Panic and Mourning

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Panic and Mourning

The Cultural Work of Trauma

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Introduction

'Panic' and 'mourning' are two pivotal constructs that often emerge and interplay under circumstances of conflict, violence, crisis, and catastrophe, both natural and man-made. Whereas panic tends to crop up during the experience of violent events, mourning, on the other hand, relates to the aftermath of a brutal disruption and to the way humans try to make sense of it retrospectively. Conversely, violent events can leave a thread of panic in their aftermath, while mourning can be unsettled, interrupted or even refuelled by another catastrophic incident.

In the present times of worldwide upheavals, 'panic' has become an inescapable keyword to convey the state of insecurity and anxiety regarding a possible global collapse. Brian Massumi has described the modern experience of organised everyday fear as a "kind of background radiation saturating existence" (Massumi 1993: 24). This politically induced state of anxiety has acquired the form of sharp panic in recent years due to several historical developments, especially the turning point of 9/11 and the ensuing geopolitical reconfigurations and large-scale threats, but also the increase in disaster perception. The saturation of social spaces by this induced state of panic and the resulting production of vulnerability has to be questioned and critically addressed. Is panic a personal emotion, a rhetorical device, or a "structure of feeling" (Williams 1961), a culturally constructed ground that constitutes social experience and shapes the formation of subjectivity? Where does it come from, what are its historical configurations, and through which mechanisms is it imagined, reproduced, instrumentalised and regulated? How does it affect cultural practices, and how may it be contested and resisted? And just how does such a pulverised formation relate to mourning?

Both panic and mourning can be regarded as responses to the threat of or actual loss. Indeed, the violent events that shattered the twentieth century and the turn of the twenty-first century, from the World Wars, genocides, colonialism, to globalisation, terrorism and natural disasters, have shaped the foundations of modernity and fostered academic interest in how humans respond, work through and come to terms with loss and traumatic occurrences. The resurgence of the concept of mourning in recent years is much indebted to Holocaust studies, which rehabilitated Freud's essay on 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917) to grasp a traumatic event that disrupted any sense of continuity with the world as known before. As the "founding trauma" (LaCapra 2001: 161) of the twentieth century, the Holocaust has challenged the possibility of mourning in its Freudian conception as "the painful, but ultimately healthy, process of severing the libidinal ties binding the mourner to the deceased" (Rae 2007: 13). Successful mourning, in Freud's reasoning, implies "working through" grief and liberating the subject from the lost object in order for it to find a new object of attachment. When

mourning is not successful, when the subject hangs onto the lost object, melancholia emerges as a pathological and unhealthy condition. However, contemporary critics have come to question the ethical and political desirability of mourning, in that it promotes forgetting, normative conciliation, and an abdication of responsibility. Melancholia, in turn, could emerge as resistance to the normative work of mourning, keeping the memory of the deceased alive and encouraging a critical and unsettling remembrance that does not comply with the conventionalised acceptation of loss and the containment of anxiety or the suppression of problematic memories in society. The refusal to mourn, re-claimed by authors such as Jacques Derrida (2006), who equates conventionalised mourning with an unethical and politically troublesome forgetting of that lost, is but one example of the many critical engagements with Freudian terminology that will be addressed and questioned throughout this volume.

Post-structuralist trauma theory, which became dominant in the 1990s, is one of the most influential strands in contemporary thought that revisits Freud's studies. One of its most contested arguments is that trauma is ontologically at odds with representation. Trauma, within this framework, would be by definition an event that one could not cognitively grasp and apprehend thus remaining inaccessible to understanding and representation. Cathy Caruth, drawing on Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, defined it as "the unwitting re-enactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (Caruth 1996: 2). This inability to process the traumatic event, to comprehend it under a narrative, determines its unrepresentability. In this sense, according to Griselda Pollock, "trauma ceases to be trauma with the advent of the structuring of representation" (2009: 43). This perspective was strongly shaped by the experience of the Holocaust, which has defied the limits of human comprehension and hence the possibilities of representation, be it verbal or visual. This strand of trauma theory has been adopted by contemporary critics who have raised new questions and expanded them to the study of other traumatic geographies and events such as colonialism, terrorism and political violence. On the other hand, the discourse of post-structuralist trauma theory has not been exempt from criticism and often charged with 'trauma fetishism', aestheticism, an excessive emphasis on victimisation, elision of history and the obliteration of social and political agency. The texts in this volume will therefore engage, discuss and recast trauma theory's contributions to the study of historical violence in its relationship to representational practices, building on its merits and rethinking its perils.

The porosity and complex interchanges between psychoanalytical concepts in cultural theory is proven by the notion of nostalgia, which, in the nineteenth century, was considered a form of melancholia, a pathological form of attachment to the past, rising as a recurrent diagnosis during American Civil War. It

is therefore unsurprising that it has also experienced a revival in recent years, emerging, as remarked by Susannah Radstone, as a response to anxiety and panic towards the future and a mechanism to face the threats to identity posed by brisk social changes (Radstone 2007: 113). As a form of 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992), a longing for a past whose image is refashioned and fabricated in the present, nostalgia has been condemned by many critics for being an instrumental mobilisation of the past to provide an easy, familiar and comforting solution for the troubles of the present. Alessa Ricciardi (2003), for example, regards nostalgia as a symptom of a society where mourning has ceased to be possible, thus equating it with melancholic behaviour unable to overcome the past. However, as Radstone also points out, these criticisms often run the risk of failing to acknowledge the real or felt losses for which nostalgia may act in response. In line with more nuanced interpretations of mourning and melancholia, nostalgia can also be regarded as social and political resistance to the oppressions of the present, and produce a positive impact on the rehabilitation of forgotten losses and the improvement of social conditions, where not clinging to the past in order to avoid facing the present. As Michel Foucault once argued, "it's a good thing to have nostalgia towards some periods on the condition that it's a way to have a thoughtful and positive relation to your own present" (1988: 12). As the texts in this volume attest, nostalgic representations of the past have become one of the most significant mechanisms for dealing with problematic legacies, the contingent demands of the present and the challenges of an uncertain future.

