**Media, Memory and Meaning in Narrative Art:**

**Trauma in Renate Dorrestein’s Novel *A Heart of Stone***

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*A Heart of Stone* comes across as a powerful prose-fictional narrative about severe mental trauma and bereavement suffered by a twelve year old girl in the Netherlands in 1973. The child’s excruciatingly inadequate resources to master them in subsequent life result mentally in deeply repressed memories, emotionally in unbearable feelings, and behaviourally in lethal life impediments. In this instance, the hurtful consequences for the gravely stricken main character Ellen van Bemmel eventually, 25 years later, give way to a process fostering the possibility of healing, of self-therapy and of a freeing-out, not least by her attempts at active use of language’s combinatory and imaging forces. In the case of Ellen, who is an independent woman of 38 in the novel’s present, this process is inaugurated by seemingly random events; most importantly, perhaps, the sudden opportunity she gets to purchase and move back into the house of her childhood. During her healing process she attains personal insights and an alternative knowledge necessary for a redistribution of repressed and of living memory.

Gradually, she ventures into the courageous, repetitional leap represented in re-living aspects of the traumatising and bereaving events of her childhood, and in re-possessing the traumatising spaces. Not least, she iteratively immerses herself in the (re)reading of forgotten or repressed materials (most notably the family photo album, in her mature years the only family heirloom retrieved for her after her childhood catastrophe), in the (re)exposure to extant media of the time, and in the attempts at writing that, all three of them, bear a metonymic or a metaphoric relation to the traumatising events. From this perspective, *A Heart of Stone* lends itself to approaches inspired by psychoanalytic thought. For example, the novel’s narrative form carries elements similar to the workings of the talking cure, to which I will return briefly in conclusion. The ”dialogic” and processual qualities of the novel can thus be witnessed not only in the relationship between the photographies and Ellen’s phrasings in writing, but also in the main character’s and the text’s dynamic use of language and represented media to negotiate and reconstruct a livable memory that makes sense and stabilises an identity in the present. This power of the novel helps in making her repressed memories *sayable*.

However, Dorrestein’s novel is more than the construction of a coherent life story of seamless continuity, paratactically combining events and segments into a meaningful whole by reestablishing a given (and already encoded), representative relationship between text and image. It is also an actively ongoing art work of imaging and mediation, a fragmented representation of another order, experimental and rupturing. It is highly intricate, and spatio-temporally it renders a constantly shifting novelistic discourse. This power of the novel is what little by little, and in leaps and ruptures, tugs the memorial process in the direction of an individually experienced but as yet speechless *visibility*. As such it is the painful yet truly creative work of attempting to represent a personally lived experience.

These two powers productively labour alongside each other to handle the repressed memorial matter and its manifold mediation in order to find a readable and thereby a both publicly and personally understandable balance between *the orders of the sayable and the visible*, between narration and depiction. This balance is also what endows Dorrestein’s fictional prose in *A Heart of Stone* with one of its foremost qualities: its tangibility and the particularly hightened sensorial acuteness (*aisthesis)* bestowed upon represented events, characters, bodies, emotions and objects, and upon the dialectical process of repression and remembrance, as well as upon the rupturing shifts between represented media and images.

The necessary minimum of readability as (paratactic) linking in *A Heart of Stone*, alongside its productive leaps and ruptures between an array of images and media, safeguards the effect of textual and medial action both produced and experienced by the dramatised, first-person writer-narrator Ellen, in tandem textual work with the novel’s implied author. Yet the novel’s pervasive sensorial acuteness certainly also carries across to and impacts its readers.

In the ongoing present of *A Heart of Stone*, the 38-year old forensic pathologist Ellen (”I am a doctor for the dead, not the living”; Dorrestein 2001: 126), single and pregnant with her first child (a baby girl), must needs stay bedridden for months before delivery, due to her condition of a prolapsed uterus. The sales advertisement she has come across by chance has enabled her to repossess her spacious childhood’s house and garden, which now literally come to function as her memorial space. With the love of her caring parents and her companionship with four siblings until Ellen turned 12, her family home was the site of great happiness. It was also the business space for her parents’ family company: a well-esteemed, productive and always up-to-date, internationally oriented newspaper-cutting agency, specialising on the USA. In other words, Ellen’s memorial space produces images not only of an archive but also of a site in which history and remembrance appear as shattered and are transformed into a dynamic space where snippets of the past are reassembled and reshaped in an ongoing process that negotiates with the present.

