Rogue Memories:
Reflections on Trauma, Art, and Technology

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"I am happy when I paint – art makes me human," Salam Ahmat says as he shows us his paintings, laying them out in front of us, one by one. Ahmat is a Kurd from Syria and had lived with his family in Switzerland for a little over a year when we visited him in the summer of 2015. His journey to a Swiss village near Olten was long and circuitous: formerly an art teacher at the Institute for Applied Art in Aleppo and a restorer at the Museum for Contemporary Art in Aleppo, he first escaped to a refugee camp in Turkey on his own in 2013 after being arrested and tortured. He then returned to Aleppo to get his family, his wife and two small children, out of Syria as well; together they then made the journey via Turkey to Switzerland. The work he shows us is all of recent date, his entire Syrian *oeuvre* was destroyed when he left his home in Aleppo. His present work consists of large and small-scale paintings, which predominantly engage with the female human figure. The larger works are acrylic on canvas and the smaller ones are in a mixed technique of acrylic and Chinese ink on paper.

Ahmad is largely an autodidact. He experimented with painting from an early age on and his desire was to attend the art school in Damascus. He did not know the right people in the regime, however, and was denied entry. He then studied philosophy and pursued art in his own manner, working as a painter and a poet. Ahmad says that the fact that he did not attend the official art school has been liberating for him; because he does not have to respect certain rules, he can be free of any canon. While working in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Aleppo, he was responsible for documenting Islamic weapons, mostly shields, which were decorated with battle scenes. These objects were full of human figures and the project proved influential in his development, giving him formal training in the approach to the human figure.

Figure 1
Salam Ahmad
Untitled (2015)
Acrylic and Chinese ink on paper
Image courtesy of Johanna Fassl

Figure 2
Salam Ahmad
Untitled (2015)
Acrylic and Chinese ink on paper
Image courtesy of Johanna Fassl

There are a few works on paper that show flowers or fantastical animals. It is the female body that dominates all paintings. In the smaller works Ahmad always starts with acrylic when painting the figure and the background is in Chinese ink. He also draws with ink, sometimes there are tiny, tremulous scribbles animating individual areas (figure 1); in other instances, strong, overriding lines dissect parts of the entire surface (figure 2). The combination of acrylic and Chinese ink give the works on paper a particular quality: the opaqueness of the acrylic and the transparency of the Chinese ink set up a tension, where the acrylic holds your attention at the human figure and the background in ink opens the space, giving it depth. The viewer's eyes and thoughts travel between human figure and unbound space, setting up a dreamlike dimension.

Beauty and sadness is what came to our mind and Ahmad did not deny the importance of both and their connection in his works.

We asked whether his creativity was linked to sadness, whether it needed sadness and where beauty ranges within sadness? Ahmad affirmed that even if the thought at the conception of the work is not beautiful, the work has to be beautiful. When painting the female nude, he is concentrated on the soul of the person he is painting, he tries to go inside the body to the soul, and the soul is beautiful and indestructible. Touching on these themes, our conversation was somewhat disconnected – a monologue interspersed with long minutes of silence from Ahmad but also from us. Ahmad does not use the language of trauma nor does he claim that painting – an act of creativity – has the capacity to heal him. But he says that making art is the only tool to remain human after having lived certain experiences. Creativity for him is a process of warding off evil and of protecting himself from succumbing to desperation – a tool to survive. In making art, he wants to render visible the soul of people, the soul of events even, but he demands nothing further of the act of painting. In this sense, his perception of his own creativity goes against much of the literature on trauma that sees artistic articulation as a way to overcome trauma, to disperse it by making traumatic experiences articulateable, and hence to access and retrieve them in a way that renders them part of a knowable life narrative.

When we visited Ahmad, ISIL had just launched an attack on the northern Syrian city of Kobanî, which until then had been reclaimed by the Kurdish forces. ISIL fighters were wearing Kurdish and Free Syrian Army uniforms when they set off a car bomb that killed at least a dozen citizens. Being a Syrian Kurd, Ahmad was deeply disturbed by the event, and, when talking about bringing out the soul of an event, he told us that he is planning a painting, or a series of works, centered on Kobanî. When we asked him about the creative process when it comes to works that have traumatic events at their root, he responded that he has to wait for the right moment in order to start. He has no control over beginning or end, as the workflow, or what shape the work takes, is by no means linear or clear. He prefers to work on several projects at the same time, each one informing the other. Waiting for the inspiration to work on Kobanî is complicated. When thinking about what happened during the attack, he is filled with disappointment, horrifying sadness, and extreme fear, emotions that are difficult to translate into art. Ahmad's preoccupation is that art will never do justice to the actual tragedy – ever.

