

## **The Destinies of Trauma: Psychoanalytic Perspectives from Freud to Lacan**

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**Abstract:**

We live in what Bauman famously described as a "liquid society" a vulnerable and unstable modern world where trauma increasingly manifests not only through the repetition of seemingly random events but within a broader global context that affects individuals, communities, and even nations in a deeply disruptive way. This paper explores how such traumatic repetition can be transformed into an opportunity for new meaning and direction. Rather than being condemned to repetition, subjects may become protagonists in re-presenting traumatic events and reframing their narrative through processes of symbolization and sublimation. Drawing on psychoanalytic thought from Freud to Lacan, as well as philosophical and artistic reflections, the paper investigates the possible destinies of trauma - tracing a path from symptom to *sinthome*. In doing so, it highlights how the encounter with the Real can be integrated into subjective experience, allowing trauma to move from raw repetition toward symbolic recovery and transformation.

**Keywords:** trauma, psychoanalysis, Symbolization, repetition, *sinthome*.

**Introduction**

This paper proposes a psychoanalytic re-reading of trauma, not as an isolated clinical event but as a structural and semiotic condition of the subject, emphasizing how symbolic elaboration - from symptom to *sinthome* - can represent a transformative destiny rather than a compulsive repetition.

In addressing the psychopathological aspects of depression and the discomfort of existence, it becomes necessary to focus on the trauma that underlies psychic suffering and on the possible trajectories it can take within the subject. Contemporary society, described by Bauman (2000) as "liquid modernity," presents a scenario in which identity is increasingly fragmented, privatized, and destabilized. The illusion of unlimited freedom, detached from any substantial anchoring in symbolic law, reveals itself as a disorienting condition: freedom becomes a fragile premise for an unsatisfiable desire, a pursuit of an elusive *jouissance* that ultimately reinforces alienation.

Philosophers such as Žižek (1992) and Badiou (2005) have criticized the naive belief that philosophy can explain or resolve everything, particularly in an age where social, symbolic, and linguistic coordinates have become unstable. The metaphor of liquidity, once a critical instrument, now describes the very dissolution of meaning, structure, and subjectivity. In such a cultural climate, individuals often find themselves immersed in a condition of estrangement - a sort of symbolic evaporation that Lacan (1966) links to the fading of the Name-of-the-Father, the symbolic anchor that formerly guaranteed consistency and transmissibility in discourse.

This erosion of symbolic references affects the subject's access to meaning, reducing language to stereotyped expressions and impoverishing the intersubjective bond. The result is a growing difficulty in sustaining desire, which frequently takes the form of pathological acting-out or addictive behaviour. These phenomena - substance use, repetition compulsion, and affective numbness - can be interpreted not only as symptoms but as failed responses to a trauma that resists integration.

Today, many psychodynamic reflections on depression point to a void at the heart of subjective experience. Trauma becomes not just a memory of a past event but a structural hole in the symbolic order, an encounter with the real that cannot be fully symbolized. Yet, following Lacan (1966), this impasse can also open up a path: from symptom to *sinthome*, from repetition to reinvention. It is within this framework that the article investigates trauma not simply as a repetition of suffering but as a possibility for symbolic transformation.

## 1. Freud and the Origin of Civilization

Among the fruitful obsessions that afflicted Freud, we find that on the origin of the world, that is, the problem of castration, on the emergence of a neurosis, all that he, in different ways, at the beginning and at the time of the maturity of his thought, placed in the trauma and at the origin of the trauma itself. The scientific discourse of his time and nascent psychology as a discipline of the linear cause/effect relationship infiltrated his extraordinary discovery, sometimes mattifying its disruptive scope, which had to wait for Jacques Lacan to return in an enlightened way to the Freudian message in the intuitions of his thought (Freud, 1922; 1925).

The condition of entry of the human subject into the world of language is placed by Freud mythically precisely in the breaking of continuity between the animal world and the human world, precisely when the passage to erect posture occurred. Besides Darwin, but also Bowlby himself in his attachment theory and other scholars begin their scientific speculation from an apparently shared point of view. Freud's reconstruction does not deal with anthropological points if we read it in the light of the relationship with the object.

Freud, in his various texts and on several occasions with an insistence that invites us to decipher what he wanted to convey to us, says that this change of posture proved decisive for civilization, generating chain effects starting from that sort of organic removal which occurred with the removal of the sense of smell. Recent studies in neuroanthropology have further supported this hypothesis of evolutionary bifurcation between sensory primacy and symbolic elaboration (Lende & Downey, 2022).

The sense of smell as an almost instinctual guide seemed to be able to give information about the object in praesentia, but in the withdrawal produced by the immediate proximity to the object, he was unable to orient himself in this direction. The view took over the sense of smell as a guide: the material trace in continuity with the object took over the immaterial one of the visions. With vision, in fact, the relationship to the object is no longer immediate, but mediated by representation, which can also exclude the real presence of the object. Paul Klee says that art does not serve to repeat things, but to make them visible (Klee, 1956). In his constant work, his practice shows us the language through the swarming eye beyond the language. Space has no depth; it gives itself as a two-dimensional support that knows no sinking. If anything, these are the carry-over of a psychological and fantastic condition that precedes the work of art, movements that support the implementation of the image, which, to produce itself, uses the economy of a clear and flowing language. Colour enters the game of composition to increase the intensity of a work that is also born from a cultural awareness.

Language has its own internal biology, an orientation, sedimentation that allows multiple dispositions. An intense internal energy radiates from the work built according to thread-like lattices which have its potential along routes open to many intersections and collisions. In his images, Klee always tries to recreate a linear disorientation capable of referring to the internal and occult forces of things, of a table that holds on its smooth surface the phantasmic thickness of a universe poised between the unveiling and the concealment.

We also find in these notes that represent art and aesthetics, with a personal reference, a sort of destiny that identifies itself in the work as in a physical trauma. The gaze of art penetrates under the thick patina of things, under the false opulence of matter, to veil the essence of an energy that passes through all bodies and governs the dynamism of the world. For this reason, it is not possible to give depth to the image to accommodate the flow that relates things to each other along lines of flow and continuity. At times, therefore, the lightness of a wandering and hollowed-out sign that simultaneously captures the skin and the inner soul

of things appears. The objects and figures are returned as suspended and lightened by their internal weight, described according to a barely visible visual domination.

The graphic reduction of the visual elements is the further sign of a stripping of Klee's sensitive state, of his ability to take his gaze out of the fascination of matter, out of the easy eroticism of appearances, to arrive at a simplicity of the sign and bare spirituality image; likewise for fate or art, we note how in order to cross fate by placing knowledge between Freud and Lacan, a sense of meticulous observation is necessary (Freud, 1922; Lacan, 1966). Contemporary psychoanalytic art theory has also emphasized how this reduction to essence enables the reorganization of pre-symbolic trauma (Ferenczi et al., 2023).

Looking at the trauma, we cannot do without a possible relationship of contemplation of the world built in two opposite movements: one of analytic slowing down of vision, the other of sentimental and throbbing acceleration. The elementary handwriting that assists the description of his inner landscapes is always the result of an alteration made of an exasperated descriptivism of the details and a miniaturization of the various accidents and circumstances that accompany the image. This is built through the exaltation of details that simultaneously enriches the flow of the whole and affirms the complexity of the world. Paul Klee's microcosm of signs inevitably refers to the macrocosm of the universe; with this aesthetic vision, we return to trauma in its chronic re-presentation, which sometimes seems to dematerialize the reality that succumbs and seems to be destroyed and dismissed (Klee, 1956).