Indeed, the possibility of representing and making sense of traumatic events is one of the most pressing concerns of this volume. In response to the limits of the notion of 'representation', largely pointed out by critical theory, concepts such as affectivity, mediality and performance have emerged to make sense of a new set of practices that wish to approach panic and mourning through new conceptualisations and materialities. These terms provide alternative models for thinking about symbolic exchanges beyond the limits of the representational paradigm, encharged with its lack of reciprocality and its connotation with symbolic violence, fixed identities, hegemonic and disempowering constructions and the naturalization of social norms and conventions. As Lawrence Grossberg has importantly argued, "signification and representation are merely two modes – and not necessarily the most important ones – in the regime of mediation" (1998: 7–8). As such, the texts gathered in this book will probe the strengths and pitfalls of the representational paradigm and engage with new models of symbolic transaction.

From an international and inter-disciplinary outlook, this volume wishes to address questions at the interface of panic and mourning and their impact on practices in literature, media, and the arts. Since violent events take place within

cultures that will draw from their traditions, memories and systems of beliefs in order to process them, the authors of this book aim precisely at discussing the effects of calamity upon the cultural structure and the way literary, artistic and media practices not only reproduce individual and collective anxieties but also generate knowledge and reshape the cultural formation within which they emerge.

The book is structured around three sections that explore the cultural productivity of panic and mourning across different media. The first section is entitled **Literary Negotiations** and investigates the manifold ways in which literature enables us to make sense of the world. The different chapters address the sombre implications of the concepts in question by treating texts from the twentieth century dealing with some of its most problematic legacies. They do so by making out different strategies to experience and articulate panic and mourning. As Ansgar Nünning and Vera Nünning point out, expanding Nelson Goodman's notion of "ways of worldmaking":

> Literature can couple coherent representations of the world, of objects, moral messages, and human agency with a self-conscious reflection of ways of world-making. Through this paradoxical structure it exposes the normativity of the construed worlds and engages in an open process of negotiation of our own strategies of worldmaking (Nünning and Nünning 2010: 7).

Hence, literature seems particularly suited to offering a forum for negotiating panic and mourning which, especially in the face of tragedy or trauma, seem to disrupt, destroy or even defy common-sense and continuity. Consequentially, within the literary "paradoxical structure" as a space for negotiating panic and mourning, the capacity to narrate – telling, writing, shaping stories – is of primal concern. The idea of narrativity not only links novels to other media and genres, as exemplified by Lucy Brisley's and Milan Miljković's texts in this section. It also relates individual stories to collective narratives, as sometimes conformant, sometimes conflicting but always interrelated processes of making sense of the surrounding world.

It is thus hardly surprising that one of the texts that emerges as one of the most important references in this section is Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia', as it offers a seminal definition of how mourning accounts for regaining a sense of normalcy. For Freud, mourning is a painful but temporal process that allows the ego to overcome its loss and re-establish its sense of reality. Melancholia, on the other hand, appears as an on-going and pathological condition (Freud 1917: 237 ff). One might easily relate these twofold processes of overcoming a loss, a successful and a pathologically unsuccessful one, to the notion of narrativity. In this analogy, a coherent story of the self serves to cope with daily life and allows

for a healthy measure of forgetting. The melancholic counter-part would present a story that falls back upon and cannot overcome tragic loss in any coherent way.

Yet, drawing on various literary examples, the chapters of this section do not solely contend with this rather polar distinction between mourning and melancholy. Quite the contrary: they investigate the nuances with which individuals experience their fear and grief and the varieties in which they might relate to communities, the (im-)possibilities of communicating and the necessity of remembering. Rather than asking for mourning as a conclusive means of settling the past, they might be considered as post-Freudians in the sense outlined by Lucy Brisley in this section, according to which "the stoic preservation of the lost object" may serve as "a basis for the ethical remembrance of the other and [...] to the widespread depathologising of melancholia within theory." In Brisley's view, however, this "theoretical revival" of melancholia and its almost too well-received equation with political reform run the risk of "operating as a totalizing frame of reference that overlooks the poststructuralist concern with the singular". Yet, it is exactly the awareness of the particular – the personal tales that also relate to, but are never identical to collective histories – that characterizes this section.

António Sousa Ribeiro in 'A Culture of Fear. Panic, Mourning, Testimony, and the Question of Representation' investigates the interplay between fear and mourning within the experience of the Holocaust and the (in)capacity of 'world-making' when subjected to extreme violence. Ribeiro examines the mechanisms of exercising power through violent disciplination and instauration of fear, concentrating on the dehumanized condition of the subject in the Nazi concentration camps. By drawing on a variety of testimonial literature and focusing particularly on Jean Améry's work, Ribeiro surveys panic and vulnerability as the outcomes of "organized violence, in particular state violence, [which] is directed in important aspects towards the production of a culture of fear as an essential control mechanism". Taking as a case in point Primo Levi's "primal scene", in which the concentration camp prisoner asks the guard "Why?", but is rebuked with a categorical "Hier ist kein Warum" (*Here there is no Why*), Ribeiro argues that the "condition of the prisoner is [...] defined as one of total disorientation". How could one narrate a coherent story of the self if that self is reduced to an object of arbitrary and uncontrollable violence, confined to a concentrationary structure that "scorns the possibilities of language"? And how can one pay testimony if, as Giorgio Agamben (1999) has famously pointed out, the ultimate witness is precisely the one that is definitely incapable of bearing testimony, because he or she did not survive to tell?

The exercise of power through inhuman treatment – exactly the denial of "any meaningful pattern" to the prisoner's existence – creates a control mechanism that remains effective, even after its material threat might have long van-

ished. Ribeiro debates the challenges of overcoming such internalization of fear by setting into dialogue two apparently conflicting positions. On the one hand, he picks up on Butler's notion of mourning as "the condition of vulnerability of every human being [that] provides the foundation for a potentially transformative ethics of recognition". This theory of ethics which takes the experience of loss and the awareness of one's ability to feel and fear pain as its starting point, however, contrasts sharply with Améry's text on 'Torture'. Rather than envisioning a universal ethics based on empathic vulnerability, Améry resents the infliction of violence, making such resentment the foundation of his moral stance. Améry's refusal of any form of reconciliation and forgiveness precludes the work of mourning as outlined by Butler, indeed standing in the way of "the logics of hope inherent to that possibility". Nonetheless, Ribeiro notes, Améry's uncompromising resentment can actually be regarded as an "imperative moral duty", as he is not looking for revenge, but for justice, a kind of justice that requires that "crime [may] become a moral reality for the criminal". His position of unyielding resentment strives for the recognition of criminal responsibility that the work of mourning often evades.

