

Despite the human capacity to survive and adapt, traumatic experiences can alter people's psychological, biological, and social equilibrium to such a degree that the memory of one particular event comes to taint all other experiences, spoiling appreciation of the present. This tyranny of the past interferes with the ability to pay attention to both new and familiar situations. When people come to concentrate selectively on reminders of their past, life tends to become colorless, and contemporary experience ceases to be a teacher. In much of the remainder of this book, we discuss what makes people vulnerable to developing such a fixation on trauma, and what can help them overcome it.

Interpret flashbacks as tyrannies, the past as an indication of trauma from psychoanalytic point of view

"The Black Hole of Trauma

Bessel A. van der Kolk and Alexander C. McFarlane"

This raises the question of how PTSD compares with the old notion of neurosis. Psychoanalysis held that the essence of neurosis is the pathological persistence of defense mechanisms employed to ward off unacceptable unconscious wishes and impulses. Over time, the ego is "hardened," defenses are consolidated, and "earlier conflict is transformed into chronic automatic modes of functioning... detached from the content of infantile conflict" (Shapiro, 1965, p. 7). "Once hardened, character continues to have a protective function. It 'binds' impulses in stable ways, limits flexibility, and constitutes an armor against the external world" (p. 8). Thus, the meaning that individuals cull out of the present depends on their prior experience and on the many subtle and indirect ways that their personal past has been incorporated into their current attitudes and beliefs. This can lead to a range of maladaptive responses in their current lives, to which "neurotics" keep responding as if they were reliving the past.

As we move toward creating a society within which we can each flourish, ageism is another distortion of relationship which interferes without vision. By ignoring the past, we are encouraged to repeat its mistakes. The "generation gap" is an important social tool for any repressive society. If the younger members of a community view the older members as contemptible or suspect or excess, they will never be able to join hands and examine the living memories of the community, nor ask the all important question, "Why?" This gives rise to a historical amnesia that keeps us working to invent the wheel every time we have to go to the store for bread.

The past as an indication that maybe there are future mistakes.

The past perfect of the second verb can already be viewed from the experiential present of Strether: 'The Sunday of the next week was a wonderful day, and Chad Newsome had let his friend know in advance that he had provided for it. There had already been a question of his taking him to see the great Gloriani... (p. 133).' It subsequently becomes clear that this flashback represents a retrospection on the part of Strether. It takes place at the moment of his arrival at the home of the artist...

Flashbacks as retrospective looks.

reminders of the trauma. These intrusions of traumatic memories can take many different shapes: **flashbacks**; intense emotions, such as panic or rage; somatic sensations; nightmares; interpersonal reenactments; character styles; and pervasive life themes (Laub and Auerhahn, 1993). Years and even decades after the original trauma, victims claim that their reliving experiences are as vivid as when the trauma first occurred (van der Kolk and Fisler, 1995). Because of this timeless and unintegrated nature of traumatic memories, victims remain embedded in the trauma as a contemporary experience, instead of being able to accept it as something belonging to the past.

Again it is a form of trauma

Paradoxically, even though vivid elements of the trauma intrude insistently in the form of **flashbacks** and nightmares, many traumatized people have a great deal of difficulty relating precisely what has happened. People may experience sensory elements of the
Difficulty in correctly assessing what has happened. Since it is what happened in the past.