



# PURE TRAUMA,

a slip of language,  
is looking for  
contributions.

Rather than being rooted in narrative, PURE TRAUMA is a way *out* of narrative: it is a gap in memory, a chasm that seizes when approached, a book that contains words but no letters. PURE TRAUMA is writing that in form, content, or association shakes and tightens itself into atomistic implosion, destroying meaning, revealing nothing.

PURE TRAUMA is the sequel to FEVER DREAMS, a zine of poetry, essays, and postulations about, undoing, or inserted into the fevered image or sequence. PURE TRAUMA is an overtaker, though, not a successor. This edition seeks violence instead of poetics, conceptualizing schemes instead of paradigmatic pluralisms, and historically jointed essays that still terrorize. Be bold, unfeeling, and unfeeling—PURE TRAUMA is a cosmology that eats other ones.

Submit speculative writings (essays, critical précis of texts both real and fictional, salon presentations, notes from the field) that circle but never quite puncture the truth of irreconcilable events, healing sessions gone wrong, or pre-pre-history.

Maximum word count is 3,000. There is no minimum word count. All subject matter is welcome but cosmic horror will not be accepted. Email submissions to [REDACTED] by May 1, 2019.





# The Trauma of Religious Innovation: An Experimental Meditation

James E. Willis, III, Ph.D.  
University of Indianapolis

As an experimental meditation, on the margins of belief, writing around and through doubt, here is religious trauma in three acts:

ACT 1: The Conditions: *I didn't ask to be here, or, nothingness was enough*

There's a strange philosophy which seems to be at the furthest end of nihilism: *anti-natalism*, or the belief that it is better to have never been born in the first place. Essentially, it goes like this: life has some joy, but it's fleeting, unpredictable, and rather inconsequential at any rate; most of life is pain and suffering in some capacity. In the anti-natalist view, whatever pleasure is derived in this life is staggeringly less than the amount of suffering and pain we all experience. Thus, it's better to have never been born. Some even go so far as to suggest that parents are morally culpable because most human lives are conceived in the selfish pursuit of pleasure.

This view is mighty depressing, and it was designed to be so. That's not the point. Rather, is there any truth to it? It's true none of us asked to be here; we rather wake up one day and find ourselves confronted with the boondoggle of life. We face all sorts of ethical decisions, questions of meaning(lessness), and the growing awareness of the potential nothingness which bookends the other side of life. If people value life, and we really mean a person who sees life as endless possibility and

beauty, we'd like to suggest that they must begin here: with utter meaninglessness. The burden is on them: prove that there is, in fact, value. We didn't ask to be confronted with all these ethical choices, and yet we must act, or not. We didn't ask to have to find work and toil to be part of this economy, and yet we must. We didn't ask to be faced with all these questions, and yet we must continue on.

The trauma here is one of proto-religion because it is the before-religion. The trauma is that the conditions are quite perfect for the event of religion. The trauma of nothingness sets the right ground for religion. Where there is holy nothing, religion in-fills. Where there is holy other, religion distracts. Where there is holy forever, there is religious ritual. And, where we stumble around the sun a few dozen times in a brief explosion of holy consciousness, religion seizes the imagination. As the proto-religion, the trauma of being, of living, of loving, of losing, meets its mor/t/al nemesis in the illusion of eternity. This invention works well as the proto becomes the real deal.

ACT 2: The Insurrection: *A shriek, a wail, and then death*

The specter of religion, or the conditions of human existence which culminate in stories to keep us from going mad, is fraught with countless stories of doubt and terror. There are many to choose from, particularly in the narratives where the divine cuts its way in to our world. If only enlightenment didn't come with such a cost. For Christians, the specter of the cross is not only the doubt and the terror, but the ongoing trauma.

The synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all contain a horrifying story mostly ignored or softened by practicing Christians: the death of Jesus which captures some of the abject hideousness of the condemned convulsing in what must have been hallucinogenic pain. The most glaring textual indication of this

pain is captured in Matthew and Mark's narrative: Jesus's dying question, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is recorded in his native language, Aramaic, but transliterated into Greek script. This point is all but lost on modern Christianity: Jesus's final words were apparently so important that they were recorded from his original language.

