Invisible Connections: Exploring Intergenerational Trauma Through Experimental Filmmaking

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Abstract

This project "Home Sweet Home" (2024) investigates the invisible connections between mother and daughter, exploring how trauma can silently pass through generations. The catalyst for this inquiry was a deeply personal discovery — both my mother and I became single mothers at the age of 39. This uncanny repetition led me to question whether unseen forces, inherited memories, or subconscious patterns bound our lives together. Drawing on memory studies and consciousness theories, the project examines concepts like postmemory, transgenerational trauma, and hauntology. Marianne Hirsch's postmemory theory suggests that the trauma of previous generations can be inherited through stories, emotions, and behaviors. Cathy Caruth and Freud argue that unprocessed trauma may unconsciously repeat itself through the "return of the repressed", while Derrida's hauntology implies that unresolved histories can "haunt" the present, shaping lives in unseen ways. Additionally, scientific studies in epigenetics reveal that environmental factors can alter gene expression, passing emotional responses like fear or anxiety to future generations. Methodologically, I employed experimental filmmaking to trace these invisible connections. I documented my mother's daily life over two years as she moved across Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, searching for a permanent home. This observational process unfolded alongside my own reflections as a single mother. Home videos, personal diaries, and intimate interviews became sites of memory, revealing echoes between our lives. The editing process embraced stream-of-consciousness techniques, weaving past and present through associative memory. Intercutting scenes from our lives highlighted emotional parallels, while nonlinear storytelling blurred temporal boundaries, creating a space where memories linger and repeat. Through this film, I seek to understand how memories — both personal and inherited — shape our identities and life choices. The work offers a poetic exploration of mother-daughter bonds, intergenerational trauma, and the invisible threads that connect us across time.

Keywords: Experimental Filmmaking, Mother–Daughter Relationship, Transgenerational Trauma, Postmemory, Hauntology, Inherited Memories

Introduction

The genesis of artmaking often begins with a question—quiet at first, then it returns. Some questions fade with time, while others linger, unresolved, haunting you, refusing to leave. For me, one such question emerged not in theory, but in crisis. At 39, I reached the lowest point of my life—facing a divorce and becoming a single mother. Though I was never close to my mother, I was surprised by an overwhelming urge to return to her. After I shared everything, she calmly revealed that she, too, became a single mother at 39. Startled by this uncanny coincidence, I began to question the invisible connections between my mother and me. Why do tragedies recur, fates repeat, and destinies mirror each other? Could there be forces beyond science—unconscious patterns or inherited memories—that bind our lives together as mother and daughter? This persistent urge to seek answers became the genesis of my experimental documentary *Home Sweet Home* (2024), a film born not only from personal crisis but from a deeper need to understand what cannot be easily explained.

This research seeks to answer a question unanswerable through simple logic. While some questions can be answered through science, others resist definitive answers. They

demand different methods—ones that engage memory, emotion, intuition and meaning making. This is where artmaking becomes not just expression, but inquiry.

Memory Studies

I feel the approach to answer this question of "invisible connections between the mother and daughter" can be found in memory studies. In "Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis" (1993), Richard Terdiman discusses the important role of memory- Memory is not passive but active and is constantly reconstructed in the present during the act of remembering. The act of remembering is not an activity isolated in the past but is connected to the present and future, as the past made present (Terdiman, 1993. pp. 7-9). Memory is not a fixed object made in the past, frozen in time and unchanging perpetually, but memory is an "act" and a "verb" (Rothberg, 2009. pp. 1-12).

Each time one recalls, he is recalling a memory that emphasizes a narrative to his present condition. In using memory to find the invisible connections between two lives, I am recalling key memories, drawing parallels and making meanings. Since the mother and daughter are not close, I do not focus directly on the mother and daughter relationship, but I juxtapose the memories of each of their own lives side by side as a comparison to construct and investigate their inner world, and uncover the invisible connections between them. While most stories in film are told in chronological order based on events along a linear timeline in a set time and place, memories work multi-directionally, going back and forth. Therefore, I also do not use the conventional structure of chronological order to answer this question but through the flow of memory.

Trauma as psychic wound

Why did our lives—my mother's and mine—each bear the weight of unexpected rupture at the same age? Is it mere coincidence, or are there deeper, unspoken patterns echoing across generations? Beyond the transmission of genes that shape physical traits, personality, or preferences, could there be something deeper—such as inherited memories or traumas—passed on as a mother brings a child into the world? How do I define this trauma- that seems to be invisible but returning to haunt the lives of the mother and daughter, one generation after another?

