*Trauma Theory*

**Lecture 2**

**Definition & Description:**

Trauma/ defined: “an external traumatic impact which shatters an Edenic childhood innocence” (75 The Trauma Question)

Definition/ Open Quote: “Trauma derives from the Greek word meaning **wound**.” 2 TQ

Definition/ Trauma: “PTSD. Involves those confronted with an experience involving ‘actual or **threatened death or serious injury,** or a physical threat to the physical integrity of the self’ considered to be outside the range of normal experience.” 1. TQ

Definition: Described as a “morbid nervous condition” in Pop Sci Mos, 1895. 2 TQ

Description/ Impact: Trauma overwhelms “the psychic defenses . . . is seared directly into the psyche, almost like a piece of shrapnel” (Carruth, 1991, 3 War wound. Qtd in 4 TQ

Definition/ Description: “a traumatic event is something unprecedented, that blasts” away the self’s defensive mechanisms, overwhelming them, leaving the self shocked by the violence of the event.

Definition: “’a trauma is an external influence necessitating an abrupt change in adaptation which the organism fails to meet.’” Kardinaer, 1941, 79, qtd in 57tq

Definition/ War wound: ‘a sudden and absolute shift from normal experience to an overwhelming encounter with death’” Lifton 1968, 21, qtd in 63tq. “indelibly marked by the ‘death imprint, in the midst of which the victim can only survive by “psychic closing off or numbing”

Definition/Trauma: “the shock that overwhelms psychic defenses” 20 tq

Definition: Trauma rooted in “fear of immediate injury to oneself.” 28tq

**Effects/ General**

Description: Traumatic event “provokes a disturbance on a large scale.” Sun and Hamlet are each studies of a traumatized self attempting to gain a mastery of the trauma, “setting in motion every possible defensive measure” (deception, affectation, lying, brutality) 9 tq. Sans its defensive perimeter, the self is vulnerable to “being flooded with large amounts of stimulus,” posing yet another problem to the self: how to control the influx of stimuli. Hence the emphasis on control in Hem’s creative process, which replicates the overwhelming influx of stimuli in the traumatic event, on the plane of illusion, giving the self a “do over,” as it were, a second opportunity at mastering the overwhelming influx of stimuli, a second change to defend itself from them. The self’s successful defense of itself from overwhelming stimuli in art enables its self defense against trauma in life, which is an aposteriori adjustment. Arts arms the self against life experiences that threaten its destruction, first by displacing the violence of those experiences into the illusory realm, second by honing the self’s defenses against that by which it is initially overwhelmed.

Description/ Effect: Trauma “saturate[s] contemporary culture.” 13 tq It always moves “outward from the wound,” its effects manifesting at a remove from the initial site of the trauma: in the mind and the body, in unrelated fears. Physical injury-suffocating attacks-anxiety-gluttony-paranoia-madness-criminal behavior.

Description/ Impact/ Idee Fixee: One of the most acute and enduring symptoms of trauma is “the fright experienced by the patient at the moment of the accident.” 36 yq. This fright, as acute as it is at onset, compounds in intensity and scope over time. Moreover, these effects are theorized to be transmissible from generation to generation, ramify[ing] through successive generations. “Degeneration theory, a precipitous descent down the evolutionary ladder” 36tq As if retrenchment of the self is a transmissible symptom of trauma, producing a kind of hereditary atavism.

Description: “Because trauma cannot be integrated into diachrony, it is a blockage, ‘a bit monstrous, unformed, confusing, confounding’ Lyotard, 1990, 17, 81tq.

Effect/ General: Involving “certain clusters of symptoms . . . . that can range from avoidance of thought or feelings related to the event to a general sense of emotional numbing . . . including loss of temper control, hyper-vigilance or ‘exaggerated startle response.’ Symptoms can . . .. appear belatedly, months or even years after the precipitating event” (American Psychiatric

Effects/ Litany: “traumatic stressors . . . produce long-term behavioral transformation, including loss of impulse control, violent over-”Assoc, 2000: 467-8, qtd in 1.

Extraordinary cluster of symptoms.

Effect/ Fear/ litany: add fear of being alone, his neurotic dependence on a female companion, who he alternately adored and abused.

Effects/ litany: Victims of trauma “not only have fixed ideas; they have also persistent emotions.” 42tq

Effect/ Litany: Often, the “precipitating trauma [is] an accident” 45tq. Effects of “fright, anxiety, shame, or physical pain.” 46tq

**Effect/ Delay**

Delay: “The traumatic event is not [just] experiences as it occurs” Qtd in 5.

Delay: “Nachtraglich” nature of trauma, “meaning delayed or deferred,” whose effects are “registered long after the first shock,” ala the delayed onset of Hemingway’s hatred for his mother, grief for Hadley. 81 tq

Delay: dispersed across space and time, “emerge across dispersed sites and in discontinuous ways.” 19tq.

Delay: “the shock is gathering in the very delay itself” 23 tq Page 1883, 148,. “terror has much to do with its production.”

Delay/ Time: In moving from the event to its aftermath, immediate and long term, the shock of trauma is compounded, both in the intensity and scope of its effects, undergoes a temporal and symptomatic magnification.

Delay: “the strange time delays and displaced symptoms” related to traumatic events. 31tq

Delay: “trauma marks the disjunction between the event and the forever belated, incomplete understanding of the event” 6