

ON THE EVERYDAYNESS OF TRAUMA

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When I was a young man, still filled with youthful indignation and unflappable bravado, I crossed an ocean to a land far away where I took up arms on behalf of my countrymen, and helped fight a seemingly never-ending war. This introduction is not the story of that war, but an acknowledgement of failure, of trauma, and the effects each of those phenomena can have on the psyche of a young man. You see, I was a forward observer: I was trained in the art of battlefield destruction; I had, at my beck and call, the most prolific assortment of firepower known to man, and I was happy to use those weapons when and if the situation demanded it. Death and destruction . . . it's funny how quickly we become comfortable with such realities. And for two deployments, those realities are what I specialized in. I *was* a "King of Battle."<sup>1</sup> But then, about three quarters of the way through my final deployment something happened. A close friend—let's call him "C"—overdosed on heroin while sleeping in his rack, on our forward operating base in between missions, where no real danger loomed besides the now apparent danger we posed to ourselves. The problem was, I *knew* C had a history of drug use, and what's worse I *knew* he was using to a greater or lesser extent, and I did nothing to prevent it. "C" died on the 24th of that September, and two weeks later he was buried. I felt like I was buried right along with him, and maybe I should have been. Maybe I still should be for writing this text. After all, by articulating the situation textually, there stands the risk of devaluing the matter at hand. This concern is only compounded by the fact that I'm not confident in my right to invoke such an occurrence when the effects of my failures and losses pale in comparison to the loss experienced by his family. Still, I must press on.

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<sup>1</sup> For those unaware, "King of Battle" is a nickname for field artillery (13-series) soldiers in the Army, referencing the game of chess to describe its importance on the battlefield. Consequently, the infantry (11-series) is referred to as the "Queen of Battle" for its power and mobility.

The next five years were nightmarish for me. In retrospect, I did what any "self-respecting" idiot would do, namely, I punished myself and everyone around me, not only by detaching myself from my family and loved ones, but also through a variety of debaucherous acts, most prolifically a period of intense drug use. Situations such as these are not uncommon; similar observations are made by Shaili Jain in her manifold description of patient "Josh" in the prologue of *The Unspeakable Mind*.<sup>2</sup> At this point it bears stating that I am deeply appreciative of Jain's investigation into post-traumatic stress, particularly her treatment of a veteran community that all too often is either handled with a sense of clinical sterility that borders on inhumanity, or that of pandering condescension, which, as anybody who knows a veteran will attest to, is not taken kindly to by those who have served. However, what strikes me most about Jain's text, and what typically strikes me about any text that looks at particular phenomena, is the lack of analysis of how trauma manifests in what Heidegger would refer to as *average everydayness*. For me, the everyday experience of my self-imposed trauma is not found in instances where I hold my breath driving through underpasses for fear of being Molotov cocktailed, although situations like those did, and continue to occur from time to time. Events such as those are what I refer to as *ideal manifestations of trauma*. Instead—for me—the everydayness of my trauma manifests in the literal inability to recognize myself in the mirror for years after C's death. In this essay I interrogate average everyday manifestations and ideal manifestations of trauma using a comparative lens. By doing so, and by examining my own process of engagement after such experiences, I hope to develop the discussion surrounding post-traumatic stress in such a way that more nuanced methodologies of healing can be illuminated.

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<sup>2</sup> Shaili Jain, *The Unspeakable Mind: Stories of Trauma and Healing from the Front Lines of PTSD Science* (New York: NY: Harper Collins, 2019), xii-xvi.