The writing situation of the novel, then, is dramatised against the background of Ellen reading photos: studying, associating and reminiscing, sideways and in-depth, on the basis of the pictures from her childhood in the family’s photo album. For the first time in her life she makes the painful yet productive effort of writing, i.e. of imaging and narrating: she attempts at phrasing into a sayable combinatorics of continuity the rupturing visibilities of the fragmented bits and snippets of her increasingly remembered past that her mind in the process allows to be selected for her, which eventually lead on to activating her repressed memory of the severe mental trauma and bereavement that she was exposed to at the age of twelve.

Before progressing further in my reading, let me at this point narrow down my line of inquiry by asking: What can fictional narrative and literary use of images and media achieve in relation to the understanding and therapeutic healing (in the sense of self-therapeutic processing) of repressed mental trauma? What qualities of literary and medial language are apt to capture, repeat and represent the chaotically repressed, condensed or substituted sensual impressions, memories, images and powerful emotions of a severely stricken, traumatised life, and make them creatively accessible for productive understanding?

We have already seen the operations of the phrasal power of language in making repressed memories *sayable*. In defining what he calls the sentence-image, Jacques Ranciere names this force in language the phrasal power of continuity and parataxis, and it posesses an already encoded relationship between text and image (Rancière 2007: 46). In Roman Jakobson’s wording, this force operates along the combination axis of language under the operational principle of contiguity: nearness (Jakobson 1960: 358). The paratactical combinatorics of nearness, then, functions as phrasal continuity and makes things sayable. It is largely based on encoded verisimilitude, possible motivations, and on the linkage of causes an effects. Furthermore, while it is encoded, the power of combination and phrasal sayability is largely *external* to the sensual and affective, i.e. it is external to the materiality of that of which it speaks. Precisely in its power of making straight and of general ordering – e.g. into a continuous life story based on recuperated memories – lies its double vicissitude. For one, it holds a productive potential for globally (or existentially) human understanding and knowledge, it can explain, help heal and make ”whole”. Yet on the other hand, its representational codes pose limitations to the possible representation of *un*encoded matter and the sensorial and affective insights that it may hold or contribute to producing. Thus, the question of to whom a narrative belongs, whose narrative it is, arises. Has it been lived, truly experienced, in individuation? Obviously, the combinatorics of phrasal sayablity borders onto the regime and the power of already encoded knowledge, which remains general, global. That, let us note, is a power which at times can be wilfully, intentionally, or inadvertently usurped and misused.

Language’s imaging power of rupture (Rancière 2007: 46), on the other hand, basically helps making things sensorially visible and heard, and belongs to another representational order which is as yet *un*encoded. Jakobson (1960: 358) locates this force within language’s selection axis under the principle of sensorial equivalence (i.e. likenesses and differences). Crucially, this imaging power is *inherent* to that which makes itself visible in it, and which attempts to reach the level of utterance. Here we encounter the sensual, affective materiality of imaging and medialisation. The imagings are sudden, performative ruptures in space and time, disturbing yet paradoxically dependent upon the force of the otherwise continuous, ”logical” phrasal combination of human situations and events, as well as phrased memory. The great array of ruptures in space and time in Dorrestein’s novel, through the occurence of both strictly linguistic as well as cultural and modern-medial textuality, shakes and stirs Ellen’s repressed memories and emotions into surfacing in the opened crevices of the discernible story-line. In this manner, repressed mental images are brought to visibility as well as to the threshold of sayability – and in the next instance: to human understanding. Imaging by ruptures is not a power of general ordering, but one of specific, individuating, ”lived” equivalence. Precisely therein lies *its* double viscissitude. For one, it truly may possess the productive potential for sudden, rupturing breakthroughs of sensual memory and individuated ”insight”, thus opening up in the next instance as well for sayability. On the other hand, it may topple over into textual-actional misfiring. The balance between Rancières two forces in the sentence-image – the phrasal power of continuity, and the imaging power of rupture ­– are in their balanced aesthetic work together tantamount for productive and creative effect. – The imaging-power of rupture in language, also in the work of reinvigorating repressed memories, belongs to anyone who has been affected by it (as the schock that it is). It therefore belongs to anyone who has truly lived and experienced it or its likenesses, both in real-life and in fiction. At the same time, unlike in the case of the predominantly story-line oriented narrative, the vicissitudes of mental trauma in relation to a textual-medial, fictional performative are not in the same measure exposed to wilfull or inadvertent usurpation and misuse.

In the attempt to observe the analytical distinction just made between the processes of language’s phrasal power of continuity, and those of the imaging power of rupture, let me now return to and resume my reading of the novel where I left it off. – First, I will single out the central and phraseable narrative strands of repressed and presently reinvigorated memory that Ellen’s reading of photos and her writing of sudden remembrances gives occasion to establishing (the general knowledge of a livable memory). From there we will move on to a closer discussion of the disruptions of and leaps in the visible imaging and between the array of visible media set in motion (individually sensorial, materially lived insight).

