



Double Dialogues

Issue Six, Winter 2005
Anatomy and Poetics

[home](#)[current issue](#)[archives](#)[gallery](#)[contact](#)[Return to Contents](#)

Anatomy and Poetics

Ann McCulloch

[Deakin University](#)

It is instructive to review the ways in which pain has been represented and discoursed across time. In this century, pain, like its most feared companion death, is looked upon with derision and all attempts are made to find ways in which we might avoid its experience. Logo-centric strategies, a legacy from the Enlightenment, may blind us to its insistence and a global acquiescence to medicinal 'solutions' may blur our perceptions of it.

Periods in which pain and suffering were accepted as a necessary and unavoidable part of existence coincided with the writing and performance of tragedy and were reflected in the visual and plastic arts. When, however, the prevailing ideology was dictated by enlightenment thought and scientific zeal artistic representations tended to give rise to narratives in which pain was associated with social and economic forces that were seen to be manageable or at least explicable in terms of these forces. However the experience of the body in pain (tagged in this issue as 'anatomy'), and the aesthetic representation of this pain (poetics), constructs a complex relationship that is not easily made explicable merely by reference to categorising tendencies of particular eras. Taking heed of Nietzsche's view that to define is to limit and Deleuze and Guattari's insight that art and language can go beyond reflecting what has been determined by established hypotheses, contemporary discourse on pain has taken on new questions.

The series of essays in this issue are testament to the diverse ways in which pain and suffering form a large part of the life lived, the art that seeks to express that life and the extent to which men and women avoid and embrace the meaning it might hold. Tim Megihan's study of Lessing's *Lakoon* further shows that new insights, on which axioms of 'truth' emerge and bring about new knowledge, in relation to the expression of pain, can be made from error. Interpreting works of art from the past and re-interpreting art in order to make sense of the present discloses the way historical events and historical discourse have and continue to propagate a wide range of metaphors, theatrical images and filmic enactments related to pain and suffering.

Art or aesthetics was seen by Nietzsche as a means of replacing the hitherto cleansing or healing powers provided by religion; art (as religion had done previously) made bearable the fact that suffering and death were not experiences that could ever be understood or serve easily to improve the quality of our existence. As these essays will demonstrate art as a kind of 'healing' agent, in that it confronts what is unbearable and turns it into art, takes on many forms and gives rise to new questions. There are arguments that hitherto misunderstood experiences for example those known to women can be 'decolonised' from male representation and understood anew with the use of new languages. What becomes evident in reading these essays is that the

aesthetic, historical and literary map from antiquity to the present is in a constant state of change and renewal as artists and theorists attempt to locate in our past and our present the ways in which bodies and minds have had pain inscribed upon them and how these manifestations have not only found their way into artistic expression but have also formed contexts throughout time for philosophical debate.

Writers working within the disciplines of History, Theology and Psychology will represent pain differently in line with the methodologies and focus endemic to these disciplines. These representations will change as history discloses its errors due to an absence of knowledge or the failure to foresee the unpredictable nature of cause and effect within changing economic and political environments. Marxist historians, for example, have seen suffering as a necessary ingredient of class struggle as it moved to a cathartic revolution; theologians have looked towards sacred books and found there promised rewards for sufferers beyond the material world and psychologists have advocated that freedom from the ill-effects of repressed pain is possible but only if the sufferer is able to speak about his or her pain, dreams and pathologies of every day life. Nietzsche on the other hand celebrates the transfiguration and the creative qualities of pain in individuals and in their art though he does not advocate that transfiguration can occur if the pain is annihilated. The literary text in its narrative capacity and its aesthetic manifestations invokes all of these approaches.