So, what precisely does it mean when one refers to average everydayness? The term seems so self-evident, one might be inclined to argue, that it hardly warrants a discussion at all, but it is precisely that self-evidence that calls for a deeper understanding. If we do not understand why a given phenomenon *is* as it obviously *is*, or to speak more precisely what *ground* the phenomenon rests upon, then any further investigation into the matter will be little more than speculation, and in a matter as important as *everyday trauma* such speculation would be simply unacceptable. That said, the definition proffered by Heidegger for average everydayness<sup>3</sup> is the Dasein's "Being-in-the world which is falling and disclosed, thrown and projecting, and for which its ownmost potentiality-for-Being is an issue, both in its Being alongside the 'world' and in its Being-with-Others."<sup>4</sup> In fallenness Dasein "covers over" or conceals world understanding, whereas in disclosedness Dasein unconceals such understanding, and each modality always implies the other. So, where a particular matter is unconcealed, there is also always concealment, and vice versa. Similarly, to be thrown is to be made subject to the factual conditions of one's situatedness, whereas Dasein's projection is the relation of its self toward a given phenomenon as it pertains to Dasein's possibilities. Dasein is always thrown and projected simultaneously. The

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<sup>3</sup> Dasein literally translates to "there-being," and for Heidegger indicates the existential condition [*eksistenz* or *eksistence* depending on the text] of a being for whom Being is a concern i.e. human Being. While there is hardly time to fully expound upon the intricacies of this term at this time, for this particular article it should be understood that when Dasein is referred to it is to be taken as a qualitative descriptor for a human being. For future reference regarding the contents of this essay, Heidegger, in *Letter on "Humanism"* (page 247, see bibliography) specifically refers to *eksistenz* as the "standing in the clearing of Being" that allows the manifest world to occur as such to an individual human in the first place.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2008), 226/H. 181.

It should be noted that in order to proceed in some reasonable fashion it was necessary for me to summarize Heidegger's much longer, and disparate discussions about matters of everydayness. For a more complete exploration of the matter it would do one well to peruse Part One of *Being and Time*.

issue of Dasein's ownmost potentiality-for-Being is a description of an individual's latent understanding of their specific, impending death, which will be discussed later. Lastly, the concepts of Being alongside the "world," and Being-with-others [*mitdasein*] describe the understanding that the Dasein is never in a position where it is not enmeshed in a world of relationships, whether those relationships be other people, or experiential things. While loosely describing these terms is important from a conceptual standpoint, what should be considered crucial in this instance is that each notion occurs simultaneously amongst the others in most instances. In short, these concomitant "states" describe the quintessential way Dasein *is* in its day-to-day existence, and it is precisely this quintessentiality that differentiates matters of everydayness—in this particular instance, trauma—from matters of ideality.

What, then, do I mean by *ideal* when referring to ideal manifestations of trauma? Most contemporary definitions of the word indicate that such a matter would be the most "perfect, or . . . best possible"<sup>5</sup> version of a particular thing or phenomenon, and while such definitions have certain utility regarding the matter at hand, they are wholly underwhelming in comparison to the word's etymological root, that being that which "[pertains] to an archetype or model."<sup>6</sup> Here it would be unsatisfactory to understand of archetype as a mere pattern from whence other phenomenal manifestations occur, although that certainly does occur. Instead the most proper positive understanding of what an archetype is, or more importantly *does*, says Jung, is act as a

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<sup>5</sup> "Ideal," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed September 12, 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/ideal>.

<sup>6</sup> "Ideal," Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed September 12, 2020, [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/chicago\\_manual\\_17th\\_edition/cmos\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/web\\_sources.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/chicago_manual_17th_edition/cmos_formatting_and_style_guide/web_sources.html).

focal point around which psychological *complexes* form.<sup>7</sup> Jung further notes that "active complexes put us momentarily under a state of duress, or compulsive thinking and acting for which under certain conditions the only appropriate term would be the judicial concept of diminished responsibility,"<sup>8</sup> and, "depending on its energy charge . . . may appear either as a mere disturbance of conscious activities or as a superordinate authority which can harness the ego to its purpose."<sup>9</sup> As I will soon demonstrate, this gestalt understanding accords with ideal manifestations of trauma as experienced by veterans, and ostensibly other PTSD survivors.