Ribeiro suggests that testimony, due to its shared public and dialogical dimension, even if insisting on resentment, might open up the possibility of transcending the limits of personal trauma in favour of "the creation of a community of memory". However, Ribeiro does not aim at discharging the tension that might exist between individual experiences of fear and the ethical demands of collective memory. Panic or mourning might be raised and incentivised in certain political systems; yet their effects will be experienced in differentiated ways by individuals. As Ribeiro points out: "There is no violence in general, as there is no suffering in general – violence and suffering have always to do with particular persons" and that differentiality of experience has to be taken into account. It is to this individuality that literature might correspond, for which it might offer a medium; a space for ethics to gain aesthetic shape. Ribeiro thus concludes "mourning [...] is the never ending transgenerational work of a coming community built upon fundamental values of justice".

Luisa Banki, Anna Pehkoranta and Lucy Brisley also share a concern in transgenerational aspects. More precisely, they focus on what might be considered "transgenerational traumatization" (Anastasiadis 2012: 1), that is as the "lasting effects on the descendants of the victims or the perpetrators who have no experiential connection to the traumatic events" (*ibid*.). Arguably the most influential approach concerning such transgenerational effects is Marianne Hirsch's conceptualisation of 'postmemory' as "the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth" (Hirsch 1996: 659). One should note, however, that Hirsch's concept of postmemory derives from the assumption

that parents and/or forefathers pass down memories from which later generations might develop a particular creative impulse. Such a narrative 'domination' however, is not necessarily the precondition for the problems of later generations in facing traumatic or – to not unnecessarily overuse the term – tragic events in family histories. The texts in this section rather concentrate on difficulties of communication and on conflicting or tenuous ways of relating to the past. In this manner, they demonstrate how literature not only represents, but rather (re-) negotiates ways of remembering and interpreting violent events.

In her investigation of 'Mourning, Melancholia and Morality: W. G. Sebald's German-Jewish Narratives', **Luisa Banki** also focuses on the (im)possibility of representation and the transgenerational effects of the Shoah. Luisa Banki contends with Sebald in that "aesthetics is ultimately always concerned with ethics." In his works, Banki attempts to show, this ethics primarily concerns "remembrances of past lives" as "both an appropriation and an invention".

While Ribeiro focuses on the testimonies of former prisoners of concentration camps and victims of extreme violence that stress the impossibility of narrating their experience in the camps, "the Sebaldian narrator", as a member of a later generation, "is not only collector and archivist of the life stories he tells, but also the power that grasps them, seizes them and, in a way, only thereby creates them". While Améry lacks the capacity to communicate the inflictions of torture he went through, choosing resentment as his stance towards the past, Sebald, on the other hand, in his condition of *Nachgeborene,* elects prose fiction as a space to negotiate past and present, establishing an active, even resistant melancholia as his relationship with the Shoah. "What is crucial, however", as Banki points out, "is that Sebald's preoccupation is not the actual past events, but rather their effects, what is remembered and passed on."

Hence, despite their apparent incompatibility, both positions reveal the same fundamental concern: the refusal to forsake and forget the past. In fact, Banki draws on Sebald's essay on Améry and Levi to highlight his position towards literary representations of the past as "'disturbance in favour of communication'" (Sebald 1990: 122, quoted by Banki) that is only "possible at the price of 'a betrayal that breaks faith to the dead'" (*ibid*.). For Banki, Sebald succeeds in articulating in his fiction the "central conflict in the representation of trauma" that is: "The wish for a stabilising representation of the traumatic loss thus stands in opposition to the fear of letting memories disappear by pronouncing/renouncing them, leading to a tension-charged, painful situation".

Stressing this central aporia, Banki rearticulates and consequentially discharges the Freudian distinction between 'mourning' and 'melancholia'. By analysing Sebald's works and drawing on Lyotard, Benjamin and Foucault, she comes to contest Freud's rather dichotomic distinction in favour of a "proverbial

Sebaldian melancholia, which is to say, of the refusal to abandon or relinquish that which is lost or past." Such a resistant "Sebaldian melancholia" is for Banki a dialectic one that moves between and intersects "German-Jewish" identities, emerging as a shared and profoundly ethical effort of both subjects who together attempt – despite "their radically different mnemonic imperatives and difficulties" – to conjoin, but not merge, particular experiences in order to create something new. The result of this dialogue only comes to existence through narration.

Anna Pehkoranta's text also centres on melancholia and narration as the means for later generations to negotiate forgetting and remembering. She draws attention to a cultural interface of politics, narration, mourning, and what she, very much in line with Brisley's observation of a "theoretical revival" of melancholia, calls a "melancholic ethics". By investigating two novels by the Chinese-American writer Fae Myenne Ng, *Bone* and *Steer toward Rock*, paying special attention as to how the immigrant protagonists cope with loss in a conservative American society, Pehkoranta comes to the conclusion that "despite its pathological origins, melancholia also holds potential for agency".

Hence, similar to the arguments raised by Ribeiro and Banki, Pehkoranta reads the novels not as stories that may reveal the truth about past events, tragic events in family histories such as one member's suicide (*Bone*) or the loss of both love and citizenship (*Steer toward Rock*), in a chronological and causal order. They rather interweave the different ways of family members negotiating the loss and thereby "fabricating [...] a story of displaced individuals balancing between racial abjection and a quest for cultural agency."

In the light of the anti-Asian American racial discourses addressed in Fae Myenne Ng's novels, Pehkoranta recasts Freud's terminology and draws attention to melancholia's "lack of closure" as holding potential for resistance. Traditionally, it is this incapacity to overcome and settle the process of grieving, the inability to progress that signifies the pathological aspect of the melancholic. For Pehkoranta, on the contrary, it is exactly this "openness to new meanings" that "allows for an unfixed view of the world" and thereby leaves opportunities for transgenerational re-negotiations of Asian-American belonging and "forms of resistance to the dominant conceptions of the past".

