would be to promote awareness of these “contexts” within which knowledge of the self and reality is embedded. The importance remains to be aware of the boundaries of these contextual structures.

It may seem as if the focus here is exclusively on the limitations that context presents to the individual, as if indeed context impairs an impartial, objective and comprehensive experience of reality, and as if the meaning of events cannot be fully exploited within the context of a specific approach. It is contextual cognitive structures, however, that create the very opportunities to experience and interpret initially, without which no one would be able to experience reality in a meaningful way (Van Alphen, *Caught by History* 24–26). But it is also true that these “opportunities” do not imply choices, it rather represents the predetermined way in which reality is to be structured, as well as the predetermined nature of these experiences themselves (Young 16–17, 28, 55, 243–44).

Contextualisation of trauma

Even the experience of or the discourse about trauma cannot escape the matrix of “context”. James E. Young devotes his study, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*, to the inseparable link between the knowledge we generate about the Holocaust trauma and the mental constructs (read: contexts) that make it possible. Not only does one require a context to orientate oneself

with regards to the event, but the context also determines the knowledge one acquires and is able to acquire.⁴ An empirical example of the determinant function of context would be the way in which the secluded nature of the Holocaust extermination camps determined the way in which the survivors experienced and interpret the Holocaust (Dresden, *De literaire getuige* 207).

To put it briefly: context is the axis around which the whole issue of trauma representation revolves, because it guides the entire process of experience, representation and reception of trauma. One can in fact distinguish three interrelated contexts. Firstly, there is the “experiential” context that plays a part in the individual’s or the community’s direct experience of the trauma. What happens here is that historical events overwhelm the discursive representative possibilities of the individual or the community to such an extent that it cannot be experienced and represented in a meaningful way. The experience consequently is not assimilated in a usual way, but rather manifests itself in terms of a trauma symptomatology. The victim can nevertheless attempt to articulate the event: the choice thus is either to express the trauma, or at least aspects thereof, or it can be deduced that the trauma partakes of the sublime and therefore cannot be articulated or represented. The effect of the latter would obviously be complete silence.

Should the first option be exercised, a second context comes into play: the “representational” context which entails the medium of representation, i.e. the variety of representative strategies each discursive context offers, with its unique possibilities and limitations. These options are largely predetermined: a rubric which determines the representation as such. The final context relevant to trauma, specifically with reference to its mediation or transmission, relates to the “reception” context, i.e. how the representation is received. Listening to a victim’s evidence is surely the most direct, the written word (as representative of the symbolic order *sui generis*) surely the most obviously mediated way in which the representation of the trauma can be received. This last context also is the most relevant to the dynamic presence of trauma within the life of the individual or the socio-political context of a community, because it determines to what extent the mediation of the trauma also includes its transmission.

The mediation and / or transmission of trauma

If the three above-mentioned contexts are regarded as an interrelated chain through which a trauma discourse is established, these could also be interpreted as three stages, the progression through which would represent the mediation or transmission of the trauma: from the authentic direct experience of the primal traumatic event via giving the experience its mediated form to being receptive to trauma representations and interpreting it within a new context. As time passes it is first and foremost the reception context that becomes the most important stage during which knowledge about the trauma is generated, because access to the authentic experience becomes

more difficult. The reception context furthermore influences the representational context in that it not only determines the nature of new representations of the traumatic event, but also the way in which *new* traumatic events are experienced. Dialectics between the two contexts ensues: the contextualisation of the text is followed by the textualisation of the context.

But the receptiveness or sensitivity of the reception context towards how the trauma is represented facilitates the way in which the trauma is received. Because the dynamics of the linked chain of contexts can either mediate trauma as *knowledge*, or transmit trauma as an adumbrated *experience*. Mediating a traumatic event means that the trauma is represented in a meaningful way, e.g. through a sensible narrative, and consequently interpreted as such. The unique unrepresentability which defines trauma is disregarded in that the trauma discourse becomes a mediating of digestible knowledge about the event. If, on the other hand, the reception context is sensitive to this sublime aspect of the event, the trauma may indeed cause an unsettlement within the reception context itself. “Empathic unsettlement” is precisely the way *secondary* traumatisation manifests itself—it does not suggest an experience identical to the original traumatic event, but rather similar, if less intense feelings of discomfort (LaCapra, *Writing* 70–71, 78–79). The result is not merely a mediation of knowledge about the event, but rather the transmission of but a shadow of the trauma itself.