What makes Ahmad's art congruent with many works that build on traumatic experiences is the absence of a precise depiction of an actual event – and yet, you can sense that there is another dimension to representation. This is what makes abstraction such a fascinating issue when it comes to discussing trauma, even if the debate cannot ever be conclusive. When going through both works on paper and the large canvases, what struck us most were the ellipses present in Ahmad's works, the use of fragments of the body, for instance, to imply the whole. It is strongly present in figure 2, where the woman's right arm is missing, or in figure 3, where the viewer is startled by the woman's pose, questioning the absence of the right leg. The body is disjointed, broken into pieces, disintegrated. You try to feel yourself into the woman's body and are constantly denied a sense of wholeness, the feeling of an intact body. The partially obscured face enhances this unsettling sensation; the image communicates fragmentation, mutilation, and surrender.

The quest for investigation, which inevitably animates the viewer when looking at works with powerful ellipses, is even stronger in the large work on canvas (figure 4). Here, we asked Ahmad directly about the representation, the meaning of the lack of arms and the obscuring of the woman's face. He told us that women in Syria are a weaker part of society. Using your arms and hands, you can fight or defend yourself but an arm-less body literally is a weak body. Given the situation of the raging conflict in Syria, we could not escape drawing the connection between arms and weapons and what it means to be utterly defenseless when un-armed in the middle of a war. The woman's appearance actually has nothing to do with religion and the often-discussed, weak position of women in Islam. Although not spelled out, in this work, the arm-less woman appears to be a direct allusion to the military conflict and the suffering of the Syrian people.
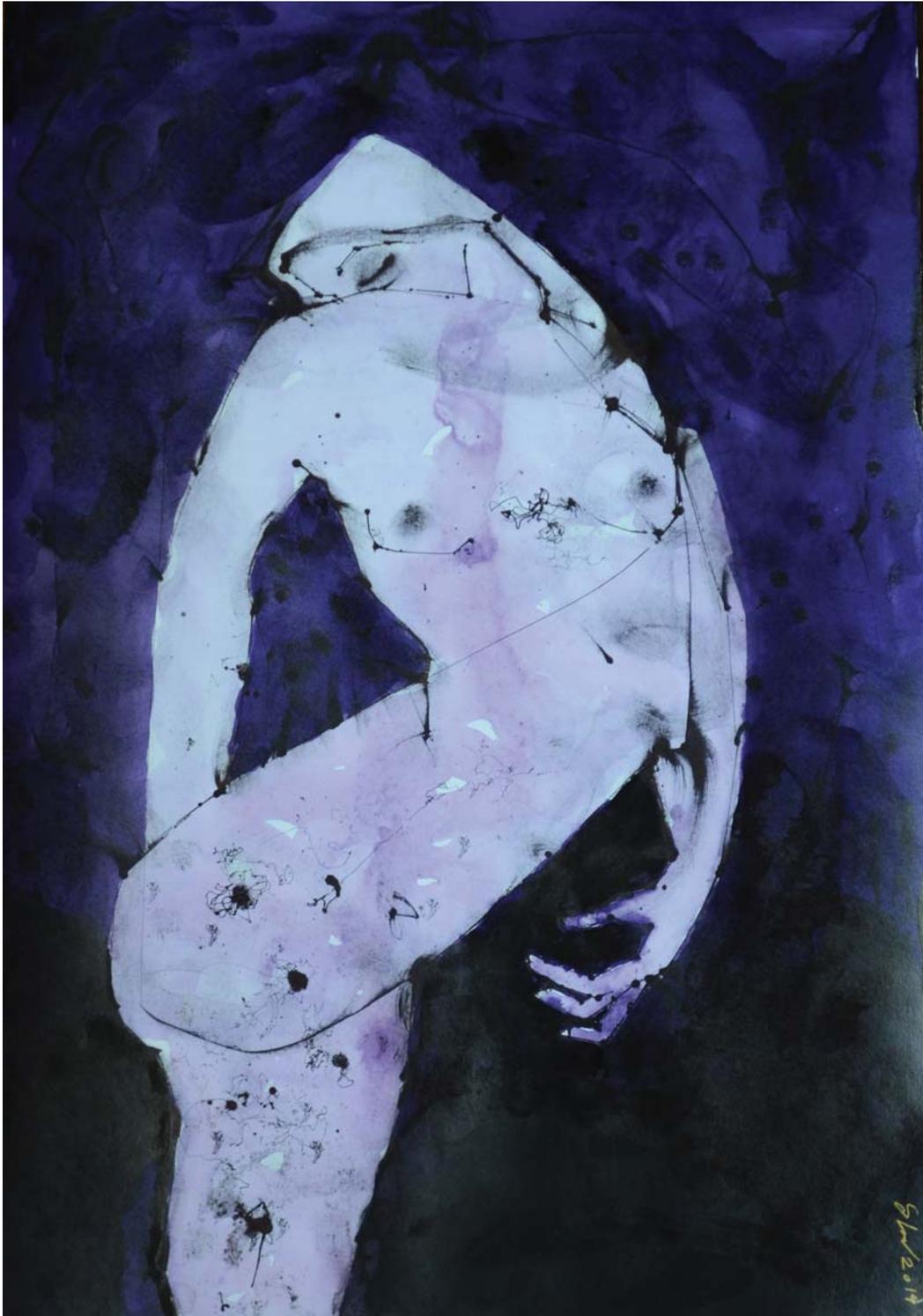
Figure 3
Salam Ahmad, Untitled (2015), Acrylic and Chinese ink on paper
Image courtesy of Johanna Fassl