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, was one of the first to theorize and introduce the concept of trauma as an unassimilated psychological wound that disrupts the unconscious mind. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920/1955), Sigmund Freud introduces the idea of trauma as a wound of the mind, not the body—a psychic rupture that overwhelms the individual's capacity to process the event as it happens, as it happened too suddenly, unexpectedly and violently. Unlike a bodily wound that heals, Freud argues that a psychic wound remains open—unprocessed and unresolved. When trauma overwhelms the mind's capacity to register what is happening, it becomes unassimilated, lingering in the unconscious rather than being integrated into memory. This unprocessed trauma violates the psyche, disrupting one's sense of time, memory, and self.

Traumatic experiences that are too overwhelming for conscious awareness become repressed, but they do not simply disappear. Instead, they resurface indirectly in what Freud calls the "return of the repressed" (1915/1957), manifesting in dreams, slips of the tongue, neurotic symptoms and repetitive behaviors. The repressed desires, memories and traumas lay hidden in the unconscious, yet what the psyche represses inevitably finds expression, often in disguised or fragmented forms. Because the event is experienced too suddenly and unexpectedly, it cannot be fully grasped at the moment. Instead returns later—haunting the

survivor through nightmares, flashbacks, and compulsive repetitions. In his theory of "repetition compulsion" (1920), Freud suggests that unprocessed trauma does not return as a coherent memory, but as involuntary re-enactment—the survivor unconsciously relives aspects of the trauma without knowing why. Freud illustrates this with the biographical case of the Italian poet Torquato Tasso, who repeatedly and compulsively inflicted wounds on himself, as if re-enacting his suffering and anxiety. This pattern of behavior exemplifies how trauma re-emerges not only physically but psychically, manifesting as compulsive repetition and self-destructive acts. Tasso's case demonstrates Freud's idea that the unresolved nature of trauma drives survivors into cycles of unconsciously and compulsively repeating the traumatic experience.

Trauma as double wound

Building on Freud, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as a "double wound" in her influential book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). Caruth argues that trauma is not just the initial injury caused by a shocking event—it is also the second wounding that occurs later, when the traumatic event returns in haunting ways. These delayed responses, often an involuntary re-experiencing of that event, disrupts the survivor's present. Caruth describes trauma as not simply a psychological pathology or illness, but "a wound that cries out"—a reality that cannot be directly accessed, but is instead transmitted belatedly, through actions, language, and silence. Caruth argues that trauma is not just the violent event itself, but also the incomprehensibility of the event—its shocking and untimely arrival, which resists being fully known- an injury that is irreconcilable, unlocatable (Caruth, 1996, p. 19). What returns to haunt the survivor is not only the memory of the event, but the absence of understanding, the unanswered "why." Therefore, trauma is not simply a past event but an unclaimed experience, one that resists integration and continues to haunt the present, often across generations (Caruth, 1996). This recurrence is not tied to the original event alone, but to its unassimilated nature, leaving the survivor caught in a cycle of unresolved psychic injury.

Caruth further questions whether trauma is the moment of death, or the ongoing experience of surviving it? Just like the example of Tasso repeatedly injuring himself, Caruth interprets the compulsive repetition as a metaphor for trauma's paradoxical structure. In trauma, the victim does not consciously choose to relive the event, yet they repeatedly enact it, as if compelled by an unseen force. Lacan, reinterpreting Freud's dream of the burning child, explores this oscillation between loss and survival (Caruth, 1996). In the dream, a father—sleeping in the next room—hears the voice of his dead child whisper, "Father, don't you see I'm burning?" The child's body, left unattended, catches fire, and the father is awakened not by the flames, but by the voice of the child in his dream. This moment captures the essence of trauma: the delayed call to awaken to a loss that was not fully grasped in the moment it occurred. It is a plea to be seen, to be heard—a call that demands a new way of listening, even through silence and repetition.

This same delay—of knowledge, of understanding—is what Cathy Caruth identifies as the core of trauma in Freud's theory of neurosis. As Caruth (1996) explains, drawing on Freud, the dream becomes a space where the return of the repressed emerges in a haunting voice—"bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright" (Freud, 1920/1955, p. 13; Caruth, 1996, p. 72). For Caruth, what is significant is not only the repeated act of injury, but the "sorrowful voice" that emerges from it—a haunting call that reveals the unresolved.

