

# Research Methods for Memory Studies

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## Painful Pasts

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### INTRODUCTION

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While memory studies has emerged as a diverse and heterogeneous body of work, a common issue over the last two decades has been with the ways in which the past is reconstructed in the present, regardless of whether this involves macro-structures such as the nation-state or the everyday minutiae of personal experience. The different perspectives and their associated scales of analysis which are brought to bear on this concern may be various, but they share a concern with the use of the past as a resource in making experience and social life meaningful, in producing or challenging cultural norms and conventions, and in reproducing or subverting established orders of power. In post-Halbwachsian explorations of memory processes, the consensual nature of these processes is rarely taken for granted. Often the pasts involved in these negotiations and struggles involve heavy emotional investment, and entail experiences of exclusion, discrimination, loss and bereavement. Under these circumstances, the stakes are high. Through remembering displacement can be redressed, victimisation recognised, and pain acknowledged. Alternatively, claims for recompense can be silenced, losses denied and exclusions reinforced. Painful pasts of this kind have preoccupied memory studies research, as is evidenced by the extensive and continually expanding literature on the memorialisation of large-scale atrocities such as the Holocaust or 9/11, and the considerable attention paid to such painful past experience as childhood sexual abuse, exile or genocide.

In some cases, painful pasts are of such severity that they cannot be integrated into processes of remembering and contestation. They can be so disruptive or disorientating that they become disconnected from the present, unamenable to narrative form and so off limits as a resource for making sense of experience. Pain is nevertheless variable, and differences in the experience

of and responses to difficult pasts must be accounted for if the specificity of the experience is to be respected. Alongside this, making sense of the past and its relation to the present depends upon establishing connections between different pasts and presents, identifying commonalities and developing meaning from past experiences in new contexts. Dealing with different types and intensities of painful pasts pose methodological challenges for memory studies. How, precisely, do we go about investigating and researching such pasts when they vary so much in nature and consequence? How can the various roles they have in processes of remembering be assessed? How should they be addressed on various social scales, from the individual to the global?

In thinking about such questions, this chapter focuses particularly on issues raised when we are dealing with painful pasts in empirical research. These include considering how we may investigate processes of remembering when the past itself is problematic as a resource for such processes, how we may make visible disturbances in routine oscillations between the temporal domains of experience, and how we may recognise and account for disruption of transactional relations between the tenses. These are methodological issues, but in approaching them we must start with the conceptualisation of painful pasts in memory studies. We must do so because one particular conceptualisation, based around notions of trauma, has dominated the treatment of such pasts in this field. This has, in our view, limited the range of methodological options open to memory studies scholars in doing research on difficult pasts. In particular, it has led to the profligate application of trauma beyond acute individual suffering to such research objects as material culture, population categories, entire periods of history, even history itself (see for example Caruth 1991, 1996; Neal 1998; Eyerman 2001; Edkins 2003). In this chapter we reject such ethically dubious uses of the concept of trauma and try instead to develop a more humanly sensitive methodological framework for dealing with the memory of painful experience.

### CONCEPTUALISING PAIN

From its roots in psychiatry and psychoanalysis, there has been a remarkable academic uptake of trauma as a concept. As Kansteiner (2004: 98) notes, 'trauma is everywhere, or, to be more precise, everywhere in the humanities'. This is equally true of the social sciences, for it now occupies a prominent position, not only in literary and cultural studies, but also in media studies, sociology and history as well as in psychology. It is this trans-disciplinary mobility that has made trauma the go-to concept in memory studies for assessing the ways in which past pain features in individual experience, social life, and contemporary culture. Indeed, it has been argued that 'increasingly,

memory worth talking about – worth remembering – is memory of trauma' (Antze and Lambek 1996: 2). In contrast to the broadly accepted definition of remembering as constituting our sense of successive selves, and therefore of identity, over the course of time, psychic trauma refers 'to any developmental event or crisis that overwhelms the ego's integrative capacities, compromising subsequent adaptive structures' (Pickering and Keightley 2009: 238; Haaken 1998: 68). Trauma is the disruption of the remembering process caused by an event or experience so at odds with our usual frameworks of remembering that it cannot be remembered in any conventional fashion. Instead of being assimilated into the continually developing story of a life, traumatic experience haunts the present by distorting memory's links to the past, leading to feelings of dissociation or panic, the re-experience of emotions felt during a traumatic episode but with no narrative connections to the episode, only terrifying flashbacks and malevolent images reverberating in the psyche of the affected person.