During our studio visit, we went through a large body of Ahmad's work but not a single one of his paintings has a title. He told us that he does not assign individual titles to his paintings or his poems, but that they are all part of the larger scope of his entire oeuvre, dedicated to "the pain of the Syrian people." Each work is signed but not titled. At some point a British friend of his named his works but that did not convince him. Assigning a title would mean to come to

terms with, to understand, to calibrate, to label; leaving a painting untitled thwarts such conclusion and opens a world of possibilities for both artist and viewer. It also creates a space for trauma to reside without pinning it down in a narrative. Titling a work would mean to literally "come to terms" with a subject, which, for Ahmad is impossible, given the scope of his project.
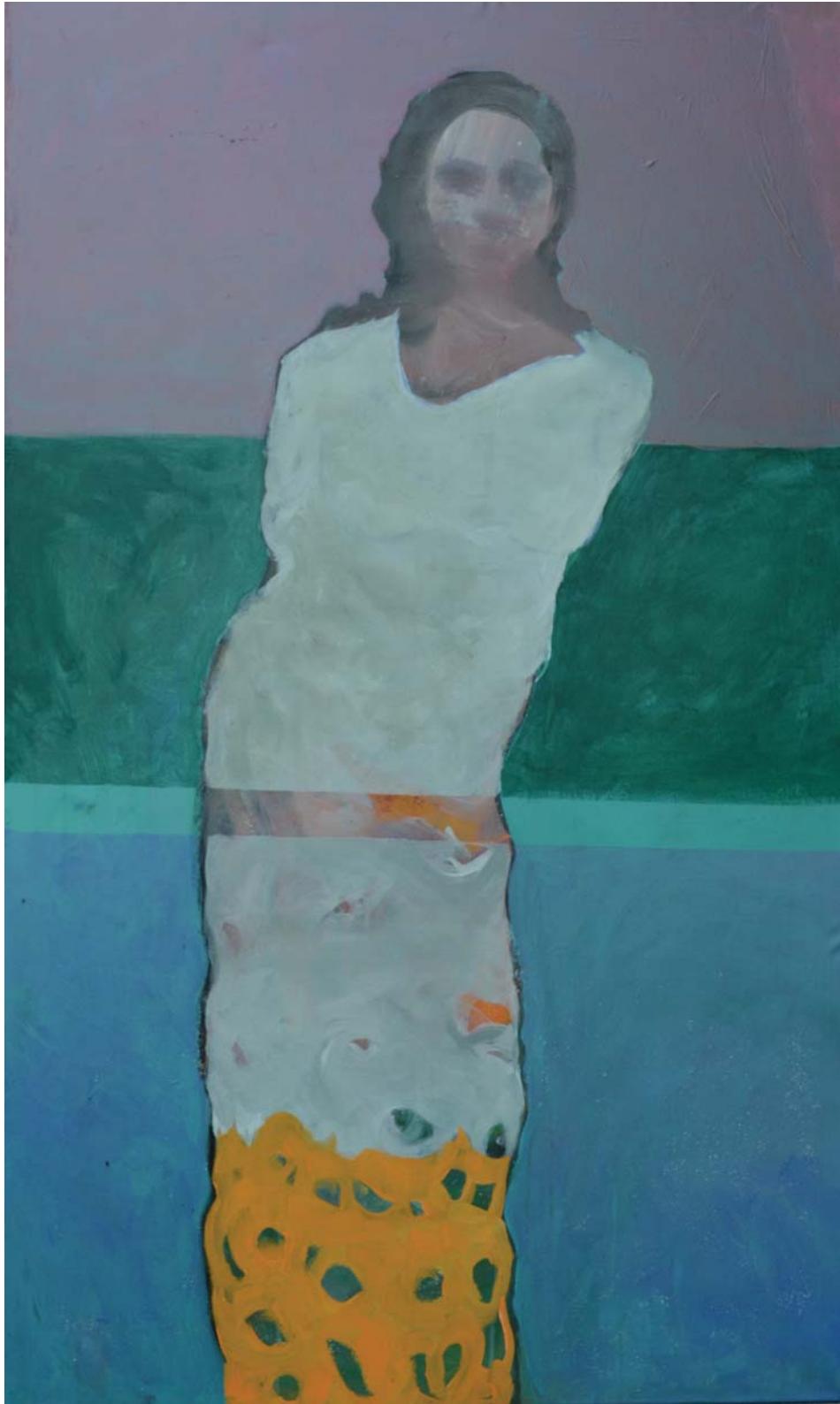