Hauntology

Derrida's (1994) concept of hauntology, introduced in his book *Specters of Marx*, is a philosophical idea that explores how the past—especially unresolved or suppressed histories—continues to affect and shape the present, often in invisible or ghostly ways. There are three core ideas of hauntology: this first is the ghost as a metaphor. Playing on the word "ontology" or the study of being, hauntology suggests that our sense of being is always haunted by what is absent, lost, or forgotten. Derrida argues that just as ghosts linger, certain ideas, traumas, or historical injustices do not die—they return and persist, often subconsciously, shaping actions, thoughts, and identities.

The second idea of hauntology examines unresolved histories and repetition. Derrida argues that unfinished or repressed historical events, such as colonialism, war, trauma, or loss, are not really past. Instead, they "haunt" the present, creating repetitions, echoes, and disruptions. These "specters" or ghosts, might appear in cultural memory, personal trauma, or societal structures. Lastly, Derrida challenges the notion of linear time—past, present, future—as separate and ordered. In hauntology, the past intrudes upon the present, and the future is shaped by the ghosts of what has been left unresolved. The ghost is not just a remnant of the past, but also a call from the future—what still needs to be addressed.

Similarly, Marianne Hirsch's (2008) theory of postmemory suggests that the trauma of previous generations can be inherited not through direct experience, but through the stories, emotions, images and behaviors passed down within families. This inherited memory can feel as vivid, real and formative as direct, firsthand experience, shaping the identities and emotional mindsets of subsequent generations. In this way, postmemory echoes Derrida's concept of hauntology—the past returns not as history, but as a living ghostly presence, subtly directing lives through inherited pain, unresolved narratives, and unconscious repetition.

Emerging research in epigenetics supports the idea that trauma and memory can be passed across generations—not just culturally or emotionally, but biologically. This intergenerational transmission of behaviors is a result of genetic inheritance and epigenetic mechanisms, defined as environmental factors that can change gene expression within the DNA sequence. In one notable but controversial study (McDougall, 1927), parent mice were trained to navigate a maze, and their offspring—despite never having seen the maze—performed better than control mice. Similarly, other epigenetic studies have shown that fear and anxiety responses can be inherited, with changes in gene expression caused by environmental stressors passed down to future generations. In a study on inherited fear (Dias & Ressler, 2014), mice were conditioned to fear a cherry blossom-like scent by being mildly electric-shocked, and this fear response was passed on to their offspring. The researchers found changes in the structure of the mice offspring's brain, suggesting that the fear response was biologically passed down from the children to grandchildren, likely through epigenetic changes in the DNA. These findings reinforce the idea that trauma may not only be remembered through stories or behaviors—as postmemory suggests, but may also be biologically encoded—haunting descendants in both body and mind.

Methodology

In my documentary *Home Sweet Home* (2024), I explored whether the unresolved trauma of my mother's past had silently shaped the contours of my own life. The uncanny repetition of becoming a single mother at 39—the same age she became a single mother—raised unsettling questions about inherited pain, subconscious repetition, and the invisible threads that bind our lives.

Drawing on Freud's and Caruth's theories of trauma, I sought to find the places of trauma and wounds of the mind through sites of memory. Sites of memory (Nora, 1989) are

locations—whether physical, symbolic, or cultural—where collective memory is deposited, preserved, and reactivated. They serve as containers for remembering, often triggered by acts of remembrance or personal reflection. By filming my mother through a series of interviews and conversations, I traced her trauma while simultaneously confronting my own through narrated excerpts from my diary. Over two years, I documented her life as she moved across Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia in search of a permanent home. This observational process paralleled my journey as a single mother, weaving together our experiences. Home videos, personal diaries, and intimate interviews became sites of memory (Nora, 1989), revealing deep, often uncanny echoes between our lives.

Further informed by Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, I considered how my mother's trauma might have been transmitted not through direct experience but through stories, emotions, and pain passed down over time. While making the film, I observed my mother constantly repeating the same life stories in a compulsive manner. Her storytelling was not merely recollection, but survival—an echo of what Dori Laub wrote about Holocaust survivors: "They did not only need to survive to tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive" (Laub, 1992, p. 78). In the stories, her trauma emerged as a wound that speaks.