So far, so relatively uncontroversial: some people, from the shell-shocked soldiers of the First World War to contemporary survivors of childhood sexual abuse, have been unable to remember their painful experiences in a coherent fashion and put past experience to use in the interests of developing a durable identity in and through time. Yet the ways in which trauma has been taken up and applied in the social sciences and humanities has gone radically beyond this specific application in several ways. To begin with, trauma has been so loosely deployed that the concept is used to cover all recollections of painful pasts. When any violent or painful experience is labelled as traumatic, the distinctive features of trauma on the one hand, and remembering on the other, are casually but definitely elided. For example, Jenny Edkins talks of the ways in which traumas are 'inscribed and re-inscribed into everyday narratives' in the practices of remembrance, memorialisation and witnessing related to political events and processes (2003: 15). The notion that trauma is broadly embedded in and structures everyday memorial practices is problematic, and is so because it is 'amnesiac rather than memorial' in nature (Luckhurst 2003: 28). Trauma involves the abrupt failure of the remembering practices and processes central to the making of the self over time, or to the representational reinterpretation of the past in public culture.

While in some accounts distinctions between trauma and memory are collapsed into each other, in others the notion of trauma is stretched to such a degree that, while it denotes a condition that is unrepresentable in language or any other symbolic form, and is advanced as generic and 'unlocatable' in any given person or group, it can also be transmitted as experience from one generation to another and is 'something that can be shared by victims and non-victims alike' (Leys 2000: 304–5). The experience of someone suffering traumatic stress disorder is run together and made relative to one who hears

their account second-hand. This is highly evident in Cathy Caruth's work. The paradox of this is that Caruth seems to suggest that trauma can be communicated and shared, despite the fact that it is beyond language. Trauma is characterised as the basic condition of historical experience, regardless of the various experiences of and responses to pain that this might involve for any given person or group; in her sweeping generalisation of the term, 'we are all victims and survivors of the trauma of representation' (Kansteiner 2004: 204). The radical relativism of this understanding of trauma as the key symptom of historical process utterly conflates victims and perpetrators of violence since both are conceived as survivors of a generalised traumatic condition (see Kansteiner and Weilnböck 2008; Leys 2000; Rothberg 2009; Keightley and Pickering 2012, Chapter 6, for further critiques of this position). Caruth places modern experience within an inescapable traumatic cage from which there is no escape.

As well as undermining historical analysis and the politics of memory, the analytical application of trauma is routinely accompanied by what can be considered as an 'aesthetic valorisation' of trauma (Kansteiner and Weilnböck 2008). In this sense trauma as a universal condition of victimhood becomes a 'form of cultural capital that bestows moral privilege' (Rothberg 2009: 87). This has the interesting effect of placing those who have experienced painful pasts beyond critique. The position of the witness, and in some theorists' accounts, the vicarious witness via mediated culture, becomes a subject position beyond critical assessment. Trauma becomes an indisputable way of knowing, one not subject to the inherent instabilities and polysemic qualities of representation. This raises the question as to whether it is desirable for trauma to be 'worked through' at all if it is the mode by which we can most authentically know the past. Narrative remembering as a continual process of making sense of the past, with its inevitable selectivity, contingency and temporariness, comes to be conceived, paradoxically, as a way of *not-knowing*, whereas trauma, a concept originally conceived to address the unrecoverable nature of the past, is positioned as its conceptual opposite. On this basis, a radical rupture between past and present is celebrated, and possibilities for renewal through a transactional relationship with the past are rejected. The possibility of working through pain, learning from it, using it as a resource in the present and for the future is conceived not only as impossible, but also as undesirable. This has an unavoidably atomising as well as politically nullifying effect.