*Traumatic core*

In the darkness of a March evening during Easter of 1973, the happy, smart and resourceful, 12-year old Ellen returns home on her bike with her dog Orson after his evening walk. Ellen is the middle child of five siblings in a joyful, active, thrifty and caring family, in which Mom and Dad love their children and vice versa, and where Mom and Dad also truly love and desire each other. With two teenager siblings, Sybille and Kes, who are on the cusp of maturity, and with her 4-year old brother Carlos and the newborn baby Ida, Ellen is being raised in a trustful setting of mutual love and responsibility, and with an understanding concern for the needs of both the mind and of the body. She is, in Dad’s iterated phrase, “the cement of the family”; ”you are fine just the way you are” (Dorrestein 2001: 137; *passim*): nomers indicating both the respect and the love bestowed upon her, yet also the serious burdens placed perhaps somewhat prematurely on her shoulders. While there has been some extra commotion in the house since the baby-girl arrived a little more than half a year ago, this has mainly given rise to good-natured irritation, some additional chores, and hightened family-humouring jokes and sarcasms. A more omenous sign, however, and part of the bustle during this commotional period, is the occurrence in which 4-year old Carlos’ skin recently was severely burnt as he accidentally overturned the tea-kettle, which Ellen had placed on the cooker out of her sense of duty to participate and assist. By no means was Ellen to blame, yet she is doomed to feel remorse, guilt and shame for the accident for years to come.

Among a series of other fragments, this is a snippet of reminiscence surfacing in the mind of the narrating Ellen. Now, 25 years posterior to her Easter-evening bike-ride, she – a single woman with a childless marriage and a series of short relationships to men behind her – continues her reading of and her peculiar yet uniquely productive “dialogue” with the photo album. What the photographies tell her, gives her sudden recollections of situations and events in the past. Their fragmented ”talk” and Ellen’s writing are supported by and extended into the remembrance of a series of phenomena and events corollary to what the photos speak of. Suddenly intruding are scraps of vivid images, phrases and formulations, and snippets from an array of media which, so it turns out, have been part of and seminal to her lived life up until her very present. By way of Ellen’s reiterated, fragmented perceptions of such mixed and variegated scraps and cut-outs, the weight of a powerful emotional yet speechlessly repressed complex in her is also gradually laid bare.

A severe impediment both in and to Ellen’s existence is that the details of her life leading up to her and Orson’s return home that Easter night, and the complicated trajectory of her succeeding life, are truncated from each other. The abyss in between is the effect of a hurtful eclipse that intricately emanates from the instantaneous occasion of her overwhelming exposure to an unspeakable, mental traumatisation on that particular night. That powerful exposure has not only eclipsed and thereby repressed from memory and consciousness the details of her experience of the occasion itself. As mental repression it has also cast shadows over and generated chasms in other, and later, parts of her life. While she certainly possesses recollection of her life as a youth and a grown-up, yet out of these parts she has been unable to produce a fathomable and liveable life story that would comprise her remembered sense perceptions, images and thoughts, and that at the same time could help heal her mental scars. In her bedridden condition, preparing for and helping forward the birth of a new life – a life that *she* will be bringing into the world and that is *hers* – the uterine care takes on new layers of meaning. Ellen’s tremendous effort to recollect and to combine scraps of powerful images and sense impressions into writing becomes textual practice – a textual action in which the vicissitudes of mental trauma can be perceived and eventually be mastered as *hers*. By way of her textual work the core of the repressed becomes reinvigorated. It is given the power of an effective, textual-medial form. Not least, the repressed is also productively regenerated and presenced as memories with the creative capacity to heal; it becomes part of a textual-medial action of atonement, and thus of being an intertwined component in an act of (self-)reconciliatory work in language.

In moving back now to the March evening we started out with, we realise that Ellen’s early years have been fortunate ones, her family a truly safe harbour and source of authentic love and care, and she herself a very happy child. Yet, on returning home that Easter night, the 12-year old girl finds her whole family motionless, scattered on the floor, some under the kitchen table, some halfway into cupboards. They have been asphyxiated with plastic bags tied around their heads, most of them have been stabbed by a knife, and have – so it turns out – first been drugged and sedated by a collected arsenal of medications prescribed by the family doctor. The horrific scene is a combination of a series of homicides, and a suicide. In the speechless agony of her overwhelming trauma of mental violence and bereavement, in which – during seconds – her entire existence has lost its foundation and been turned upside down, she suddenly perceives that her younger brother Carlos’ face retches inside his plastic bag under the kitchen table. She hurriedly unties his bag, gives him pulmonary first-aid, makes him breathe – and saves his life. The two of them, still speechless, instinctually rush to the house’s darkest locker-room in the cellar. There, in the afternoon of the following day, they are found by the police – still panic-stricken, severely traumatised, silently perched beside each other on a wooden shelf.