The transmission of the Holocaust trauma from one generation to the next can clearly be illustrated within a family context: it refers to the fact that the following generation will interpret the Holocaust in terms of the way in which it had been articulated by the parents (survivors). The framework of the children is greatly determined by that of the parents, and because it is not possible for them to interpret the trauma representations (or even acting out of symptoms) as mediated information, an unsettlement or secondary traumatisation is the result (Levine 20).

Mediation and transmission are two extremes on the spectrum of individual and collective trauma reception, and with reference to the discourse on trauma should also be interpreted in terms of the dynamics of “working through” and “acting out”.⁵ Emphasis on the one or the other may have serious consequences: either a secondary traumatisation or the cerebral defusing of the trauma.⁶ In reality it is true that probably a combination of the two occurs in any given serious confrontation of a trauma. The best way to deal with trauma would be to find a balance between the two.

Dealing with trauma self-reflectively

How should one then do justice to a traumatic incident when representing an event such as the Holocaust? The answer lies in a keen self-awareness and a conscious self-reflection about the contextual foundations on which the own perspective is built. Being aware of and deconstructing the subjective perspective should result in creating a critical modus which can serve as a platform to create knowledge and dialogue

about the subject (Felman, "Apocalypse" 160). The acknowledgement of inherent limitations regarding the own perspective also signifies a sensitivity towards the dangers of representation by omission: it enhances a greater willingness to enter into a dialogue with other points of view, but also to enter into a multi-perspective approach regarding the object to be represented (e.g. a traumatic incident) (LaCapra, *Representing* 31–34, 65–66; *Writing* 35–40). Should this not happen, it could result in a canonisation of the own point of view, the foundation of an explanatory master narrative and the closure of any other relevant interpretative possibilities (LaCapra, *Representing* 23; Friedlander 131; Young 149, 298–99). Defending the own subject position at all costs is also dangerous since it can lead to the repetitive acting out of the symptoms of the traumatisation process, whether or not it happens in ignorance of the fact that the one can cause the other (Eisenstein 2). Examples of these would be the improper appropriation of victim status or attribution of perpetrator identity, which at the very least would result in a symptomatic social dynamics of exclusion. Defending these issues on a greater (collective) scale can therefore have very serious socio-political repercussions. "Collective repression and suppression may bring temporary comfort but carry their own destructive costs: further victimisation, lost human connections, and unresolved anguish" (Vickroy 4).⁷ The moment interpretative contexts stagnate or self criticism fades, the modus of interpretation petrifies into a fetishistic narrative or dictatorial emplotment.⁸ The only visible evidence of trauma then would be the indirect traces of *différence*, left by the failure of the contextualised symbolic order to articulate the trauma.

To put it in psychoanalytical terms: a sense for the own transference in the interpretation process is paramount.

Transference is itself at the intersection of the personal, political, and textual, and it encompasses at least two related issues: the way in which problems and processes active in the texts or artefacts we study are repeated in displaced and often disguised or distorted form in our very accounts of them; and the more interpersonal dimension of involvement made familiar by psychoanalysis (LaCapra, *Representing* 111).⁹

Transference entails the projection of that which is uniquely part of the subject position onto the "text" that is being "read", as well as the more emotional rapport that can develop in relation to this "text". The effect is that the resultant interpretation is inherently linked to the subject position of the individual—with all its positive and negative aspects, its unique possibilities and shortcomings.

The appeal therefore is for self-reflection, especially with regard to the blind spots that are part of any subject position, and to be receptive towards dialogue. This, however, may easily resemble a general and complete distrust of all points of view and values. It is a common basis for criticism levelled against what is perceived to be postmodern relativism: on what does one base ethical accountability when sureties

waver? Are ethics, also ethics with respect to trauma representation, possible? There seems to be consensus that one should strive to create “ethically accountable contexts” (and especially communities) within which critical dialogue can take place within a predetermined and accountable set of parameters. Apart from intersubjective consensus, any such context must also take the evolving nature of the circumstance and contextual subject positions into account.¹⁰

In order to illustrate some of the points raised in the discussion thus far, the Dutch novel *Tralievader* (translated as *Nightfather*) by Carl Friedman¹¹ will be analysed with reference to the role context plays in the trauma discourse.

