

E. Balsemão Pires, C.A.S. Carvalho, J. Ricarte (eds.). *Memory, Trauma and Narratives of the Self: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. Cheltenham-Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2024. 250 pp. ISBN: 978-1-03533-796-5

The memory turn and the trauma studies are two major theoretical currents that have been reshaping our understanding of memory over the past two decades. Despite their thematic affinities, which are evident at a first glance, each of these fields tends to foreground dimensions that may initially even appear antithetical. While memory studies place their emphasis on the public and symbolic mediation of remembrance, trauma studies focus on the embodied rupture through which experience inscribes itself in the subject. Edited by Edmundo Balsemão Pires, Cláudio Alexandre S. Carvalho, and Joana Ricarte, the volume *Memory, Trauma and Narratives of the Self* (2024) invites us to rethink this apparent contrast within a coherent common framework. At the most fundamental level, both approaches aim to displace memory beyond the confines of inner representation, opening it to the exteriority of relation in bodily, linguistic, and social terms.

Throughout the book, this synthesis is sustained by two complementary notions: on one hand, the body-subject of trauma, in which affective and somatic traces are first registered, and on the other hand the communicating body, where those traces take shape in language, gesture, and social interaction. In other words, the body itself is the first communicative scene, the place where experience leaves its mark even before any story is told; communication becomes the extended body of memory, the space in which those marks are shared and transformed within collective life. The volume thus constitutes a genuinely interdisciplinary exchange bringing together philosophy, psychology, psychoanalysis, social theory, political studies, and the arts, where memory, trauma, and narration appear as interdependent aspects of a single communicative process. This ambition is clearly set out in the editors' introduction, which combines a rich bibliographical command of memory and trauma studies with a careful organization of the volume that lends unity to distinct intellectual and disciplinary perspectives.

Arguably, the volume's theoretical orientation finds its most explicit articulation in Edmundo Balsemão Pires's essay "Memory as a communication medium", which provides a conceptual axis through which the relation between memory, trauma, and narration can be read across the other contributions. Drawing on phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and communication theory, Balsemão Pires advances a dialogical-constructivist account of memory as always already implying an act of address. Even apparently "internal" memory presupposes a communicative differentiation between a past and a present self, an exchange that unfolds within socially delimited horizons of time and within spatial frameworks that are themselves communicatively constituted. From this standpoint, memory never belongs to a solitary interiority – its very intelligibility depends on shared coordinates that make recognition possible. Trauma then marks the point at which the communicative configuration falters, producing forms of repetition that fail to find reception. Psychological automatisms signal the persistence of an unaddressed message, while the restoration of experiential continuity involves the laborious reopening of communicative circuits, whether

clinical, narrative, artistic, or political. Narration thereby functions as a practice of realignment between speaker and listener (“addresser” and “addressee”), enabling fragmented experience to acquire temporal and epistemic consistency. The essay gathers together themes the author has developed elsewhere, such as his works on the pragmatist critique of representation (2011) and on Pierre Janet’s theory of dissociation (2019).

Around this dense theoretical core, the volume unfolds as a set of exploratory proposals that seek at times to extend and at times to test the conceptual nucleus articulated by Balsemão Pires, in a variety of directions. The reader moves gradually from the internal dialogue of consciousness to the social networks of speech, art, and politics – from the body that remembers to the voices that respond to it.

Thus, around the first of these poles are grouped the essays that examine what happens to the self when the circuits of communication collapse and must, in some way, be rebuilt. Cláudio Carvalho opens this section by examining the forms through which memory becomes internally captured and rendered opaque. By focusing on melancholy and trauma as modes of cryptic inscription, the chapter explores how experience can remain bound to unworked obligations that resist narration and recognition. These configurations of memory often exceed the individual horizon, extending into transgenerational dynamics in which loss and responsibility remain suspended. From this perspective, trauma brings to the foreground the fragile conditions under which experience can become communicable at all. Therapeutic communication is therefore approached as a carefully structured medium, within which memory may gradually recover its capacity to circulate. Attention is given to the conditions that allow the problem to be activated, to the relational work of validation, and to the forms of attunement through which experience can once again find an interlocutor.

What Carvalho treats as an inner articulation is what psychoanalysts Carlos Faraite and Henrique Testa Vicente transpose into the ethical and intersubjective sphere. For both authors, working through trauma involves a strenuous effort to reconstruct the space of address between two consciousnesses, allowing the voice of suffering to encounter a listener capable of response. Communication here assumes a moral weight: it is not merely a vehicle of expression, but an entire structure of care — the condition of recognition and reciprocity. Their approach is grounded in a Freudian and Lacanian framework, within which trauma is understood as shaping identity across individual and generational levels.

