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

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

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Renate Dorrestein’s novel *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 her memorial baggage 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, twenty-five 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 an active mediation of past and present by way of language’s combinatory and imaging forces. In the case of Ellen who, in the novel’s present, is an independent woman of thirty-eight, 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 on a courageous, repetitional leap into the past when 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 also in her own writing about the past. Her activation of all three media resources represents an attempt at creating 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” (Freud and Breuer 2001), 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 her writing, but also in the main character’s and the text’s dynamic use of language and other media to negotiate and reconstruct a livable memory that stabilises an identity in the present. This power of the novel helps in making Ellen’s repressed memories not only (re)livable but – seminally – also *sayable*.

However, Dorrestein’s novel is more than the construction of a coherent life story, paratactically combining isolated events into a meaningful whole by reestablishing an already encoded representative relationship between text and image. It is also an ongoing process of imaging and mediation, a fragmented representation of another order, experimental and disruptive. This power of the novel to make the process unfold is what little by little, and in spatio-temporal leaps and ruptures, tugs the truly creative memorial process in the direction of an individually experienced but as yet speechless *visibility*.

Sayability and visibility stand out as the two powers that 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 them, one 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 its aesthetically particularly hightened sensorial acuteness bestowed upon represented events, characters, bodies, emotions and objects, upon the dialectical process of repression and remembrance, as well as upon the disruptive shifts between represented media and images. Thus, the effects of textual and medial action are both produced and experienced by the dramatised, first-person narrator Ellen, in tandem with the novel’s implied author.

In the ongoing present of *A Heart of Stone*, the thirty-eight-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 childhood’s spacious 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 twelve, 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 with a manifold archive kept in the house, specialising on the USA.

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. This eventually leads on to activating her repressed memory of the severe mental trauma and bereavement that she was exposed to at the age of twelve. 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.

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 self-therapeutic healing of repressed mental trauma? What qualities of literary and medial language are apt to capture the chaotically condensed sensual impressions, memories, images and powerful emotions of a traumatised life, and make them creatively accessible for productive understanding?

We have already witnessed the operations of the phrasal power of language in making repressed memories sayable. Furthermore, in his first step of defining what he calls the sentence-image, Jacques Rancière names this force in language the phrasal power of continuity and parataxis, and it possesses 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 (Jakobson 1960: 358). The paratactical combinatorics of nearness, then, functions as phrasal continuity and makes things sayable. It is largely based on already encoded verisimilitude, possible motivations, and on the linkage of causes and effects. Moreover, while already encoded, the power of combination and phrasal sayability is largely *external* to the sensual materiality of that of which it speaks. Precisely in its power of turning exernalities into a continuous life story based on recuperated memories lies its double vicissitude. For one, it holds a productive potential for globally existential human understanding and knowledge, it can explain, and transform shards into a ”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. 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 power of already encoded and general knowledge. That, let us note, is a power which at times can be wilfully or inadvertently usurped and misappropriated.

In circumscribing language’s imaging power of rupture (Rancière 2007: 46), on the other hand, Rancière performs his second step in identifying the sentence-image. Basically, this power in language helps making things sensorially visible and belongs to another representational order that 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 that attempts to reach the level of utterance. 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 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 *individuated* human understanding. Imaging by disruptions is not a power of ordering, yet one of specific, individuating, ”lived” equivalence. Precisely therein lies *its* double viscissitude. For one, it truly may possess the productive potential for sudden 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 Rancière’s 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 shockingly affected by it, 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 performative are not in the same measure exposed to wilfull or inadvertent misappropriation.

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 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 processed by Ellen’s reading of photos and her writing of sudden remembrances. From there we will move on to a closer discussion of the leaps in the visible imaging, and of that in between the array of visible media, that set the individuated, materially lived insight in motion.

*Traumatic core*

In the darkness of a March evening during Easter of 1973, the happy and resourceful, twelve-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 thrifty and caring family, in which Mom and Dad love their children and vice versa, and where Mom and Dad also love each other. With two teenager siblings, Sybille and Kes, who are on the cusp of maturity, and with her four-year-old brother Carlos and the newborn baby Ida, Ellen is being raised in a trustful setting 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*): these are 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 four-year-old Carlos’ skin was recently severely burnt as he accidentally overturned the tea-kettle, which Ellen had placed on the cooker out of her sense of duty to assist. By no means was Ellen to blame, yet she is doomed to feel 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, twenty-five 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 extended into the remembrance of a series of phenomena and events corollary to what the photos show. 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 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 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 wounds. In her bedridden condition, preparing for and helping forward the birth of a new life entirely *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 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. Not least, the repressed is also productively made present 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-)reconciliation.