***Nightfather* by Carl Friedman**

The story

Nightfather is the first person narration of a young girl who, over the course of 40 short chapters, provides short fragments from her daily family life. Most, if not all, of the events she describes, relates to the role her father, a Holocaust survivor, plays in the life of this family. Embedded in her narrative are several (often gruesome) anecdotes as told by her father, Ephraim, who incessantly shares his experiences in the camp with his wife, Bette, and three children (Max, Simon and the narrator) (Will 33). Although the telling of these stories seems to be a psychological tic, he is aware that the events he experienced cannot be explained, cannot be mediated to someone else: “You can’t even begin to understand”, he says (Friedman, *Nightfather* 9–10). The father’s entire frame of reference, which determines his daily existence, can be traced back to the traumatic experiences from his past. Even events related by the narrator and in which the father himself plays no part, are placed against the background of *his* frame of reference. This is quickly established as symptomatic of how the (traumatic and past) world of the father overlaps with the world of the children and begins to cast a sombre shadow. The impact this has on the behaviour and ideas of the children are far reaching: the Nazi trauma becomes a more reliable point of departure than any other frame of reference prevalent amongst their peers.

As the novel is played out a shift in the narration becomes noticeable, as the stories of the father progressively take up more narrative space. Although the narrative perspective is still that of the young girl and the anecdotes are clearly indicated as being that of the father (by making use of inverted commas), some chapters consist entirely of his stories. Ephraim therefore takes up the position of a second narrator and on the story level becomes of even more importance, because apart from his narration it is precisely his stories which elicit the reactions of the other members of the family, including those of the young narrator.

Father Ephraim’s anecdotes deal mostly with his life in the camp: the suffering and hardships due to hard labour, poor nutrition, disease and abuse. The family

context, within which these are narrated, is indelibly stamped by them. Atrocities and hardships that were experienced by the father seep into the frame of reference of the children, causing them to occasionally act abnormal in the eyes of those around them. The narrator becomes aware of this at her school: her childlike, naïve remarks about traumatic incidents (or simply her drawings depicting these events) elicit strange reactions from her teacher and fellow pupils. The three siblings share this common perspective and often play games inspired by this. The only indication of an actual historical date in the text is the court case of Adolf Eichmann that is broadcast on television—this suggests that the events in the story take place around 1961.

The story to a lesser degree is about the development of plot, than it is about the presentation of a psychological state of affairs, a mode of existence, with the various effects it has for the different characters. All of these can be linked directly to the presence of a trauma that has not been dealt with, but which haunts one generation and is transmitted to the next.

The representation of trauma

The “nightfather’s” never ending flood of words about his traumatic Holocaust experiences, as well as these becoming embedded in the mind of the susceptible narrator, means that the representation of trauma in *Nightfather* occurs on two levels. The first person narrations of the father are representations of the authentic and original trauma as experienced by the victim. The narrative secondly describes the narrator’s reactions to these and the effects the father’s narration and actions have on the family. The traumatised state of the father is furthermore illustrated by his acting out of certain trauma symptoms: apart from his endless and repetitive recollections of the past, which in itself illustrates his preoccupation with his traumatic experiences, he often exhibits behaviour reminiscent of post-traumatic stress disorder.

The impact of Ephraim’s (the primary victim’s) traumatic experiences on the psyche of the children, whether as a result of his consistent articulation of the events or his acting out of the trauma symptoms, is reflected in the narration, which includes the narrator’s observation of the reactions of the brothers, Max and Simon. It is suggested that these children form part of a second generation of victims—a generation indirectly affected by the traumatic events experienced by the first generation. The children may well be exposed to a trauma of a different nature: a family trauma the dynamics of which is then projected onto the Holocaust trauma as cause. Whatever the case may be, the problematic issue in *Nightfather* is typical of what is regarded as a second generation trauma (Missinne 222). Trauma in the novel ultimately arises because two opposing frames of reference and contexts clash: the contextualised trauma representations of the father are at odds with the reception context of the children. Transmission of trauma from one to the other means that one frame of reference impacts negatively on the other, because the latter did not exhibit the necessary Freudian

*Angstbereitschaft*¹² to assimilate that which was being transmitted or mediated in a meaningful way. Since second generation trauma specifically deals with the frame of reference of young children, this confrontation has the potential to completely distort their developing world view. Whether all of these can be ascribed to the transmission of only the primary traumatic experiences or whether other family issues are included under the one trauma as common cause is irrelevant in considering that at least some kind of traumatisation, also known as “empathetic unsettlement”, did take place during this interaction (Ibsch 154).