All that said, what do examples of ideal and everyday manifestations of trauma look like? Imagine, if you will, driving down a street you've driven down countless times before. It's a cool spring morning, and the sun shines intermittently through the billowy clouds. Monster Magnet's "Mindless Ones" is playing on the car stereo. You *love* this song. Too few rock-and-roll bands have the nerve to be so unrepentantly nerdy that they'd mention Dr. Strange's Dormammu in their lyrics. As you crest the ridge of the hill by the conservatory in the town you've lived in for the past twenty years, the shadow of the old train trestle appears in the valley below. An unexpected wave of terror washes over you. The music fades into oblivion, and you recognize the faint smell of biodiesel. All you can see is the trestle; all you can feel is the urge to reach behind you to locate your teammate's carbine. It's standard operating procedure for "gunners" to keep an M4 with them at all times so they can clear an impending obstacle before the convoy can continue. Regardless of the fact that there have been relatively few such attacks during the war

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<sup>7</sup> C.G. Jung, "Recent Thoughts on Schizophrenia," in *Psychogenesis of Mental Disease*, trans. Gerhard Adler and R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 254.

<sup>8</sup> C.G. Jung, *Structure & Dynamics of the Psyche*, trans. Gerhard Adler and R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 96.

<sup>9</sup> C.G. Jung, *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 75.

on terrorism—if any at all—being molotoved is a popular concern among those who spend their days (and nights) sitting in the cupula. Not being able to feel the buttstock of the rifle sends a shiver down your spine. By the time you turn around completely to check to see where it had fallen too, the horn from a car behind you startles you back into reality. You've stopped in the middle of the road. Embarrassed, you speed off in your beat-up, old mustang . . . but you still hold your breath as you drive beneath the overpass.

Fast forward a few weeks: it's now early summer, and the window of your sparsely furnished apartment on the south side of town is open, allowing a sickly, pre-storm wind to waft in through the wire mesh. It's just barely cool enough to make it so you don't decide against getting up, and installing the brand-new Frigidaire air conditioner you'd purchased days earlier. As per your norm, you fall asleep clutching the raggedy pillow you've had for the last gods-know-how-long in a way that resembles a full-nelson headlock. Anything newer; anything softer would be entirely too much for you to be comfortable.<sup>10</sup> You fall asleep with ease, though the peace is short-lived. You don't remember the dream that jolts you back into consciousness, but it does just that; you wake up as if somebody put hot coals down your shirt, with a gasp. A few meager drops of sweat roll down your brow, and you become keenly aware of the increased moisture surrounding your body. But it's nothing like the movies. You're not *sopping* wet, nor are you pouting uncontrollably. You simply know that *something* was wrong . . . no something *is* wrong in that other world you go to when you fall into sleep, and it feels like it's beginning to creep into this world, the one you supposedly now safely inhabit.<sup>11</sup> After throwing your legs over

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<sup>10</sup> Anybody who has spent any amount of time in a combat unit will understand this sentiment.

<sup>11</sup> see Medard Boss, *The Analysis of Dreams*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans (London, UK: Rider, 1957).

the side of the bed, you shamle across the room, down the hall, and into the bathroom to take a drink of water, and splash your face. You do so uneventfully. However, upon looking up at the mirror, a strange, and horrifying thing occurs. You *see* the person in the mirror; you *see* the water running down his face. It makes the person staring back at you look like a splashed watercolor painting, the streaks of water distorting his angled cheekbones ever so slightly. Beyond that there's absolutely nothing about the person you are looking at that you can recognize; no distinguishing characteristic that helps you to recall any memory, any history of who he is, and how he relates to you. It's as if you've never seen this person before in your life. All you can do, after staring in disbelief for what seems like an eternity, is assure yourself that you are in fact alone in your apartment, after which you glance back at the mirror one more time, turn off the light, and return to bed. This phenomenon continues to occur, although in decreasing interval over the years, up to and through the present with little explanation as to why.<sup>12</sup>

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While I do not have the luxury of exploring Boss' Daseinanalytic method of dream analysis here, it is an interesting set of ideas to keep because of the way he integrates the Heideggerian understanding of "world" into a psychotherapeutic framework. For Boss, dreaming and the un-conscious are no less "real" than the conscious world, and as such need to be examined in an almost phenomenological way, as opposed to the hyper symbolic approach used by theorists like Freud, and Jung.