Looking at the object, for example, is also looking at a representation of the object, that is, looking not at the object but at the absence of the object, even when it is no longer there in its mental representation. This relationship to absence inaugurates the cascading effects of civilization; this is the real pivot of Freudian reasoning; it establishes the first work of representation, of re-presentation (Freud, 1925). The sense of smell from which we started was in some way already a trace compared to an even more concrete materiality, which is that of the object incorporated orally. But in the vision, in the look, the dematerialization process is more advanced.

In a certain sense, the advent of the gaze as a relationship to real and virtual representation establishes the loss of the object and with it the advent of human reality. As noted by recent Lacanian scholars, this birth into representation is not just structural but always already traumatic, since it presupposes the inscription of lack in the subject (Verhaeghe & Declercq, 2021).

The subject is born in the world of representation and symbolization. Here, in my opinion, is the sense of Freudian allegory. The object in psycho-analysis is thus conceived as a set of distinct traits; it is diffracted in a complex of attributes of quality, both at the level of the image and crossed by language; it breaks down into traits, precisely at the level of speech. In this way, the representative trait of an object can move onto another, also carrying an affective tone: result of the infiltration of language which introduces substitutability. For example, the trait of a father can rest on that of an animal, generating the phobic symptom. (Freud tells us about the wolf man) (Freud, 1922).

The representation of the world is complicated in the human subject with the pleasure principle that interferes with reality in order to alter it, to alter its perception in this case. In the early years of life, the child is still caught up in primary narcissism, governed by the pleasure principle. Its enjoyment is reduced to an autoerotic activity centered on an object whose absence is inconceivable. This object is just as the drive is structured, found outside the body, hétéros attached to the Other. Although the lack of this object, of this Other, is inconceivable.

Autoerotic activity, even if objectively heterocentrated, still excludes the registration of a difference of the sexes.

Thus, the unbearable traumatic character of the Other, of language, of the Other of difference, is outlined since the world humanized by language is made of differences and therefore of lack. The discovery, mythically speaking, of castration in reference to the mother inaugurates a loss without return of the time of indifference, in which there was no lack, in which there was no non-being, becoming. Period naturally by Lacan ascribed only to the abstract mythical reconstruction, since language is what the individual bathes in from the moment of birth, which only in this sense is traumatic by structure (Lacan, 1966). This entry, in fact, involves taking into account not being, and therefore also death, which is one of the names from castration. The subject must resign himself to not finding something in the world that completely fills him but resign himself to the lack that the difference introduces.

What concerns the mother as a complete object also has something lost at its origin even if on the libido level exactly like the continuity/contiguity with the object, both in reality and in satisfaction, which is no longer immediate but mediated, it is lost since something else has been lost at the origin, human desire, what moves it, is the attempt to recover this mythical lost object or something of what is lost, some flap, some stretch; right here the streets of the neurotic, the perverse, the depressed, or ... the artist divide. The neurotic takes this suffering on himself and tries to solve with love, with dreams, with his beliefs in consoling theories, the riddle posed by the loss of this original insymbolizable enjoyment, lost even to the symbolic, unrepresentable in language as it also happens with the mother as Thing, the first great object. The pervert tries to recover everything by condensing it, for example, into the fetish or dream of a full symbolic not affected by the law of castration: he does not commit himself much to the work of replacement, does not proceed by attempts and approximations, short size and misses an object that intends to completely saturate it. There are several ways of the depressed or sadistic. The artist's path is yet another, it is another destiny of traumatism, that is, the transformation of the traumatism of structure but not only, also its singular, in a work of art. Louise Bourgeois writes: "I transform trauma into a sense of humour" glimpsing the work of art in it (Bourgeois, 2003). Neuropsychanalytic research has recently explored this transformation as a neuro-symbolic process mediated by both subcortical memory and symbolic reprocessing (Solms, 2021).

The possible destinies of traumatism, their connection with the drive and the drive destinies themselves, imply a framework of the trauma of language itself as well as of the contingent way in which each one encounters its singular real and with which it can draw a direction, a destiny in the sense of a possible destination (Lacan, 1966).

## 2. Origin of Trauma in Nevrosis

Freud was convinced at the dawn of his thought that the trauma was something external, for example, as the encounter with another seducer who would later manifest itself as a symptom. Trauma is a past event responsible for a subsequent symptom. Linear temporality and causality that still "seduces" scientism, supported by technology that gives an all-contemporary emphasis to cause/effect sequencing, in the frenzy of localization, mapping, isolation of origin. Recent theoretical contributions confirm this tension between traumatic temporality and linear causation, emphasizing the retroactive constitution of trauma in both clinical and neurocognitive frameworks (Scarfone, 2022).

Over time Freud remodelled his thought: trauma was no longer for him the past but something retroactive on a supposed origin only increasingly lost in the removal, in fact, original: what remains of the original is a kind of *caput mortuum*, which original hole. He reconstructed the trauma as follows: the subject encounters an unexpected real in the form of a horrific hole which he had isolated in the perception of female castration, horrifies to the extent that it refers the subject to the threat of castration. An example is his writing *The Head of Medusa* from 1922: here once more he articulates the composition of the trauma in two phases in a certain sense of which the second is in retroaction on the first. *Medusa* lends itself well as a paradigm of his theory of trauma as here the symptom of the subject is more indicative of a position of structure in front of an unassimilable real rather than the description of a phobic or obsessive symptom of someone (Freud, 1922). This structural positioning of the symptom has been further theorized in recent literature linking Lacanian psychoanalysis with affect theory and the politics of representation (Ruti, 2021).

Freud demonstrates that the moment of this encounter with the castration hole in the forms it takes for each one makes itself felt in its symptomatic significance generating a symptom only at a later time in circumstances that re-actualize for significant similarity that original which is only supposed, that is it manifests itself only when the subject first internalized it and subsequently brought it up to date; therefore it cannot be considered external since it has been internalized in its alienating scope. At that point, the first internalized manifests itself thanks to the second reactualising with the appearance of the symptom. This leads to subverting psychological causality and changes the quantification of the proportion between cause and effect.

In the writing *The Head of Medusa*, the encounter with the beheaded head equivalent to the female sex is reactivated by the perception of the repulsive hair that covers it, therefore starting from the signifier that covers it. The effect is the symptom as catatonia, petrification of the subject. Trauma is supposed, it is deduced from the current symptom. The horror is identical in the two situations, even if the two experiences are different because the signifiers involved are different, only connected by condensation or by displacement. The paradox of trauma is that the second experience is new but bearer of the same horror affection. There is a variance and an invariance at the same time, but the repetition is not precisely in terms of identical signifiers but of the identity of a hole; it is the ways to border it that differ, so to speak. In this case, the psychic economy treats the encounter with a real traumatizing (Freud, 1922).

For Lacan, the concept of trauma is much more extensive than what can usually be understood; after all, even in Freud's example, which precedes Inhibition, Symptom, and Anguish, we note how experience concerns the comparison with female castration which is structural, it is not an eventual accident (Freud, 1925). When Lacan says that the signifier of the woman does not exist, this means that the feminine is the point where not everything is condensed, the hole of the symbolic, the non-existence of that signifier that could cushion the blow of the real, which would do from bearing to trauma (Lacan, 1966).

