

I'm standing here before you and I'm going to speak, and everything I'm going to say will be debatable, and however accurately I want to express myself, I'm afraid I will occasion some misunderstandings, but there is one notion that probably everyone present is familiar with, and it probably means the same thing to all of us, and that notion is trauma. Without having forgotten the original meaning of this Greek word, which used to denote injury to the body, we have learned that the psyche can also be injured. But while physical injuries can be called trauma even if they regenerate perfectly, either on their own or with medical help, psychological trauma is an event that the adaptability of the individual is insufficient to deal with, and which therefore fundamentally changes the individual, in other words, eliminates the person they were before, while at the same time disrupting the continuity between the person before and the person after the event.

It is also well known that the phenomenon of trauma inherently involves repression and inexpressibility, and that trauma is not just a matter of individuals but also of groups, with more and more events being described as traumatic.

However, a newly described traumatising event is still not immediately and universally accepted as a traumatising event. This in fact follows from the inherent correlation between trauma and repression.

We can marvel at how many people are affected by trauma and how victims are left to their own devices in the face of adversity. And we can also marvel at the frequency with which new kinds of trauma are created, or more precisely, at the frequency with which new phenomena are named as trauma.

Some artists have been working with trauma since before the concept of trauma was even conceived and widespread – the arts have always been capable of revealing and healing trauma – but in recent decades more and more artists have been consciously and programmatically addressing this issue. It seems that some of the most significant works of contemporary art are created in the context of trauma.

We have shifted from a world of unexpressed, inexpressible traumas to a world where we practically see and show the entire life of the individual as well as the history of peoples and countries as no less than a series of traumas, one on top of the other. If we examine whether the efforts of artists have been successful, whether works of great impact have been created in the spirit of processing trauma, whether masterpieces have been created, and whether works that reveal traumas and hopefully reduce the likelihood of the

occurrence of other similar traumas have been created, then we will find confirmation that this is an important trend, certainly one of the most important trends out there.

I feel I must talk about the exhibition I saw back in the mid-nineties, which has been on my mind for years. I stumbled across it while wandering around one of the world's most prestigious museums, and I was completely unprepared for what I saw. Human faces. Looking at me from the wall. Looking at us, the spectators, or looking into the abyss. Into me. When I first saw them, I didn't know who they were. Who am I kidding, of course I did, because I quickly assembled them into a narrative. In layman's terms, I thought up who they were. I even formed an opinion about them. What I have not yet mentioned is that apparently their liberty was restricted and they were in fear. Then, perhaps still in the room, reading the accompanying curatorial text, I learned that they were not who I thought they were: I was given a different narrative, and at the same time I was made aware of who had taken away the liberty of the people in the pictures, and why. And I had already known from other sources what had happened to them shortly after the photos were taken. They all died miserable deaths.

The reason I had to tell you this is not only because in retrospect, that was the greatest exhibition experience of my life, but also because the present exhibition has a double title: *Előhívás / emplotment*. The term *előhívás*, meaning 'development' and 'retrieval', I suppose, needs no explanation, either in terms of photographs or traumas. *Emplotment* all the more so. **Plot** is originally an English word, meaning 'tale, storyline, intrigue, scheme, plan, conspiracy'. In the context of trauma, it refers to the attempt by some therapists to repair the disrupted continuity with the patient's help, and place the trauma back into the course of life by means of 'emplotment'.

In the case of collective trauma, narrative refers to an account of the story of a particular community from a particular perspective, in a particular interpretation. In terms of the impact of the work it does matter whether the recipient is familiar with, sympathetic to, indifferent to, or unable to accept a particular narrative or its equivalents. At the same time, the artist's skills – talent, expertise, etc. – can facilitate the acceptance of a narrative that is unfamiliar or not necessarily appealing, thereby facilitating the development of an empathetic attitude. At first, it may seem that when one resorts to the method of emplotment in narrating a past event that has caused collective trauma, one embarks on a

path quite different from that of historiography. However, this is only the case if we understand historiography in a traditional, positivist way. Some philosophers of history, such as Louis O. Mink, point out that the event in no way precedes the narrative reference to it; their relation is in fact reversed. “Events are not the raw material out of which narratives are constructed; rather an event is an abstraction from a narrative. [...] We cannot suppose that the actuality of the past is an untold story. There can in fact be no untold stories at all, just as there is no untold knowledge. There can be only past facts not described in a context of narrative form.”

My understanding is that this does not diminish the responsibility of either the historiographers or the artists who tell the stories of the past. On the contrary – since the work of art, of course, in different ways depending on the genre, not only imitates reality but is itself part of reality, in fact, it is reality itself –, they do have a responsibility to be not only influential but also authentic.

The material for the exhibition *Előhívás / Emplotment* has been curated by Fruzsina Feigl, Borbála Kálmán and Katalin Timár. Their concept was to organise the works around five possible artistic objectives: revelation, catalysis, resource, reparation and performativity.

The outside world we left behind when we entered the museum’s closed space was not without trauma. Even in these moments, our fellow human beings are experiencing trauma of immeasurable amplitude and gravity. We can be sure that the artists here wish to neither deny nor make us forget this.

As a writer, as an artist working with texts, I am also confronted with the problem of how long writing can still make sense in the face of collective and personal catastrophes. I have to think of the writers who bore witness to the Second World War – some of whom, the most prominent ones, later committed suicide. In their case, therefore, artistic expression was unsuccessful in terms of reparation. On the other hand, one can hardly fail to see a gleam of hope when someone at least attempts to process trauma artistically. On 10 May 1944, a Hungarian poet, after describing a world set up for killing in 15 lines, concluded his poem with this line, this unexpected poetic gesture:

Tell me then that there is no hope.

Gábor ZOLTÁN