<sup>12</sup> see Eugene Mayer and Bruno Rossion, "Prosopagnosia," in *The Behavior and Cognitive Neurology of Stroke*, eds. Oliver Godefroy and Julian Bogousslavsky (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 315-334, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511544880.017.

see Joel Patchitt and Sukhi S. Shergill, "Understanding Misidentification Syndromes Using the Integrative Memory Model," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 42, no. 295 (2019). doi:10.1017/S0140525X19001961.

see "Dissociative Disorders," National Alliance on Mental Illness, accessed September 13, 2020, <https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Mental-Health-Conditions/Dissociative-Disorders>.

This story is in no way hyperbolic. Unfortunately, I cannot think of a better way to describe the circumstance than as I have done here, although it is my intent to continue revisiting this issue throughout the length of my career. That said, the first time this kind of situation presented itself to me, I panicked, as one might expect, and began researching the phenomenon.



These examples constitute a particular manifestation of trauma, the former being an ideal manifestation whereas the latter is an everyday manifestation. Admittedly, there are reasonable arguments to be made that what I perceive to be an everyday manifestation of trauma might have nothing to do with my overseas experiences at all . . . and there is merit to that line of thinking, especially when one considers alternative explanations for the phenomenon such as physiological damage to the brain, or schizophrenia, which does, in fact, occur in my family (see Footnote 11). However, given that neither phenomenon occurred prior to the death of C, and that both types of event typically occur within a reasonable timeframe of one another (although the latter occurs much more frequently than the former), I feel I have sufficient reason to believe that the two issues are entangled. That I have progressed in my own mental stability over the course of the last eight years, and that the rate of incidence of both forms of traumatic recollection have decreased precipitously since dealing with them as described only serves to strengthen this belief. Having said that, we can now ask the question: how are these two manifest forms of trauma different from one another? In order to answer this question it becomes necessary to first examine how they are the same.

The first thing that announces itself is that observation that in both instances I was engaging in a generally mundane activity, in the first instance, driving over a hill toward a train trestle that I have driven past and still drive past on nearly a daily basis; in the second instance I

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As best as I can tell there are three psychocognitive possibilities as to why this would occur: the first is prosopagnosia, otherwise known as "face blindness," although this seems unlikely since it is commonly linked with physiological damage of the brain. The second, and a more plausible explanation would be a misidentification disorder such as Capgras Syndrome, although that typically manifests in schizophrenics. The last, and most likely cause, as best as I can tell, would be a dissociative disorder such as "derealization" as described by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, which typically occur in relation to a traumatic event such as those experienced during military service.

was simply attempting to go to sleep. This observation itself is not nearly as important as the more subtle issue that in both instances I was in a relatively ambivalent mood, or as Heidegger might describe it, my *attunement* was one of ambivalence. What does this mean, to be attuned? For Heidegger attunement refers to a state-of-mind, that aspect of a thrown being's openness to the world that allows things to manifest or be encountered "in-the-world." By being attuned in such a way, things relative to that attunement make themselves known or are brought forth toward our Dasein.<sup>13</sup> A simplistic understanding of this would be to consider the slightly exaggerated case of being-hungry. When hungry the world around you arrays itself so that those things relevant to your hunger manifest more readily than other things; that box of cold pizza in the fridge calls to you, and in it this way it is distantly "nearer" to you than other things in the room, for instance, a fly that has been annoying you all afternoon. It is not that you are ignoring the fly; to the contrary, by being-hungry the fly ceases to be, however momentarily. In the cases above, the relatively ambivalent attunement described means that I was simply attempting to exist within the mood of that given moment, be it enjoyment of the music while not crashing the car (a distinct difference from actively driving), or physically orienting myself so that I could fall asleep.