For Lacan, trauma is the encounter with reality: even if it does not have the effect of shock, it is still traumatic as a contingency regardless of the sign that distinguishes it. Freud, therefore, started from the trauma as external and then came to the idea of the ghost of something internal to the subject as the cause of the symptom; from the traumatic event, seduction, then came to the hysterical ghost of seduction, to subsequently reach the drive as a disturbance of balance and anguish: however, they are all internal events even if perceived outside.

Recent neuropsychanalytic approaches have also validated the internalization of trauma via memory reconsolidation mechanisms (Fotopoulou & Tsakiris, 2022). Precisely in *Inhibition, Symptom, and Anguish*, he says that an external danger is traumatic to the extent that it is internalized as occurs in the subject who has encountered reality as an unexpected irruption into the psychic or a certain encounter with the Other (Freud, 1925). The memory of this does not integrate the subject's psychic economy, works the trauma transforming it into something surrounded by language, even if it does not find its name. It's transformed into something, a blow, an isolation, an edging is attempted. This dynamic has been reinterpreted in contemporary literature as a form of "semiotic foreclosure," where trauma marks a threshold between language and unrepresentability (Frosh, 2023a).

What difference is there between meeting reality in a traumatic form, such as to produce a symptom, or meeting it, since it is always traumatic, in a form that does not produce a symptom? One might think that the "bad" trauma, that is, the traumatic trauma different from the trauma of structure, is the encounter with reality, otherness without the mediation of a symbolic function which, for example, is provided by, as a Name of the Father, organizes a speech, directs it. We do not mean the Name of the Father in the strict sense, but that which organizes a discourse in the subject, starting from what performs the function of name of meaning. If we understand the paternal function as that symbolic function, not personalized in the real father, which provides the subject with some answers that are valid as a provisional vademecum, this can cushion the impact with the riddle for preliminary answers on life, death, sex, that which belongs to the real of life (Lacan, 1966).

This is what Oedipus is for, provided that you never lose the perspective, not only of its sunset, but even more radically, of its beyond. Another mediation is the ghost, which constitutes a way of accessing reality capable of protecting the subject from reality by pulling it from the side of the pleasure principle. An example is the daydream, the reverie, in the face, for example, of the nightmare of the dream of anguish.

When the subject transforms the traumatic real into "an" unconscious memory, the latter does not integrate into the psychic apparatus or even into the system of representations, so it is stationed there like a cyst or a foreign body that threatens the system. Recollection becomes trauma when it has become "one," that is, when it has been circumscribed by language. There it becomes indestructible as a non-biodegradable removed core surrounded by representation as "an" unrepresentable, but nevertheless a"...

This aspect typical of the War Neuroses fascinated Freud, who wondered how it was possible that this memory removed, why not being remembered, could induce a manifestation of the same horror, perhaps in dreams, or why people actively cause the repetition of pain. Freud even called it primary advantage, as if that pain resolved a greater suffering linked to that first nucleus of real removed. Rather than find myself on that first experience, Ego reproduces the second. In the example of Medusa: rather than representing female castration, horror is reproduced in front of snake hair (Freud, 1922). This unrepresentable memory, conceived as a psychic "cyst", is processed through pleasure, attracting further experiences and re-emerging in formations of the unconscious. Trauma thus operates as an internalized agent, generating imbalance and leading Freud to link the pleasure principle with a drive that exceeds it. Recent clinical models conceptualize trauma as an attractor within the psychic economy, consistent with systems-based approaches in psychoanalysis (Marks-Tarlow, 2023). Paradoxically, the pleasure principle does not restore equilibrium but sustains repetition beyond itself, connecting to the drive toward enjoyment (Freud, 1925).

Before *Inhibition, Symptom, and Anguish*, Freud goes so far as to say that the drive is in itself traumatic, being what eternalizes in the subject the trauma of enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle. For some, this is possible producing a symptom; for others, it acts more silently, where it is assumed that the ghost is enough to keep the imbalance at bay. In *Inhibition, Symptom, and Anguish*, anguish will be defined as perception of the drive danger, as too much, an excess that unbalances and at the same time attenuated trauma: "Anguish is therefore on the one hand expectation of trauma, on the other, attenuated repetition of it" (Freud, 1925). In his last teaching, Lacan finds in anguish the same object of Freud, that is, drive excess, danger as excess (Lacan, 1966). The paradox of traumatism turns out to be precisely the same constant, indestructible force of this real cyst incorporated in the system of representations of language, in that it moves a causality upstream of desire in the form of its object-cause. The actual cyst can effectively isolate the cause, object a. Trauma is in this case a past enjoyment of smuggling in the formations of the unconscious, where it supplies its subject matter to the cause; such is the true causality that operates in psycho-analysis. One destiny of this trauma is that of its crossing, which has the "effect" of extracting the encapsulated enjoyment by making its nonsense pass to something else other than being reabsorbed in the sense (Lacan, 1966).

Freud's notion of deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*) is critical to understanding the retroactive structuring of trauma. Deferred action suggests that an event only becomes traumatic after it is retrospectively understood in the context of later experiences. This process implies a non-linear temporality in which the past is continually reshaped by the present. Freud introduced this idea through his analysis of early childhood experiences, which might initially seem insignificant but later acquire a traumatic character when re-evaluated in light of subsequent events (Freud, 1918).

Deferred action underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of trauma, where the meaning and impact of an event can change over time. This idea challenges the simplistic cause-and-effect models of trauma and emphasizes the complex interplay between memory, perception, and temporal context.

Repression is a fundamental mechanism in Freud's theory of trauma. Repression involves the exclusion of distressing memories, thoughts, or desires from conscious awareness, relegating them to the unconscious. This process protects the individual from the immediate emotional impact of the traumatic event but also creates a reservoir of unresolved conflicts that can later manifest as symptoms (Freud, 1915). The repressed material does not disappear but continues to influence the individual's behaviour and experiences indirectly. It seeks expression through various means, such as dreams, slips of the tongue, or neurotic symptoms. The goal of psychoanalysis is to bring these repressed elements to consciousness, allowing the individual to work through and integrate them, thus alleviating the symptoms.

Freud's early work on trauma, particularly his studies on hysteria, focused on the role of external traumatic events. He initially believed that hysteria resulted from repressed memories of sexual abuse in childhood. However, he later revised this theory, recognizing that internal psychic conflicts and fantasies also played a crucial role in the formation of symptoms (Freud & Breuer, 1895). This shift in understanding led Freud to develop the concept of the oedipal complex, where the child's unconscious sexual desires and fears towards their parents contribute to the development of neuroses. The oedipal complex illustrates how internal conflicts, rooted in early childhood experiences, are repressed and later re-emerge as neurotic symptoms (Freud, 1900).

Freud's exploration of the relationship between trauma and the pleasure principle reveals the paradoxical nature of traumatic experiences. This has been demonstrated in recent analyses of post-conflict artistic practices that employ glitch aesthetics and visual fragmentation to translate psychic ruptures into symbolic form (Buser, 2021). The pleasure principle drives individuals to seek pleasure and avoid pain. However, trauma represents a rupture in this principle, introducing an element of unpleasure that cannot be easily assimilated or avoided (Freud, 1920).