Myoung Jae Yi in his essay 'The Literary Voice of Pain and Suffering' looks at the potential of literature in its inter-disciplinary guise to alleviate the pain and suffering caused by depression. In particular he asks whether a dynamic reading of Herman Melville's *Bartleby* and Irvin Yalom's *When Nietzsche Wept* provides 'a painkilling placebo effect' in relation to these texts representing the experience and expression of depression. Melville's *Bartleby* character, who withdraws from his work-situation behind a screen with the resonating words 'I prefer not to' when allocated a task, presents as a possible depressive. Myoung Jae Yi notes that *Bartleby* escapes all attempts to engage him in social and work related activities. These attempts change to scorn and distaste when *Bartleby* continues 'to prefer not to'. His silence, his withdrawal and his evident pain remain unchangeable and the fact that his final demise is his incarceration reveals the destructive nature of depression and silence. Nevertheless Jae Yi's analysis, quoting Deleuze, points to the positive aspect of his utterance: 'I prefer not to': The negation of his responsibilities to his work and to the relationships of power in which society places him, transforms the logic of presuppositions into a logic of preference (Deleuze, 1997: 73). Jae Yi argues that by uttering his preference for being non-committal, *Bartleby* overturns society and in the process creates a logic whereby language is freed from the constrictions of constructed meaning. This is the cue for a discourse of sadness, its direction determined by the 'preference' of those who give voice to its silence (Jae Yi, 2005). Both readings of the texts mentioned in this article are original and bring to this journal issue on 'Anatomy & Poetics', after a detailed and well researched argument, a prescription for the possible powers of literature: 'Literature's role would therefore be to encompass the diversity of pain's representations and to create a shared discursive community aimed at alleviating the pain and suffering and depression' (Jae Yi, 2005). Myoung Jae Yi explores the ways in which reading literature may invoke a possible medicinal effect for those isolated by their pain and suffering. Dominique Hecq argues that it is writing itself that constitutes a kind of 'cure' for those inflicted with panic and anxiety.

Dominique Hecq discusses the difference between the Freudian approach and understanding of anxiety with that of Jacques Lacan's development of the same theme. Her main interest is to understand a cathartic role that writing plays in relation to panic and anxiety. She argues that anxiety is the organising principle of the *jouissance* of the writer. This refers to a form of enjoyment that has a 'sexual' energy attached to it and although connected to pleasure it may be pleasure that the subject derives from suffering. Her paper demonstrates how the writer 'is subject to all the lures and slippages of a language caught up in the toils of desire' (Honderich, p. 453) and yet writing, founded in panic, can subdue this panic. Furthermore the paper involves a

comparison between the writing of James Joyce and Marguerita Duras arguing that the processes 'of sexual identification complicate the way writers relate to their art' and are expressed in terms of symbolic and imaginary identifications. This complex, scholarly paper nevertheless renders a simple idea that enacts theoretically what many of the other papers attempted to achieve in the creation of their art- she argues that writing has a direct relationship to anxiety, and in being a symptom of it, is also the means of channelling it towards pleasure and escape from 'the scream' and terror that it invokes in its raw experience.

Uli Kran, in a significant way, takes her reader through an actual journey towards this escape as well as a personal understanding of the process.

Kran's essay 'Hand Ink Thread: Using Pain to construct Selfhood in Art' identifies her approach as constructing 'a general theory of pain as internal vector, a form of inner directedness which faces towards , and at the same time strives away from, a certain place or body position'. Kran interconnects the location , memory of, understanding of and physical tracing of pain; she, in learning a sensitivity to the origins and the direction of pain, has sourced a means of gaining agency, movement and some kind of control of it. This fascinating essay is accompanied by drawings which began as records of what can be done with damaged, and sometimes a completely disabled set of drawing hands. That these damaged hands have found their state of suffering in relation to her suffering, in some ways the symptoms of what cannot be located consciously, further contributes to the authenticity and originality of this essay. The emphasis is on self-creation, the aim is to come to terms with 'causes' that are lodged in unreachable memory banks but necessarily expressed as physical pain. The degree of self-analysis in this article is overwhelming. Kran has considered multiple positions on how pain is represented, how the suffering subject is seen from the outside and how that same subject must be aware of the problems associated with self-observation. Kran's journey via images, philosophy, and excursions into a range of human emotional states (anger, fear, desire) accesses memory in the tracing of anatomical figures. Kran tackles the philosophical problems associated with, for example, the way the imagination avoids pain and how messages like 'Don't go there' and 'You are bad' become easily mixed. Kran offers 'solutions' that she sees as already contextualised in Wittgenstein's philosophy which explicitly links ethics, aesthetics and truth.