It is our contention that instead of conceiving of trauma as either collapsed into remembering processes or radically divorced from them, we should see trauma as distinct from, but also linked to, these processes. While trauma involves the disruption of conventional processes of making sense of experience and adding to our store of knowledge, traumatic responses to

painful pasts disrupt and problematise the remembering process in a variety of ways. Remembered narratives and representations can therefore be used as an empirical resource to identify the gradations of response to painful pasts, ranging from a complete inability to remember on the one hand, and a completely coherent remembered narrative on the other. In between these poles are representations of the past which we might consider as possessing traumatic features, as well as being characterised as remembering. It is through the examination of these examples that the tensions and difficulties involved in remembering painful pasts can be made visible.

#### TRAUMA, PAIN AND THE PROBLEM OF METHOD

The imperialistic extrapolation of trauma as the analytical framework *par excellence* for social and cultural memory poses serious methodological problems. If trauma is at the root of historical consciousness, but at the same time unavailable in representational form, there can be no method for its critical identification – still less for making analytical sense of the ways in which it is involved (or not) in relations between past and present. This double-bind is conveniently overlooked when the concept of trauma is applied as an interpretative frame, while the specificity of trauma as an uninterpreted response to a intensely disruptive experience is lost along with the struggle to bring it into the realm of conventional discourse and so begin the process of 'working through'. The cavalier metaphorical application of trauma obscures the relationship between remembering and trauma and the distinctive features of each. The problem memory studies is left with is that trauma identifies an important response to painful experiences at an individual level, but it is only one mode of response to past pain. A much broader approach is needed if we are to account for the wide variety of painful pasts and responses to them. What has made this difficult in memory studies to date is the woeful lack of empirical research attempting to investigate the specific ways in which individuals and groups remember painful pasts. This is compounded by a tendency to ignore empirical research from other fields of research which may contribute to this project, including studies of individual trauma victims and of collective suffering.

In moving beyond the limitations of the trauma paradigm, the methodological prerequisites for dealing with the remembering of painful pasts are three-fold. Firstly, the integrity of traumatic suffering should be recognised and appreciated, and clearly distinguished from the variety of experiences involved in the remembering of painful pasts along with the rhetorical strategies and power relations they entail. This necessitates a close empirical focus on the key features of traumatic responses observable in accounts of painful pasts in

contrast to the assimilation of such pasts in accounts which activate transactional relations between the past and present. In this respect, Gadi BenEzer has identified thirteen specific discursive features which 'signal' trauma, ranging from long silences and the loss of emotional control to changes in voice and body language (2004: 34–6). In being indicative of a specifically traumatic response to an event, such features mark uncontrolled disruption in the movement between experience as process to experience as product. Making this distinction means seeing trauma and remembering as existing along a discursive continuum in which, over time, traumatic features may decrease and the availability of past experience to the processes of remembering may emerge. This opens up the possibility for seeing trauma, not as a closed circuit of literal repetition, but a temporally specific response which may, in time, be moved beyond, so rehabilitating the possibility for renewal.

Secondly, we should attend methodologically to the different levels on which painful pasts operate, from the individual through to the cultural. This requires looking into the interplay between cultural representations of the past, the social practices involved in their articulation and the social frameworks of remembering that they draw on, as well as individual practices of interpretation in their reception (Irwin-Zarecka 2007). Rather than distantly 'reading off' a traumatic response from memorial sites, mediated representations, or a groups' proximity to a given event, the lived relationships between past and present that are performed through remembering practices need to be closely attended to.

Attending to oscillations between individual, social and cultural domains of engagement with painful pasts is intimately bound up with our third methodological requirement. This is that we should attempt to work ethically with the memory of painful pasts in empirical research. The wilful dismissal of the experiential relationship between the trauma sufferer and the original traumatic event in much recent literature on 'cultural trauma' has considerable ethical implications, as we and others have discussed elsewhere (Kansteiner 2004; Leys 2000; Luckhurst 2003; Pickering and Keightley 2009). The extrapolation of trauma to large categories of people on the basis of secondary or tertiary encounters with violent or disruptive pasts hugely dilutes the experience of victims and survivors, and in doing so empathy, as a response premised on the maintenance of critical distance, is transformed into a position of identification where the experience of suffering is appropriated at one remove (LaCapra 2001: 21–2). In order to redress this, memory studies needs ethically to dissociate the experiences of individual victims from practices of reception among those who engage with painful pasts at one (or more) remove(s). This is not to say that the transmission of painful experiences is impossible, but rather to argue that when exploring second-hand engagements with painful pasts and the interpretative practices that they involve, remembering rather than trauma