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 twelve-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 an 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, 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.

*Building a story line*

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 and are there instead met and given first-aid treatment by Ellen’s former teacher, yet are returned to the orphanage, from which young Carlos then eventually is removed and moves away. A single attempt at a reunion between sister and younger brother five years later in life is futile; her brother has become another, and they never meet again.

Bereavement and separation then give way to self-destruction and in part activate the death drive in Ellen (Freud 2001). Having completed college and medical school and finished her specialisation, she is married to Thijs for thirteen years. They remain childless, drift more and more apart, and eventually divorce each other. She has professionally become a forensic pathologist, “a doctor for the dead” (Dorrestein 2001: 126; *passim*). In her tormented cool, she cuts the corpses open, examines them, and stitches them up again, yet always on the search for the causes of death as signified *knowledge*. The images of corpses that break through in Ellen’s writing in the present, however, take on the disrupting visual power of embodied media and only then appraoch a radically new sayability and a freeing-out. For her, and alongside her medically symbolised knowledge, corpses have for years also carried the speechlessly repressed function of *showing* and *seeing* not merely others’ but her own eventual death. Since her catastrophic trauma at twelve, they have placed Ellen in the proximity of primary repression’s pre-lingual and paradoxical both abhorrence for, and attraction to the corpse as *abject* (Kristeva 1982). Also corporeal smells and liquids, not least those of her family’s sexual bodies and her parents’ love-making, that she had already learned to have a natural relation to prior to her traumatisation, have turned into ineffable, abjective defilement for her. In Kristeva’s nuanced approach to abjection, she makes the careful differentiation between work within the symbolic order’s already encoded signification of death and of corpses, which renders knowledge and meaning of death, and on the other hand, the as yet unencoded work of the repressed materiality of showing (one’s) death (Kristeva 1982: 3). It is precisely the latter which needs to be set free in a life-experientially individuated, eruptive visibility that can be phrased as alterity and become sayable as insight. This doubleness of Kristeva’s take on the abjective position emulates with Ellen’s painful and utterly traumatising both personal and professional situation in adult life. It also speaks of how Ellen is at all enabled to endure her repeated traumatic pain. At the same time, the combinatorics of the frail yet vaguely accessible story line whose build-up I pursue and analytically attempt to piece together here, and the power of the disrupting images and media which we have already seen at work, and that I will turn to in more analytical detail below, in essence make up precisely the novel’s complex sentence-image, for whose nomer I lean on Rancière’s thought.

Meanwhile, and now back in the vague story line, Ellen along with her work simultaneously undergoes lengthy psychoanalytically-oriented psychotherapy, sneering sarcastically and destructively at some of her therapists, seemingly without any effect on her. 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 self-destruction 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 consumer 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 and keeps growing in Ellen over the next twenty-five 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 reservoir 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 – *Dad*, who to Ellen had been the very embodiment of rock-solid love and trust ever since her rearing and socialising years?

Without any evidence, she strongly feels for twenty-five 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 in the melancholic, his person has taken seat within Ellen’s own body (Freud 2001a; Kristeva 1989), and she cannot expel him from her now tainted corpse. – 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 entirely 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 returns with full force.

By chance Ellen 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 interiors and its newspaper-cutting agency archives: 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 four-year old brother were found severely traumatised and speechless twenty-five 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, twenty-five years after her initial, catastrophic traumatisation, she receives 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 tucked away there without Ellen’s knowledge. In bed now, and again in her childhood house, looking at the photos, 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 now triggers the 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 twenty-five years. In her 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 be marked down on paper: 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. There, one type of 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, now stand her in good stead in *an ongoing process that negotiates with the present*.

The crevices produced out of such haphazard 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 four-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 twelve 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 the use 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 further despair, that Mom during her severe illness has kept stabbing and bruising the infant. Ellen’s guilt has been connected to her youthful irritation and frustration over yet another child in the family twenty-five 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, in accordance with the second half of the name, 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 meets with Ellen again and starts helping her with house and garden. He is another 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 started the work on her recently regained garden before she got bed-ridden, and Bas, the expert gardener, work extensively with the cultivation of ornamental plants and communicate partly in the language of horticulture which then also triggers memories for Ellen. – Bas becomes an agent in the service of mediation in Ellen’s process of reconciliation, not least while he in her house incidentally finds and submits to Ellen her Dad’s factual 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 twenty-five years ago, which, as Ellen and Bas gather corroboration of, also comprised Mother’s violent-aggressive torture of her little baby. 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. 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 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.