While Banki and Pehkoranta put forward optimistic accounts of narrative engagements with the past that might attest to active or even resistant forms of melancholia, **Milan Miljković**'s 'Nostalgias and Mourning: The Nation in the Serbian Journal *The Spring* (1992–1996)' adds another dimension to this discussion as he shifts the focus from personal narrators to discursive constructions of collective memory through nostalgic representations. He does so by questioning the role of the Serbian journal *The Spring* at the end of the twentieth century, when the former Yugoslav republics were striving to revive old representations of

ethnic identities in the service of the new-found nations. He examines the possible instrumentalisation of tropes of remembrance in nationalist discourse and is especially concerned with the specific role that periodicals played in this discursive formation.

Drawing from Svetlana Boym's distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia, Miljković acknowledges that *The Spring* "did participate in the overall public discourse of restorative nostalgia that articulated the pre-modern notion of the nation". Clearly, such a kind of 'restorative nostalgia', defined by Boym as a narrative of collective identity fashioned as transhistorical and natural truth, contrasts sharply with any of the personal and experiential negations of the past that have been treated in the preceding chapters. Thus, Miljković identifies the combination of the "Kosovo myth with the themes of the Great Serbian Migration of 1690 and the Serbian Uprisings of the 19th century" as attempts to "articulate a new sense of unity". In this way, the author enlightens how effectively the retrospective operationalisation of such highly emotionally charged responses to wars and their losses might serve current interests in re-enacting old myths of ethnic unity.

However, analysing a number of prose texts and poems, Miljković is also able to make out instances of a more nuanced kind of "reflective nostalgia". This notion, again drawn from Svetlana Boym, shares the orientation towards the past with 'restorative nostalgia' whilst not claiming to represent an absolute truth. This more self-reflexive and critical type of nostalgia, concerned rather with "individual stories, fragmented memories and counter-memories", is found in some of the more experimental poems and travel writings. Interestingly, Miljković also picks up on Freud's notion of 'mourning' but clarifies an important distinction between the psychoanalytic theory and the context of Serbia's 1990s discourse on ethnic identity and community, namely the impossibility of testing reality when "the object of national memory is usually represented as an image of collective and nameless martyrdom with whom the 'mourners' had never been really and personally connected".

One might claim a similar precondition for the effects of transgenerational traumatisation and the connected modes of diasporic nostalgia. Nevertheless, Miljković' observation draws attention to the difference between common usage of the term 'mourning' as a political means to create the sense of a holistic entity, and the psychological process laid out by Freud. While the latter stresses the temporal closure of a distancing of the ego from a loved object, the former attempts to instigate and strengthen the attachment to a never actually experienced, loved or lost past. Miljković concludes that the different texts in *The Spring*, despite contributing to the overall fixation with a lost past, in some cases opened up the

possibility of initiating "the processes of [...] rethinking ethnic differences" and of laying down a common ground for mutual understanding in the Balkans.

To close the section on Literary Negotiations, **Lucy Brisley**'s text provides a comprehensive overview of theoretical appropriations of Freudian melancholia in a largely positive sense and as a notion enabling the kind of dynamic and resistant dealings with the past that we have encountered throughout this section. While Brisley does not deny the benefits of such a theoretical revival of melancholia, she does point out that "the very proliferation of such theories means they are at risk of operating as a totalizing frame of reference." Consequentially, rather than adding another perspective to this "poststructuralist turn towards an ethics of memory", she rather takes it as her investigative departure point to consider 'Melancholic Violence and the Spectre of Failed ideals in Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* and Yasmina Khadra's *Wolf Dreams*'.

Brisley's main point of critique addresses the risks that melancholia in the case of Algerian history might pose to mourning in the sense of an actual coming to terms with the events of the war of independence, more exactly the role played by the *National Liberation Front* (hereafter referred to by its French acronym FLN) within that conflict. By reading Khadra's novel *Wolf Dreams* as a parody of Pontecorvo's film, Brisley investigates how the film propagates a certain historical narrative, specifically one where FLN members and activists star as the promising founding fathers of a young democratic nation. The problem with this "propaganda", in Brisley's view, is not only that it has largely been read as an authentic depiction of historical truth. Even more disturbing would seem the way in which the ideology and violence of the Islamic Salvation Front (hereafter referred to by its French acronym FIS), which came to power in 1992, adopted and exploited the myths and rhetoric of the very party, the FLN, that was the target of the FIS's "ongoing bloody attacks". Through its numerous intertextual references to *The Battle of Algiers*, Brisley shows how *Wolf Dreams* brings to the fore the FIS's "almost mimetic relationship to that of the FLN of the anti-colonial movement". It is in this function as a discursive pool from which political actors may draw their legitimising references, a formation that in the case of the FIS appears almost mimetic, that Brisley perceives the risks of melancholia: "The easy manner in which the FIS could appropriate putative myths of lost Islamic origins and then reframe them as the failed ideals of the independence movement is indicative of the ongoing fabrication of history that has shrouded Algeria for decades".

It is melancholia in such a sense of politically motivated "fabrication of history" that Brisley argues against, because it might advocate a one-sided, fundamental and even violent perspective. However, while Brisley therefore warns of the theoretical pitfalls of embracing melancholia in a postcolonial context, it should be noted that her final plea to "insist upon a sustained critique of the

past that consciously works through the multivalent layers of secrecy and ideology" does not differ substantially from the dynamic engagements with history that have been called for by the other authors in this section. Moreover, her comparative investigation of Yasmina Khadra's novel and Gillo Pontecorvo's film also points towards the next section of this book, which explores in greater detail how visual media explore, question and transfigure issues of panic and mourning.

Entitled **Visual Resonances**, the second section foregrounds the visual articulation of panic and mourning across different cultural and geographical spaces. Borrowing from Aleida Assmann's notion of "resonance", which she defines as "the evoking or suggesting of images, memories, emotions, and meaning", or the interaction between an experience and a "cultural frame" (Assmann 2010), this section wishes to gauge the enduring reverberations of traumatic events on visuality, the means through which past images bear on the present.

The fundamental question the texts in this section seek to tackle is how a visual object can mediate the experience or the legacy of the historical past "to which the object in some sense bears witness but for which it can only account imperfectly" (Saltzman and Rosenberg 2006: ix). This question harks back to the debate around the representability of the Holocaust that surfaced in the first section of this volume but which bears particular implications on the field of visual representation. Should trauma resist representation, as authors including Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman (1992) have claimed, then do all representations in the modern media have to be considered "inadequate, inappropriate or even obscene?" (Meek 2010: 29). While some critics regard popular representations of historical trauma as improper and distorting, others argue that today there is no event that is not influenced and transformed by their representations, which have to be critically examined in order to understand the dynamics of remembrance and forgetting of traumatic histories.