Whereas Uli Kran has used her own body to access the source and management of mental and physical suffering Sarah Austin in her essay 'Mike Parr, Pain and the Discursive Rupture' draws from Foucault's thought when explicating a theatre piece in which the actor imposes pain on himself in order to communicate a political message. Mike Parr draws on images of the lost, alienated refugee across time, yet it is clear where his message is being aimed. His is a political statement and it targets an Australian public with a representation of the brutality and cruelty of immigration policy and its denial of liberty to the refugee detainees. The point is that the bodies of refugees are literally imprisoned, confined and restrained. Parr's performance which involves his lips being sewn together projects an image of 'constructed, 'stitched-up' and distorted identity' (Austin, 2005). This essay analyses the way Parr uses the punished and condemned body to make the 'honourable amendment' on behalf of the Australian people that Foucault talked about in *Discipline and Punish*. Austin shows how Parr's body, within a performance piece, is put through torture that is 'equivalent to the nature of the crime, in this case the treatment of Asylum seekers by the Australian government, in order to amend justice (Austin, 2005). Austin's analysis is comprehensive and draws from a history of torture, not only in direct reference to historical event, but, also, to the discourses about pain and torture, and representations of it, by historians, creative artists and political theorists.

Denise Varney, in her article 'Grotesque images and Sardonic Humour: Pain and Affect in German Drama', is also dealing with historical events and political travesties. However her interest centres on a particular play by Bertolt Brecht : *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* which, when directed by Heiner Müller post Holocaust, enacts a

re-confrontation with fascism. Müller's direction is aimed more at a German audience than the earlier productions which had an American audience in mind. Varney is interested in theatrical images and how they evoke the pain of an historical period; she highlights the ways in which Müller's production 'introduced emotional heat into the play through music and acting' (Wattke, 2000). Varney's analysis carefully and persuasively explicates how Müller successfully represents Hitler to both refer to and exceed Hitler in that 'he should speak to racist ideologies then and now and denounce them, expose them for ridicule and put them up for critique (Varney, 2005). Varney draws on Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of affect in her analysis of Müller's production; this strategy works well and contributes to making sense of how theatrical images work in Müller's image-based theatre. Varney chooses the Seduction/Castration scene in the production to argue her case explaining the significance of provoking laughter in an audience towards an 'impotent Hitler'.

Whereas Varney proclaims the need Müller had to make Hitler a figure of derision, impotence and laughter, Dvir Abromovich looks towards the victims of this Dictator and how survivors from his persecution have ensured that their children, and their children's children, not only remember an event that they did not live through but be compelled to accept and maintain the hovering weight of collective memory. Abromovich is acutely aware of the extent to which members of the post-Holocaust generation have been 'scarred by the dark images and unspoken anxieties projected by their parents' onto their daily lives. The shaping of the Holocaust memory comes at a cost, but comes inevitably and necessarily. This essay traces the changes in the last sixty years in the ways this memory is sustained and how it varies from the 60s to the present. Abromovitch explicates the changes and gives an acute and sensitive overview of how the narratives of the second generation, via poetics and fiction, represent the psychological burden of the Holocaust that cripples the collective and individual identity of young Israelis as they search for a conduit through which they can bear witness to and repair the self that carries a terror previously ignored or suppressed.

In contrast to this analysis of disturbing, theatrical political theatre, where images in theatre evoke a painful history (Varney, 2005) and the pain of asylum seekers is represented (Austin, 2005) Ken Wach's analysis of Frida Kahlo's paintings includes the narrative of an individual life lived which he eloquently refers to as 'a fabric torn by tragedy'. Wach is suspicious of mantras that proclaim that it is the intensity of the suffering that will determine the greatness of the art. Nevertheless Wach's essay represents the nature of Kahlo's physical pain explaining, not only the traffic accident that caused it, but the aftermath of pain that involved surgery for the painter every nine months until she died aged 47 years. Wach employs three pictorial devices: 'personalised dualities', empathy with suffering and the use of emblematic compositions, as a means of accessing the power and origins of Kahlo's paintings. Although Wach is drawing on biography, to some extent, in his analysis, his point that of her 200 known works only 55 were self-portraits is an instructive one. This article therefore explains Kahlo's painting world, the places where she found sources for her work and the extent to which her work can be seen as surrealist. Wach also explores the contemporary response to her work and goes some way towards making sense of why Kahlo has become an icon in feminist discourse.