The only other substantiative similarity is that both situations (in fact all "situations") are hallmarked by a cathecting event. In the case of the springtime drive it is the sight of the trestle after cresting the hill, and in the case of the summertime night it is reasonable to suspect it was the dream that startled me back into consciousness. Interestingly, the Event [*Ereignis*] is a particular point of concern for Heidegger: for him it is not a simple matter of occurrence but "the

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2008), 176/H. 137.

temporal-spatial simultaneity for [Being] and beings."<sup>14</sup> So, when Heidegger discusses the Event, he is describing the disclosure of an instance of meaningful appropriation. In effect, the Dasein becomes bound up or grounded in the Event, and it is the grounding of Dasein by Being in Being that is needed in order for Being, and the essential occurrence of the Truth to unfold.<sup>15,16</sup> A simpler description of the unfolding of Truth is given to us by Michael Wheeler, who characterizes it as "the normal sense-making that follows a paradigm-shift," and while I feel as though this description would be dangerously simplistic for an extended discussion of the Event, for the purposes of this essay it will have to suffice.<sup>17</sup>

As best as I can tell the "minor" differences separating the described instances of trauma can be reduced to one significant difference—the potentiality for the radical alterity of "world"—that affects the individual (namely, me) differently *during* the event itself. Here I understand the world as "the *manifestness of beings as such as a whole*,"<sup>18</sup> the "place" of the Dasein's relational possibilities; where attunements, the factual conditions of human existence, the human Dasein's temporal nature, and most prolifically the disclosing power of language and discourse [*λόγος*] all factor into the unconcealing and concealing of meaning in respect to the essence of beings. If we

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Indiana, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), EPUB, H. 13, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=e089mna&AN=462798&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

<sup>15</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions*, H. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions*, H. 141.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Wheeler, "Martin Heidegger," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford, 2011, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heidegger/>.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, trans. by William McNeil and Nicholas Walker (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 284/§68.

assume the Oxford's definition of *alterity* as "the state of being other or different"<sup>19</sup> to be accurate (or at least sufficient), then the radical or complete alterity of one's world would be tantamount to the dissolution of reality as such within the temporality of the moment, although this should not be understood as saying the world itself would be rendered *indeterminate*. Such dissolution is only present in the case of the ideal. I am, for lack of better words, "far away" from the present moment; my "there-being" [*da-sein*] is no longer on the hill of my Pennsylvania hometown—either perceivably or temporally—but somewhere outside of Kabul's Jalalabad Road in Afghanistan. I do not hear Monster Magnet on my radio, but the sound (and smell) of traffic as we return to our forward operating base from having depot level maintenance performed on our vehicles. I no longer drive my mustang, but search frantically for a rifle so that I can clear the approaching overpass.<sup>20</sup> I am attuned in such a way that these things are revealed to me. In juxtaposition, no such alterity occurs during the everyday manifestation of trauma. I *am*, for all intents and purposes, precisely in the place I was prior to falling asleep, albeit mildly unsettled and noticeably sodden in a comparative sense. In fact, the only thing that is "othered" in the more mundane experience is the "I." "I" *am* seemingly no longer present in the world as it stands.

Understanding this experiential difference, not just in terms of severity but as a root to the fundamental essence of my psychopathological state, was and continues to be an integral step in my personal movement toward recovery. But such an awareness did not simply appear overnight, nor did the mode of thinking that gave way to it. Here I am tempted to invoke

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<sup>19</sup> "Alterity," Oxford English Dictionary, accessed September 14, 2020, <https://www.oed.com/oed2/00006546;jsessionid=8F255831E7A9978C468BC11B338F90A1>.