Figure 3
Salam Ahmad, Untitled (2015), Acrylic and Chinese ink on paper
Image courtesy of Johanna Fassl

There is no immediate end or resolution to the pain of the Syrian people. The lack of titles mirrors the absence of holistic bodies and both are powerful forms of abstraction. Absence is forcefully eloquent when it comes to expression, regardless of context. When calibrated within the scenario of trauma, absence is doubly powerful, as it is associated with mutilation, death, and destruction. In Ahmad's thinking there is another powerful void: the absence of an audience that can understand the terrible sadness of the events he depicts. Because of this perceived inability to understand, he feels that his immediate audience is not able to appreciate his work – this is a form of abstraction of his fear. Ahmad then is doubly caught in a mode of indeterminacy: both the lack of titles denote his internal resistance to being pinned down and to forging a narrative that might help to overcome trauma; and his living conditions in a country in whose narratives and cultural history Ahmad does not see himself mirrored pose a very real obstacle to coming to terms with his past.

Our conversation with Ahmad touched upon the key issues that we defined when we first thought about this volume: trauma, abstraction, and creativity. Asking ourselves the question of what we might contribute to the field, we decided to trace the way in which the language of trauma manifests itself in individual cases of cultural production, ranging from drawing to painting, and photography to television series. We wanted to specifically focus on the role of abstraction in the context of creative processes informed by trauma. How is trauma uncovered in the human mind and body during creative processes? What forms does it take in a work? What defines the relationship between traumatized artists and their audiences? What is the relationship between the historical context and the specific sites of trauma to more essential conceptions of a psyche subjected to trauma? What are the various (and curious) forms of transmittability of trauma?

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After we left Ahmad and boarded the train, we were strangely discontent. We felt that we had invaded somebody's privacy and did not get much further in our investigation of trauma and creativity. After some time had passed, it became clear that this was not a matter of the questions we asked or answers we received; it is the nature of trauma. It is and remains a 'complex beast' – individual, elusive, and impossible to articulate decisively. As Roger Luckhurst argues in his overview of the field of trauma studies, the history of trauma theory and its dissemination, development, and contemporary importance in fields as disparate as medicine, legal studies, literature, art, and neuroscience, resist any facile claims to comprehensive knowledge.[1] And yet, despite the fact that many of the more sophisticated strains of thought remain elusive, the basic concepts associated with trauma, such as flashbacks, nightmares, repressed memory, depression, and the compulsive repetition of experiences have saturated popular representations in literature, film, television series, and newscasts. Typically, they accompany the commentary on any major cultural catastrophe, including events as dissimilar as wars, public court cases, natural disasters, sexual abuse, and mass shootings. We all understand the language of trauma and tend to use and receive it as shorthand to capture and comprehend the more horrific events offered up daily. And yet, the common language and interpretation of trauma does not fully go to the heart of the matter. Trauma has been and will remain a challenging topic of study, due to its indefinability, fragmentary manifestation, and persisting (cultural) taboos in its discussion. One can have lived through a catastrophic event and not develop the classic symptoms associated with trauma; one can also have lived a disturbance that is not officially recognized as a disaster and show all the symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder; and one can be traumatized without knowing it. When it comes to the articulation of trauma, in itself so difficult to pinpoint in works of literature, art, or popular culture, the vexing question of whether trauma is representable at all recurs throughout the history of all disciplines associated with trauma studies.

In many ways the history of trauma studies in the twentieth century is a history of a struggle to understand the porous relationship between mind and body, to render tangible the invisible wounds of the psyche, and to conceptualize the dynamics between the wounded individuals and their surroundings. Its major insights in the late nineteenth and twentieth

centuries coalesced around, and were driven by the need to come to terms with historical events and developments – such as the industrialization in the late nineteenth century, the aftermaths of the two world wars, Vietnam, and the cold war – each shattering a collective's self-understanding in its own specific way.