In the following segments I will attempt to disentangle analytically and assess some more of the most central components of Renate Dorrestein’s novelistic narrative about Ellen, and then proceed to analysing its imaging and textual-medial complexities. In so doing, I will focus in particular on the aesthetic functions of the imaging, textual and medial occurrences involved.

*Further story-line:*

*The phrasal power of combinatorics (*“*knowledge”)*

Posterior to the traumatising family catastrophe, and during Ellen’s six ensuing years at an orphan home, where she is initially placed with her brother, she is struck by a second major separation and irretrievable loss: Carlos is taken away from her and is adopted by another family. This comes to pass despite the utterly strenuous attempt the two of them make at escaping and saving themselves, through wind and sleet along the railway tracks on a Christmas Eve. They have headed in the wrong direction, are there instead met and given first-aid treatment by Ellen’s former teacher, yet are returned to the orphange, from which young Carlos then eventually is removed and moves away. A single attempt at a reunion between them five years later in life is futile; her brother has irretrievably become another, and they never meet again.

Bereavement and separation then gives way to self-destructivity and activates the death drive in Ellen (Freud 2001). Having completed college and medical school and finished her spesialisation, she is married to Thijs for 13 years. They remain childless, drift more and more apart, and then divorce each other. She has professionally become a forensic pathologist, “a doctor for the dead” (Dorrestein 2001: 126; *passim*.) – another iterated, imaging motif. In her tormented cool, she cuts the corpses open, examines them, and stiches them up again, yet always on the search for the causes of death, and form that perspective, as well serving the life-drive and the quite different cause of upholding life. Meanwhile, she simultaneously undergoes lengthy psychoanalytically-oriented psychotherapy, sneering sarcastically and destructively at some of her therapists, seemingly without any effect-taking results of healing her mental scars.

Next to her job, she starts leading a reckless life of one-night stands, repeatedly bereaving herself from any lasting relationships to men. Yet her destructivity goes further: Ellen’s inability to bonding in any lasting relationship, is accompanied by lasciviousness, in which she makes extensive use of non-committed, impersonal sex in its sole function of being an estranged, personally distanced consumer (society) commodity. – For beyond the immediate pains from her tremendous initial trauma and its aftermaths, another traumatising anxiety has already from the beginning taken seat in her, gotten internalised, and it keeps growing in Ellen over the next 25 years. Mom, it turned ut, was the mentally ill perpetrator on that devastating Easter night years ago now, suffering from post-partum psychosis. While Mom had covertly collected an abundant reservoire of potent medications against her severe post-natal depression, yet she had dispensed these into the evening family meal, which Ellen missed because of her walking the dog. Ellen’s growing, traumatising agony is centred around her burning question: was *father* in on it? Was her Dad a complicit, to whom she had always had a rock-solid natural trust and loving relationship during her rearing and socialising years, and vise versa?

Without any evidence, she strongly feels for 25 years of her life that Father *has* betrayed her, which amounts to another experience of loss of true love, and another, yet deeper sensation of bereavement. Ellen for many years cannot mourn over Dad. Like to the melancholic, his person has taken seat within Ellen’s own body (Freud 2001a), and she cannot expel his for her now tainted corpse out of her body. All of this, in the faint story-line that can be analysed as phrased and sayable, is based on the verisimilitudal, cause and effect-relations stemming out of the police’s evidence: the medium of *a* *single handwritten note*, saying: “We’ll see to it that they don’t suffer” (Dorrestein 2001: 192). It eventually turns out the note was handwritten entirely by Mom, without Dad’s knowledge or complicity at all. In the stirring-up of her memory of her only visit to the family grave, with its granite Heart of Stone, it is not enirely Ellen’s own heart that is conjured up as a present-day image, yet, to be sure, also the hearts of her parents. Still, in the present of the novel, another evidence of Dad’s innocence and unbroken trust later appears by way of her friend Bas, and Ellens guilt at first, yet later her trustful love of her father (and perhaps a healed relationship to them?) returns with full force.

By performative chance (*the newspaper-ad* being an instantaneously disruptive, textual-medial action), Ellen (now aged 38) sees her childhood home coming up for sale: she buys it at the spur of the moment. It is completely redesigned, ripped of all its family and newspaper-cutting agency archives and interiors: this was the successful livelihood for the still well-functioning van Bemmel family and their staff of students. Yet she now dares to explore its rooms again, and as the very last one: the dark-cellar storage-room where she and her 4-year old brother were found severely traumatised and speechless 25 years ago. Ellen is pregnant by now, with a girl-baby, by one of her many casual-men relations with whom she has quickly broken up. She decides to bear the child, she starts feeling maternal love, and she as well starts nourishing feelings for Bas, a former agency-staff member and dear friend of hers, who still lives close by her house. Suffering a uterine prolapse, she has to remain bedridden for the duration of her pregnancy, yet Bas helps her in any matter.