The question is how the second generation, in other words the first person narrator, Max and Simon, experience their father? Very early in *Nightfather* the traumatised state of the father is defined as a static condition, he “has camp”. “To ‘have camp’” means to be traumatised: both his symptoms and his narration attest to this. The awareness the children have of the father’s trauma symptoms, for example his “monopolisation of grief” (Muller 223), causes a reaction which leads to severe tension between the generations. Whilst the mother is unwavering in her support of the father, Max, Simon and the narrator react differently.

The most obvious and telling reaction is that of Max, the eldest of the three children. Max is the only one willing to confront his father directly—as a result of the suppressed feelings and emotions the children have developed having had constantly to listen to his stories. At times it results in a vicious war of words between the two of them. Its impact on Max (and the other children) is profound and the confrontation of his father indicates just how deeply his whole being is affected by it.

The reactions of Max are a direct result of the way the children see their father. Not only *is* the still developing reception context of the children infringed upon, but other emotions experienced by the children follow on the behaviour of the father which is peripheral, but still relevant, to his traumatised state: his inability to show love and care for the children. The natural reaction is to project all of these emotions on to the experienced Holocaust trauma of the father as cause.

Narrative perspective and context

The use of a first person narrator in *Nightfather* is a literary strategy that not only is used very successfully to contrast the frames of reference or discursive contexts of the first and second generations, but also to portray the profound influence the one has on the other. The lives of the children are described both within the family and within the school context amongst their friends and peers—a world which has little knowledge and is even quite indifferent and unsympathetic towards what happened in the Holocaust (Will 33; Missinne 222). The very first chapter establishes the childlike perspective of the narrator: “He never mentions it by name. It might have been Trebivor or Majdawitz, Soblinka or Birkenhausen. He talks about ‘the camp’, as if there had been just one” (Friedman, *Nightfather* 1).

The garbled enumeration of the Holocaust concentration and death camps serves more than one purpose: among others it emphasizes the absence of a mature perspective on the Holocaust trauma. One might have anticipated an informed (retrospective) perspective on the events, given the fact that the narration takes place 16 years after the Second World War. However, it is precisely the immature perspective of the child narrator that illustrates the contextual restraints of her perspective. It is precisely these limitations which serve as the precondition for any potential traumatising: the parameters which allow for the meaningful interpretation and assimilation of events are either still in a process of development or simply lacking.

The unconventionality of the own context and perspective is further made manifest when the narrator comments self-reflectively on her own use of language, and that of the family: it is a language imprinted by trauma. Referring to her friend, Nellie, the narrator remarks: "Words like barracks, latrine, or crematorium mean nothing to her. She speaks a different language" (Friedman, *Nightfather* 21). The confrontation of the different contexts (which would enable the trauma transmission) is mirrored by the impact one language context has on another, because language remains a contextually determined means of representation (Ibsch 154).

Another way in which the contexts of the father and the narrator can be distinguished from one another lies in the fact that the first person narrator narrates and describes events in the present tense (which to a large extent inhibits an informed, retrospective perspective), whilst the first person witness, the father, narrates the camp experiences in the past tense. As his stories take up increasingly more space towards the end of the text, (and increasingly fewer events are related in the present tense by the first person narrator) the sense is that the past is constantly encroaching on the present. There seems to be no escaping the impact of the trauma.

The children are conditioned to assimilate the father's frame of reference, which in turn leads to the naïve appropriation of a victim status against which the eldest, Max, rebels. The worlds of the child and that of the father overlap—an eclipse which results in a grey area that the narrator describes as "different", but the reader cannot but interpret against the backdrop of trauma transmission.

The impact that many of the stories and descriptions have on the children manifests itself in many ways: fear ("I'm not scared of crocodiles. I'm scared of vermin. What I'm most scared of is Willi Hammer" (Friedman, *Nightfather* 44); behaviour totally out of the ordinary when compared to "normal" behaviour (practising to hide a knife from the Nazis; making plans to slaughter Pink, the cat, in the event of war; burying toys in the garden so that the SS will not confiscate them; swearing at the teddy bear by calling it "Sauhund" in preparation for a possible gassing; taking a tube of toothpaste to school in case they are to be taken on a death march); the transference of traumatic motifs from the world of the father onto their daily experiences (such as the wolf in the zoo also having "camp", or relating a camping excursion at school to *the camp*);

and the representations of the children becoming increasingly tainted by the uncanny traumatic (macabre drawings at school, the figure of the distorted cowboy in a dream about the Wild West). The interference that takes place is evident.