In his essay, Luís António Umbelino offers a philosophical genealogy that deepens this line of thought by tracing the self-addressing capacity of consciousness back to Maine de Biran. Memory is here shown to arise from the very act by which the subject turns toward itself, a minimal form of dialogue that later opens onto social relation. Particular emphasis is placed on Biran’s analyses of somnambulism and “animal life”, treated as philosophically decisive for grasping the involuntary and pre-reflective layers that underlie both memory and self-relation. Paulo Jesus, in turn, examines the autobiographical impact of trauma by conceptualizing it as a force capable of reshaping the entire personality. His chapter concentrates on the narrative conditions under which agency and existential creativity may be reactivated, describing trauma as a biographical rupture that disrupts continuity and orientation

toward the future. A crucial role is played by the reference to the Holocaust survivor Jean Améry, which marks an extreme point at which freedom and authorship are put to the test under the pressure of traumatic experience. Read in this light, Améry functions as a limit figure that clarifies what is at stake in the narrative post-traumatic work, while the notion of “liminal hotspots” identifies critical zones in which organic and psychic processes converge in the reorganization of personal life stories.

One can discern a movement across this set of essays: communication begins in the body, passes through consciousness, and opens the field of social remembrance. The passage from the first to the second part of the book mirrors this movement: from the body-subject of trauma – the somatic imprint of pain – to its shared expression in words and gestures – the communicating body of artistic and political practice.

The philosophical architecture erected up to this point is, thus, translated into art and politics in the subsequent essays. Here communication becomes visible and, as it were, staged. The section opens precisely with an essay by Ellen W. Kaplan on theatre, which the editors rightly single out as one of the book’s most original texts. The stage appears as a laboratory of memory, a place where bodies, gestures, and voices reactivate broken circuits of address. The spectator’s presence converts representation into relation, and the performance itself becomes a communicative act that transforms private pain into collective awareness. Paulo Tunhas then reflects on the relation between memory, history, and literary performance by examining how the past is made present in the works and correspondence of 19th-century Portuguese historian Oliveira Martins and novelist Eça de Queiroz. Their exchange brings to light a tension between different ways of engaging with bygone events: on the one hand, the effort to reconstruct a coherent historical sequence, and on the other, the capacity of literary narration to revive the past through imaginative determination. Tunhas approaches literature as a space in which past lives and events regain experiential proximity, not through criteria of historical verification, but through the internal coherence and evidentiary force of narrative construction.

From the arts, the volume eventually moves to the social and the political realms. Gonçalo Marcelo addresses the ethical and political dimensions of trauma by focusing on the concept of epistemic injustice. His contribution examines how conflicts of narrative shape the public intelligibility of suffering, showing how structural forms of injustice persist when dominant interpretive frameworks prevent certain experiences from being adequately articulated and recognized. By linking narrative exclusion to the difficulty of mobilizing resistance and social change, Marcelo situates memory within the broader relations that connect interpretation to power and to forms of collective responsibility. Amena Amer extends this discussion by examining how narratives of belonging and recognition operate in contexts marked by marginalization. Drawing on social-psychological research, her chapter explores the ways in which identities are negotiated at the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, showing how experiences of misrecognition shape personal agency as well as collective positioning. Memory emerges here as a situated practice through which individuals navigate social norms and power relations while testing possibilities of participation. Raquel da Silva reflects on the methodological and ethical challenges

involved in interviewing former politically violent militants. Her contribution foregrounds the narrative dimension of fieldwork, showing how memory and self-presentation are worked out within the interview situation itself, together with questions of responsibility. Attention is given to the asymmetries and vulnerabilities that shape these encounters, highlighting how the production of testimony is inseparable from questions of trust and ethical accountability. Joana Ricarte's chapter examines historical memory, cultural violence, and conflict through an analysis of dehumanization in the context of Israel and Palestine. By tracing how narratives of identity and security are constructed and sedimented over time, the analysis shows how certain forms of violence become normalized and rendered intelligible. Memory is approached as a contested field in which competing narratives shape both the persistence of conflict and the conditions under which alternative political imaginaries may emerge.

What stands out with particular force in this second part is the book's interdisciplinary coherence. The same conceptual rhythm of rupture and reconnection runs through philosophy, therapy, art, and politics. The empirical essays are able to illuminate what philosophy abstracts from; philosophy, in turn, provides the grammar through which art and politics become intelligible. This reciprocal play gives the essays their tone, which itself corresponds to the book's content – neither purely theoretical nor purely empirical, but in constant exchange between “internal” and “external”, representation and situation. Beginning with the body as the first communicative scene, the discussion moves through the troubled dialogue within the self and culminates in an opening to collective speech. In the end, a vision emerges of a whole that is as consistent as it is plural: memory as a field of communication, trauma as the collapse of that field, and narration as the practice that may restore it.

In this conceptually ambitious and richly articulated book, originality lies less in the introduction of new concepts than in the connection between domains that are often kept apart – the clinic and the polis, gesture and word, private self and shared meanings. As in polyphonic music, here too each contribution, with its own sound and melody, is oriented by the same harmonic principles and productively oscillates, both in form and content, between the whole – communication – and the part – irreducibly embodied voices.

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