This is the question still permeating the discussion around Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985), which **Liliane Weissberg** addresses in the section's first text, 'Odysseus, Rowing'. Lanzmann's dispute with Jean Luc-Godard upon the release of *Shoah* illustrates the issues at stake in this debate. Godard claimed that given the Nazi's compulsive tendency to document everything, it is thus possible that a reel of film recording the gas chambers in action actually exists. For Godard, the discovery of such footage would make up for what he considers the failure of cinema – not having been there to record the exterminations. Lanzmann's reaction to Godard's wishful finding was that were he to come into possession of such 'an accursed reel of film', not only would he not show it, but he would actually destroy it. Indeed, in his programmatic movie *Shoah,* Lanzmann rejected the use of archival images, which he considers not only inadequate to accounting for the traumatic experience of the Holocaust, but also complicit with

the Nazi extermination, choosing instead to focus on the testimonies of survivors, perpetrators and bystanders performed in the present. For Lanzmann, according to Weissberg, the impossibility of representing the Shoah is not only a matter of aesthetic possibilities, or of the human capacity to grasp the event. It is also a problem of ethics. Rendering the events in the form of images would involve an effort to understand the Shoah that "borders on the obscene". In fact, Dominick LaCapra has described Lanzmann's position as a *Bilderverbot*, a ban on images, which many critics in turn see as actually complying with the Nazi regulation of visibility. However, Lanzmann insists on the correspondence between representing and understanding – his exclusion of images is a refusal to understand what should remain non-understandable, because understanding is acknowledging and legitimising what is actually beyond reason. Yet, how can one reject visual representation, re-enactment of events and any kind of explanation and still make a movie about the Shoah? Concentrating on *Shoah*'s opening sequence, in which Lanzmann brings a Holocaust survivor back to the invisible remnants of Chelmno, formerly a concentration camp, Weissberg discusses the aporias of Lanzmann's stance. On the one hand, the filmmaker firmly rejects the use of historical images and of re-enactments, which he considers incapable of adequately testifying to the brutality of the event. On the other hand, Lanzmann does create images and makes Srebnik, the character in the opening sequence, re-enact scenes from the past on the site where they had actually taken place, thus allowing past images to resonate in the present. According to Weissberg, in its internal contradictions, *Shoah* is a film that both offers and resists representation, a film that builds a testimony on the ultimate and ethical impossibility to pay testimony.

Lanzmann's repudiation of historical images renders a tense and problematic relationship with the visual materials inherited from the past. This tension was exemplarily addressed by Georges Didi-Huberman's in his influential and much debated *Images malgré Tout* (2003), where he claims, much in line with Godard's stance, that a critical engagement with images, regardless of their provenance, is necessary, responsible and politically enlightening. Instead of rejected, Didi-Huberman claims, our relationship to images has to be rethought. Indeed, many studies over the last two decades have shown an effort to confront and engage with images of historical trauma in order to understand how the memory of traumatic events is influenced by the images bequeathed by history or produced in the present as an answer to their legacy. As Allan Meek has argued, "[a]ny understanding of historical trauma today needs to attend to the roles that discourses about, and representations of, trauma play in struggles over identity and the meanings of the past" (Meek 2010: 39). Remaining with the field of Holocaust studies, many authors have tried to make sense of the ideological, political and social repercussions of the images generated during the war and

to explain the formation of visual canons, sets of selected images that circulate in public memory and shape the remembrance of traumatic events within different communities and national cultures. **Daniela Agostinho**, in '(Un-)Framing Triumph and Trauma: Visibility, Gender and Liberation through the Soviet Gaze', translates this concern by focusing on the visual memory of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. Drawing on Judith Butler's notion of "frame", operations of power that determine the visibility of conflicts, she argues that the Soviet framing of the Holocaust subsumes the Nazi targeting of Jews into the conduct of the 'Great Patriotic War', the Soviet Union's struggle against Nazism. In her view, this not only relegates the Holocaust to "blind spots of representation" but also gives rise to a unified and 'sovietised' memory of WWII. Concentrating on the photographic representation of women, she also contends that sexual difference is a powerful but ambivalent instrument within the visual canon of the Soviet Union. Not contending with short-sighted critiques of the notion of representation, which is often charged for its normalization of hegemonic positions and for precluding agency, she argues that resistance to hegemonic representation can emerge from within representation itself. Through interpretative analysis of photographs taken upon the liberation of areas of Eastern Europe and of the women's concentration camp of Ravensbrück, she argues that while sexual difference is clearly instrumentalised and regulated, it simultaneously holds the potential to undermine the 'Soviet gaze' and the official narrative of war by leaving traces or cues to visually suppressed experiences on the surface of representation. As such, in Agostinho's claim, the frames of war, while concealing traumatic events and exerting control over the subjects they depict, can also be "unframed" by the unsettling presence of sexual difference in the visual field.

With the rise of new forms of traumatic experiences as a consequence of capitalist globalisation, post-structuralist trauma theory has been increasingly subjected to criticism by several scholars and charged with particularising trauma and endowing it with an almost obscure and mystic quality by stressing its ultimate unrepresentability. According to **Ban Wang**, trauma studies have failed to conceptualise identity and agency within the scope of new forms of oppression and exclusion that characterise contemporary political and economic powers. Critical of the "depoliticised turn" he claims trauma studies have taken, Wang pleas for a study of everyday trauma that can work as a "critical theory of society" (Meek 2010: 28). Trauma theory, in his view, needs to move away from the obscure psychic world of the victim and take into account the ongoing political and economic violence. In 'The Banality of Trauma: Globalisation, Migrant Labour, and Nostalgia in Fruit Chan's *Durian Durian*', Wang claims that "migration, uprooting, and dislocation in global capital flows have become a common traumatic experience for millions" that trauma theory has neglected to grapple with. Focus-

ing on the "banality of everyday trauma", Wang wishes to shift attention from the private psychic world to the historical and violent consequences of globalisation on the labouring body that destroys any sense of belonging in community life. Taking the Chinese film *Durian Durian* as a case, he demonstrates how the human body, under the conditions of contemporary capitalism, becomes habituated to the 'banality of trauma' and turns into a labouring, alienated machine. Unsurprisingly, in the face of traumatic everyday life in capitalist Hong Kong, the film turns toward mainland China and the idea of a communal fold, gesturing with nostalgia towards the residual socialist past that, in reality, is also on the verge of extinction due to China's growing fascination with Western culture. The film depicts both the trauma at home as the erosion of the communal belonging of Socialism, and the trauma of the labouring body in the global market. Nostalgia emerges according to Wang as resistance to the uprooting and estrangement spawned by capitalist globalization, whereby the return to tradition and community – or the illusion thereof – enables the transcendence of everyday trauma.