***Nightfather* as illustration of the transmission of trauma**

Most of the various aspects relevant to the mediation or transmission of trauma discussed above can be identified in the novel. Not only does the father exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (which relate to his actively “acting out” of the events), but he incessantly articulates the past by the telling of stories. These represent the second context or stage in the establishing of a trauma discourse: the representational context which enables him to give form to and mould his experiences.

The most telling context, with regards to the mediation or transmission of the trauma, relates to the reception context within which these stories and erratic trauma symptoms of the father are received. In *Nightfather* this is represented by the three children, specifically the narrator whose naïve and limited frame of reference are from the very beginning of the story set up as vulnerable to the trauma symptoms of the father. The narrator is unable to deal in a self-conscious way with the traumatic symptoms and stories of the father, i.e. she lacks awareness about the distance between her and the narrated (and acted out) traumatic event. The result is the eclipse of her own world by that of the father, without her being able to confirm her subject position as being that of only a witness.

Being unable to translate both the traumatic stories and the acting out of symptoms into a mediation of information, the children experience empathic unsettlement. Not only mediation, but also a transmission of the Holocaust trauma takes place—not nearly to the extent of the effects of the authentic original trauma, but enough for the children to experience fear and “act out” some of its symptoms by exhibiting behaviour which would not be considered normal. Included here would be the appropriation of a sense of victim status.

It remains interesting to note the way in which texts like these are received within the literary context. *Nightfather* by implication is interpreted as a novel which has the second generation trauma as theme—which means that the latter is perceived as a collective trauma indicated by very specific characteristics. Whether discussed as literature dealing with Jewish issues or the way in which later generations write about the Holocaust, a standard set of themes are seen as defining the way in which the trauma is represented. This in effect means that mediation takes place—irrespective of the often deeply disturbing events described in the stories themselves, the texts do nothing more than mediate knowledge about the trauma according to a standard set of values. This does not imply that transmission of trauma cannot take place in the personal reading of a text like *Nightfather*. What it does imply, though, is that the discourse on and about a traumatic event by implication is set to a large extent on the

mediation of information about the trauma. Within the set structures of the literary or cultural discourse room is left for empathic unsettlement, but the literary discourse itself is necessarily bound by reflection and self-reflection on themes, characteristics and tendencies.

This in effect contrasts to what is represented in the novel as such—the *transmission* of father Ephraim's trauma to the next generation the narrator belongs to. As a theme the novel deals with the transmission of trauma, as a literary text it illustrates the mediation of trauma.

Conclusion

"Context" both serves as that which facilitates the possibility the individual or collective group has to establish and maintain a meaningful relation with reality and a beacon which, when overwhelmed by a historical event, serves as a prerequisite for the manifestation of trauma. Both the transmission of trauma from one individual to another and the interpretation of trauma as a collective notion which can subsequently be transmitted from one generation to the next, depend on the way in which "context" features in the dynamics of the trauma process.

The full impact and meaning of trauma cannot be mediated either as a unique, individual or collective experience. An (individual or collective) reception context susceptible to the represented trauma can at most facilitate a muted transmission of the sublime nature of trauma, creating a degree of "empathic unsettlement". This happens automatically when, for example, the "unimpaired" but sensitive reception context of the listener or next generation, is infringed upon. Parallel to the dynamics of this transmission process, transference from the reception context does take place, which means that the transmitted traumatic experience is also contextualised by the receiver. At its worst the result is the appropriation of trauma. The dangers linked to these kinds of contextualisation increase exponentially on a collective level: the official definition and interpretation of historical events as traumatic, inserts layers of meaning between the primary experience and the mediated representation, with the effect that the primary experience is replaced with a simulacrum. Great care must therefore be exercised when defining a historic event as traumatic and in any given attempt to mediate traumatic experiences. Being aware of the own contextualised perspective as well as being self-reflective in the reception of the events as traumatic has the best chance to strike a balance between the transmission and the mediation of trauma. Too easily can the symptoms of a trauma be perpetuated if no critical distance between the experiential and the reception contexts exists (i.e. transmission). The past can also too easily be reduced to a historical trope or narrative which can serve as the manipulative means to transfer and disseminate inclinations only relevant to the own context (i.e. mediation). The process of the transmission of trauma then becomes nothing more

than the mediation of trauma representations. The only resemblance it then has to the primary experience is a common historical date.

The problematic issues that arise in the wake of trauma and its representations go beyond questions regarding its individual or collective psychological effects or general theories about the limits of representation. Being sensitive to the dynamics and interaction of contexts that define the trauma discourse is simply an ethical way to best approach any traumatic event.