And yet, this may not be the case. Psalm 22, extant long before Jesus, contains this phrase. So, to the close reader, the question remains: did Jesus say this phrase because it was prophesized in Psalm 22, or did Matthew and Mark borrow this phrasing to indicate prophecy and put it in to the mouthpiece of Jesus? The trauma here is twofold: the potential doubt of Jesus at the moment of death, when he realized the betrayal and abandonment of his God, opens so many paths to reinterpreting faithful doubt in religion, yet the textual ambiguity of Psalm 22 being written in the narrative means the trauma of historical uncertainty reigns.

Jesus's terror in the face of ultimate abandonment and absence should haunt Christians. Theologians reinterpreted Jesus's humiliation and death in light of different forms of salvation, particularly as a price paid for sinners. But, this sidesteps an important part of the text: we cannot easily get away from the doubt written in to the prophecy. Matthew and Mark both record the final moments of Jesus's earthly existence as a violent cutting of the normal order. This man, the demonstration of the divine in the world, was wracked with doubt while his body was wracked with excruciating pain. Is it too much to suggest that such doubt forms the crux of religion in an irreconcilable way?

The trauma of Jesus's crucifixion, then, serves as one model amongst many in the world history of religion, because it is an insurrection forcing the moment of decision. It is a cutting out

of the normal order of things, the mundane and boring aspects of merely existing, forcing the conditions of religion to come together in an intelligible way. Yet, what this shows us is that the conclusion of the insurrection is really the confusion of doubt. The insurrection of religion, which is supposed to give clarity and meaning, actually does quite the opposite: the ambiguity of historical and textual traumas indicates doubt at the heart of religious belief. Did Siddhartha descend into the final temptation of the demon Mara without an ounce of doubt? Did Abraham raise the knife above his beloved son Isaac with no doubt? Did Muhammad bury his head in the lap of his wife Khadija, overcome with doubt and fear, from his existential encounter with the angel of God? Did Arjuna necessarily delay his duty, his karmic requirement, to do battle while he openly doubted with Krishna?

The irony is that when the conditions of proto-religion are right, and religion incises the mundane as an insurrection, the consequence is doubt. At the heart of religion, then, is the collective trauma played out in narratives of doubt.

### ACT 3: The Rekindling: *Innovation*

Like winter fire brought back to a roar, the incision of the divine into the normal order reshapes belief with doubt at the

of human history which spans many tens of thousands of years. Some scholars have called this the “Axial Age” because these individuals (re)formed beliefs into what most people today believe. Without debating the merits of this theory, we can say that we do live in the shadow of some very consequential actions taken within a relatively short amount of time.

Yet, these religions tend to function within their own black box of either revelation (in the west) or karma (in the east). If there is theological innovation, it occurs within pretty strict parameters which are deemed heterodox if they veer too far off course. The trauma of incision of the divine into the normal order of things heals when innovation is stifled: things can grow back and just be normal. We can get on with our daily coping.

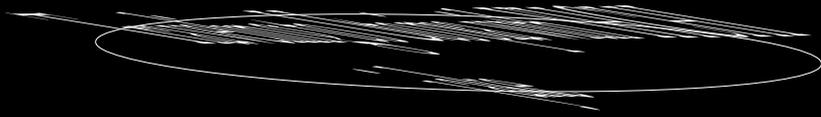
Religion is fertile ground for innovation because it is the expression of human desires, identity, coping mechanisms, and (ultimate?) destiny. But, we do not think of “innovation” in religion, at least in the same way we think about technology, machines, or other inventions to supposedly make our lives easier. We might get a 2.0 version with a major reform, break-off sect, or fringe group. This is not the same thing as innovation, though; it is taking the norm in a different direction, as is human habit.

very center. We have no way to write intelligibly about “after religion” because as long as we humans exist, so too our attendant religions will assuage some anxieties. But, what we can say about the rekindling is that through religious trauma, we can begin to rethink the future of religion before it gets here.

It’s no coincidence that the founders of today’s world religions, folks like Abraham, Jesus, the Buddha, Muhammad, Confucius, Mahavira, and Zoroaster all lived within a relatively close timeframe of each other, at least when we consider epochs

What does religious innovation look like when the incision, the blunt trauma of the divine breaking in to human history, reopens our Axial wounds? What happens when our festering doubt creates the conditions necessary, again, for proto-religion?