Wang adopts a strongly critical stance towards what he considers a lack of historical perspective in trauma theory, arguing that studying trauma "often elides its long-term socio-historical consequences and significance", sometimes even evading history. The idiom of trauma studies, he contends, tends to slither into "a fashionable language of visuality", in which terms like 'image', 'witnessing', and 'testimony' render an emphasis on symptoms rather than deeper social and political implications. However, in 'Evocations of the Unspeakable: Trauma, Silence and Mourning in Contemporary Chinese Art', **Tânia Ganito** demonstrates how the language of visuality can prove fundamental to grasping the profound and long-term impact of traumatic events in China. Focussing on contemporary Chinese artist Zhang Xiaogang, Ganito argues that his works contain the ability to fill the discursive gaps that subsist in the interstices of official narratives of the past. By inscribing into the present mnemonic fragments that have been silenced by history, Zhang Xiaogang's works contribute to a more complete image of a traumatic past in order to ensure that emotional and factual memories are properly registered for the generations to come. As such, visual imagery, by resonating past impressions, can actually retrieve and bring to light "traces of the past that were blurred but not completely buried by history", drawing awareness to a problematic historical past that is at risk of being suppressed and forgotten.

Similar to Ban Wang, Ganito also focuses on the bodies depicted in Zhang Xiaogang's works, but instead of regarding them as passive victims of a violent past, she contends that the body is capable of storing and inscribing unspeakable records related to traumatic experiences into present times. Zhang Xiaogang's bodies, according to Ganito, evoke silences and records registered in the interstices of official memory, as "pieces of evidence", and thereby challenge the "con-

spiracies of silence" surrounding this traumatic past. As such, silence is not seen as a mere symptom of trauma but rather as a mechanism of resistance endowed with agency. Ganito also surveys the process of nostalgia that, following the end of the Cultural Revolution, China embraced as a solution for both reconstructing identity consciousness and recreating cultural memory. In this context, as Wang's text also demonstrates, nostalgia surfaced as a strategy of embellishing the past and solacing the present. Zhang Xiaogang's artworks, however, reveal an alternative nostalgic concern that she terms "critical memory" as they incorporate nostalgia's complicating reverse, carving up a space for negotiation between the negative and the positive aspects of the past, the normativity of official versions of past events and the counter-narratives to those conventionalised accounts.

While Ganito concentrates on the role of contemporary Chinese art as a symbolic and cathartic space for the mediation of past and present experiences, **Elisabetta Colla**, in '*Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thought*: Ritualistic Artefacts and Mourning Mediation in Imperial China', turns once more to Freud to tackle the crucial question of mourning and creativity, centring her analysis on the "ways and mechanisms with which man creates so as to be able to retain what death makes him lose" (Fiorini, Bokanowski and Lewkowicz 2007: 110, quoted by Colla). While Freud avoided exploring the relationship between creativity and mourning in his essay on mourning and melancholia, Elisabetta Colla resorts to his text on 'Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thought' (1914) to argue for the cathartic dimension of *mingqi,* ritualistic artefacts placed in burial chambers in ancient China as part of the funerary agenda that prepared the deceased for the afterlife. In her view, both symbolic and physical loss lead to a survival anxiety that tries to compensate for loss through rituals and objects that, like *mingqi*, are perceivable as the materialisation of the power of thought, animism and magic due to their function of mediating between life and afterlife.

Colla regards both the burial chamber and the museum as "ritualistic spaces", the former being a sacred place created to worship ancestors and the latter a modern and secular reinvented space for cultural pilgrimage within the framework of which the artistic past is mourned. This similarity works as the background for her analysis of a sample of *mingqi* exhibited at the Museum of the Macau Scientific and Cultural Centre in Lisbon. In Colla's view, mourning is the process through which grief is shifted to a symbolic order as a way to recover from loss, and artefacts like *mingqi,* alongside other forms of visual representations, may be regarded as culturally contingent mourning practices to signify loss, to overcome melancholia for the departed and to foster a process of potentially healing remembrance.

Sharing emotional constructs such as panic and mourning is essential for conjuring up individual and collective identities. The representation of traumatic

events and their diffusion through traditional and new media channels is contributing to the emergence of remediated affects and performances, and audiences are playing a major role in this remediation process, as well as in the logics of performance, thereby questioning and displacing the paradigm of representation.

'Remediation' was proposed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999) as a key factor in any understanding of the essence of new media. They argue that new media do not substitute older media forms rather they refashion them through the incorporation and combination of some of their main characteristics. The notion of performance, on the other hand, articulates three different meanings throughout this section: firstly, as a framed event that requires an audience and that often incites participation; secondly, and in line with the performative turn in the humanities, as a concern with the social construction of reality as well as the way cultural practices are influenced by the context in which they occur; and thirdly, as 'performativity', the social agency of discourse, defined by Judith Butler as "that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler 1993: 2). As the authors in this section demonstrate, more than representing loss and grief, the different media are (re-)mediating them and during the remediation process they deeply involve the audience that feels part of the events they witness as if they are live.

Nevertheless, to be able to assume a participatory role, it is necessary to feel affectively involved with the situation given that, as Frederik Tygstrup suggests, "affects not only derive from, but also inform and guide cultural agency and the formation of ideas and beliefs that will eventually be socially institutionalized". As such, the third section, **(Re-)Mediated Affects and Performances,** investigates, through different but complementary approaches, how panic and mourning representations are transformed into remediated performances that are shaped through affectivity, a primary disposition for sharing 'states of mind'. Affects are thereby understood by different researchers as an important alternative perspective to 'traditional' representation models, and according to Richard Grusin:

> one of the attractions of affect theory is that it provides an alternative model of the human subject and its motivations to the post-structuralist psychoanalytic models favoured by most contemporary cultural and media theorists. Affectivity helps shift the focus from representation to mediation, deploying an ontological model that refuses the dualism built into the concept of representation (Grusin 2010: 7).