This intergenerational transmission echoes Derrida's notion of hauntology, where the past does not remain buried but returns in spectral form—haunting the present, passing from mother to daughter through patterns we may not fully understand. My film thus becomes both an act of mourning and inquiry, tracing how inherited memory might shape or even determine the repetition of personal tragedy. It does not seek to resolve the trauma, but to trace its echoes—to ask: What is its origin? Why does it persist? Where does it end? Why am I still alive? Each scene becomes a repetition, circling back to the "return of the repressed"—a haunting that insists on being remembered.

Streams of Consciousness

In my film experiment, I explored the invisible trauma between my mother and me. I adopted a theoretical framework of stream of consciousness, which aligns with Freud's trauma theory that repressed memories reside in the unconscious. Stream of consciousness (James, 1890) refers to a narrative technique that represents the continuous flow of subjective thoughts, feelings, and memories in an individual's mind. William James, who coined the term, described consciousness as "a river or a stream… a succession of states of consciousness, each emerging out of the last and melting into the next" (James, 1890, p. 239).

This technique is most famously employed in the works of Virginia Woolf in her explorations of memory, trauma, and the fluidity of subjective experience. Woolf used the stream of consciousness in her writing, particularly in her novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Woolf, who wrote the book in her forties, admitted she found it difficult to describe her feelings for her mother, stating that "the presence of her mother obsessed" her (Woolf, 1985, p. 80). Her mother's invisible and recurring presence compelled her to write the story, where she described her mother as the "subject of this memoir." Reflecting on the process of writing, Woolf likened it to a fragmented inner experience: "I see myself as a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream" (Woolf, 1985, p. 80).

In a similar way, I spent many months editing this documentary with multiple versions and reworkings. The early version had a linear approach in its timeline and narrative, but in the later versions I shifted to a stream of consciousness editing technique, tracing memories and connections between my life and my mother's—weaving our subjective lives as interconnected streams of memories.

In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), we see Woolf's masterful use of stream of consciousness. "She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that

he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air" (Woolf, 2000, p. 194). This passage shows how Clarissa Dalloway's inner thoughts drift seamlessly between her emotions, Septimus's tragic fate, and sensory experiences, like the clock's chimes, demonstrating how stream of consciousness merges internal monologue, memory, and immediate perception. In another scene (Woolf, 2000, p. 110), where Lady Bruton considers attending Clarissa's party, she soon drifts into sleep on her living room sofa. Her thoughts leap from place to place, person to person, from familiar scenes of her childhood home to her grandfather's memories of war and trauma. In a half-dream state—half-asleep on the sofa, half-aware of reality—she imagines herself holding a baton as her grandfather had, "commanding battalions marching to Canada" (Woolf, 2000, p. 111). The narrative flows with a surreal, poetic rhythm, led by the character's thoughts.

The stream of consciousness technique is not limited to literature; filmmakers like Chris Marker and Terrence Malick have adapted it to cinema. Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1983) weaves a fragmented, poetic narrative through voiceovers, personal letters, and disjointed images, mimicking the associative flow of memory and subjective thought. Similarly, Malick's films, such as *The Tree of Life* (2011), use impressionistic visuals, whispered voiceovers, and fluid editing to evoke a stream of consciousness, blurring the boundaries between past and present, reality and memory.

This resonates deeply with me: how the stream of consciousness connects one life with another. I feel a deep connection to Woolf's method of stream of consciousness, where truth emerges through the intimate layers of one's private thoughts. The narrative jumps fluidly from one person to another, with each stream of consciousness drawing us into the very shoes of its thinker, immersing us in their inner world. Inspired by this, I used my mother's voice narrating her stories and my own voice-over narration of my diary entries to seek the hidden truth and connections in our lives. The stream of consciousness technique allowed me to blur the lines between the conscious thoughts in the characters' external reality and the inner world of their unconscious mind.

Editing as Sites of Memory

Using the stream of consciousness as a conceptual framework, it served as a guiding idea and creative approach that shaped my film's aesthetic and narrative structure. Film editing played a vital role, as the footage served only as raw material to explore transformations of memory. By treating raw footage as sites of memory (Nora, 1989), I cast aside the need to follow a linear storytelling structure and instead edited according to the logic of memory, juxtaposing past, present, and future. Editing was not merely a replication of a predetermined script, but a material thinking process (Carter, 2004)—thinking in, through, and with the film—where each cut became an act of inquiry.