is the more appropriate analytical framework since it requires critical engagement with the discursive and rhetorical processes involved in the articulation of the pain of others. This is precisely what Sontag recommends when she suggests that 'no "we" should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people's pain' (2003: 6). In addition, working with individual accounts of traumatic and painful pasts brings its own set of methodological dilemmas for the researcher with respect to the elicitation of accounts and the treatment of sensitive data. In attempting to develop ethical research practices in this regard, memory studies has much to learn from the more established practices of oral history.

It is to the ways in which these methodological imperatives can be performed in empirical research that we now turn. As has already been discussed, memories of painful pasts operate on a number of scales, from the intensely personal to the broadly public. Of course, each scale is implied in every other – the intensely personal account draws on publicly shared frames and discourses in order to be communicable, while public accounts are received and interpreted at an individual level. In this chapter we have chosen to focus on the increasingly overlooked iterations of personal pain in order to demonstrate the analytical strategies involved in working with trauma and painful remembering.

#### PERSONAL ITERATIONS OF PAIN

Empirical research on painful remembering involves the collection of personal narratives of painful pasts. This can be achieved in two ways. Firstly, it could involve the elicitation of accounts as part of the research process. Although quantitative methods such as surveys might provide important contextual data for assessing the prevalence and key features of memories of this kind, it is primarily qualitative approaches which provide in-depth, detailed accounts of how disruptive or disturbing experiences affect identity construction and processes of reconciling past and present over time. For example, Anna Reading collected gendered memories of the Holocaust articulated by generations of Jews with experience of the Holocaust at one or two removes, either through family narratives or cultural mediations. Reading used a life-history approach in order to elicit written and then verbal accounts of young people's memories of the Holocaust in order to 'give voice to and explore the meanings and constructions of socially inherited memories for the generation of people who would not have experienced the events of the Holocaust themselves, although they may have family or older friends who did' (Reading 2002: 20). The use of qualitative interviews to elicit memories of disturbing events generates data which both captures the content of painful memories but is also inscribed

with the processes of remembering through which they are constructed and articulated.

In contrast, our own research investigates the use of everyday media in remembering practices rather than memories of a specific event or period. In this research we have utilised a variety of qualitative techniques. Our starting point was the in-depth interview in which one researcher, or sometimes two, initiated a guided conversation with participants about their remembering practices. As part of these interviews participants were asked to discuss particular photographs or items of music which were associated with important or particularly emotive memories. Inevitably this produced accounts where painful pasts, or more often pasts which had subsequently taken on a painful resonance with the passing of time, were described and discussed. The use of elicitation techniques provides a valuable anchor for the interview process, allowing sometimes intangible and nebulous memories to be articulated with more clarity and precision. This is of particular value to the researcher in the data-gathering process as it provides a focal point for elaboration. For example, when discussing a particular song which is associated with a painful past, researchers can go beyond asking about its mnemonic associations to ask when it is played in the present, the specific responses to it on listening, who one might listen to it with or where it is stored. These questions move us beyond a focus on the content of painful memories into the realm of their articulation in everyday remembering practices, and provide clues to their contemporary use and significance.

When eliciting mnemonic accounts of painful pasts, the presence of the interviewer can pose its own methodological challenges. Allowing an interviewee the required time and space for reflection on a painful experience without interruption can run up against or contravene the discursive demands of an in-depth interview, where extended gaps, silences, tears or long breaks disturb the flow of talk and may cause the interview process to break down. In our own research we have experimented with methods which remove the physical presence of the interviewer while maintaining the guided nature of elicited recollections. To do this we have used what we have called 'self-interviews', in which participants are provided with a guidance sheet which asks them to look through their photo albums, listen to their music collections, and narrate the experience of doing so using a Dictaphone (Keightley et al. 2012, and see Chapter 6). This partially frees the participants from the discursive and social demands of a conventional interview, allowing them to have reflective periods of silence, take breaks as necessary, and follow the path of their own recollections without the interjections of an interviewer. While the interviewer's presence is still felt through the guidance sheet, this mode of interviewing provides participants with a discursive space that is more sensitive to the demands of painful remembering than a traditional qualitative interview.