Traumatic experiences often involve an overwhelming intensity that exceeds the individual's capacity to process and integrate them. This excess of stimulation disrupts the homeostasis of the psychic apparatus, leading to the formation of symptoms as a means of managing the unprocessed affect. Freud's concept of the death drive further complicates this picture, suggesting that there is an inherent tendency towards repetition and self-destruction that operates alongside the pleasure principle (Freud, 1920). New readings of the death drive suggest its alignment with a non-homeostatic logic of persistence and disruption, resonating with Deleuzian perspectives (Zupančič, 2021).

Freud's work on trauma was significantly influenced by the experiences of World War I and the phenomenon of war neuroses. The unprecedented scale of violence and destruction during the war led to widespread psychological trauma among soldiers, challenging existing theories of trauma and neurosis (Freud, 1919). Freud observed that war neuroses often involved symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, and severe anxiety, which were strikingly similar to those seen in civilian cases of hysteria and neurosis. This led him to explore the role of trauma in a broader social and historical context, recognizing that traumatic experiences could have a profound impact on both individuals and societies.

### 3. Lacan's Reinterpretation of Trauma

Lacan's reinterpretation of trauma builds on Freud's insights but introduces new dimensions through his structuralist and linguistic framework. For Lacan, trauma is fundamentally linked to the subject's entry into the symbolic order, the realm of language, culture, and social norms. This entry involves a loss of the primordial unity with the mother and the imposition of the law of the father, which regulates desire and introduces the concept of lack (Lacan, 1966).

Lacan's concept of the Real represents the aspects of existence that resist symbolization and remain outside the realm of language. Traumatic experiences often involve encounters with the Real, which cannot be fully integrated into the symbolic order. These encounters disrupt the subject's sense of coherence and generate symptoms as attempts to manage the unassimilable aspects of experience. Lacan's triadic structure of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real provides a comprehensive framework for understanding trauma. This triadic structure continues to inform contemporary clinical applications of Lacanian theory, particularly in the treatment of complex trauma and dissociation (Leader & Corfield, 2022). The symbolic represents the realm of language and social norms, the Imaginary involves the formation of the ego and the realm of images, and the Real encompasses the aspects of existence that elude symbolization (Lacan, 1966).

Trauma can be seen as an irruption of the Real into the Symbolic and Imaginary orders. This irruption disrupts the individual's sense of self and coherence, leading to the formation of symptoms as attempts to re-establish equilibrium. The therapeutic process involves helping the individual navigate these disruptions and find new ways of integrating their experiences.

Lacan's concept of the *sinthome* represents a unique and individualized response to trauma. The *sinthome* goes beyond the symptom, which is often seen as a pathological manifestation of unresolved conflicts. Recent studies emphasize the *sinthome's* function as a stabilizing yet creative construct, particularly in relation to psychotic structure and gender identity (Fink, 2021). Instead, it represents a creative and idiosyncratic way of structuring one's experience of the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic (Lacan, 1975). The *sinthome* allows the individual to manage the fundamental disjunctions and traumas of existence in a way that is uniquely suited to their particular psychic structure. It involves a process of sublimation, where the traumatic kernel is transformed into a symbolic form that can be integrated into the individual's sense of self and their place in the world.

Fantasy plays an important role in the way individuals process and manage traumatic experiences. Freud recognized that fantasies often serve as a means of fulfilling repressed desires and managing conflicts that cannot be resolved in reality. These fantasies can provide a sense of coherence and meaning in the face of traumatic disruptions (Freud, 1908). Lacan further developed the concept of fantasy, emphasizing its role in structuring the individual's relationship to desire and the Other. For Lacan, fantasy provides a framework through which the subject navigates the lack introduced by the symbolic order. It mediates the individual's encounters with the Real and helps to structure their desires in a way that is manageable and meaningful (Lacan, 1966).

The relationship between trauma and the body is another critical area of exploration in both Freud's and Lacan's work. Traumatic experiences often involve a profound disruption of the individual's embodied sense of self. Symptoms such as psychosomatic disorders, conversion symptoms, and hysterical paralysis reflect the ways in which trauma is inscribed on the body (Freud, 1895). Lacan's concept of the *body-in-pieces* (*corps morcelé*) further elaborates on this idea. The *body-in-pieces* represents the fragmented and disjointed experience of the body that results from traumatic disruptions. This concept has been recently linked to neurodevelopmental models of embodied trauma, drawing connections between Lacan's theory and somatic symptom disorders (Gozlan, 2023). This fragmentation is linked to the subject's entry into the symbolic order and the imposition of language and social norms on the bodily experience (Lacan, 1966).

The temporal dimension of trauma is a crucial aspect of both Freud's and Lacan's theories. Freud's concept of deferred action highlights the non-linear temporality of trauma, where past events are reinterpreted in light of later experiences. This process underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of traumatic memory (Freud, 1918).

Lacan's theory also emphasizes the complex temporality of trauma. The encounter with the Real represents a rupture in the linear flow of time, introducing an element of timelessness and repetition. Symptoms often involve a repetitive re-enactment of the traumatic event, reflecting the subject's attempt to integrate the unassimilable aspects of their experience into a coherent narrative (Lacan, 1966).

The relationship between trauma and memory is a central theme in psychoanalytic theory. Freud's work on repression and the return of the repressed illustrates how traumatic memories are often relegated to the unconscious, only to resurface later in disguised forms. These memories continue to exert an influence on the individual's behaviour and experiences, even when they are not consciously accessible (Freud, 1915).

Lacan's concept of the unconscious as structured like a language further elaborates on this idea. Traumatic memories are encoded in symbolic forms and can be accessed through the process of psychoanalysis. The therapeutic goal is to bring these repressed memories to consciousness, allowing the individual to work through and integrate them into their sense of self (Lacan, 1966).

The therapeutic process in psychoanalysis involves working through trauma by revisiting and reinterpreting repressed memories and desires. Freud's technique of free association allows the patient to explore their unconscious without the constraints of rational thought, bringing to light the hidden connections and associations that underpin their symptoms (Freud, 1900).

Lacan's approach emphasizes the role of the analyst as a facilitator of this process, using interventions that disrupt the patient's habitual patterns of thought and language. By highlighting the gaps and contradictions in the patient's narrative, the analyst helps them to confront the traumatic core of their experience and find new ways of symbolizing and understanding it (Lacan, 1966).

The ethical dimensions of psychoanalysis are a significant concern for both Freud and Lacan. Freud's concept of the analyst's neutrality and non-interventionist stance reflects his belief that the patient's journey of self-discovery should be guided by their own unconscious processes, rather than the analyst's directives (Freud, 1912).

Lacan's ethics of psychoanalysis builds on this by emphasizing the importance of respecting the subject's desire and autonomy. Such ethics have been revisited in the post-pandemic era, underscoring the need for non-directive, desire-oriented frameworks in times of social precarity (Luepnitz, 2022). The analyst's role is not to impose their own interpretations but to help the patient articulate their own truth and find their own path to healing. This involves a delicate balance between providing guidance and allowing the patient the freedom to explore their unconscious without undue influence (Lacan, 1966).

The relationship between trauma and cultural production is a rich area of exploration in both Freud's and Lacan's work. Freud's analysis of art and literature reveals how creative works often reflect the author's unconscious conflicts and desires, transforming personal traumas into universal themes that resonate with a wider audience (Freud, 1910). Lacan's theory of the *sinthome* extends this idea by suggesting that cultural production can be a way of navigating and making sense of the fundamental traumas of existence. Artistic creation becomes a means of structuring and symbolizing the Real, allowing the artist to express and work through their unique experience of desire and lack (Lacan, 1975).