In literary and visual culture studies one concern took central stage: the question of the 'articulability' of trauma. Can it be fully said, seen, narrated – in short represented – at all? Within this context, the 80's and 90's of the twentieth century saw the formation of two camps around these questions. Cathy Caruth, following in the footsteps of Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin, diagnosed a central paradox in trauma. According to Caruth, because of the belated nature of experiencing trauma, it is fully evident only in connection with another historical context and geographical location.[2] At the same time, she points out that it is not only the reality of the trauma that repeatedly returns to haunt the victim, but also the lack of complete access to and full knowledge of the trauma. Trauma then in this school of thought only ever offered up the possibility of incomplete, nonlinear knowledge of an experience forever belated, fractured, and in disjuncture with the time in which it is felt. The belief that a trauma narrative enables an effective working through the painful events remains impossible.

This view was rooted in the deconstructivist stance rehearsed at the same time in intellectual debates over the cold war. Considering the possibility of total destruction in the nuclear age and the fear of potentially obliterating a world archive, the symbol for the repository of human knowledge and history, the importance of both word and image received prime attention. Semiotics, and with it the discussion of the connection of signifier to signified, entered the disciplines of literature and art and changed the way texts, both written and visual, were read. Questioning traditional assumptions about certainty, identity, and truth, deconstructionism claimed that also 'trauma resides beyond the limits of representation.' Jacques Derrida, in "No Apocalypse, Not Now," takes up the speed of nuclear armament and the possibility of total war beyond earth and brings up the notion of "dissociation" (division and dislocation) in order to reflect upon the essence of knowledge and *techné*.[3] He held the imagination of nuclear war responsible for the blurring of the dividing line between *doxa* (opinion) and *épistémè* (knowledge), noting that nuclear war is something so spectacular, a science-driven fable, that it obliterates the line between belief and science: "Among the acts of observing, revealing, knowing […] the limits have never been so precarious, so undecidable."[4]

Judith Herman opposes this view of trauma narrative as aporetic, essentially incapable of healing because of its incompleteness.[5] Rather, to her mind narratives are powerful therapeutic tools, capable of enabling trauma victims to work through their experiences and eventually find resolution. The space opened up by Herman whose background is in the treatment of incest victims, and children and women who have experienced sexual violence and situations of captivity, is not between work and viewer, but rather between therapist and patient. As Irene Visser remarks in an essay on the nexus of postcolonial studies and trauma theory, Hermans' stance holds out "a more sustainable perspective for a postcolonial trauma theory, not only because it entails an openness to the structuring of narrativization, but also because it allows a historically and culturally specific approach to trauma narratives."[6]

Seen from a twenty-first century perspective, the deconstructionist claim that "there is no such thing as an absolutely legitimizable competence for a phenomenon" shuts down the certainty that the visual world can be fully grasped and explained. What you see is *not* what you get, as the world residing behind and in visual phenomena can be manifold and without apparent connection to the phenomenon's outward appearance. At the same time, this claim curiously opens the possibility for trauma's figuration. Assuming that 'trauma resides beyond the limits of representation' detaches meaning from symbol: it liberates word, sentence, and paragraph from semantic whole; it frees the mark on the canvas and the stroke on paper from an immediate referential system; it does away with the assumption that a photograph must be 'of' the scene that marks its content. Art history and visual culture embrace uncertainty at the root of representation. Abstraction no longer means 'without subject matter' and thus necessarily is a

transcendental engagement with pure form. Abstraction can be located in void and absence, deformation and distortion, fragmentation and dispersal, but also in excess and hyperbole, hyperreality and hypervisibility. Granting abstraction the potential of representation shifts the discussion from surface to viewer where both become the 'producers' of the work. It also opens the transitional space between work and viewer as a possible site in which trauma finds a place to reside.

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As we assembled this volume, we encountered old foes and new friends in the discussion of trauma. Inevitably, all of the articles we selected center on war and/or national conflicts, discussing both old and new struggles. Thomas Röske's essay innovatively sexualizes World War II; Klitsa Antoniou and Antonis Danos discuss abstraction in painting in artists working in the wake of the Turkish military invasion on the island of Cyprus; Harun Farocki, Michaela Wünsch, Johanna Fassl, and Atyaf Rasheed's texts have the war on terror in Iraq at their basis; and this introduction features an artist who fled from the war in Syria. Although not dealing with declared wars, the contributions by Gabriel Gee and Kathleen McQueen and Liz Park are about national conflicts. In Gee's conversation with Northern Irish artist Conor McFeely "The Troubles" are implied; and in McQueen and Park's essay the legacy of Hugo Chavez' oppressive regime is the source of trauma. This tells us that wars are at the forefront of discussion in the second decade of the twenty-first century; it also confirms that trauma remains a valid and important angle with which to come to terms with this history. The common denominator for all processing of conflict in the artists' minds discussed in these articles is the phrase with which we opened our introduction, Salam Ahmad's statement that "art makes me human." Although creativity does not have ultimate healing powers, it is a way of getting in touch with the inner workings of mind and body, and, at least in fragments, to confront the 'complex beast' called trauma.