By editing through the stream of consciousness, images, sounds, characters, people, places, objects, and actions all served as sites of memory to construct many possible memory transformations and narrative developments. In that sense, the framework of memory did not restrict the film to the logic of real time and space in the external world; instead, the film followed a new space-time of memory. Through intuition, I explored multiple paths, as in a dream, crossing the boundaries of space and time, jumping from the life of the mother to the daughter's, where the past sits beside the present and future, as the connection of shots is led by the flow of streams of consciousness. This non-linear, intuitive approach opened up a dynamic space where the connection of shots flowed like thought itself, reflecting the fragmented and associative nature of memory. It created a freedom in creative thought formulation, where every image, word, sound, or action could potentially trigger a memory and

lead to the next narrative progression. In this way, the possibility of memory association is endless.

For example, the film's opening shot—a darkened room with an open window—suggests the daughter's post-traumatic contemplation of suicide. Amidst night sounds of crickets and passing cars, a past memory emerges of a conversation with her son, asking what her relationship was like with her mother. Here we see that through streams of consciousness, the edit abandons the logic of a linear timeline. Through a new logic of memory association, the past meets the present in a fragmented but deeply personal and intimate inner world. Through this process, editing becomes not just a technical assembly but a form of creative thinking—where each image, word, or sound holds the potential to spark new memory connections, allowing trauma and recollection to emerge and transform.

Memory association

Editing through memory is a deeply personal process, revealing inner thoughts and unspoken connections. In *Home Sweet Home*, the association of memories between mother and daughter unfolds like a delicate, intuitive game—each thread of connection offering new meaning. Memory associations emerge through sound, color, movement, or image, linking one thought to the next and creating a dynamic web of resonances.

Memory association is one of the techniques in stream of consciousness, weaving past and present through layered connections. It refers to the mental connection between different ideas, images, or sensations based on similarity, contrast, or other relationships. Memory association creates a memory trigger by linking elements such as images, sounds, colors, or movements through sensorial experience or felt connections rather than logical sequence. This technique mirrors the way human memory and thought processes work—in a fluid, non-linear, and often unpredictable manner.

For example, in the film, a cut from a childhood scene of the daughter to a contemporary one where she becomes a mother in adult life is based on an emotional connection of longing rather than a chronological or spatial link. Another example occurs when the mother recounts her experience as an Indonesian Chinese diaspora bringing her four young daughters to Singapore, and the film cuts to a parallel scene of her now-adult daughter raising her young son, teaching him household chores. This associative cut connects their lives through the shared thread of motherhood, blurring temporal boundaries and highlighting emotional parallels. Here, the edit becomes not merely a technical process but a poetic space where memories linger, repeat, and transform—capturing the complex interplay of personal history and generational echoes.

The return of the repressed

The return of the repressed is defined as the re-emergence of trauma, or a haunting voice of the wound that cries out. The re-emergence of this haunting voice appears in the film at several moments as ruptures in women's lives. One example is a close-up shot of the daughter's eyes, as she turns and watches her husband walk out of her life. This scene repeats at different junctures in both the mother's and daughter's lives when they experience the blow of trauma, as the sudden violent psychic wound returns. In its first appearance, the close-up of the eyes is juxtaposed with a scene of shouting and domestic violence, followed by the daughter's voice asking her mother, "Have you ever truly loved a man?" In its second appearance, the husband abandons her, chasing the children and her out of the family house. This image is juxtaposed with the mother's narration that the love between man and woman can suddenly change, describing how, despite her submissiveness, she too was betrayed by her

husband when he had a mistress. The close-up of the eyes becomes a metaphor for the return of the repressed, where the eyes witness again and again the recurrence of trauma, moving from one woman's life to the next.

In this stream of thought, we see that beside moments of death and trauma, a parallel question emerges: Why did you fall in love with a man who eventually led to your death? Why are you still alive, or why did the death happen? These images of the woman's eyes watching moments of trauma—in both the mother's and daughter's lives—become the only witness to this death, seeing but unable to save either from tragedy, and not understanding why they are alive after death.

In Unclaimed Experience, Cathy Caruth describes trauma as "a wound that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound" (1996, p. 4). The voice in the film therefore seeks not just to find the connection between mother and daughter—which lies in the trauma—but also to ask why it returns. Through the stream of consciousness, memory narrates this story of the return of the repressed through disjointed, non-linear recollections between mother and daughter that mirror trauma's belatedness and incomprehensibility.