Gathering data on personal iterations of painful remembering does not necessarily involve the active elicitation of remembered accounts. Empirical research may involve the collection of pre-existing first-hand accounts of painful pasts, such as diaries, memoirs, and other autobiographical writings which have been self-produced outside of the research process. This kind of writing features heavily in both popular and academic literature, but for memory studies accounts – such as those of second-generation Holocaust survivors – has proved particularly fertile for the analysis of the performance and transmission of painful memory.<sup>1</sup> These accounts are qualitatively different from those produced through the research process as they have been created for different reasons in a variety of social and historical contexts, but, in common with elicited narratives, they contain both the content of painful memories and traces of the remembering process itself. These may be particularly useful if the painful event under investigation has passed out of living memory, or if the object of investigation is historically specific processes of remembering.

Although specific research objectives in analysing painful remembering using both elicited and self-produced narratives may vary, what they have in common is the need for an analytical approach which addresses the distinctive content of painful memories while attending to the specific mnemonic practices and processes they involve. In remembering we see the relatively successful reconciliation of experience with social schemas in the processes of making sense of the past, while traumatic accounts are characterised by an inability to communicate or fully represent painful experience using shared frameworks of meaning. In order to show how such differences may be manifest, we offer two brief examples.

The first example derives from an account which displays a number of traumatic features. It is taken from an interview we conducted with Gabor, a man in his seventies, in which he describes memories of his childhood in Hungary. The extract is taken from a lengthy interview in which he disjointedly recounts a poverty-stricken and abusive family life, his realisation that he was Jewish and possibly adopted, and his subsequent disowning by his family on his failure to send money back to Hungary after moving to London. In the interests of clarity, it should be noted that the extract is comprised of two sections of the original interview which, as they are a continuous part of the same story, we have placed together. Between them came a lengthy excursus on the process of coming to the UK. For reasons of space this has been removed from the example.

Mainly small as my parents were – I myself personally had been adopted. I don't really like talking about that too much. Er, but I was adopted. I believe – not I believe, I know I was born Jewish. Having

spoke about that, it brings a tear to my eyes. Mm, ask me something else and go back because I'm going to cry. I can't cope with that. But of course we never came [to London] for the money, did we? Because, er, well I myself personally just absconded due to the row with my parents. As I touched on earlier, I was adopted. I think I – well, I not think, I know, I know, I just won't want to admit it even to myself. I was born Jewish and somewhere along the line my mother either – she either my birth mother or she's inherited me or somehow has got me. I'm not hundred percent certain, I've never been told the truth. And, er, and, er, I found out when I was a teenager. Other boys in our school called me Jew boy and things like that. And it's like a bullying – and when I find I – when I one day had enough courage to ask my mother she denied it. She said, 'they just bullying you, ignore them', this and that. But I knew she was lying, you could see on her face she was lying. And about two or three months later, or a year later, it was confirmed that I'm in fact been adopted, I'm Jewish. But how I ever was adopted or why, I don't know. [Break] Because if you can stop to think for a minute, I've told you that I was born Jewish, but that has an implication that my father, if not my mother – because I'm not a hundred percent certain that my mother is my birth mother, but I think she is. But my father went to the gas chamber and it's in your head all the time. I never shifted it, ever since I find out that I was Jewish. And I often thought to myself I'd go into the synagogue and ask if they could help. Then I thought, what the hell for? You know, what the hell for? What do I going to say? I don't even know a name of a person. You know, do as I've said to you earlier, if you would think on those lines when you approach any subject is a person is really made a part of their experience. What you are is really what you live through.

Gabor's narrative is intensely painful and hinges on his discovery of his Jewish identity and the identity-oriented affective disturbances associated with his sense of not belonging. The narrative is disjointed, ricocheting between the core element of the narrative (his Jewish identity) and a number of other events, both real, such as his re- or rather dis-location to the UK, or imaginatively engaged with, such as the manner of his biological father's death. His account demonstrates a number of features characteristic of traumatic experience, indicating the difficulty of assimilating elements of his past into a coherent narrative. In the first instance Gabor loses emotional control in the telling of his account at the point just prior to his request for the interviewer to 'ask me something else. . .'. In fact Gabor shed a silent tear just before this request was made. It is clear that he is reflexively aware of the potential for remembering to move him to tears, and also aware of his inability to control

this emotional response without diverting away from the subject completely. But some aspects of his emotional account are unintended.