<sup>20</sup> This might seem highly specific for what is basically a vivid recollection of a memory. With that in mind, it should be noted that these occurrences happened most frequently moving away from civic centers such as Kabul because places such as those are where such overpasses tended to be.

Heidegger's notion of *tautological thinking*<sup>21</sup> to describe my coping methodology, but the problem with that is that at that particular moment in time, when both instances of traumatic recollection were occurring most frequently, I was totally unaware of Heidegger's philosophy. In fact, by that point I had temporarily left school, and was actively in the depths of a heavy drug binge, the likes of which I will not describe any further in this essay. Direction in regard to this issue would not occur until roughly two years later, after I had met my now wife, and returned to West Chester University. By that point I was a year "clean," and as anybody who has ever come off of drugs can attest to, I began to put on weight. Instead of allowing the issue to further depress me—because one is always depressed to a degree in such circumstances—I decided to get back into shape, and thus began going to the gym. Inspiration, it seems, comes from the most unlikely of sources. One day, while running one day a strange, an intense video was randomly selected by *YouTube* for me to listen to as I coughed and wheezed my way around the indoor track at our gym. It was—oddly enough—the Ultimate Warrior reciting the entire first chapter of Orison Swett Mardon's seminal work, *An Iron Will*. Despite the profundity of the entire text, one comment made in reference to a quote from Henry Ward Beecher impressed itself upon me in a way that few others to this date have: "One of the secrets to a successful life is to be able to hold all of our energies upon one point, to focus all of the scattered rays of the mind upon one place or thing."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols—Conversations—Letters*, trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay, ed. Medard Boss (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 25 (see footnote).

<sup>22</sup> Orison Swett Marden, *An Iron Will*, <http://www.brainybetty.com/2007Motivation/Orison%20Swett%20Marden%20-%20An%20Iron%20Will.pdf>.

It should be noted that, while I have a physical copy of this text to cite, I chose to include a digital version since I thought it might be of some use to certain readers.

What does it mean to "focus . . . the scattered rays of the mind upon one . . . thing?" It occurred to me that I had never really considered the matter of thinking about any particular thing in such a consequential way. Thinking was just something I *did*; something I took for granted. In the same way, I assumed "my condition" was just the way things were, and that that was the end of the story. However, Marden's quote gave me pause for concern over such apathy. To scatter can be taken as moving something far apart in many directions, or "to cover a surface with things that are . . . in no particular arrangement."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it would be reasonable to suggest that being-scattered is to be disorganized, disoriented, or, to speak colloquially, to "be messed up," a good assessment of my psychological state at the time. To focus is to direct or give one's attention to a thing; to make clear,<sup>24</sup> or more prolifically, bring into clearness. Here it is important to consider that such thinking, while useful to a degree, might not be nearly as important for understanding instances ideal manifestations of trauma. Even in my uneducated state it seemed obvious to me that such instances were prompted by the revival of lived experiences, a line of thought that accords with the results of studies conducted by theorists like

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<sup>23</sup> "Scatter," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed September 16, 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/scatter>.

<sup>24</sup> "Focus," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed September 16, 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/focus>.

Linda Levine,<sup>25</sup> Laney et al.,<sup>26</sup> and Kathy Pezdek.<sup>27</sup> However, as it pertains to everyday manifestations of trauma, the idea of focusing one's mental energy on the phenomenon in question; to not accept it as simply given but to interrogate its meaning became the weapon I would use to fight the battle with my mind.

So, what does such focused thinking look like? How does it occur? Models such as The most typical response to that question, and the form of healing I have encountered most frequently during my many hours of therapy (both voluntary, and involuntary) accords with Jain's description of *Psychological First Aid*, namely that those seeking to aid the psychologically traumatized ought to [protect] survivors from further harm; [reassure] them that the trauma is over; connect them with family and friends, and other essential resources; and [give] them the opportunity to talk to a compassionate listener who is trained to respect their dignity, culture, and capacity."<sup>28</sup> On the surface this approach seems perfectly reasonable, and shares similar concerns with more commonly known psychotherapeutic methodologies such as Viktor Frankl's *logotherapy*, and Carl Rogers *humanistic* model. However, the realization that I came to—the understanding so many of my brothers have come to—is that the most proper way to deal with trauma is not to push through it as if one were on a straight line, but "turning into"

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<sup>25</sup> see Linda J. Levine, "Reconstructing Memory from Emotions," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 126, no. 2 (1997): 165-177, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0096-3445.126.2.165>.