Now, 25 years after her initial, catastrophic traumatisation, she recieves from her former orphanage-assistant friend the only heirloom left from her childhood home: the *family photo album*. It has suddenly been retrieved at the institution after having been inadvertently tucked away there without Ellen’s knowledge. In bed now, and again in her childhood house, looking at the photographies, reading them, Ellen starts her “dialogue” with this photographic medium: She writes, as a first-person narrator – haphazardly, criss-cross, with vast temporal leaps back and forth. The sensorial impacts of the shifts to this medium and its images from her and her family members’ distant past, jump-shifts by proxy to the representational intrusion of other visible and heard media with “past” images, phrases (ads, fashion, culture), songlyrics (pop music), headlines (the newspaper cut-outs), dialogue lines (films), politics (TV and the news media), etc. This massive textual-medial action then triggers the presencing of repressed and forgotten personal memories in Ellen.

When especially painful memories are touched upon, her discourse fences off and at times briefly fades over to third-person narration; then again back to first-person: Obviously, she is initially not ready to go the full way into repeating her traumas and their repressed memories. In these passages, she also writes in a dreamlike language, fantasising. However, she suddenly also recollects pleasant memories, and associates from them to sensual equivalences in other images as well as to sensorial likenesses in an array of textual references and in medial phenomena. All of these she has previously truly sensed and lived by, but they have “lived on” as it were “materially”, yet have been in phenomenal oblivion for 25 years. In her (while in bed) necessary *cut-up writing*, studying *the photo album* helps Ellen open ruptures for other material images long lost, that are now unsystematically and obliquely jotted down on paper. Of great help is the triggering of her memory of *her diary*. The same goes for her recollection of the news-agency’s *cut-up techniques*: She lets snippets from *politics*, *films*, famous *cinematic one-liners*, *rhythmic music*, from her school-training in *literature*, *ancient mythology*, *cultural history*, from her aquired *discourse of the medical profession* and of *forensic pathology*, and more, be jotted down on paper. There, one *textuality, discourse, and mediality* is superimposed on the other. The “unsystematic systematic” of the *archive* and its modern corollary of a site in which history and reminiscences appear as shattered and are transformed into a dynamic space where snippets of the past are reassembled and reshaped in *an ongoing process that negotiates with the present*; furthermore: of *memory* and of *the memorial*, as she learnt it in the newspaper-cutting agency and through studying for school when she grew up, all of this now stands her in good stead.

The performative crevices that thus arise as textual-medial, truly creative *textual* action out of such jotted writing, open sudden spaces for imaging and visibility also of her innermost hidden and repressed – and as yet *unphrased – recollections*: Towards the end of her pregnancy spent on writing, she carefully enters the area of their old kitchen. Yet beyond that, she also carefully tiptoes downstairs and enters the still dark cellar-storage room, in which the *memories now shoot up in repetitions of the boxed-in space* where she sat hidden with her brother in the immediate aftermath of the initial mental traumatisation that had struck her. Triggering her repressed memory is also the suddenly appearing, strongly *emotional and sensorial image in her mind of her 4-year old brother*, terrified to death. Returning to her, now as conscious understanding, is as well the internalisation of her distrust of her Dad, and by extension: of other men. The important insight emerges, too, that what traumatically took hold of her, as it were like a destiny, was a mental blow that she at the age of 12 had no possible resources to master then.

Now, on the other hand, both language’s *phrasal power* and its *unique sensorial imaging power* become creative tandem resources for her. In this process she undergoes a freeing-out, a kind of liberation, for the future, and for further future life and insight to come: She decides to name her yet unborn baby-girl *Ida-Sophie*. By way of the impact of this *medium of names*, she seeks a freeing-out from her deepfelt, lifelong emotions of guilt and shame on occasion of her memory of her then new-born baby-sister *Ida*. It turns out, to Ellen’s despair, that Mom during her severe illness has kept stabbing and bruising the infant, with a series of visits to the (unsuspecting) doctor’s as a consequence. Ellen’s guilt has been connected to her youthful irritation and frustration over yet another child in the family 25 years ago, which made Ellen convince her family to name her now long deceased sister, *Ida*: At the time, *Ida* was the ugliest name Ellen could think of. Now, Ellen’s decision to name her own coming child *Ida-Sophie*, abates her feelings of guilt and shame, while, along the lines of the name-medium, her own child will then eventually emerge as an “Ida-Who-Knows”, possessing insight, thus tentatively settling Ellen’s issue of bad conscience in an act of “nominal” atonement.