*\*Special thanks to Dr. Viktoria Strunk for editing this essay.*



Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries' piece "Traveling to Utopia: With a Brief History of the Technology" proposes that technology's progression ironically functions as an invasion, using metaphors of immigration and nationality to propel their questioning of society's integration with technology. The use of specific languages, nationalities, personal narratives, and forms of technology ground the piece in the viewers' reality, allowing the work to transcend the screen and embed itself in daily life.

When the viewer begins the piece, the visual structure and elements demand the most attention, with the mellow jazz taking a close second. The introduction to the piece displays: "Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries Presents," followed by a countdown of mixed numbers and words overlaying the visual narrative structure that will encompass almost the entire piece. This structure is a three-piece textual layout, with the top in Korean and the bottom two in English. The word placement creates a clear hierarchy of importance, as the middle text is presented much larger than either the top or bottom bars, both of which are green text on black background, alluding to the old terminal display on early personal computers. This acts to bracket the middle text, displayed in the same typeface, black on white, suggesting a progression from old, "visible guts" technology to newer, more aestheticized forms of technological presentation that mask the underlying mechanisms of operation. This is a signifier that outlines the evolution of media and technology from a separate facet of our lives to a deeply integral one that permeates almost everything. This futuristic integra-

tion of technology and daily life is hinted at before the piece is even begun.

The title itself foreshadows a critique of societal/technological change by pretending to visit "utopia." Invoking Wells, Huxley, and various other science fiction writers produces a lineage of dystopic futures where our technological advances have altered individuals and society, suggesting a transition from technology as innovation to technology as invasion. YHCHI follows this framework and provokes the viewer to consider how the narratives and the visual elements in this piece may parallel or allude to their lives. The personal narratives allow the viewers to subsume themselves in the struggles of each protagonist, and thus relay these conflicts to their own lives. The stories follow characters that could easily be someone the viewer knows.

The middle narrative describes a woman who is presented with technology (and the succeeding upgrades to that technology) when she leaves home for college. After a certain point she discovers a locator chip in her gut and decides to just "avoid [...] certain areas."<sup>1</sup> Being literally impregnated with a technology that is foreign to her, she lacks the means to attain privacy. Continually shifting between temporary/transitional locations allows her an impermanence that removes her from the feeling of being watched, because it doesn't matter – it's such an impersonal place that it is personal. She says she likes to escape by going to "airport hotels where the atmosphere is exotic but reassuring in the midst of which I feel like I've gone to a far-off place that's both everywhere and nowhere."<sup>2</sup> This last portion of the narrative lacks punctuation until the very end, whereas the rest of the piece contains much more, highlighting a greater discomfort – an anxiety – when the monologue is trying to project minimally problematic acquiescence. The woman is constructed as being passive, not only unable to react and fight for herself, but unwilling to do so.

<sup>1</sup>Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, "Traveling Utopia: With a Brief History of the Technology," 3:31-3:34  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 3:36-3:43

In contrast, the bottom narrative follows a man who struggles with his identity in a hostile environment, which seems to be every environment the man inhabits: *he* is the embedded nuisance. This portion uses several French phrases, mentions Paris and French police, Seoul, an English passport that the police cannot read, and the “hierarchy in the *délit de faciès*: Arab, African, Swarthy, Asian.”<sup>3</sup> These, along with the larger personal narrative of the man dreaming he was not detained when stopped, bring together immigration, ethnicity, assimilation, surveillance, espionage (and thus national security), and the acts within emigration via the oppressed individual. The man also says he “avoided” certain areas to stay out of the view of some body of overseers.<sup>4</sup> He is unable to alter his situation, as greater forces continually bear down upon him: he is not so much passive as he is apathetic. His fatigue is derived from a constant quelling of his struggle for personal freedom and agency.