<sup>26</sup> see Laney et al., "Memory for Thematically Arousing Events," *Memory & Cognition* 32, no. 7 (2004): 1149-1159, <https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03196888>.

<sup>27</sup> see Kathy Pezdek, "Event Memory and Autobiographical Memory for the Events of September 11, 2001," *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 17 (2003): 1033-1045, doi:10.1002/acp.984.

<sup>28</sup> Shaili Jain, *The Unspeakable Mind: Stories of Trauma and Healing from the Front Lines of PTSD Science* (New York: NY: Harper Collins, 2019), 245.

the trauma, skirting it if you will, and always keeping it in sight. Why would anybody *want* to do such a thing? Jung had this notion about the *circumambulation*: "There is no linear evolution," he stated. "Uniform development exists, at most, only at the beginning; later everything points toward the center."<sup>29</sup> Heidegger expressed a similar idea in his description of the necessity of resoluteness (i.e. being-authentic) when engaging with "the possibility of the absolute impossibility of [Being] i.e. death."<sup>30</sup> The importance of this circumambulatory movement "around" the trauma is essentially hermeneutic: each moment spent observing the phenomenon in question is another opportunity to interpret the phenomenon, and each new interpretation brings about new opportunities to interpret and possibilities to understanding *ad infinitum*. Of central importance, says Gadamer, is the effect this process has on the Self: "Self-understanding always occurs through understanding something other than the [S]elf, and includes the unity and integrity of the other."<sup>31</sup> What this means is that through continued interpretation of my trauma, I not only come to understand the trauma, but I also come to a better understanding of my Self.

We are now ready to return to the original question of this investigation: how should we understand the essence of everyday manifestations of trauma, in this instance, the derealization of my Self in the mirror of my apartment bathroom after an undefined nightmare? What precisely is it to *see* one's Self—or anybody for that matter—in the first place? It is not self-

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<sup>29</sup> C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York, NY: Vintage, 1989), 197.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2008), p. 294/¶ 250.

<sup>31</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2013), 87.



evident, when I say I see my wife, that I am simply referencing another carbon-based lifeform of the same variety as me who I am legally obliged to "be with" that happens to reside in the same living-structure. That would amount to little more than the capacity for vision. But if we grasp "to see" at its roots—to see meaning to behold or experience<sup>32</sup>—then a better picture of what it is "to see" comes into focus: by seeing a given thing we hold it in a certain regard; we consider it in a particular way. When I see my wife, not only do I perceive her physically, I recognize what she means to me, both as an individual and in the context of my world; not just in the immediate sense, but simultaneously in the totality of her historical and potential being as she "manifests." That is why, when you are sufficiently invested in a relationship with a significant other, and realize that that person has been unfaithful for years, your ontological structure crumbles. The determinate nature of your world; your "knowledge" of the relationship as it occurred in the past and its possibilities for the future as well as any relationship connected to it falls apart like so many *Jenga* pieces.<sup>33</sup> It is not simply that there is one facet of your significant other that you understood in an insufficient manner—the whole of their being as it pertains to you is thrown into question.

With that in mind, the question about whether one can ever really know one's Self is a question that has been a topic of discussion for some time now: Freud made the issue popular in his description of the ego and the id as being "like a man on horseback who has to hold in check

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<sup>32</sup> "See," Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed September 16, 2020, [https://www.etymonline.com/word/see#etymonline\\_v\\_23104](https://www.etymonline.com/word/see#etymonline_v_23104).

