

Why is trauma urgent?¹

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In announcing the conference theme, ***iUrgent!***, B. Seynhaeve states that ‘that which is urgent can be approached from different angles. It can be looked at from the angle of trauma’.³

Trauma indicates a breach, which can be seen by uncontained energy. E. Laurent⁴ describes it as structural and occurring at two levels. Initially, the breach is caused by a failure of neurotic repetition, the defences, or the excitation-proof shield. Freud⁵ proposes that the breach is covered or filled up with an invention based on a relation to the mother. So, the breach is filled and a repetition is put in place (see the ‘fort-da’ game⁶) where there is no invention, the breach is not filled. Lacan called this a ‘troumatisme’⁷.

The second level where trauma exists is where language is imposed. E. Laurent⁸ notes that Lacan underlines a sudden cut-off point produced by the coupling between language and living beings, a trauma for the human species. On the fringes of the language system, a number of clinical phenomena are produced which fall within the category of the real, a real that is specific to each speaking being. These phenomena, trauma, hallucination, and the experience of “perverse” jouissance, stand at once on the edge of this system and at its heart (so in two places). They stem from a topology that is more complex than a mere inside and outside. Neurotics too experience moments of anxiety that give them some idea of these phenomena.

So, the link to urgency occurs when there is a failure of mechanisms to come into place, usually in childhood, and when language fails at the fringes or centre of its system. This is schematized by J-A. Miller⁹:

- 1) Language as symbolic surrounded by the real. This is the symbolic present inside the real. If the real is totally separated from sense, then a ‘troumatisme’ emerges.
- 2) Language as symbolic with a hole in it. The subject speaks the truth from within the system of language, but it is a truth which covers up or has no hole in it. When the system is breached, then anguish or dread ensues.

Treatments differ for the two levels of trauma. An example which may give glimpses of both levels and is defined in everyday language and the DSM as traumatic - the 2017 fire in Grenfell Towers, a block of flats, in London. Instead of evacuating the flats, tenants were ordered to stay put and consequently many died.

1. Developed in a NLS Cartel ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ & ‘Trauma’.

2. Member of the London Society

3. <http://www.amp-nls.org/page/gb/49/nls-messenger/o/2017-2018/3314>

4. Laurent, E., Trauma in Reverse : http://sfile-pull.f-static.com/image/users/576746/ftp/my_files/trauma%20in%20Reverse%20Laurent.pdf?id=29168137

5. Freud, S., 1926, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, SE, vol. XX, p. 170

6. Freud, S., *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, SE vol. 2, pp. 14–17

7. Lacan, J., Seminar XXI – *Les non-dupes errent* : 19.02.1974 www.LacaniIreland.com

8. Laurent, E., *Lost in Cognition*, translated by A.R. Price, London, Karnac, 2014, p 99.

9. Miller, J-A., *The Seminar of Barcelona Part 2*, Psychoanalytical Notebooks Issue 1. 1998, p. 63.

<http://londonsociety-nls.org.uk/LibraryLS/Texts-from-the-the-PN/The-Seminar-of-Barcelona-Part-2.pdf>

In her evidence to the enquiry¹⁰, London's fire brigade commissioner, D. Cotton, stated that fire was as unexpected as 'a space shuttle landing on the Shard'. During the fire Cotton as monitoring officer provided support, guidance and reassurance to the incident commander. She did not take command herself because she was satisfied with the fire-fighting plan.

Cotton said she had felt she was not fully doing her job as monitoring officer, particularly when, as the night progressed, she found herself comforting fire fighters. "I've never seen a situation on the fire ground where fire fighters were openly crying and distressed," she said. In a statement she gave to a police investigation, Cotton said: "I have had issues with my memory, which I believe is linked to the traumatic nature and sheer scale of the incident. I'm still finding it very difficult to look at visual images and have conversations about Grenfell".

I suggest, as a tentative hypothesis, that the fire fighters suffered a breach at level 2. Their symbolic system suffered a hole in its middle. The Grenfell fire was incomprehensible. Anguish, as noted by Cotton, was produced.

For D. Cotton, the breach was at level 1. Language was separated from sense and a '*troumatisme*' occurred, she has issues with memory. So even though the trauma was common, each subject's reaction was different.

10. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/sep/27/london-fire-brigade-chief-denies-she-should-have-expected-grenfell-dany-cotton>