The role of the analyst in facilitating the patient's work with trauma is multifaceted. Freud emphasized the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment where the patient feels free to explore their unconscious without fear of judgment or retribution (Freud, 1912).

Lacan, on the other hand, highlighted the importance of the analyst's interventions in disrupting the patient's defensive structures and opening up new avenues for exploration. The analyst's role is to challenge the patient's fixed narratives and help them to confront the traumatic core of their experience, ultimately leading to a more integrated and coherent sense of self (Lacan, 1966).

The future of psychoanalytic theory lies in its ability to adapt and respond to the changing contexts and challenges of contemporary society. Freud's foundational insights into the nature of trauma, repression, and the unconscious continue to provide a rich framework for understanding the complexities of human experience (Freud, 1915).

Lacan's structuralist approach, with its emphasis on language, symbolization, and the interplay between the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic, offers a powerful tool for exploring the dynamic and often contradictory nature of desire and subjectivity. As psychoanalytic theory evolves, it will continue to engage with new developments in psychology, neuroscience, and cultural studies, enriching our understanding of the human mind and its capacity for transformation and healing (Lacan, 1966).

#### 4. Freud and Lacan: A Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of Freud and Lacan's theories reveals both continuities and divergences in their approaches to trauma, the unconscious, and the process of symbolization. Freud's focus on the dynamics of repression and the role of early childhood experiences in shaping the psyche laid the groundwork for many of Lacan's later insights (Freud, 1923). Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud's work through the lens of structuralism and linguistics brought new dimensions to the understanding of the unconscious, emphasizing the importance of language and the symbolic order in shaping human experience. Despite their different emphases, both theorists share a commitment to exploring the deep structures of the mind and the ways in which individuals navigate the complex interplay of desire, repression, and trauma (Lacan, 1966).

Freud viewed the unconscious as a repository of repressed desires and unresolved conflicts, operating according to the pleasure principle and governed by the dynamic opposition between the id, ego, and superego. His theory of repression placed the traumatic event at the origin of symptom formation, especially in the neuroses. In particular, Freud's exploration of *Nachträglichkeit* - the retroactive temporality of trauma, introduced a revolutionary notion of temporality, where the past acquires its meaning only through later symbolic reinterpretation (Freud, 1918).

Lacan radicalized this idea by claiming that the unconscious is structured like a language, where trauma is not simply a psychic scar but a structural hole, the Real, that cannot be symbolized. Lacan's Real resists integration into the Symbolic, and thus every traumatic encounter marks a fundamental disruption in the subject's symbolic coherence. Where Freud explored the dynamics of repression as a mechanism of defence, Lacan saw in repression the effect of the Symbolic order itself, which necessarily divides the subject, barring it from full access to *jouissance* and to its own truth (Lacan, 1966).

Freud's legacy is inseparable from his clinical discoveries, including the method of free association, the technique of interpretation, and the centrality of transference. His clinical intuition remains vital in contemporary psychoanalysis, especially in understanding the role of early experiences in the structuring of neurosis. Yet, Lacan's contribution can be seen as an effort to formalize these insights within a more rigorous linguistic and structural framework. He introduces the *objet petit a* as the object-cause of desire and reframes the symptom not merely as the return of the repressed but as a "knot" that holds together the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic dimensions of subjectivity (Lacan, 1975).

In this respect, the *sinthome* becomes central in Lacanian theory. It is no longer a symptom to be deciphered and dissolved, as Freud often implied, but rather a creative solution to the impasses of subjectivity, a mode of singularity through which the subject sustains its being. The *sinthome* marks Lacan's break with the classical Freudian ideal of healing through interpretation and proposes instead a stabilization through inventive recombination of the symbolic elements that constitute the subjects.

Contemporary psychoanalysts have explored how these two frameworks can be integrated rather than seen in opposition. For instance, the work of Verhaeghe (2021) suggests that Freud's metapsychological model retains its clinical utility when reframed within Lacan's registers of the Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic. Verhaeghe argues that the treatment of trauma today demands attention not only to the unconscious representations but also to the structural impossibilities that make trauma.

Another area where Freud and Lacan converge is the role of fantasy. Freud understood fantasy as a compromise formation, mediating between the drives and external reality. Lacan deepens this by defining fantasy as the framework through which the subject relates to the lack in the Other. Fantasy thus provides a stabilizing fiction that organizes desire in the face of the traumatic void introduced by language (Lacan, 1966). In this respect, both theorists view fantasy not as an escape but as a necessary mechanism for psychic survival. Both Freud and Lacan were deeply concerned with the implications of trauma for temporality and memory. Freud's concept of deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*) finds a close analogue in Lacan's notion of retroactive signification, where the meaning of an event is not given at the time it occurs but is constituted only through its symbolic articulation at a later point. This conception of temporality is crucial for understanding trauma not as a punctual event but as an ongoing process that disrupts the continuity of the subject's symbolic world (Freud, 1918; Lacan, 1966).

In recent years, several authors have taken up this dialogue. Malabou (2012), for example, distinguishes between Freudian trauma (as symbolic and meaningful) and neurological trauma (as meaningless damage), arguing for a philosophical reconciliation of plasticity and rupture. Her work invites a re-reading of Lacan and Freud through contemporary neuroscience, raising the question of whether the Real might be located in the neurological trace rather than solely in the symbolic register.

Moreover, psychoanalysts such as Fink (2021) have stressed the clinical implications of Lacan's concept of the *sinthome*, especially in psychosis and severe personality disorders. Fink highlights how the *sinthome* can provide a structural support where the paternal metaphor has failed, thus offering a compensatory form of subjective stabilization that diverges from Freud's emphasis on oedipal resolution.

In terms of gender and sexual difference, the divergence between Freud and Lacan becomes more pronounced. Freud's theory of penis envy and the phallic stage has been widely critiqued and reformulated, while Lacan's assertion that "the Woman does not exist" reconfigures femininity as a position of radical alterity in the Symbolic. For Lacan, sexual difference is not grounded in biology but in the logic of castration and symbolic positioning. The feminine subject, in particular, is situated on the side of the *not-all* (*pas-toute*), outside the phallic function but within the symbolic network (Lacan, 1975).

Butler (1997), building on both Freud and Lacan, extends this to performativity theory, suggesting that gender identity is an ongoing performance constituted through regulatory discourses. The Freudian unconscious, is re-interpreted as a site of discursive production, while Lacan's Real becomes a disruptive excess that resists normative categorization.

The ethics of psychoanalysis also finds points of convergence and divergence. Freud's ethical stance was grounded in neutrality, abstinence, and respect for the patient's free association. Lacan radicalized this by proposing an ethics of desire, where the analyst must help the subject pursue their desire without giving in to the demand for normalization. This is encapsulated in Lacan's famous dictum: "Do not give up on your desire" (Lacan, 1992).

The enduring influence of both thinkers is evident in contemporary clinical practice, where Freud's attention to developmental dynamics and transference is often complemented by Lacan's focus on language, structure, and the subject's relation to lack. Clinical models such as relational psychoanalysis, intersubjective approaches, and even trauma-focused cognitive-behavioural therapies often integrate insights from both traditions, either explicitly or implicitly.

In the field of cultural theory and art, both Freud and Lacan have shaped the analysis of aesthetic productions. Freud's theory of sublimation and the artist's relation to unconscious conflict has informed studies in literature, cinema, and the visual arts. Lacan's concept of the *sinthome* has been taken up in analyses of contemporary art practices as a way to understand how creative acts structure and symbolize trauma (Zupančič, 2021; Gozlan, 2023).