Our initial interest in the operation of trauma in the human mind and body during creative processes finds a new point of discussion in technology. Harun Farocki, Michaela Wünsch, and Johanna Fassl exhibit and examine the role of technology in the surfacing and recognition of traumatic memory. Farocki's video installations in his *Serious Games* series document how computer-generated game technology is used on military bases during therapy for battle-scarred soldiers. Wünsch looks at how trauma and its aftermath are represented in *Hatufim* and *Homeland*, specifically how television's temporality, that is the sequencing of episodes and the structure of flashbacks, reflect the nature of traumatic memory. And Fassl explores high-dynamic-range photography, digital software processing, and Kathryn Bigelow's high-speed Phantom HD camera in her discussion of how war is actually seen, encoded in the brain, and recalled from memory. Without wanting to glorify technology, we see great potential for the unveiling and understanding of the nature of traumatic memory in yet-to-be-developed machines, apparatuses, and software applications. Walter Benjamin in 1931 was already aware of the potential of the camera, stating that the machine captures a different 'reality' from the one the eye sees. Instead of a consciously framed nature, it is "a space held together unconsciously" and photography makes the knowledge of that space possible.[7] New technologies that have the potential to release information from bound spaces will stimulate mental processes in the recovering of traumatic memory and its assimilation.

The volume opens with the essay "Thoughts and Trauma – Theory and Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder from a Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy Perspective" by **Julia König**, introducing the topic from the point of view of the cognitive psychologist and therapist. The term "trauma" is firmly defined by official organs, outlining a set of symptoms for conditions, such as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). But the issue is more complex than a set of undisputed signs and the term "trauma," often so casually thrown into a conversation, should be used with great care. PTSD is not an exclusive reaction to a personal or collective catastrophe, not everybody living a traumatic event develops mental health problems, some people recover all by themselves. The article posits the exteriority of trauma to a person's self and addresses two ways how individuals try to integrate it into their lives: people either strive to keep

their cognitive schemas intact or they alter their schemas to comply with reality. "Assimilation" describes the cognitive process when the traumatic event is interpreted in a way that it fits into the existing schema; and "accommodation" is the process when the schema is changed so that new information can be incorporated. König gives a case study, where she demonstrates how important it is to recognize "assimilation" and "accommodation" processes in the model known as Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT). The model aims at changing these dysfunctional beliefs. A particularly important point of discussion is brought up in the so-called "stuck-points," problematic cognitions that hinder the processing and integration of traumatic events into a person's life.

Cathy Caruth's essay "Parting Words: Trauma, Silence and Survival," engages with Freud's ideas of trauma, which have served as a theoretical underpinning to some essays in this volume. It suggests that Freud's insights into trauma are to be understood as a juxtaposition of the well-known fort-da game in which a child enacts the mother's departure, with the dreams of soldiers returned from the World War I battlefields which brought them back repeatedly to the horrors they had experienced. Departing from this initial juxtaposition in Freud's thinking, she locates her own insight into the nexus of the death drive and the life drive in the compelling story of a group in Atlanta that was established to help children who had felt trauma and loss. In her analysis of interviews she conducted with friends of a boy who had been killed, Caruth notes how the bereaved are sent into life with the help of an abstraction of sorts: a memento, or materialized object of memory. She sees this as a release, which shows that the language of theory "articulates the very notion of the trauma and the death drive as a creative act of parting." Abstraction and creativity, then are paired here as passageways that turns trauma into memory.

The third contribution comes from **Klitsa Antoniou and Antonis Danos** and is titled "Writing Trauma: Giving a Voice to a Wound that Seems to Defy Representation in Contemporary Greek Cypriot Art." It discusses Greek Cypriot art following the Turkish military invasion on the island of Cyprus in 1974, which is responsible for the division of the island until today. While König's article explains the processing of trauma in cognitive-behavioral psychology and Caruth gives us the perspective from a literary criticism point of view, Antoniou and Danos propose a valid model in the analysis of art engaging with Cypriot history. Switching from a text-image based theory to a model that addresses the 'event of picturing,' they direct their investigation to the expressivity of the surface and the sensations provoked in the viewer. It is a performative model, putting the viewer response at its center, which challenges the notion of the unrepresentability of trauma. Trauma, they contend, can be represented and recognized as such. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, they investigate abstract painting and a theory where the 'figural' replaces the 'figurative,' thus opening a possibility of understanding the nature of the artists' abstractions. Deformations are interpreted as 'catastrophes' that disrupt the figural, leading to a 'violence of sensation' in the nervous system of the viewer. Distortion does not result in the variation of degree of a symbol, it is not the bolding of an existing mark. Rather, this abstraction is speaks of a difference in kind, where distortion creates a violence to the eye, provoking a sensation of forces in the viewer. These deformations show up in the guise of stretching and smearing over figures and landscapes; in marks and lines that literally 'wound' the surface; in a-signifying lines and formless forces; in thick layered material; and in installations with empty frames and spaces.