Feminist discourse comes in many guises. Ricci-Jane Adams in her article 'Magical Feminism: The Paradoxical *Pain in Fefu and her Friends* by Maria Irene Fornes and *The Eisteddfod* by Lally Katz' maintains that women's subjectivity has been distorted by patriarchy but that there is a way of addressing this situation. Her reading of the two plays listed in the title of her article utilizes 'magic realism' as a means of under-cutting the authority of what in the past was understood as 'realism'. The analysis is driven by identifying the 'sphere of disturbance' embedded in the construction of female characters. The aim is to demonstrate that 'magical feminism' is a 'strategy that can be employed by feminist dramatic practitioners to achieve decolonisation of the female subject' (Adams, 2005). The female characters in both plays are presented as

experiencing pain that is traceable to an inability to be 'embodied' as women. 'Fictions' and 'real worlds' become interchangeable, and in the process, shed light on old constructions that have created damaged psyches and provide explanations of the processes that have led to the marginalisation of the female subject.

Dirk De Bryun, also deals with loss, but in his article the emphasis is on loss, not related to gender, but to the kind of loss that results in disintegration of the spirit and the body in the face of pain. De Bryun works with filmic images. His film *Traum a Dream* deals with 'breakdown', with the sufferings of children when families lose their order; it seeks to bring to the surface emotions most often locked away in unconscious depths. The film, De Bryun contends, is 'part of a search for an innovative audio visual technique to articulate personal experience; De Bryun argues that experimental non-narrative cinema may provide an appropriate architecture for the expression of trauma given that trauma is about break-down and collapse of story.

Gaylene Perry and Annette Iggulden would perhaps agree with these sentiments but would see possible problem solving for the person in pain to be represented in words and painting images rather than in filmic ones. Gaylene Perry, author of *Midnight Water* (2004), dealt in this work with the loss of her father and her brother eleven years ago in an irrigation channel in country Victoria (Australia). She set her story in one day - the day of the drownings. In the light of this remarkable, beautifully, written memoir, the article 'Breath & Elegy: Moments of Grief and Art' deals from her perspective with stories relevant to the loss of her family that were not included in the book. This piece takes the form of a letter Gaylene exchanges with Annette Iggulden (Painter and Art Historian) in which they discuss the possible means of representing grief in art. Iggulden in her responses to Perry draws from personal experience, paintings and events across time, theatrical performance and discourses on pain to explore the ways in which grief is channelled into, or perhaps, even appeased in art. The exchange between Perry and Iggulden skids across aesthetics, philosophy, theatre and psychological theories exacting instances from these disciplines that give their exchange a richness without blurring the creative energies that infuse their personal engagement with the question of how one might represent and utilise grief in art. Iggulden at one point in her letters to Perry analyses the role of silence noting that 'the voice of the bereaved, silenced by the wound of grief, has an alternative avenue for their 'silent' speech through an embodied performance of language, found in the acts of sounding and writing as drawing or inscription' (Perry & Iggulden, 2005).

Elissa Goodrich in her essay 'At the Still Point: Performing Silence, Interpreting Silence' is also intrigued with the role played by silence. In her case the interest is in relation to music. Her work is an attempt to open up discussion about the role of silence in music performance and the ability of silence to transform. Goodrich's analysis relates to three pieces of music used as her case studies. Each of these pieces deals with pain, and each, deals with pain in a unique way. The works, performed at the Double Dialogues conference, Arts and Pain II: Anatomy and Poetics (2004), represent in turn, a 'song of war', a 'song of loss' and a 'song of solace'. Within each work there is a multitude of silences: between notes, between phrases, before the music begins (as audience and performers alike prepare), and finally, when each work ends. Silence is as much a part of music performance as 'sound' is.

What is fascinating about this article is how Goodrich succeeds in explicating how the silence in each of the three musical pieces can be understood: the silences within a piece on war ('song of war': devised from research into Australian detention centres); 'Gentle Hand', a reworking of a traditional Bedouin song ('song of loss') and a contemporary jazz work written for piano and vibraphone ('song of solace').

Goodrich in her analysis of the music and its silences employs the landmark socio-anthropological theories of ritual by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner to these works. She addresses the transformative power of silence in musical performance explicating what she terms the 'liminal moment' in performance and suggests that :

'Perhaps this is *the* expressive tool that music possesses that a literary text does not' (Goodrich, 2005). It is certainly the case the writers attempting to express the inexpressible often utilize music and painting in their narratives in the hope that these elements when engendered as verbal symbols might rescue the writer from that 'failure before words'.