The centrality of affects is addressed by **Frederik Tygstrup** in 'Affective Spaces', a chapter that frames the analysis of Torres, Gonçalves, Duindam, and Surmann on (re)mediated panic and mourning performances within the contextualizing dimension of affectivity. Drawing on Robert Musil's distinction between "psy-

chological doctrines to whom the 'I' is an indisputable core piece, detectable in every movement of the spirit and particularly in the emotion" and "doctrines that completely disregard the 'I' and only consider the relations between expressions" (Musil 1978: 1160, quoted by Tygstrup), Tygstrup maps the different approaches to understanding emotions. He begins by analysing how the history of emotions, the phenomenology of emotions and the psychology of emotions address the first alternative suggested by Musil, and concludes that emotions are seen only as something we carry with us, and not as something in which we may find ourselves.

To understand the difference between emotions as something we have as opposed to something we are in, we need to acknowledge the distinction between emotion and affect. According to Tygstrup, "subjects have emotions, but affects produce subjectivity". Nonetheless, this distinction is not always easily perceived and depends on the object of analysis. Three main approaches to understanding collective affective experiences are proposed: the first is based on Gilles Deleuze's theorization of affectivity as something relational; the second, on the situational nature of affects; and the third, on the corporeal dimension of affects. Tygstrup contends "that affects cannot be pinned down to one specific realm or layer of reality but seem to persist as a material/immaterial halo or sphere hovering indistinctly but none less insistently above and within any field of human agency and interaction". This understanding emphasises the spatial dimension of affects as something we are in, and acknowledges the existence of affective spaces. The spatial nature of affects is examined through the analysis of Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) and J. G. Ballard's *Super-Cannes* (2000), *Millennium People* (2003), and *Kingdome Come* (2006). His main goals are to show how analysis of the spatial being of social existence may be drawn, and how these two literary works interpret historical spaces – New York City in the aftermath of 9/11 and the "new European urban designed landscapes of the thriving middle classes", and their affective infrastructures. Despite differences between the works examined, Tygstrup concludes that both DeLillo and Ballard experiment with techniques of mapping affective spaces, and may be considered "cartographers of affect", given "they contribute to the understanding of the contemporary micro-politics of affects and the changing relational geographies underpinning them and thus eventually also to understanding how affective spaces mould our lives and the selves we come to embody".

Catastrophic events may be perceived as both emotional and affective, depending on the perspective and contextualised object of our analysis, since, as Cintra Torres points out, "[a]s sensorial experiences, catastrophes have to be 'felt' to be fully apprehended through senses". In 'Catastrophes in Sight and Sound', **Eduardo Cintra Torres** offers a historical survey of catastrophe representation,

claiming that "[f]rom late antiquity onwards, catastrophes have been put into words but, given their enormity, remain beyond the human capacity of verbal expression." The development of visual forms of communication like painting, photography, film, television, or other user-generated means of representation such as those offered by mobile phones contributed to a shift in the way catastrophes are represented, but Torres proposes that the definite turning point was the emergence of mass media because from that moment on catastrophes could be mediated through "sight and sound".

The central elements of his investigation are the representational techniques and their adequacy to the different media contexts. From the first Classical antiquity representations of catastrophes in historical texts and theatre, to highly mediated contemporary events, throughout this chapter different events and their representation are examined: the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, the sinking of the Titanic and the Hindenburg disaster constitute some of the case studies discussed. Torres argues that the way catastrophes are portrayed has changed throughout the ages and that the development of different forms of mediation contributed to the transformation of catastrophes into collective events: "[t]hey become part of the daily life and of the daily expectations of viewers until the next catastrophic event occurs, and the process of humanizing the unthinkable rewinds an old story anew."

The next two chapters expand Torres' argument by discussing and engaging with the concept of "media event" proposed by media theorists Dayan and Katz: events that interrupt routine and "intervene in the normal flow of broadcasting and our lives" (Dayan and Katz 1992: 5). In 'From Panic to Mourning: 9/11 and the Need for Spectacle', **Diana Gonçalves** focuses on the television coverage of the September 11 attacks and their transformation into a media event. The mediated exploitation of panic and fear led to the transformation of the event into a spectacle, with regular programming schedules being cancelled, and the terrorist attacks turning into the main subject of all TV programs. The aftermath of the catastrophe was also appropriated through media strategies, this time centred on the mediatisation of mourning. Public commemorations and benefit events were organised and broadcast, becoming part of what Gonçalves terms *mournitainment*, the public spectacle of mourning and loss through a performance or show. In the media coverage of 9/11 then, catastrophe, spectacle and reality overlapped, transforming the experience of disaster and unravelling the tendency of the media apparatus to reproduce an aesthetic of spectacle. According to Gonçalves, the remediation of catastrophe into spectacle followed the same logic traditionally used by cinematographic industry: "[t]he images were so spectacular, so absurdly (un)real, that most people thought they could have only been produced by the Hollywood machine". The transformation of catastrophe into a remediated

media event, where the juxtaposition of reality and fiction with previous representations became evident, was achieved through the appropriation and massive dissemination of the events: "[f]irst evoking the big blockbuster plots and special effects, 9/11 later stimulated the organization of megaspectacles, exploiting people's emotions and the event's social, cultural, historical, political and economic impact."

Gonçalves' proposal of understanding 9/11 attacks as media events results from a reformulated approach to the concept proposed by Dayan and Katz (1992). Gonçalves argues that due to the impact of the terrorist attacks we should not classify them as news events (Dayan and Katz 1992) but as media events, despite not being a ritual and scheduled event. In deploying the term media event instead of news event, Gonçalves' goal "is to recover the main features attributed to this kind of events and apply them to 9/11, an event characterised by the blurring of the notions of news and spectacle".