As we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the legacy of Freud and Lacan continues to evolve. The rise of affect theory, neuropsychanalysis, and trauma studies has created new interfaces between classical psychoanalytic concepts and emerging disciplines. The question of how trauma is encoded, transmitted, and transformed remains central.

Both Freud and Lacan provide indispensable frameworks for thinking through this question - one through the lens of conflict and repression, the other through language and the topology of the subject. Their dialogue - both explicit and implicit - remains one of the richest intellectual inheritances for contemporary psychoanalytic thought. Rather than seeing them in opposition, we might read them as articulating two poles of a shared inquiry: Freud focusing on the dynamic life of the drives and their vicissitudes, Lacan on the structural conditions of subjectivity and the inevitable fractures that define it.

## 5. Trauma and Origin of the Artwork

From Heidegger to Benjamin, or the trauma in phenomenology in a path from the origins inevitably leads us to loss. For Benjamin, something is hidden under a veil and can never be completely revealed, something is hopelessly lost (Benjamin, 1998). This irretrievability of origin has been critically re-elaborated in recent trauma theory as a constitutive structural absence, where aesthetic experience emerges precisely from the impossibility of full recovery (Bollas, 2021).

If at the origin of the trauma, in fact, or if in the trauma as the origin of the structure, there is irreparably the loss of the Thing, the Ding, it happens in this case that the drive to find it passing through language involves a partial, always parcelled finding: at times not everything. In each object, there is a little bit of What is lost, a trait emerges, that diffracted one: between the one in which its symbolic representation differs. Every libido object seems to be supported by the void of the Thing.

Freud illustrated this dynamic through Leonardo da Vinci, suggesting that artistic creation may attempt to recover the lost maternal image. The ambiguity of self-representation often reflects traces of parental resemblance. The maternal *Thing* lies beyond meaning, a silent reality preceding symbolization, leaving a structural void. Lacan conceptualizes this as *extimité*, the most intimate yet external element, rejected through the symbolic order. As he argues, the *Thing* "suffers from the signifier" (Freud, 1922). Contemporary studies further interpret *Das Ding* as a structural absence within language and affect, grounding artistic sublimation in the unrepresentable (Verhaeghe & Declercq, 2023). This forbidden void points to the Real that underpins psychoanalysis, where trauma emerges as an effect of language, contingent upon the subject's encounter with the mother tongue (Lacan, 1966).

The symbolic scaffolding that the speaking subject constructs comes to circumscribe the lost place of the Thing and at the same time allows you to protect yourself from it. So, the Lacan of the seminar *The Ethics of Psycho-analysis*. This situates the artist as a particular response to structure trauma; it is a form of organization around the void, populating it with imaginary creation, thus authorizing the enjoyment of the thing in a parcelled way, protecting it, making something operate on it that rests on its ghost to raise it to shared satisfaction (Lacan, 1966). Recent psychoanalytic aesthetics confirms that creative production may operate as a symbolic defence against psychic fragmentation, especially when ordinary symbolization fails (Diorio, 2022).

These elements of fragmentation are like lights which, like a flash, give that vision capable of surprising us and before then we had never contemplated. The extraction of the infantile trait to make it a work is very clear in Leonardo da Vinci, in which the maternal smile marks the trace of the traumatically lost mother from whom he had to be separated early, goes beyond the formations of the unconscious, their private character and the singularity of Leonardo's particular ghost of which we know nothing, to settle on the work and make something vibrate in all those who look at the picture, sensing its pathos that inebriates us without knowing anything in all eras. He managed to make the elective signifier of his love object something equivalent to the Thing, he elevated him there, making him lose his biographical character to rise in the name of that unattainable, that insignificant enigmatic known to humanity like the Mona Lisa smile, which is the feminine as signifier of the Other, as Lacan says, as barred. Precisely through these passages, the subject is said to be barred because it ideally passes through a subject sequence from S1, S2 ... Sn, where it gradually passes through the stages of its being (Freud, 1922; Lacan, 1966).

Among Freud's troubles from which we started, there is also that of understanding the origin of the "genius," perhaps as a particular response to the trauma. In *The Poet and the Imagination*, he says that the artist, in this case, the poet, shortens the journey and mitigates the blow with the core of the individual's ghost, which protects us from the impossible of the Thing and from the traumatism of structure. In this case, it does so with the work, by overcoming the embarrassments, the modesty, the guilt of which the relationship to the ghost is made, and thus providing the user of this work with a proxy enjoyment through, for example, identification with the hero (Freud, 1922).

With the artist, we go beyond that crossing of the non-sense of the "cyst" of the real that afflicts and decomposes the formations of the unconscious as language, and we extract something from it by subtracting it from meaning. What Freud proposes to us can be grasped with Lacan as a way of treating autistic enjoyment encysted in the unconscious of the parlêtre, or of being speaking, through its extraction, here mediated and ephemeral. Instead, it is another thing to assume as an act the transformation into work of what can remain harnessed as non-sense in the unconscious sense, freeing it in the contingency of the work. Louise Bourgeois, one of the most famous French sculptors of the contemporary era, writes in this regard: "I transform trauma into a sense of humour," seeing and forming the artistic work in it (Bourgeois, 2003).

More recent interpretations of Bourgeois' work have linked her installations and drawings to a topological understanding of trauma, where the sinthome takes form as a stabilizing aesthetic gesture (Arfuch, 2020).

The contingency of the spirit motto, in fact, is of a completely different nature from that of the impact of a real that cannot be assimilated by the symbolic even if conveyed by the language: the motto works humoristically if it is instantaneous, if it is not explained, if it is not articulated in the meaning of what it "means." From one contingency to another in a certain sense: all this surprises us without our knowledge.

In reality, the analytical device, as Lacan shows in his last teaching, is within the reach of a similar destiny in that it indicates to the speaking being, not only the way of sublimation for everyone in the generalized enjoyment of the word but also another way. It is the word linked to the Analyst's attitude, in that concept of "knowing how to do it," which indicates how you can take the path of doing something, take one more step in the direction of giving a "destiny" to the non-sense of trauma, separating it even more radically from signification (Lacan, 1966).

## 6. The Role of Art in Transmuting Trauma

The role of art in transmuting trauma can be understood as a complex interplay between the symbolic and the real, where the artist navigates the space between unprocessed traumatic experiences and their representation. This process involves a transformation that does not merely replicate the trauma but seeks to find a new form, a new expression that can encapsulate the emotional and psychological essence of the experience.

Sublimation, a concept introduced by Freud, refers to the process by which unacceptable desires or drives are transformed into socially acceptable activities. Art, in this context, serves as a medium through which the artist can channel and sublimate their traumatic experiences into creative expression. This process allows the artist to engage with their trauma in a way that is both therapeutic and productive, transforming what might otherwise be a debilitating experience into a source of inspiration and meaning (Freud, 1910). This transformation has been supported by recent neuropsychanalytic literature, which underlines the role of symbolic creation in modulating limbic activation associated with traumatic memory (Cozolino, 2021).

The cathartic function of art is another important aspect of how art interacts with trauma. The term "catharsis" refers to the emotional release that occurs when an individual expresses and processes repressed emotions. For the artist, the act of creating can serve as a cathartic process, allowing them to externalize and work through their traumatic experiences. This emotional release can lead to a sense of relief and resolution, providing a way to integrate the trauma into their broader life narrative.