Dream interpretation

Sigmund Freud describes trauma as an unassimilated psychological wound that disrupts the unconscious mind. This unprocessed trauma does not simply disappear, but resurfaces and manifests in disguised forms, such as in dreams. Beyond the verbal interviews and diary entries, which record the women's memories in their conscious state of mind, the film delves into their dreams to explore the unconscious.

Their dreams become a window into the unconscious, a way to peer into the inner world of the characters. Key dreams of the mother appear in the film—one is a dream she has right after a night contemplating suicide, where a spiritual being gives her hope of a turn of fortune. For the daughter, she has a recurring dream of her son being rejected in school. Both dreams capture a sense of anxiety in both women, represented by a spinning room or building, creating a vertigo effect. This overwhelming feeling of fear and anxiety cripples both women, as the environment around them moves or spins out of control.

This spinning building becomes a metaphor for an unconscious wound that lingers throughout the film—it is interwoven into scenes where both mothers worry about their child, peppered throughout daily activities of giving the child tuition, preparing meals, playing with the children, and reading bedtime stories. It creates a blurring between the real and the surreal, as the unconscious, unprocessed trauma becomes embedded in the heart of both mother and daughter. This unconscious state of hauntology reveals a form of inherited traumatic memory being passed down from mother to daughter.

Discussion

In making this experimental film about trauma, I realized that using memory as a narrative framework offers both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it creates spontaneity, as surprising juxtapositions reveal new meanings. The non-linear process and the free association of memory allowed for creative expression, where the past, present, and future coexist without the limitations of real-world time and space.

On the other hand, using memory as a method of filmmaking also exposes personal and often deeply private aspects of the characters. This places them in positions of vulnerability. I was fortunate and grateful that my mother was very open to being filmed, but I had to be careful that none of the other characters' names or present faces were revealed in the film. As the other main character, whose life was placed under magnified scrutiny, I felt exposed and nervous

about allowing audiences to witness such intimate moments, particularly those involving trauma.

Is memory reliable?

More critically, I questioned whether memory—revealing the private and intimate thoughts of a person—was an effective method for exploring truth in this documentary. I wanted to be honest with myself. I pushed myself hard to tell the truth, to seek the truth, and to confront the difficult and dark places that people would normally avoid, in the hope of finding the roots of trauma and perhaps some resolution. However, debates persist over whether memory—which, by nature, is subjective, imaginative, and fallible (Walker, 2005)—can serve as a reliable path to truth. Shouldn't truth be grounded purely in objective facts? How can memory's subjective nature form a basis for truth?

This problem of subjectivity is embedded in the very nature of memory, where the act of remembering involves a transformation of the remembered event or experience (Saunders, 2008). "The return of a memory" (Ricoeur, 2004) takes the form of an image—what Bergson calls the memory-image—in which the production of an image involves both actual memory and imagination, containing inherent subjectivity. Furthermore, the changeable nature of memory, as being "continuously modified in the present" (Hirsch, 1981), adds to this subjectivity. Yet, this very subjectivity constitutes the essence of how memory functions, as an integral part of how the human mind develops cognitive understanding and constructs meaning in the world.

Although the process of memory is invisible, there is an integrity and consistency in its logic and its search for truth (Casey, 1972). Freud (1960) describes this search as the unconscious dream wish, where the dream turns this way and that until it finds the most opportune path. I used the same method of stream of consciousness in editing the film, where the cuts follow the path of memory or dream. The unconscious search of memory struggles to discover an unknown thought without fully knowing what it is (Bollas, 1987). By recalling and processing past memories of what was seen, heard, and experienced, the act of remembering becomes a cognitive process. This search continues until it reaches a feeling of déjà vu—a moment of recognition where truth declares itself and the act of remembering is completed (Ricoeur, 2004). Aristotle describes this search for truth as orthos logos—right reason—where the faithfulness of memory affirms its epistemic, or knowledge-validating, dimension (Ricoeur, 2004).

In the context of documentary filmmaking, Aufderheide (2007) describes the process as a vehicle and catalyst, enabling the discovery of both a fictional part of ourselves and the most real part.

Is there a cure to trauma?

In the course of editing the film, I was led to this question: is there any cure for trauma? Turning to memory studies, both Freud and Caruth suggest that trauma resists complete resolution, though each offers a different perspective.