There is, for example, an observable shifting between the tenses. In recounting his experience of bullying at school he begins discussing it in the past tense, then the present tense ruptures the narrative with the phrase 'and when I find' as he attempts to formulate an account of asking his mother about his schoolmates' derisory references to his Jewishness. He quickly returns to the past tense in continuing his description, but this lapse in tenses provides fleeting evidence in the transcript of Gabor becoming momentarily re-submerged in the original experience. Slipping from remembering into reliving the past is given expressive form in the temporal dislocation of his story. Losing oneself in the original event, along with temporal disorientation, are features identified by BenEzer as indicative of a traumatic response (2004; see also LaCapra 1999). The past has not been fully assimilated, and so intrudes on the present, throwing Gabor back into the moment of his original pain. In the face of that again, the temporal domains of past and present become radically unstable rather than retaining their integrity as narrative touchstones. Temporal duration is either vague or variable: phrases such as 'somewhere along the line' and 'about two or three months later, or a year later' make clear that narrative coherence has not been achieved, even at this distant remove, with Gabor's narrative being marked by lacunae and imprecision, its meanings still elusive after all these years. Along with this lack of clarity is the shifting between 'thinking' and 'knowing' which characterises the narrative. Gabor searches for stability in his revision to his original statement that he 'thinks' he was adopted, changing it to his 'knowing' that he was adopted. He searches for a referential relationship with the past, but his ontological claims are built on shaky experiential foundations which threaten to give way at any point and plunge him once again into a state of 'not-knowing'. In all these ways the events of his past remain unmanageable in his remembering.

The unknowable nature of Gabor's past is most evident in his description of the supposed manner of his father's death. He says that 'my father went to the gas chamber and it's in your head all the time. I never shifted it, ever since I find out that I was Jewish'. His father's death in the Holocaust and his own Jewish identity are inextricably linked, but this connection cannot be made clear sense of. He is unable to hinge his narrative either on public discourses of anti-Semitism as his Jewish identity remains in question, or on the historical narratives of the Holocaust as he is unable to establish, factually or imaginatively, a referential link between his experience and that historical event.<sup>2</sup> As BenEzer suggests, 'life stories include an exposition of the relations between the private and the collective context' in which they are lived, but in this case that relationship is not fully formed (2004: 30). The socio-cultural frames through which Gabor might marshal his experience and make sense of

it remain out of reach. Instead he is left to piece together disparate elements of his own and his inherited past without shared frames of memory through which to interpret them. Under these circumstances, his past remains atomised and alienated from a collective past, and so speculation on his father's death is left to inhabit his mind without narrative settlement.

There is anger as well as confusion and doubt in this. Gabor considers going to a synagogue for help in tracing his father, but then repeatedly asks 'what the hell for?' Past experience is not a resource for renewal in the present because he has no way of situating his own experience within a wider collective Jewish memory. He has no point of entry into the Jewish community of memory; his experience remains on the margins, with shared interpretative frames just out of reach. The resulting incoherence of his narrated experience does not provide him with a site from which to build the story of himself and integrate new knowledge about the past into it. Gabor's harrowing childhood experience is made all the more poignant as he concludes that 'what you are is really what you live through'. Without the possibility of creatively reconstructing his past into a meaningful remembered narrative, Gabor's very sense of self is disharmonious.

In contrast to the extract from the interview with Gabor, the second example is taken from Brian Dillon's memoir of his troubled childhood, which articulates the experience of painful remembering generated by the viewing of a photograph of his childhood home.