As outlined in the lower narrative, language plays an important role in this piece, and YHCHI chose English for the piece consciously,<sup>5</sup> beginning the argument of colonialism and globalization that underlies much of the piece, extending to both visual and narrative metaphor: everything is being infected with technology. All three lines of text move at separate paces, the top continually scrolling like a Times Square stock feed (but to the beat of the percussion), the middle swiping on the four count, and the bottom flashing from one line to the next on the same beat. These compete for the viewer’s attention and focus, miming a flow of entertainment: the ephemeral stream of options passes so quickly that choice is often relinquished for passive submission. The flow itself is a controlling mechanism, moving the viewer forever forward, never allowing a step back, again mirroring the unstoppable growth and evolution of technology. The continuous scroll of Korean, being unreadable, foreign, and exotic (to many viewers), fits oddly well with the

**Traveling to Utopia with YHCHI**  
music playing, degrading it to a row of symbols that allude to song – a score of sorts – which is ambiguous and, in many ways, meaningless. This resonates with the dominance of English in the piece; it is assumed that we do not understand the Korean and thus its coordination with the music and its relation to our image of the stock feed reinforce the superiority of English by proposing that it is the only text that matters. This would only be a weak connection without the music, the existence of which promotes several concurrent interpretations.

The jazz, a mash up of many forms of music, free-forming and taking its own style, fits the “progression” framework, as it, in some ways, predated globalization in funneling and synthesizing several cultures in a wave of popular music. The jazz also acts to keep the text moving, as it does in all of YHCHI’s pieces, producing the sensation that we have no control, but that submission to this is ok – this is how it’s supposed to be, as all music has taught us to listen, especially when presented in this unidirectional way. Similarly, there is a dissonance in the mood of the music and that of the text, though they don’t confront one another directly. The jazz in this piece contends with some of the impact of the piece: the narrative is not necessarily upbeat, but the use of fairly light jazz reinforces the lulling, delusional space inhabited by the narratives’ characters. Sedately happy, the music mirrors the blind *soma*-induced submission to technology’s invasion.

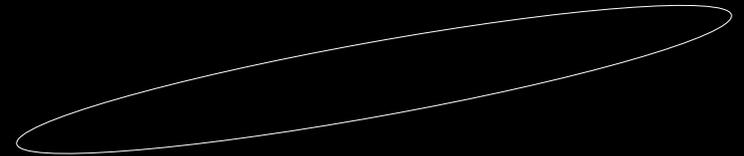
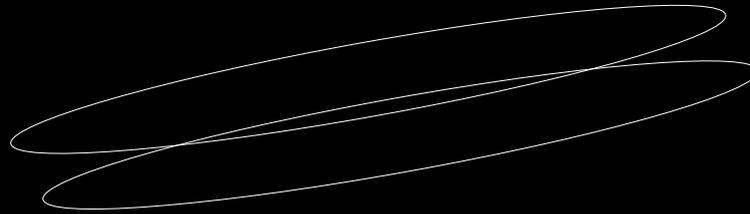
Employing all these elements, YHCHI is suggesting that technology is utilized for the invasion of people’s lives for matters of

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 2:56-3:01

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 3:04

<sup>5</sup>[http://iowareview.uiowa.edu/TIRW/TIRW\\_Archive/tirweb/feature/younghae/interview.html](http://iowareview.uiowa.edu/TIRW/TIRW_Archive/tirweb/feature/younghae/interview.html)

security, which is cyclical in nature: as the body at large invades the individual body/life, the individual loses control, agency, and thus the perception of safety. The issue of unattainable safety revolves around the contested sanctity of the body as well as the privacy of our personal lives, as individuals are managed by their respective governing bodies. Both narratives show that individuals grapple with this insecurity, but compromise and ultimately submit to it without much struggle. YHCHI propose this is happening somewhere, be it real or not, present, future, or past, male and female, classless, and relatable to the majority of their audience: the viewer is made into the subject of the narrative via its ambiguity. Here then is the provocation: if we are being surveilled, or are going to be, in any of these ways, will we submit so placidly?