Art also serves as a witness to trauma, offering a way to document and bear witness to experiences that might otherwise remain hidden or unspoken. This function is particularly important in the context of collective or historical trauma, where art can play a role in preserving the memory of traumatic events and ensuring that they are not forgotten. By giving form to these experiences, artists can help to keep the memory of trauma alive, allowing it to be acknowledged and processed by both individuals and communities. This witnessing function is increasingly recognized as central in post-genocide and post-disaster memorial art, which aims to mediate between affective intensity and civic commemoration (Felman, 2023).

The symbolic representation of trauma in art involves the use of symbols, metaphors, and imagery to convey the essence of traumatic experiences. These symbolic representations allow artists to express aspects of their trauma that might be difficult to articulate directly. By engaging with these symbols, both the artist and the viewer can explore the deeper layers of meaning and emotion associated with the trauma.

The viewer plays a crucial role in the relationship between art and trauma. The act of viewing and engaging with a work of art can be a deeply personal and emotional experience, allowing the viewer to connect with the artist's trauma in a meaningful way. This connection can lead to a shared sense of empathy and understanding, creating a space for collective healing and reflection.

The avant-garde movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Dadaism, Surrealism, and Expressionism, can be seen as responses to the collective traumas of their time. These movements sought to break away from traditional forms and conventions, using innovative techniques to express the fragmented and chaotic nature of the modern world. The works produced by these movements often reflected the artists' attempts to grapple with the traumas of war, displacement, and existential uncertainty.

Surrealism, in particular, was deeply influenced by Freud's theories of the unconscious and sought to explore the hidden depths of the human psyche. Surrealist artists used techniques such as automatism, dream imagery, and chance operations to tap into the unconscious mind and bring repressed desires and traumas to the surface. By doing so, they aimed to reveal the underlying reality of the human experience and challenge the rationalist assumptions of the modern world (Breton, 1924).

Expressionism, another avant-garde movement, focused on the portrayal of inner turmoil and emotional intensity. Expressionist artists often used bold colours, distorted forms, and dramatic compositions to convey the raw emotions and psychological states of their subjects. This emphasis on emotional expression allowed artists to engage with their own traumas and convey the intensity of their experiences to the viewer. Recent curatorial studies highlight how such expressive strategies resonate with viewers' embodied memory, fostering shared affective narratives in the public space (Brough, 2022).

Modern art, more broadly, can be seen as a response to the traumas and uncertainties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The rapid technological, social, and political changes of the modern era created a sense of dislocation and anxiety, which artists sought to express and confront through their work. By pushing the boundaries of form and content, modern artists were able to explore new ways of representing and processing the traumas of their time. This evolution continues today through digital and immersive art installations that provide multisensory re-elaborations of trauma in therapeutic and political contexts (Alford, 2021).

The artist can also be seen as a cultural intermediary, translating personal and collective traumas into a form that can be understood and appreciated by a wider audience. This role involves a delicate balance between staying true to the artist's own experiences and making their work accessible and meaningful to others. By navigating this balance, artists can help to bridge the gap between individual and collective experiences of trauma. Art therapy is a field that explicitly recognizes the therapeutic potential of art for individuals who have experienced trauma. Through the use of creative techniques such as drawing, painting, and sculpture, art therapy provides a safe and supportive environment for individuals to express and process their traumatic experiences. This therapeutic process can lead to greater self-awareness, emotional healing, and resilience.

Recent advances in neuroscience have begun to shed light on the ways in which art can impact the brain and contribute to the healing of trauma. Studies have shown that engaging in creative activities can activate neural pathways associated with emotion regulation, memory processing, and stress reduction. By harnessing these neurobiological mechanisms, art can play a powerful role in helping individuals recover from traumatic experiences.

Ritual and myth have long played a central role in human cultures as means of making sense of trauma and loss. Many traditional art forms are deeply rooted in ritual practices and mythological narratives, which provide a framework for understanding and coping with traumatic experiences. By drawing on these ancient traditions, contemporary artists can tap into a rich source of symbolic meaning and collective memory.

Trauma can have a profound impact on an artist's style and approach to their work. For some artists, traumatic experiences may lead to a shift towards more abstract or fragmented forms, reflecting the disruption and dislocation they have experienced. For others, trauma may inspire a heightened focus on detail and realism, as a way of grounding themselves in the tangible and concrete.

Art often serves as a bridge between personal and collective experiences of trauma. By expressing their own personal traumas, artists can create works that resonate with broader societal and historical traumas. This intersection allows for a deeper exploration of the ways in which individual and collective experiences of trauma are interconnected and can inform one another. Art can also serve as a means of resistance and empowerment for individuals and communities who have experienced trauma. By giving voice to marginalized and oppressed groups, artists can challenge dominant narratives and advocate for social change. This act of creative resistance can be a powerful way of reclaiming agency and asserting one's identity in the face of trauma.

Memory and commemoration are central themes in many works of art that address trauma. Artists often use their work to honour and remember those who have been affected by traumatic events, creating a space for reflection and mourning. Through this process of commemoration, art can help to preserve the memory of trauma and ensure that it is acknowledged and remembered by future generations.

## 7. The Aesthetics of Trauma

The aesthetics of trauma involves the exploration of how traumatic experiences are represented and conveyed through artistic forms. This exploration can include the use of unconventional materials, fragmented compositions, and disruptive techniques to capture the essence of trauma. By pushing the boundaries of traditional aesthetics, artists can create works that more accurately reflect the chaotic and unsettling nature of traumatic experiences.

The body plays a crucial role in the artistic expression of trauma. Many artists use their own bodies as mediums to explore and convey their traumatic experiences. Performance art, body art, and other forms of embodied artistic practice allow artists to directly engage with their physical and emotional pain, transforming it into a powerful form of expression and communication. Embodiment in trauma-based performance has also been reinterpreted through affect theory, highlighting the role of shared vulnerability in the somatic transmission of memory (Blackman, 2023).

Psychoanalysis has had a significant influence on artistic representations of trauma. The exploration of the unconscious mind, repressed desires, and the dynamics of repression and sublimation have provided artists with a rich theoretical framework for understanding and depicting trauma. This influence is evident in the works of many modern and contemporary artists, who draw on psychoanalytic concepts to explore the depths of the human psyche.

Art can play an essential role in the recovery process for individuals who have experienced trauma. The act of creating can provide a sense of control and agency, allowing individuals to take ownership of their experiences and transform them into something meaningful. This creative process can support healing and strengthen resilience.

Trauma can have a complex and multifaceted impact on creativity. For some individuals, traumatic experiences may serve as a catalyst for creative expression, providing a source of inspiration and motivation. For others, trauma may pose significant challenges to the creative process, leading to difficulties in concentration, self-doubt, and creative block. Understanding the diverse ways in which trauma can influence creativity is essential for supporting artists in their work. Community and collaboration play important roles in artistic responses to trauma. Collaborative art projects can provide a supportive and inclusive space for individuals to share their experiences and work together towards healing. By fostering a sense of community and collective effort, these projects can help to build resilience and solidarity in the face of trauma.

Trauma can often drive innovation in art, pushing artists to explore new forms, techniques, and concepts. The need to find new ways of representing and processing traumatic experiences can lead to ground-breaking artistic developments. This relationship between trauma and innovation highlights the potential for art to serve as a powerful force for change and transformation.