Bas, her longtime friend from the staff of the once active newspaper-cutting agency, meets with Ellen again and starts helping her with house maintenance and keeping the garden. He is another suffering, twisted soul and soulmate, who masters *his* mental life with a daily intake of Prozac, and by now runs a productive gardening centre nearby. Ellen, who has started the work on her recently regained garden before she gets bed-ridden, and Bas, the expert gardener, work extensively with the cultivation of ornamental plants and communicate partly in the *language of* *horticulture* – another intermittently intruding medium that contributes to opening textual imaging ruptures, which then also trigger memories for Ellen. – As far as Bas is concerned, and importantly, he incidentally finds in Ellen’s house and submits to her, her Dad’s *ticket purchase* for a holiday trip he had planned for Mom and himself to Florida during the period of Mom’s post-partum depression. The sudden appearance of this object, in a sense also a “medium”, finally convinces Ellen that she has judged her Dad wrongly. This is clear evidence that Ellen’s Dad *did* try to help his wife and to prevent their post-birth commotion 25 years ago. The turmoil involved, it turns out, continuous with violent bruises, a number of inflicted illnesses, the baby’s cries of suffering, and hospitalisations for little Ida – all of these were also consequences of mother’s violent-aggressive actions. Dad did wish to make life easier for his wife, to assist her, to save the children from extra burdens, and to take Mom for a trip of rest and new experiences (although it did not come about) – in the midst of the crisis. Having gained this insight, a period of guilty shame for, and by now true mourning over her Dad follows for Ellen. Her emotions of violent bereavements and of the possible, fundamental betrayal abate. By now, she finds reconfirmation of trust and genuine love in her now emerging memory of him. He never betrayed or deceived her. – Along the same lines, Bas now *purchases Florida tickets* for Ellen and himself, and a possible future and life together for them presences itself, and lies at hand, as a family of three.

*Performative, textual-medial action:*

*The imaging power of rupture (“sensorial, materially lived insight”)*

In some of the analytical comments above, it has already in part been necessary to move from the novel’s *story-line* dimension (part of the combinatorics of narrative, and of its sayability), and to its dimension of *imaging rupture* (where elements are forgrounded, or summarized, repeated as essential or peripheral, diverged from or forked off in new directions). But I have also commented on the novel’s *narrating,* or *voice*: in *A Heart of Stone*, the first-person (on rare occasions the third-person) narrative code. While the two latter levels cannot do completely without a combinatorics of phrasing, yet they are primarily rooted in the imaging, textual-medial possibility of making something visible, while perceived, and bringing it to the level of sayability.

In this segment, as well, I will on the whole remain with my analytical vocabulary of choice, inspired in me by theorists like Rancière, Jakobson, and Freud). Here, the most important terms are textual combination axis, and textual selection axis, as well as the intertwinements of these two with modern, fictional narrative’s oblique, incongruous relations of narrative’s *knowing* (prompted by narrative’s external combinatorics and phrasal power), and narrative’s *doing* (prompted by narrative’s rupturing imaging power, which is sensorially inherent to that which it endeavours to render representations of, inherent to that of which is speaks). Fictionsal narratives related to the representation of mental trauma make active use of and draw upon creative speech-acts and textual-medial performativity, both of which help repressed memories to be triggered sensorially and to become visible and sayable through the active production of memories. This is how fictional narratives sensorially work towards the representation of individuated (while bodily perceived), “lived” and “experienced” life. Here, the representational process facilitates the presencing: it works towards making sensorially visible and audible that which has remained repressed, unseen and unheard. While inherent and directly involving the senses, in terms of therapeutic effect this representational process represents another and affective kind of healing in the use of the properties of language than the external power of the already combinatorically phraseable and encoded sayability in language – a power possessing a knowledge that could be appropriated and misused.

Dorrestein’s novel abounds in textually imaging actions as well as in rupturing impacts from sudden shifts between represented medial phenomena that are superimposed upon each other. Thus, a high number of instantaneous textual-medial shifts and repetitions occur throughout the text. The crevices and ruptures they open, make space for an alternate visibility and hearability, and their sensorial impacts facilitate the triggering of repressed memories. These are produced and presenced by way of the textual creativity in shifts and repetitions, bringing memories to the verge of becoming new sayabilities. – Such both textual and medial occurrences are imaging events in Dorresten’s narrative prose fiction. They produce perceptional likenesses between them, that extend across a variety of local contexts. I have already pointed to the importance of the numerous shifts back and forth to *the family photo album*, and the repetitive imaging of the crucial cut-up ”structure-without-structurality” of the (newspaper-cutting) *archive*. Yet there is more. The following is a comprehensive overview of the imaging-rupturing cuts and shifts in textuality and between the represented media in the novel, that imbues the text with instantaneous impacts from a diversified pattern of actional linguistic repetitions:

The novel plays with numerous texts and various discursive practices, genres and media involved in Dorrestein’s novel. To mention but a few, *A Heart of Stone* involves a complex, *cut-up and fragmented, first-person narrative code* including *dialogue*, a thorough *aesthetic, plenitude-oriented composition*, snippets and devices from *the Bible* (Easter, Christmas Eve), *Greek myth* (Medea and Jason; Eros and Thanatos), the structual likenesses to elements of the *melodrama*, the *thriller*, *newspaper and magazine journalism*, and to the techniques involved in *photography* (and the *vocabulary of the photographer*: not least the focus on the momentary shutter- and opening device of the camera lense – the adept photographer in the family is Ellen’s brother Kes). Furthermore, there are the repeated impacts of the workings of the cut-and-glue *archive*, numerous scraps of *rhythmic music and lyrics excerpts*, *films*, *film-stars* and *excerpts of characters and lines*. There are *quotes from other modern media*, the discourses of *current politics* of the 60’s and the 70’s*, of the areas of reported criminality and public life*; moreover snippets of *commercials of modern fashion and hygiene*, reported events from the *modern cultural history of the USA and the Netherlands*. There repetitively occur elements of the *discourse of forensic pathology*, of the *discourse of medical science in general*, and from the *dialoguing of psychotherapy’s working-through*. There are even scraps from the *official time-tables of Nederlandse Spoorwegen*, from various *orders and travelling tickets*, and there is a host of repetitions of *vernacular and cultural gestures of the time*, even repeated elements of a *language of morbidity*, the *discourse of the art of gardening and horticulture*, etc.

All of these, repetitively superimposed upon one another throughout, are textual and medial, *sensorial* phenomena, textually-medially acting, performatively. They have all been lived, been experienced, in individuation. The disruptive leaps that they by their percpetional similarities extend across the story-line’s stifled, encoded and externally controlled contexts of the *human*-life story, crack up that immediately ”understandable”, general story. Although personalised to some degree, individually lived mental trauma cannot be mastered merely by a narrative language that is external to what it speaks of. Trauma is also individuated, bodily perceived, unique, and is in need of apt representation. Therefore, in the cracks and crevices that this massive sensorial imaging in representation opens up, even repressed emotions and memories are stirred and triggered. They may come to perceptional life, anew, as repetition of something that Ellen, in her individuated case, and due to mental repression, has not known the existence of for years.

*The talking cure? (In the vein of Freud, Breuer,*

*Bertha Pappenheim, and a possible talking(-writing) cure)*

We have already looked at a quite special, potential ”talking-cure” pattern in *A Heart of Stone*, where Ellen, presented with the family photo album, first ”reads” what the photographies tell her of, then responds by writing in her own tentative and fragmented language. This device is quite comprehensive throughout the novel; it doubtlessly also functions as a liberating, freeing-out ”talking-cure” work for Ellen, in which she gradually liberates herself from feelings of guilt and shame, yet also manages to set her own repressed memories free.

Here I will draw attention to another talking-cure pattern, which also in quite considerable measure gives the fragmented novelistic text a comprehensive composition. In the textual play *between the first-person narrator* (Ellen, who by way of the textual-medial impacting eventually has her repressed memories and images swell forth in her), and *the implied author*. In *his* formal “dialogue” with Ellen, he creates a crucial compositional layer in the novel: Among other things, the implied author (a textual subjectivity) shapes the novel’s form of two main parts with three photo-reading chapters in each, plus an epilogue. The implied author also supplies the necessary plenitude of compositional form by way of a more or less even distribution of repetitional word-strings, motifs (there are a series of *Leitmotive* supporting the aesthetic build-up of a formal plenitude), as well as by a system of expressive gestures: Examples of these are Dad’s already mentioned “Ellen, you are the cement of the family”; “You are fine just the way you are” (Dorrestein 2001: *passim*) – by the way, this is also part of the lyrics of a jazz standard; and furthermore, Dad’s loyal wink of his eye to Ellen above his eyeglases. The implied author aesthetically enacts the repetitive distribution and variation of Leitmotivic names like Ida and Ida-Sophie. The implied author also installs relevant and congenial excerpts and references to concrete myths from the Greek world. There are elements of the myth of Medea and Jason (Medea murdered her children to spite her husband’s unfaithfulness), and of the myth of Eros and Thanatos, which Freud alludes to in his essays on *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), and *Mourning and Melancholia* (1915). The latter myth is cleary a narrative that is central to both Freud’s and Dorrestein’s ongoing dicussion of the instinctual life drive and death drive, both of which drives are compatible with the struggles in Ellen’s traumatised mind.