I am looking now at the photograph I took of a house which was no longer my house. I have never noticed before that from the junction of the pavement and tarmac, where there was once a gate on which I was forbidden to swing, there radiates a pattern of cracks that stretches out to the very edge of the image. There was a time when I knew every one of those striations, and all the similar scars and contusions that marked my passage towards the house as I turned off the main road and into the quiet curve of ours. I remember now that as I approached the house that day, I remarked how familiar each and every crack still looked and how at the same time they seemed to have recomposed themselves into a new and startling arrangement: they all led to a house I could no longer enter, a house that in some sense was simply no longer there. The house in the photograph seems to define the centre of a web of memories that have obliterated its actual, concrete presence. It is the meeting place, and the vanishing point, of the lines that make up my perspective on the past. (Dillon 2005: 45–6)

Dillon's account deftly traces the experience of remembering. His narrative shuttles back and forth between his childhood experience and the contempo-

rary foreignness of this once familiar place. In this shuttling back and forth, the temporal tenses of his experience retain their integrity despite the pain of loss he experiences in the act of remembering. This is in direct contrast to Gabor's accidental slippage into the present tense which is indicative of the instability of his own temporal positioning in relation to his experience. Dillon's movement between past and present is a productive one, as the tension he constructs between the remembered past and the remembering present opens up a critical space in which absence and loss are rendered meaningful.

The photograph Dillon narrates is situated as the 'meeting point' of past and present, and through his telling he weaves these different temporal states together to produce an account of absence in the present. This provides a stable referential anchor for his narrative, the most notable missing feature in Gabor's account. Dillon crafts an account of the relation between past and present as one of painful absence and loss, but in doing so communicates the complex transformations in meaning of the lived places of his childhood. The 'scars and contusions' that once marked his imaginative possession of that place are now 'recomposed', forming new markers of meaning in the present. Dillon's narrative is also stable in terms of the positioning of his subject position in relation to the past. He resolutely inhabits his remembering self, despite reflecting back on the perspective of his remembered self. In doing so the past is creatively used, not only to narrate his past experience but cumulatively to construct the rememberer himself. Dillon's account works up to a point where he can articulate 'my perspective on the past'; he successfully deploys a cultural framework of meaning which relates to the meaning of the 'family home' in order to make his past experience communicable. The detailed references to the textures and topology of the family home using the familiar images of the garden gate, the pavement and the quiet curve of the side street render Dillon's past recognisable to readers, and so the account of painful loss turns on the reader's shared understanding of the nuclear family and the spaces in which it is located.

Through his account, Dillon actively constructs a culturally and historically specific meaning of the childhood home through an imaginative return to it. In this sense it is characteristic not as an instance of trauma, but of painful remembering utilising effectively shared tropes and discursive strategies to render meaningful a painful legacy and represent that meaning in the public domain. In his painful remembering, the past is not hived off from the present but used in connection with it to make sense of experience over time. The past, although painful, is an accessible resource for the remembering subject.

In both accounts, loss and absence are articulated, but in Gabor's account the past is unavailable for the satisfactory construction of negotiated meaning, whereas in Dillon's account the past and present are brought into active dialogue with one another and in this process accumulated experience is made

communicable. While the two accounts are produced in the quite different contexts of the in-depth interview and the literary act of constructing an autobiographical account, subsuming them both under the umbrella term of trauma would risk losing sight, not only of their individual narrative features, but also the renewal they provide (or not) in the present. While visible in the process of remembering, the 'unworked through' experience doesn't feature as a harmonious constituent of the narrative, and instead exists in the narrative only in a halting and disordered form. Contrary to Caruth's suggestion that traumatic experience is completely beyond representation, it is visible here precisely in the ways in which it breaks through and interrupts the representation of the past in the present. It is in the process of Gabor's struggle to order his experience into a coherent remembered narrative that we can identify trauma as distinct from, but also as acting upon processes of everyday remembering. To talk of Dillon's account as 'traumatic' would be to annul the possibilities his account creates for thinking through the experience of family life and the losses it entails and then acting on the qualitatively new knowledge that this remembering of childhood might allow. In addition, to equate the two accounts would diminish the very real psychic disruptions experienced by Gabor in his failure to achieve reconciliation with his deeply troubled past through the process of remembering.