In "Dots and Dashes, Crumbs and Ashes" by **Kathleen MacQueen and Liz Park**, artistic abstractions take shape in the uncanny spaces left over by catastrophes. In their discussion of the works by Gwenessa Lam and María Elena Álvarez, and their conversations with the artists, they show two inverse modes of making meaning of these spaces of catastrophe, of 'deploying abstraction as a silent resistance to the inscrutable nature of trauma.' While Lam fills the voids with ghosts and shadows of lives lived there, evoking memories of loss, Álvarez uses the empty spaces as places of refuge, which she layers and re-populates with remnants and scraps and detritus of life in Venezuela in the aftermath of Hugo Chavez' death in 2013. MacQueen's reading of Álvarez' work focuses on trauma as a disturbance in the ability of engagement with

this world turned upside down, and the creative process as a means to stay on the right side of the dual processes of acting out and working through trauma. If, as MacQueen argues, Álvarez ultimately creates spaces of hope and permeability in a praxis that draws from her immediate politicized context, Park understands Lam's spaces as closed, angst-ridden, and inward-looking, pressed together by unfathomable violence in the world beyond. What remains in the closed spaces are remnants of violent history and destruction: blinded windows, the outlines of Chinese vases blasted in a ray of light, floating, mangled objects, and the fragments of dialog, houses built by Chinese coolies in the 19th century. Lam's response then is not to a personal trauma, but rather to a shared culture of violence. By filling the spaces she visualizes with the detritus of this trauma, she re-invests them with the possibility of reconstruction.

Thomas Röske in his own way reacts to a shared culture of violence in his essay "Sexualized Suffering: On Some Lithographs by Richard Grune." Grune was arrested at the end of 1934 for his homosexuality and subsequently spent eight years in and out of different concentration camps until he was able to flee during the death march from the camp Flossenbürg. The lithographs depict the torture and murder of prisoners in Nazi concentration camps. Röske's inspiration for this piece came from what he terms a fundamental "irritation" he felt when he first saw them exhibited in the former camp Neuengammen. This irritation is based on a tension he perceived between Grune's declared intention to make visible the horrors prisoners experienced at the hands of their torturers and to remember them. At the same time, he perceived the unintentional revelation of a homoerotic fascination with both perpetrators and victims. Röske interprets the gap between the overt and covert meanings of the images as a manifestation of the trauma Grune experienced as a homosexual in Germany not only during, but also after National Socialist rule. For the notorious paragraph 175 that criminalized homosexuality in Germany remained in effect until 1994, preventing gay survivors of the regime from claiming victim status or from receiving reparations after the war. Hence, as Röske argues, Grune's publication in 1945 of his lithographs was meant to show that he was as much a victim as anyone else and certainly not to reveal homoerotic tendencies. The culture of violence, which in the case of homosexuals persisted long after 1945, influenced the very act of representation and reception of Grune's work: only a temporal distance to that time has allowed for the detection of the sadomasochistic elements in Grune's work, which can be understood as the trace of traumatic experiences that were hardly ever acknowledged and certainly never resolved.

A blend of overt and covert meanings are also fundamental to the work of Northern Irish artist Conor Mac Feely whose conversation art historian **Gabriel Gee** curls around five objects that form part of discreet pieces of art. It becomes clear that each piece offers a range of interpretive possibilities, often containing hidden elements that function as the existential roots of each piece. These roots, in the form of aesthetic elements, in turn might be understood as symptoms of submerged pasts and places, and traces of experiences too traumatic to remember. The notion of partiality – of incompleteness – is central to Mac Feely's art: it implies at once a search for the lost or hidden or veiled part, and a vexed relationship to parts that can take the form of desire, for instance, or of fixation.