<sup>33</sup> see Ryan Wasser, "The Ontological Significance of Foundherentism" (unpublished manuscript, September 12, 2020), <https://philpapers.org/rec/WASTOS-2>.

the superior strength of the horse."<sup>34</sup> Jung makes similar, albeit more nuanced observations about unconscious structures in *The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*,<sup>35</sup> and as recently as 2013 theorists such as Jonathan Haidt have alluded to the fundamental unknowability of the Self as it resides within a political framework.<sup>36</sup> The point is that we never really know our Self as much as we would like to think we do, and it is precisely that "like we think we do" that gets us into trouble. In the previous example of the unfaithful spouse, it never occurs to the individual in question that that person they have built their life with could possibly comport themselves in such a way, that they were capable of such deception. It is important here to recognize the profundity of a statement made by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes . . . but right through every human being—and through all human hearts."<sup>37</sup> What makes this declaration so vital is the way it takes the onus of unethicity, and places it squarely on the shoulders of each individual: if my wife is capable of doing such things, then so am I. Unfortunately, too few people consider this possibility, instead preferring to moral grandstand out of righteous indignation.

The fact of the matter is that I failed to understand that truism just as much as anybody, especially in my younger years. I enlisted in the military, and deployed to the Middle East with a

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<sup>34</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, ed. Ernest Jones, trans. Joan Riviere (London, UK: Hogarth Press, 1926), 30, <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.218607/page/n31/mode/2up>.

<sup>35</sup> see C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).

<sup>36</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2013), 66. Haidt's model references what he calls "The Elephant and the Rider," which has a distinctly Freudian ring to it.

<sup>37</sup> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney and Henry Willetts (London, UK: Vintage, 2017), 312.

certain set of preconceptions about my Self, about where I came from, about who I was at that time, and, to borrow the Gadamerian phrase, an inadequate understanding of the tradition from whence I came. After all, one is *never* the villain in their story; one always leaves home the *hero*. In my specific case, I prided myself on unyielding honesty, and on love and loyalty to my brothers. I thought I *embodied* the Army Core Values, most prolifically "personal courage."<sup>38</sup> Had I only lived up to that mythologized version of my Self, perhaps C would still be alive today. It is my honest belief—and the only evidence I have to support this claim is my improved mental state—that the unchecked incongruency between how I perceived my Self to be, and how "I" really was, how I suppose I really am to certain degree, is the causal link between my failures as a soldier and a friend, and my continuing, albeit significantly less frequent experiences of trauma-induced derealization.

This interrogation—if one can even call it that—will undoubtedly receive criticism from a variety of directions, most worrisomely those that focus on methodology. Admittedly, I have relied heavily on personal matters, and anecdotal claims to substantiate my thinking; a major academic faux pas. In many ways this text is very much an autoethnography, a genre I typically loath on principle. Such criticisms are not unwarranted. For instance, in a 2004 study Geoffrey Wolford discusses the problem that accompanies the practice of presenting recollected memories as historical fact, noting that “[i]f people wish to write fiction, they have every right to do so, but not every right to call it research.”<sup>39</sup> Indeed. Autoethnographies *should not* form the crux of any

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<sup>38</sup> "The Army Values," U.S. Army, accessed September 17, 2020, <https://www.army.mil/values/index.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Geoffrey Wolford, " Finding the limits: Autoethnography and being an Oxford University Proctor," *Qualitative Research* 4 (2004): 403-417, [doi.org/10.1177/1468794104047238](https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794104047238).

serious scientific study as the very notion stinks of academic impropriety. That said, my intent here was never to establish a categorical claim to knowledge, or to suggest some practice that ought to be held up as some panacea for trauma *in toto*. My only hope, in examining my own failures as a soldier and the effects those failures had on my existential condition, was that new passages forward—or possibly old passages that had simply been "covered-over"—can be hewn down in studies focused trauma-related issues.

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