#### CONCLUSION: WORKING WITH PAINFUL PASTS

In working with personal accounts of painful pasts it is crucial that analytical techniques are able to distinguish between traumatic disruptions to memory in which the meaning cannot produce a synthesis of past and present experience, and ways of reconciling past and present experience in order to make past pain meaningful and communicable through the synthesis of personal experience with social frameworks of meaning. Analyses of painful remembering should therefore take account of two interconnected axes which underpin remembering as a process of making sense of the past: the temporal axis along which the success or failure of trafficking between past and present occurs, and the social axis of transmission along which the success or failure to reconcile personal experience with social frames of meaning occurs. It is their radically different operation along these two axes that we are using to draw out the distinction between these two examples as characterised by traumatic experience on the one hand, and painful remembering on the other. In doing so the specificity of each traumatic or remembered experience can be attended to without running together qualitatively different responses to pain and the outcomes they involve, so preventing mnemonic responses being read off from the event itself. In each case this requires attending to specific instances in personal

accounts where temporal distinctions are either collapsed and blurred, or identified and maintained, where the past is either uncontrollably repeated or creatively recomposed, and where social and cultural conventions are successfully or unsuccessfully deployed in making painful experiences meaningful.

Attending to these two axes of transmission prevents the bland universalising of trauma to the remembrance of any painful past experience and refuses the bracketing off of experiences which disrupt and challenge everyday remembering practices as intrinsically unknowable. Indiscriminate use of the term trauma renders questions about the rhetorical deployment of such pasts redundant, and annuls the possibilities they might provide for the construction of new meaning and action premised upon it in the present. If we are to develop methodological tools for investigating the politics of memory, our use of trauma as an analytical framework should be limited to those cases where there is clear empirical justification for its application. Using trauma outside these specific contexts, whether in personal accounts of painful pasts as we have seen in the examples explored in this chapter, or in more public representations of widely shared painful pasts, crucial questions relating to meaning and agency, victimhood and perpetration, the personal and the collective will be subsumed into descriptions of traumatic repetition. The transactional value of the past will be overlooked. Instead, as we hope to have shown here in our graded distinctions between painful remembering and traumatic accounts, the presence of pain in and of itself does not render the past sterile as an imaginative resource. That is why we need more refined analytical tools which will allow us to recognise and explore how painful pasts are manifested in everyday remembering practices.

#### SUMMARY: KEY POINTS

- In this chapter we have identified painful pasts and the ways in which they are remembered as a core concern for memory studies.
- We identify the prevalence of trauma as a concept in memory studies and discuss the ways in which it has been extended beyond its psychoanalytic and psychiatric origins into explorations of social and cultural memory.
- We argued that, as a concept, trauma has been extensively misapplied in memory studies, and noted its analytical limitations when exploring the remembering of painful pasts.
- We propose that trauma and painful remembering should be distinguished from one another in order to assess the gradations of response to painful experience by attending closely to the ways in which painful pasts are creatively used in processes of remembering, or remain unavailable for the imaginative work of memory.

- Using empirical examples we demonstrate how trauma and painful remembering can be distinguished in the process of analysis and the ways in which this opens up the possibility of accounting for the ways in which some painful pasts can be used rhetorically or as sites for renewal in the present, whereas some remain disruptive to the processes of remembering.

#### FURTHER READING

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Cathy Caruth (1996) and Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1991) are perhaps the most widely cited proponents of the trauma paradigm in memory studies and provide good examples of the transposition of trauma into the cultural realm. Despite the widespread uptake of trauma in memory studies there have been a number of scholars who have provided critiques of the ways in which trauma has been applied. Wulf Kansteiner has produced a number of publications in which he develops a broadly based appraisal in this regard (see for example Kansteiner 2004). Ruth Leys (2000) provides a wide-ranging genealogy of the concept of trauma, and in doing so provides a critique of its culturalist applications. Likewise, Roger Luckhurst (2008) provides an excellent account of the origins of the concept of trauma and the emergence of 'trauma culture' in the 1980s. Michael Rothberg's work on multi-directional memory is an excellent example of research that moves beyond the trauma paradigm to explore in more detail the complex processes of transmission involved in remembering painful pasts (2009).

#### NOTES

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1. See, for example, second-generation accounts by Fass (2011), Hoffman (1998, 2005) and Karpf (1997).
2. Elsewhere in the interview he talks of the possibility that his father was shot, or simply absent.