Art of all kind presents itself in silence. The voices that exude from it occurs in the moment that it is viewed or heard. As spectators we bring to the art our own histories, the limits and expanse of our knowledge and we view it from a particular point in time imbued with its insistent ideologies. Tim Mehigan's article 'Lessing's *Laoköon* and the problem of Pain', mentioned in the beginning of this overview of *Double Dialogues 6: Art and Pain II: Anatomy and Poetics*, demonstrates the way a work of art can be misunderstood due to the vagaries of history and inaccurate interpretations. His story of how the antique marble group depicting Laoköon and his two sons caught in the coils of two serpents is discoursed across history, remodelled by Michaelangelo (inaccurately as discovered at a later date) and utilised, in its Renaissance version, as the premise on which claims were made about the difference between poetics and the plastic arts, makes for fascinating reading. This essay alerts us to the ways in which every insight that one brings to a work of art, whether correct or not, will go into the mix of rendering new theories and perhaps even, in turn, determining human behaviour. The tale told about the impact of this sculpture serves as an ideal closing metaphor. How does art represent pain? As an expression of aesthetic beauty or as a condition controlled and muted by rationality? As many of these articles attest, perhaps art has problem-solving capacities, in its representation of pain, that exceed solutions arrived at via science and reason

REFERENCES

- R.E. Abrams (1978), 'Bartleby and the Fragile Pageantry of the Ego' in *ELH*, Vol. 45, No.3, Autumn.
- Dawn, Ades (1989), *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1920 – 1980*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press.
- Dore Ashton (1993), 'Surrealism and Latin America', in *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, New York, Harry N. Abrams.
- G. Deleuze (1997) 'Bartleby; or, The Formula' in *Essays Clinical and Critical*, Minnesota: Uni. Of Minnesota Press.
- Armando R Favazza (1996). *Bodies under siege: self-mutilation and body modification in culture and psychiatry*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press
- Michel Foucault (1977), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York: Pantheon.
- S. Felman (1997), 'To Open the Question' in *Yale French Studies*, No.55/56.
- S. Freud (1991), 'Mourning and Melancholia' in *On Metapsychology*, London: Penguin.
- Judith Herman (1992), *Trauma and Recovery*, New York: Basic Books.
- Jacques Lacan (1977). *Ecrits: A Selection*, tr. Alan Sheridan, London: Tavistock.
- 1954-55 (1978/). *Le Séminaire. Livre II, 1954-55, Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller: Paris: Seuil.
- G. E. Lessing (1892), *Lessing's Laokoon*, ed, and introduction L.E. Upcott, Oxford:

Clarendon Press.

H. Melville (1998), *Bartleby the Scrivener*, in Baym et al *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* , New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

D.B. Morris (1996), 'About suffering: voice, genre, and moral community' *Daedalus*, Vol.125, No.1.

Ann McCulloch and Justin Clemens (2004), *The Other Side of the World: Literature of Sadness : The Body and Mind in Crisis*, Melbourne: Deakin University.

F. Nietzsche (1915), *Human All Too Human* , Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company.

F. Nietzsche (1974), *The Gay Science* , New York: Vintage.

F. Nietzsche (1968), *The Will to Power*, New York: Vintage.

Louis A Sass (1992), *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the light of modernism, literature and thought* (New York: Random House).

Louis A Sass (1994), *The Paradoxes of Delusion: Wittgenstein, Schreber, and the schizophrenic mind* , Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Efraim Sicher (ed) (1998). *Breaking Crystal: writing and Memory After Auschwitz* (Urbana: University of Illinois)

(1998). 'The Burden of Memory: The Writing of the Post-Holocaust Generation', in Sicher (ed) (1998)

George Steiner (1979). *Language and Silence: Essays 1958-1966*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Victor Turner (1982), *From Ritual to Theatre*, New York: PAJ Publications.

Martin Wuttke (2000), "Milestone in Theatre History", *The Hindu*, 10/12/2000, Accessed: 1/7/2003, from www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2000/12/10/stories/1310032g.htm

I.D. Yalom (1993), *When Nietzsche Wept: A Novel of Obsession* , Australia:Penguin.

[Return to Contents](#)



[home](#)

[current issue](#)

[archives](#)

[gallery](#)

[contact](#)

Copyright © Double Dialogues 1996-2005
For questions or comment regarding content, please contact the editors@doubledialogues.com
Duplication without express written consent is prohibited