*the dead bloom from my own birth*  
*J. Hacker*

clutch mouse albert his front teeth bare proud goosesteps onto  
the back terrace sunlit theater well he's only been out a few  
minutes i explain for the first time in months i believe it was  
before our time moves slow like i've never seen before the pre-  
conceived notions you may have have to go he is a *cold blooded*  
*killer* looks like he wouldn't have it in him gliding the glass door  
open it scoots under a pile leaves to my left hand me a cigarette  
he is such a fat and loving creature

eva las vegas has it all brown black tan white light patches here  
and there is no separation witness it all unfold spiraling out like  
a bulging caterpillar falling off the edge digs her nails in shreds  
the cardboard man must have made a fortune tell you what  
it looks like a giant cartoon mouth loops infinity without ever  
meeting in the middle mike swats at her tail hangs on top some-  
times inside "watches tv" out the eastern front window fluid for  
them waking dreaming

gnaw my black cells breathe i read kwekwe has some heavy  
shit going on the toilet is covered in it makes you think before  
having children see this guy for example offed himself for some  
reason bitch left him and his bed empty well no wonder she  
wouldn't marry his crazy sexist obsessive ass hole

calls out echo against my skin fingers the point of my jaw shat-  
ters my bubble voice narrates *night and fog* stills my heart pause  
waits like a tiger in december waiting for release

the i is happy i whisper into my left ear

((thank You Existence))

knives lay down resting in my eye points on the stainless steel  
kettle siemens stained with fingerprints over the years coffee  
dust caught in a rush i think without really thinking i extend  
your call returned unable to wash your gravel from the fox hole  
opening sequence of the five millionth season

violet Ss between my legs endless ourobouros never quite  
reaches the raw pink root of it her flea bitten tail end of last  
summer got an odd case gnawed the fur right off rubs and  
comes just now like a groomed poodle wild with eyes longing  
back at the back crying for the wild memories from whence she  
bounds and bounds with a surprising amount of lift for such  
heft fur as long as a grey wolf whipping around cirrus against  
my leg swells with favor for her liberation

reporting for duty i gather from the bedroom doorway she  
sleeps at least her eyes are closed tilted pale and at peace facing  
the horizon at her dusk duvet beaming dark smiles through the  
belt of venus i feel

parting curtains floods bright wincing yes! i wanted to ask you  
meek spurts jagged canines well we share brain cells after all i  
spin the resin prism it hangs by a thread accidentally distracting  
reaches for the thoughts never end stream in rainbows where  
the ceiling meets the wall

rolling shoulders frustrated eyes scrunching sighs lets go for  
nearly the last time see when my brain lesions and swells i i  
can't remind the spool in the pop crayon. shine sauce. salt! see,  
with an extra. on it. always. sigh. i was wandering for that *thing*,  
like that you know but couldn't find. though the bubbles broke.  
the glass. can you see who's that

fat albert

fox foley sink hole chest smile assures it's okay you're okay

expectantly edging pale winter snows needs a new slipcover  
maybe for christmas no no thank you not for forever not for  
remembering a *mandala* next to the bed runs seizing fingertips  
the frays of calico flecks between us you want to pose a ques-  
tion

and so the hunt begins downpours freezing rains rages remem-  
bers lost in want to do the volume close the open bathroom  
door old Darwin sweetheart my love sleeps like a crumpled sol-  
dier in the corner i wander off the trail over the room and back  
around to meet hers as the last beat calls for raised eyebrows  
exclaiming shit i don't know

still fault lies blame on my father or was it i who was always  
never regret sorry with all due respect the dead bloom from my  
own birth regrets disappearing regrets wishing it would all go  
away

smiles

moments desire believing the believing hope that attention has  
been paid like a broad insincere and flat

thoughtless wordless thoughts

my dry eye pans one click to the right empty starting up i make  
my move to glass the grab hears appalled to pucker the sucking  
lips of the deer that lay dying on the frozen road last night

but adoring people stopped us sound to make thirsty!

fuck my listens subconsciously how interested coincidence or  
total perception subconscious of all time never thought but i me  
interesting and agree so much love for i was only a baby

hiss hiss soda yes!

no fault

like water into water imagines flies dead center chest opens like  
an empty sky arise

so why needles ——— claws ——— knives

# The Compassionate Fatigue

-

Dr. Viktoria Strunk

“Vicarious traumatization (VT) or compassion fatigue (CF), also labeled secondary trauma, refers to the cumulative effect of working with survivors of traumatic life events, or perpetrators, as part of everyday work” (Osofsky, Putnam, & Lederman, 2008, p. 91).