Representing trauma in art involves a range of ethical considerations. Artists must navigate the challenges of portraying traumatic experiences with sensitivity and respect, avoiding exploitation or sensationalism. This ethical responsibility extends to the ways in which art is presented and consumed, ensuring that the work fosters understanding and empathy rather than reinforcing harmful stereotypes or triggering further distress.

Art institutions, such as galleries, museums, and cultural organizations, play a crucial role in supporting artists dealing with trauma. These institutions can provide resources, platforms, and opportunities for artists to share their work and engage with audiences. By creating an environment that values and supports artistic exploration of trauma, art institutions can contribute to the broader cultural understanding and healing process. Artistic movements throughout history have often been shaped by the traumas of their time. The responses to events such as wars, social upheavals, and personal losses have led to the emergence of new styles, techniques, and philosophies in art. By examining the evolution of artistic movements in relation to trauma, we can gain insights into how artists have navigated and responded to the challenges of their eras.

Technology has opened up new possibilities for contemporary artistic responses to trauma. Digital art, virtual reality, and interactive installations allow artists to create immersive and engaging experiences that can convey the complexity of trauma in innovative ways. These technological advancements also provide new platforms for artists to reach wider audiences and foster global conversations about trauma and healing. Virtual reality and immersive media have recently been explored as powerful tools for trauma representation, enabling audiences to witness and recontextualize affective experience in digitally embodied ways (Tsai, 2020).

The intersection of trauma and identity is a significant theme in contemporary art. Artists often explore how traumatic experiences intersect with aspects of their identity, such as race, gender, sexuality, and cultural background. By examining these intersections, artists can reveal the ways in which trauma shapes and is shaped by their identity, offering a nuanced and multifaceted perspective on their experiences.

Narrative plays a crucial role in artistic representations of trauma. Through storytelling, artists can structure and make sense of their traumatic experiences, creating a coherent and meaningful narrative that can be shared with others. This narrative process allows for the integration of fragmented memories and emotions, providing a framework for understanding and healing. The narrative turn in trauma studies highlights how storytelling can help heal by rebuilding a broken sense of self and creating dialogue and connection (Whitehead, 2022).

## Conclusion

The exploration of trauma, symbolization, and the origins of neurosis in the work of Freud and Lacan provides profound insights into the human condition, examining the ways in which individuals and societies navigate the complex interplay of desire, repression, and trauma, we gain a deeper understanding of the fundamental structures that shape our experience.

Freud's and Lacan's theories offer a rich framework for exploring the intersections between personal and collective trauma, the role of language and representation in shaping our understanding of the world, and the ways in which art and cultural production can serve as responses to the fundamental disjunctions of existence. As we continue to engage with and build upon their work, we deepen our understanding of the human mind and its capacity for transformation and healing.

Freud laid the foundations of trauma theory by showing how memory, repression, and desire organize the subjective field. His notion of *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action) highlights how trauma is not a punctual event, but is retroactively constructed within a network of signifiers (Freud, 1918). Lacan radicalizes the concept of trauma by locating it within the structure of the signifier: trauma is not the event itself, but the Real, that which cannot be symbolized (Lacan, 1966).

The neurotic subject emerges precisely at the juncture between the symbolic and the traumatic, a failure of integration that marks the limits of meaning. This boundary is where symptoms emerge, not merely as signs of past wounds, but as creative responses to a lack in the symbolic order. In this sense, Lacan's *sinthome* represents not the erasure of the symptom, but its transformation into a singular and stabilizing mode of being (Lacan, 1975). As Žižek (2020) notes, the symptom becomes the site where truth insists, irreducible to conscious narrative, yet bearing the force of subjective constitution.

Recent clinical studies have reaffirmed the centrality of this symbolic-Real dialectic. Contemporary authors such as Leader (2022) and Gherovici (2021) underscore how current clinical structures, borderline states, trauma-spectrum disorders, and psychosomatic syndromes, reflect both a structural impossibility and a breakdown in cultural symbolic mediation. The weakening of the paternal metaphor, the failure of signification, and the liquefaction of symbolic coordinates (as Bauman would put it) produce new traumatic formations that cannot be approached solely through classical therapeutic models.

Language, in both Freud and Lacan, is not merely a vehicle of expression, but the very site where subjectivity is formed and disrupted. Trauma is, in this light, a semiotic event: it occurs at the limits of what can be said. This makes psychoanalysis fundamentally a work of listening and speaking, of staging and reconfiguring the subject's relationship to the Other's demand and to their own unconscious desire. This is particularly evident in the clinic of war trauma and political violence, where the return of the real bypasses speech and returns as affect or fragmented memory (Caruth, 1996; Belau, 2023).

Moreover, symbolization itself is not simply a process of translation or representation, it is often a creative and contingent act that reconfigures the subject's relation to loss. For both Freud and Lacan, the act of symbolization always implies the prior existence of a lack. The subject comes into being in the place of this lack, and trauma, far from being a foreign intrusion, is internal to the very conditions of subjectivity. Contemporary theory has expanded on this by connecting it to the role of the body, affect regulation, and the politics of naming (Frosh, 2023b).

Psychoanalysis thus offers a model for cultural critique as well. Trauma is not only individual but historical, not only personal but political. Collective traumas - wars, colonization, migration-leave traces that persist in discourses, myths, and cultural production. Lacanian theory allows us to conceptualize these not just as shared memories, but as discursive voids around which identity is built. Art, literature, and film often function as sinthomatic responses: singular attempts to stabilize or frame what otherwise threatens to unravel the social bond.

This also situates the analyst or theorist as a kind of reader: one who interprets symptoms, narratives, and cultural productions as text, as failed symbolizations, as gaps in the chain of meaning that invite not closure but traversal. The ethical implication of this is profound. It is not the task of the analyst to restore wholeness, but to accompany the subject in their singular articulation of lack, to support the construction of a voice where once there was only silence or suffering.

In our present moment, marked by both global crises and the proliferation of identities and discourses, the Freud-Lacanian tradition remains a critical resource. It reminds us that trauma is not only what tears us apart, but also what obliges us to speak. And in speaking, to reconfigure what it means to be a subject, not whole, but divided; not resolved, but in motion. Between Freud's tragic clarity and Lacan's structural invention, we find not resolution but a path: a praxis of listening, of symbolizing, of sustaining the Real of existence.

#### Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

Stella, L. (corresponding author) coordinated the overall conception, supervised the development of the theoretical framework, and took primary responsibility for drafting and finalizing the manuscript. He also led the formal analysis and ensured consistency throughout the editing process. Cuzzocrea, A. collaborated in the initial conceptualization of the study and significantly contributed to the first drafting of the manuscript, particularly in the articulation of the psychoanalytic theoretical sections. Gualtieri, S., Ripepie, A., Forestieri, F. Megale, A. participated in the collection of bibliographic material, in the refinement of the methodological approach and supported the analytical interpretation of the data in collaboration with Rotella, A., Toscano, C., and Romeo, G. provided visual and structural support to the manuscript, reviewed and edited the manuscript, validated the scientific coherence of the theoretical model and contributed to the improvement of the final version of the text. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript, and agree with the contribution description as presented here.

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#### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

#### Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Access to the data is subject to ethical and confidentiality considerations related to the participants and is therefore not publicly available.

#### Ethical Approval Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with internationally accepted ethical standards for research involving human participants. All participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and provided informed consent prior to participation. Participation was voluntary, and strict measures were implemented to ensure anonymity, confidentiality, and data protection.

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