The ”dialogue” between these two sensorial voice-and-visibilty instances is where another parallell to psychoanalysis’ talking-cure performatively happens in *A Heart of Stone*. Here lies the aesthetically and therapeutically successful negotiaton between the two extremes of my theoretical segment and its research questions: (1) The phrasal power of combination little by litle exerts the rudiments of a story-line to be understood as meaningful and turned into encoded knowledge (but is it Ellen’s lived and perceived story, or is it the product of the power of encoded knowledge?). (2) The massively active and rapidly shifting imaging power of rupture, of not yet encoded, speechless images, memories, intertexts, and modern media, somehow resound repetitively with each other and work as substitutes and triggering instances for the innermost repressed memories, images and emotions. – The outcome of the cure-through-dialogue compositional form is that the imaging power gets interspersed with, establishes likenesses to, and momentarily provides sensual material repetitions of indiviuated, self-perceived materials that are repressed, and bring them onto the threshold of sayability and consciousness. Their crevices creatively open up for visibility (to Ellen, to the implied author, and to readers) – a visibility of lived and experienced matter that she has kept repressed for 25 years.

*In tentative conclusion*

This concludes the discussion of my first research question raised initially (What can aesthetic narrative and aesthetic use of media achieve in relation to the understanding of and the therapeutic healing, or self-therapuetic processing, of mental trauma?). – It is time to attempt to formulate an answer to the second problem question I raised: What qualities of aesthetic or literary, and medial language is apt to capture, repeat and make accessible for productive, creative understanding the chaotically repressed, condensed or substituted sensual impressions, memories, images and strong emotions of a severely stricken, traumatised life? What *is* aesthetically performative prose-fictional language?

My answer would be that it is a language and represented media that *act* *textually*: they do what they say, and they truly install. Or as in performative memory constructions: by the impacts of sudden shifts and repetitions, they truly *re*-install into the world – and yet anew – sensorial, lived, and experienced images, yet that still are without full phrasing. These are images which either were not there before, or that have been expelled (repressed) from the world, and now become creatively reinstated, by sensorially imaging repetition. This is so, while theories of speech acts and performatives teach us that the creativity or performativity of language (*i.e.* textual-medial action – *not* primarily anthropomorphic action) depends on the installation of elements endowed with deictic-shifter functions and their iterability. “Deictic shifters” simply means elements that are placeholders in language, textual components that are there in their fullest sensorial presence (Austin 1975; Jakobson 1957): ”I am, you are, they are here, and hold this place”. But at the same time: ”this material thing here, this phenomenon here, sensorially holds this place and that place, and you cannot circumvent us or do without us”.

Furthermore, the repetition of the shifts between placeholders creates a textual play of self-referensiality that extends across a variety of (localised) and ordered, pre-encoded discursive contexts, i.e. it is a play of perceptional or sensorial likenesses, *not* anchored in human, existential, phenomenal contexts. To take full effect, however, this creative play must be “countersigned” by the other: Other subjective instances – in the literary text, or readers, viewers, anybody – he or she, the other, must agree, so to speak, about the perception and function of these placeholders (images, time levels, place indicators, textual motifs, snippets of phrases or word-strings, or the operative manner of represented media, truly experienced and sensed by reading the text). The other, he or she, must agree, *countersign*, that these placeholding-imagings are also sensed and experienced as lived by him or her. When that *happens* in language, then the creative play takes productive effect (Derrida 1982).

Referring by shifts, ruptures and repetiton *to each other*, and subsuming-comprising *different* localised contexts, these sudden leaps are by their impacts enabled to carve out and draw the contours of a new, or reproduce anew, an alternative communicative space to be phrased. This also goes for repressed memories. Deictic placeholders, images, memories, as well as represented media in Dorrestein’s case, utter themselves *inherently*, they are real matter without an already proscribed phrasing: They make themselves visible, hearable, as sensorial, experiential ”insight”. They do need language’s power of phraseability and combinatorics as well, in order to fully reach the completeness of sayability, and to attain the level of *external*, generalized knowledge. Yet primarily they are powers of *inherent*, sensorial imaging matter. Thus aesthetic narratives, narrative literary language, is extended in an oblique play – one between *knowing* and *doing* – between the mimetically understandable and the yet unkown, between phenomenalism and the imaging, truly experiential inherence that knowledge has expelled from phenomenalism. This play, also in the aesthetically narrative representation of mental trauma, opens up for the impact of a sensed, perceived, experienced space of alterity, another existence, uhinged from the misusable power of already encoded social bonds. When such narratives include the matter of repressed memory, they possess the power to lay the grounds for liberation and atonement, and to function as instances in the act of (self-)reconciliatory work in language.

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