Whereas the contributions by Antoniou and Danos, McQueen and Park, Röske, and Gee discuss trauma predominantly within cultural contexts, the second set of articles concentrate on technology as a means of unearthing trauma from the depths of the human mind. **Michaela Wünsch's** article "Temporalities of Trauma in *Hatufim* and *Homeland*" focuses on two television series, the Israeli *Hatufim* and its American spin-off *Homeland*, to trace televisual representation of trauma and its aftermath. Departing from the position that trauma cannot be represented as such, she is interested in the nexus of temporality and television and argues that trauma in her two case studies is expressed in three different modes of temporality: suddenness, belatedness, and repetition. These three modes pick up where we left the public imaginary of trauma. Indeed Wünsch asks at the end of her article whether using these worn tropes of trauma are really an attempt at authenticity on the part of the directors, and not, more importantly, simply "simply a

subjects relation under the dispositive of television in regard to a memory which is necessarily traumatic."

The piece by the late **Harun Farocki** originally accompanied four video installations of his series titled *Serious Games*. Farocki filmed a drill at the Marine Corps Base 29 Palms in California that used computer-generated game technology to simulate 'real-life' war situations in the conflicts in the Middle-East to both prepare recruits before being deployed to Afghanistan and to treat returning soldiers from Iraq, to use Farocki's words: "Never has war been so transparent, so tangible, so efficient or so virtual." He describes how the technology represents a going back to the beginning. Not only is it employed on both ends of the war experience, upon departure and after termination of a tour; it is a technology that initially was developed by the military, then further developed by game designers, and now being sold back to the same military apparatus where it originated. In *Serious Games IV* Harocki concludes with a startling observation: "This chapter considers the fact that the pictures with which preparations were made for war are so very similar to the pictures with which war was evaluated afterward. But there is a difference: The program for commemorating traumatic experiences is somewhat cheaper. Nothing and no-one casts a shadow here."

In "'We Photograph Things To Drive Them Out of Our Minds': War, Vision, and the Decoding of Memory in the Photography of Iraq Veteran Russell Chapman," **Johanna Fassl** discusses how a soldier physically sees war, how that information is encoded in the brain and what forms it takes when recalled from memory. Fassl starts by describing how memory of traumatic events surfaced during digital manipulation of photographs in both high-dynamic-range (HDR) and Lightroom applications by Scottish born photographer Russell Chapman. Processes of abstraction turned seemingly 'benign' pictures into evidence of lived situations. In experiments conducted in the classroom, the traumatic content of abstract photographs is recognized even when the viewer has no idea about the context or creative process of an image. In her analysis of vision that takes place under emotional stress, Fassl refers to explosion scenes in Kathryn Bigelow's academy award winning film *The Hurt Locker*. The blasts were filmed with extraordinary technology that captures the most minute details, giving the viewer sharp images of small pebbles rising from the ground and fine particles of rust detaching from cars, all in super slow motion. Referring to recent studies in neuropsychology that demonstrate the alteration of both consciousness and vision under emotional stress, Fassl confirms that emotional arousal prioritizes detail-focused vision. Seeing war is a visually acute process and recalling war happens in a similar manner, where the details that received precedence during the event return from the depths of the human mind with equal precision and without narrative context. Together with the contributions by Wünsch and Farocki, Fassl's paper explores how recent technologies advance the understanding of how traumatic content is processed in the brain.

The volume concludes with the play *The Sign* by **Atyaf Rasheed**, which originally was published in the Iraqi Pavillion's exhibition catalogue at the 56th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia. Having opened our introduction to this volume with the work by the Syrian painter Salam Ahmad, we wanted to conclude in similar fashion, this time turning to creative piece by a women living in Baghdad. *The Sign* features three characters, all without name or gender. At the center of the plot is a mystery surrounding a little girl (again anonymous) and her fate after an explosion. The First Character claims to have seen her and describes the state of being while searching the girl: "As if it were a nightmare in a long night that does not want to end, I ran in every direction where corpses fell like emaciated birds, and the eyes of those saved were like balls of timbers, red." Upon further probing by the Second Character if the First Character actually found the girl, the latter responds "No. Something strong and sharp hit my head – I do not know, I was screaming – I held my head and then…" After that the play blurs all lines between reality and fiction, the reader has no idea what actually happened. Rasheed's piece of poetic theater is a brilliant metaphor for the state of being of a traumatized individual. When it comes to analyzing trauma in creative expressions, the sign (on the surface) is non-referential, as outlined in Danos and Antoniou's essay: again, what you see is *not* what you get. Just as we

thought we had cracked another shell in the understanding of trauma, Rasheed helps us to return to a state of confusion and bewilderment, lost in a sea of rogue memories.

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[1] See Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008).

[2] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), 7.

[3] Jacques Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)," *Diacritics* 14/2 "Nuclear Criticism" (1984), 24.

[4] Derrida, "No Apocalypse, No Now," 25.

[5] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (London: Pandora, 1994).

[6] Irene Visser, "Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47/3 (2011), 273.

[7] Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," *Screen* 13/1 (1972): 5-26.