David Duindam, on the other hand, in 'Stage, Performance, Media Event: The National Commemoration of the Second World War in the Netherlands', resorts to Dayan and Katz' original understanding of media event, stressing its ritualistic dimension through an analysis of the Dutch Remembrance Day ceremony. In this chapter, Duindam examines the development of the national Remembrance Day within the cultural memory of war and the process of nation-building in the Netherlands. The conceptualization of the event is drawn against the notion of the dynamics of cultural memory (Erll and Rigney 2009) and the importance of remembrance rituals as performances of 'nationalized memories'. In the last part of the chapter, Duindam presents the case study of the 2010 commemoration, which was disrupted by an incident that caused mass panic, and explores how the combination of three particular elements are employed in the construction of what he claims to be a 'nationalized community': stage, performance and media event.

Duindam regards the National Monument as an important location for official and unofficial collective practices and as displaying two main features: "[a]s a sculpture, it embodies a specific and restricted memory of the war. As a symbolic site, it offers a ceremonial stage for performances that endorse the nation". The National Monument is the stage for a collective performance of remembrance, the *Dodenherdenking* – an annual Dutch ceremony to remember national war victims, with a special emphasis on World War II. According to Duindam, the meaning of this shared performance has also evolved; at first, its main goal was to remember the historical events of World War II, but since being televised it became a media event offering its audience the possibility of experiencing it without being physically present at the ceremony's location. This proves the ritual nature of media events, which "hang a halo over the television set and transform the viewing

experience", whereby "passive spectatorship gives way to ceremonial participation" (Dayan and Katz 1992, quoted by Duindam). The transformation of this ceremony from a 'localised' collective performance into a 'traditional' media event resulted in the greater involvement of 'non-present' audiences invited to take part in the ceremony from their own houses.

Through detailed analysis of the 2010 ceremony, Duindam deconstructs the paradoxal logic of the ceremony, arguing that the feeling of communion conceals the social inequality in the Netherlands, where tolerance and integration are only possible within the framework of the nation-state. The 2010 edition of this ceremony also evidenced the fragility of mediated participation that was easily disrupted by the transformation of a scheduled media event into a news event: "Great news events speak of accidents, of disruption; great ceremonial events celebrate order and its restoration" (Dayan and Katz 1992: 9). While Gonçalves' analysis of 9/11's transformation into a media event emphasized the importance of news being transformed into spectacle, this more 'traditional' approach proposed by Duindam focuses on the 'novelty' of the disruption of the annual ceremony. In this case, the ritualistic event was transformed into a news event due to a disruption that took only a few minutes, altering the planned broadcast agenda but not changing the collective meaning of the ceremony.

Finally, Duindam's case study also underlines the role played by affects in sharing 'collective states of mind', and expands Tygstrup's considerations on the spatial dimension of affects to a mediated realm, showing that "the performance of memory is inscribed by affect: the semblance of being there allows the viewing experience to take on such an affective charge" (Winter 2010, quoted by Duindam). This affective charge of the viewing experience becomes crucial in the final chapter of this volume, '*No Fun:* Mourning the Loss of Tragedy in Contemporary Performance Art', where **Frauke Surmann** also examines the articulation of (re)mediation, performance and spectatorship, in which the creative potential of performance art intersects with new media, collapsing the mimetic paradigm and the tragic apparatus. In *No Fun,* one of the most recent online performances by the Italian artist collective Eva and Franco Mattes alias 0100101110101101.ORG, a suicide is simulated on *Chatroulette* (http://chatroulette.com), a chat platform that pairs users randomly for video conversations. During this online performance, which went on for several hours, thousands of users were exposed to the performer's body hanging from the ceiling. Surmann interprets this online performance in light of Jean-Luc Nancy's idea of "loss of tragedy" (2008) – a liminal state where tragedy seems to be lost whilst simultaneously still present.

According to Nancy, the loss of an adequate model to expressing the inevitable human mortality, once embodied by Aristotelian tragedy and its purposeful staging of a catastrophic event, displaces any notion of a social order and its

political and ethical implications into a state of liminality, a "transitional state between tragedy as an abandoned frame of reference and its pending replacement". To confront the loss of this symbolic order, two possible attitudes stand out: nostalgia for the lost, and longing "for the eruption of an absolute coming". Both nostalgia and longing wish to overcome the liminal state by either restoring or inventing its replacement. However, in Surmann's view, what is so striking about *No Fun* is precisely that it proclaims and perpetuates the loss of tragedy, the radical absence of a joint frame of reference, precluding both nostalgia and longing. In contrast, Surmann contends, *No Fun* sustains this liminality within what she terms an 'aesthetics of the after', calling for mourning as a third attitude towards the *after*, a mourning that "does not mourn the loss of something but rather the very state of loss itself" in the moment of the after.

Despite its "unstable equilibrium of irresolvable aesthetic and moral ambiguity", Surmann recognises creative potential to this "aesthetics of the after", claiming it might be perceived as a productive model for dealing with the loss of tragedy as it appeals to an active and creative approach to mourning loss. This active engagement is enabled by the possibility of reciprocal interaction on *chatroulette*, which guarantees the dialogical structure of the performance. Due to this medial interaction, the state of liminality cannot be reduced to a static and anomic condition, rather becoming a zone of reciprocal activity. Facing the absence of any consensus-building frame of reference, *No Fun* calls for an essentially different ethics, no longer anchored in a predetermined symbolic order, but rather deriving from a "*communitas* of mourning" that arises and crafts itself from the instant and shared experience of loss. Coming back to the opening of this volume, and recalling Ribeiro's plea for a "dialogical community of memory", this last chapter appeals to an active *communitas* of mourning that is forced to continuously generate its own symbolic frame of reference as a dynamic and dialogical response to loss whilst still able to forge its own ethics as a shared but negotiated responsibility.

Should, on the one hand, the essays in this volume recast and interrogate the problematic legacies of our historical past, on the other hand, they open up a space for a sustained and dynamic critique of both past and present that radiates from a "coming community" (Agamben 1993). This community is not built upon any sense of universalism, continuity and homogenous identities, but one that disrupts undifferentiated conceptions of belonging, fostering a common ground where tensions, contradictions and singularities come into dialogue without obliterating differences or demanding closure. A community insubordinate to normative and unified claims, capable of conjuring networks of fluid relationships in order to negotiate the legacies of the past and face the challenges of the future to come.

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