*The imaging power of rupture*

In some of the analytical comments above, it has already in part been necessary to move from the novel’s *story-line* dimension and to its dimension of *imaging rupture* where elements are suddenly forgrounded in the leaps of the narrative and its forking off in new directions. Fictional 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, “lived” and “experienced” life. Here, textual representation works towards making sensorially visible and audible that which has remained unseen and unheard until it breaks loose in visible repetitions of repressed experiences. While sensorially inherent to that of which it speaks, and directly involving the senses, in terms of therapeutic effect this representational process foregrounds another and affective kind of healing by use of language to promote discursive knowledge and activates a power to release compelling insights only on the brink of the sayable.

Dorrestein’s novel abounds in textually imaging actions as well as in erupting 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 by way of the crevices and ruptures they open, and they make space for an alternate visibility, bringing memories to the verge of becoming new sayabilities. Such occurrences are imaging events in Dorresten’s narrative prose fiction. They produce perceptional likenesses between them, which 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 archive,the existence of which Ellen now recalls and which serves as a model for her disruptive narrative. 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, and 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, have been individually experienced. The disruptive leaps that they by their percpetional similarities extend across the story line’s 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 a unique, embodied experience, and is in need of apt representation, sensorially internal to that of which it speaks. Therefore, in the cracks and crevices that this massive sensorial imaging 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, has not known the existence of for years.

*The talking 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,”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 gives the fragmented novelistic text a comprehensive composition: the textual play between Ellen the first-person narrator and the implied author, that as well opens up a textual play of two types of repetition (Miller 1982). In the formal “dialogue” with Ellen, the implied authors creates a crucial compositional layer in the novel: among other things, the implied author, understood as an instance of subjectivity in the text, shapes the novel with two main parts containing 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, 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”, and furthermore, Dad’s loyal wink of an eye above his eyeglasses (Dorrestein 2001: *passim*). The implied author aesthetically enacts the repetitive distribution of names like Ida and Ida-Sophie, similar to *Leitmotifs*. 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 the novel’s ongoing dicussion of the instinctual life drive and death drive, both of which are compatible with the struggles in Ellen’s traumatised mind.

The ”dialogue” between these two sensorial voice-and-visibility instances is where another parallell to psychoanalysis’ talking-cure happens in *A Heart of Stone*. Here lies the aesthetically and therapeutically successful negotiaton into a performatively truly creative sentence-image (Rancière 2007: 46), installed by and in between the two linguistic extremes of sayability and visibility – the phrasal power of continuity, and the imaging power of rupture – that I discussed in my initial theoretical section leading up to the formulation of my research questions. It turns out that the sentence-image carries highly productive powers in late modern narrative art about mental trauma, repressed memory, imaging and media shifts, and in high measure possesses the potential to produce the requirements for a processual formation of healing and a livable meaning as insight for both fictional characters as well as readers. (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 whether or not it is actually Ellen’s life story, or the product of the power of narrative. (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 of the innermost repressed memories, images and emotions. – The outcome of the cure-through-dialogue compositional form is that the imaging power gets interspersed with and momentarily provides sensual repetitions of individually, perceived materials that are repressed, and bring them onto the threshold of sayability. 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 twenty-five years.

*In conclusion*

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

My answer would be that it is a language that *acts* *textually*: it does what it says. Or, as in performative memory constructions: by the impacts of sudden shifts and repetitions, it truly *re*-installs 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 depends on the installation of elements endowed with deictic-shifter functions and their iterability. “Deictic shifters” means elements that are placeholders in language pointing to the embodied and situated nature of language use (Austin 1975; Jakobson 1957 a and b; Miller 2001, 2010, 2014): ”I am, you are, they are here, and hold this place”. But at the same time: ”this phenomenon here, holds this place”.

Furthermore, the repetition of the shifts between placeholders creates a textual play of self-referentiality that extends across a variety of localised and ordered, pre-encoded discursive contexts. To take full effect, however, this creative play must be “countersigned”: other subjective instances in the literary text, or readers, viewers, anybody 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 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). Within the novel’s fictional world, a character that takes on the role of other in this sense, and productively countersigns the textually self-referential play that extends across a variety of contexts, is obviously Bas, who thereby creatively helps “re-ground” Ellen’s writing in a newly understood life context that comprises space both for Ellen and himself.

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 eventually to attain the level of *external*, generalised knowledge. Yet primarily they are powers of *inherent*, sensorial imaging matter. Thus aesthetic narratives are engaged in an oblique play between *knowing* and *doing*, between the mimetically understandable and the as yet unkown. This play, also in the aesthetically narrative representation of mental trauma, opens up for the impact of an experienced space of alterity, another existence, unhinged from the repressive 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 of (self-)reconciliatory work in language.

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