Armed with a clipboard and pen, she stepped out of the nighttime air into the pulsing fluorescent lighting of the children’s hospital. Scanning the wall, she quickly noted that the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) was on the fourth floor. Stepping onto the elevator, her mind scanned the vast experience in her brain that she had in this field and sighed as she understood that past experience would not prepare her for what she was about to see. Feeling a jolt made by the sudden stop of the elevator, she stepped out into the PICU and looked for the correct room.

The child was only two. That is what her report said when she received the hotline call. This was an immediate response. Law enforcement had requested social services immediately. The child's nearly lifeless body was hooked up to several machines, and they all made annoying sounds. Whoosh, whoosh, beep, beep, breaking the otherwise silence of the room. The lights had been dimmed for the child to rest in the induced coma-sleep, a slumber of all slumbers. She didn't even note a single twitch coming from the child or notice his eyelids flickering back and forth as they do when dreaming wonderful dreams. Even in the shadow light, she noted a second or third degree burn on the child's chest. The skin hung there precariously, much like a parachutist who realizes his lifeline is stuck in a 25-foot tall pine tree. She could barely look at anything else as the sight of his chest was so disturbing. Glancing upward she noted the surgical scars across the top of his head, proving that whatever had gone terribly wrong had tried to be righted by the surgical team.

“Studies of child protection workers and social workers working with abused children and families in the child protection system have reported high rates of secondary traumatization” (Osofsky, Putnam, & Lederman, 2008, p. 95).

The left arm looked like a spindly twig sticking out of the side of a hot dog bun, as the cast that splinted the three breaks did not seem to quite fit the child's arm. The police officer, who had just jaunted into the room, stood next to her and said, “Makes your stomach turn, don't it?” The cop was about 6 foot nothing and towered over her. He talked slowly and deliberately, as if trying to remember what to say in this situation. “Doctor said if he lives, he'll have brain damage.” At this comment, she turned, feeling the contents of her late lunch rolling around in her stomach.

“The secondary traumatization of employees ultimately decreases their functioning and undermines the working environment in an organization” (Osofsky, Putnam, & Lederman, 2008, p. 94).

“In a study of 115 police officers, seeing abused children was the most frequent incident type (68%) identified” (Osofsky, Putnam, & Lederman, 2008, p. 96).

She was running in her sleep, trying to stop the beast, stop it before it was too late. The child was just within her grasp, but she could feel his tiny fingers slipping out of her hand. She tried to scream but the words did not form in her sleeping mouth. The beast tried to harm him again and again, but she couldn't allow that. She tried to tell her brain to tell her feet to start running, start running toward the beast who was trying to harm the boy. The boy's cries of pain reverberated her entire body. She could not stop the beast, could not stop this mother from nearly killing her child. The dream was always the same, and she always awakened in a cold sweat, wondering if she should change careers.

#### References

Osofsky, J.D., Putnam, F.W., & Lederman, C. S. (2008). How to maintain emotional health when working with trauma. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 59(4), 91-102.



# BIOS

James Willis, III holds a Ph.D. in comparative religion from King's College London. He teaches various religion courses at the University of Indianapolis and enjoys reading and writing. In his spare time, he enjoys home renovation and building projects. He has grown to be comfortable using power tools.

jake  
attempting nondual, queer, antiracist, feminist, and decolonial approaches to:  
pluriversal, Indigenous, anarchist, and noneurocentric/nonhierarchical/antihegemonic pedagogies and atypical learning environments and ways of knowing/being; intentional communities, permaculture.  
impact of “technology” on the above.  
jacobsellhicks.com

J. Hacker (1979, Bellevue, WA) is a musician, photographer and sound artist, and has written for *Slutist*, *Pole Burn*, and *The Lazy Vegan*. Hacker uses ritual to examine sexuality, violence and the nature of being. She has exhibited and performed at NYPL, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office, Fridman Gallery, Experimental Intermedia Belgium, Garner Arts Center, and her work has been featured in publications including *Vice*, *The Wire*, *Kerrang*, *Detroit Metro Times*, *Bizarre*, *Decibel*, *Brooklyn Vegan*, *Denzatsu*, among others.  
www.joanhacker.com

Viktoria Strunk, Ed.D. has published widely, including essays and chapters on Victorian literature, machine ethics, and religious education.

Matthew Schwager works in multimedia.  
msss.studio