Notes

1. See Lifton in Caruth ("Interview" 132–33), Laub (78), Felman ("Education" 16–17, 39–40), Eaglestone (16–17), Ester (159), Dresden (*De literaire getuige* 225), Dresden (*Vervolging* 217, 224–25), Steunebrink (68–79), Sars (121) and Van Alphen (*Caught* 18–20) regarding the definition of trauma.
2. The culmination of this is silence, à la George Steiner in his work *Language and Silence* (see Langer 14–15; Steiner 156).
3. Barthes in an essay emphasizes this to such an extent that he refers to the "death of the author". According to his idea the text and subject positions are to such an extent structured by the context that the Romantic ideal of a creative genius becomes nothing more than misguided naiveté.
4. "[S]ubjects are the effect of the discursive processing of their experiences" (Van Alphen, "Symptoms" 25). See Young (13–14, 18, 20, 36, 61, 67–68, 74, 149–50, 162); Dresden (*Vervolging* 15, 45); Eaglestone (28–29); Eisenstein (3, 51); LaCapra (*Representing* 26); Laub (81); Antze and Lambek (xx–xxi).
5. This in turn refers to Freud's contrast between melancholy and mourning: "Freud compared and contrasted melancholia with mourning. He saw melancholia as characteristic of an arrested process in which the depressed and traumatized self, locked in compulsive repetition, remains narcissistically identified with the lost object. Mourning brought the possibility of engaging trauma and achieving a reinvestment in, or 'recathexis' of, life that allowed one to begin again" (LaCapra, *History* 44–45; see *History* 183–87; "Trauma"; LaCapra, *Writing* 21–23, 141–46).
6. Baudrillard (79) discusses the contrast between information and meaning: "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning". In these terms mediation of a trauma would refer to information about the event and transmission would refer to its meaning.
7. See Santner (144) on the *Historikerstreit*.
8. See Young's (34–35, 43, 91–92, 108–09) extensive treatment of the documentary as a particular way of representation ("trope").
9. LaCapra (*Representing* 11, 26, 46, 110–11, 174–78; *History* 206–07); Young (140); Leibovici (11–13); Dresden (*De literaire getuige* 253–54); Eaglestone (162–63); Friedlander (38, 48, 72–73, 123) and Santner (145–46).
10. The nature of these communities are vague, but Lang (310–14) has this to say: "By this reference [moral community] I mean that the moral weight ascribed to an issue analyzed in terms of the radical will reflect the context of social identity in which the historical representation is addressed—in the present, that is, rather than in the past presented" (310). See Roth (5–9, 77–79) about similar tendencies in the works of Richard Rorty, Hayden White en Michel Foucault. See Eaglestone (236–40).
11. Inspired by her father's illness, Carl Friedman wrote a number of poems in the eighties which were submitted for publication—they were not published, but her publisher encouraged her to capture her memories in prose (Will 32–33). This eventually resulted in her prose debut, *Tralievader*, which was published in 1991. The afterword written by Friedman and published in the English translation emphasizes the autobiographical nature of the text: "After his liberation by the Red Army and after many wanderings [...], my father returned home from the war in June 1945, suffering from hunger edema and tuberculosis. In 1947 he married my mother, and my mother married a critically ill man. My father underwent several operations on his lungs and was kept in hospitals and sanatoria on and off for nearly ten years. In the intervals he came home to press my mother to his heart. And not only to his heart, for she fell pregnant three times. She bore him two sons and

a daughter. When my father was finally pronounced cured, an affliction much more terrible than tuberculosis appeared, an affliction of the memory. His lengthy stay in sanatoria had let the genie out of the bottle, so to speak. My father could not forget the war. He spoke almost incessantly about his camp experiences, not only to my mother, but also to us, his children. Each one of us reacted in his own way, but all of us were marked by it for life. A child is a hollow vessel with a thundering echo. What is a child to make of tales of hunger, humiliation, and murder? Where did the tales stop and reality begin? We no longer knew (Friedman, *Nightfather* 135).

12. The “preparedness” which allows the meaningful assimilation of regular events (regular because they submit to the existent frames of reference), but is absent during the experience of the traumatic event, is by Freud referred to as *Angstbereitschaft*. It literally means to be prepared to fear—prepared to orientate oneself *vis-à-vis* the unknown, within the discursive context (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 61).

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