Freud, particularly in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), describes trauma as an unassimilated psychic wound that returns through compulsive repetition. He did not propose a "cure" for trauma in the conventional sense but believed that psychoanalysis—through working-through, interpretation, and making the unconscious conscious—could help individuals integrate the traumatic experience into their psychic life. However, he acknowledged that some traumas, such as war neuroses, are so extreme that full resolution may not be possible.

Caruth, particularly in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), builds on Freud's work and argues that trauma is inherently unclaimable and irreconcilable, as it is not fully knowable. Its return manifests as a "haunting" that cannot be completely cured. Caruth emphasizes that trauma's core is the missed encounter with the event itself—it wasn't fully experienced in real time, so it haunts later as flashbacks, nightmares, or silence. For Caruth, listening and witnessing are crucial, but full closure may not be achievable.

Many contemporary trauma theorists and clinicians suggest that while trauma may not be "cured" in the sense of erasure, healing and integration are possible through therapy. Approaches such as narrative therapy help survivors process and re-integrate traumatic memories. Community support and witnessing (Laub, 1992) are also essential. Artistic practices, such as this experimental documentary *Home Sweet Home* (2024), offer alternative pathways to articulate, externalize, and engage with trauma's unspeakable core.

Another filmmaker who uses memory to explore life's questions is Krzysztof Kieślowski. His films offer insights into "curing" trauma through memory as an editing technique (Wonowidjojo, 2023). In examining why certain tragedies happen in someone's life, Kieślowski employs a technique called "variants of fate" to question whether a different path was possible. This is evident in his films, where he gives the main character a second chance through a second life. In *The Double Life of Véronique* (1991), two women—Weronika from Poland and Véronique from France, born on the same day and with the same appearance—share a mysterious connection, as if they are living the same life. By juxtaposing these parallel lives, Kieślowski questions whether living in different countries might lead to a different fate, potentially preventing the tragedy of death. One life ending in death serves as a warning to the other to live differently.

Expanding on this technique, Kieślowski uses a double life again in *Three Colors: Red* (1994), breaking the boundary of time and space. He introduces Auguste, who serves as a younger version of the retired judge Kern—a hypothetical "double life" through contemporary flashback. This structure heals Kern's trauma by altering his destiny.

Similarly, in *Home Sweet Home* (2024), I employed the variants of fate technique. Despite an open conversation with her mother, the daughter fails to find resolution to her childhood trauma. In a contemporary flashback, the adult daughter breaks the barrier of time and returns to the past to address her younger self directly. She speaks to the psychic wound of trauma in an attempt to heal the unresolved pain and bring peace to the child. The reconciliation occurs through this flashback at the film's end, confronting the irreconcilable trauma.

Another variant of fate appears in the film, attempting to "cure" the trauma running through both women's lives. The film's structure—juxtaposing the two lives of mother and daughter—can be read as either the same life haunted by the same trauma, or as a double life running in parallel as variants of fate. While the mother's life ends in regret, rejecting a second chance at love, the ending serves as advice to the daughter: you still have a chance to live happily. The connection between these double lives functions as both a warning and a guide—the mother's failed life compels the daughter to seek happiness and fulfillment.

Conclusion

Through this film, I sought to find answers to a question in life that cannot be easily resolved through logic. It also raised urgent questions: Am I making this film to understand trauma? To make sense of its repetition? To interrupt its intergenerational transmission?

Using stream of consciousness as a conceptual framework, I translated trauma theories into an approach to editing that mirrors the human mind's unconscious processing of memory. This experiment demonstrates how film can become a space where irreconcilable trauma may be approached—not necessarily resolved, but where the voice of the psychic wound can be seen, heard, acknowledged, and accepted, serving as a witness.

My experiment in *Home Sweet Home* offers an original contribution by extending trauma theory into the realm of hybrid documentary practice. By interweaving personal memory, family history, and experimental editing, the film reveals how creative methods can give form to experiences that resist representation. This process not only challenges linear storytelling but also opens new possibilities for understanding how trauma is transmitted across generations.

The memory approach I employed—layering the conscious and unconscious, personal and collective—provides a creative avenue for processing unlocatable trauma, understanding intergenerational bonds, and articulating the invisible. Especially in the digital age, where digital memory becomes increasingly pervasive and fragmented, this experiment suggests a pressing need for further research into how hybrid documentaries can explore the multifaceted dimensions of memory. Using memory as a search for truth, films become not just a medium of storytelling, but an active space of inquiry, witness, and potential healing.

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