

ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN PRAGUE
FILM AND TV SCHOOL (FAMU)
DEPARTMENT OF PHOTOGRAPHY

BACHELOR THESIS

VICARIOUS TRAUMA

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Examiner:

Date of thesis defense:

Academic title granted: BcA

PRAGUE, 2019

AKADEMIE MÚZICKÝCH UMĚNÍ V PRAZE FILMOVÁ A TELEVIZNÍ
FAKULTA
FILMOVÉ, TELEVIZNÍ A FOTOGRAFICKÉ UMĚNÍ A NOVÁ MÉDIA
OBOR FOTOGRAFIE

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

TRAUMA Z DRUHE RUKY

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Zkoušející:

Datum obhajoby diplomové práce:

Akademický titul udělen: BcA.

PRAHA, 2019

Declaration

I declare that I have prepared my Bachelor's Thesis/Master's Thesis, Dissertation independently on the following topic:

under the expert guidance of my thesis advisor and with the use of the cited literature and sources.

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Abstract

The construct of this thesis is an examination of the role of trauma or traumatic events within a viewer's vicarious experience. The fundamental aspects, which I will be examining, in order to understand this role, will be vicarious witnessing of traumatic events via media and art. Beginning with how trauma is understood in a clinical sense, the thesis will explore the definition and the history of trauma. Furthermore, the thesis will explore the understanding of vicarious trauma through media witnessing. This thesis presents case studies in which the experience of a traumatic event is portrayed, in a vicarious capacity, to an audience, whether it be through mass media, or contemporary art and will establish the importance and role of vicarious trauma in today's society.

Konstrukce této práce je zkoumáním role traumatu nebo traumatu události v rámci divácké zkušenosti. Základní aspekty, které budu zkoumat, abych pochopil tuto roli, budou zástupným svědkem traumatických událostí prostřednictvím médií a umění. Počínaje tím, jak je trauma chápáno, bude práce zkoumat definici a historii traumatu. Pokračování práce bude zkoumat chápání zprostředkovaného traumatu, a to prostřednictvím sdělovacích prostředků. Tato práce prezentuje případové studie, ve kterých je zkušenost traumatické události vylíčena ve zprostředkované funkci divákovi, ať už prostřednictvím masmédií, či současného umění, a ukáže důležitost a úlohu zprostředkovaného traumatu.

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Introduction: The Psychological Impact of Trauma

Traumatic events occur to people in all sorts of different capacities and experiences. Many people have either experienced a traumatic event or met someone who has experienced trauma and, likewise, dealt with trauma either physically or psychologically. Generally, psychological trauma occurs when an individual cannot cope with an overwhelming amount of stress from a singular or recurring distressing situation; some examples include the experience of a natural disaster, physical violence, physical and mental abuse, terrorism, or having someone close pass away. In the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*, published in the 1990s, trauma was defined as:

- (1) the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others;
- (2) the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror.

Note: In children, this may be expressed instead by disorganized or agitated behavior.¹

However, this early DSM definition seems to greatly generalize a traumatic event as something that threatens someone's physical integrity only; yet, *psychological* integrity is an important aspect of a human being that can be as equally threatened by trauma, i.e., highly upsetting but not life-threatening events - for example, extreme emotional abuse, major loss or separation, degradation or humiliation, and coercion (but not a physical threat or force) to sexual experiences - as such, DSM IV undoubtedly underestimated the extent of actual trauma in the general population².

When one has experienced a traumatic event, it is difficult to attribute traumatization to their mental state, as being traumatized cannot be easily diagnosed. There are no exact symptoms of traumatization and the longevity of a traumatic event

¹ Estss.org. (2019). *DSM IV PTSD definition – ESTSS*. [online] Available at: <https://estss.org/learn-about-trauma/dsm-iv-definition/> [Accessed 19 Feb. 2019].

² Briere, J. and Scott, C. (2006). *Principles of trauma therapy*. 1st ed. Sage Publications, Inc, p.4.

does not pertain to being traumatized; being traumatized refers merely to the inability to cope with the traumatic event that had occurred, which can, though is not subject to, cause psychological disorders, such as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, substance abuse, and/or anxiety disorders. The main reason why it is extraordinarily difficult to diagnose an individual as traumatized is that the inability to cope is dependent on the individual's emotional resilience following the traumatic event.

An individual's resilience to being traumatized is dependent on his or her coping mechanisms. Whether or not someone uses coping mechanisms that can alleviate the impact of traumatic situations is dependent on a vast range of factors that can include the available support system, e.g., family or friends, a healthy upbringing, immediate environment, or stress factors. A large aspect of one's resilience is not only situational but also can be reliant on previous exposure to trauma. Seery *et al.* (2010) conducted a study to determine whether or not a person emerges from a crisis with emotional damage. The results were dependent on:

1. The depth and severity of the crisis;
2. The number and severity of crises accumulated over a lifetime prior to the latest trauma;
3. In fact, moderate to mild prior events can actually strengthen a person to meet the new crisis³

The authors explored a sample population of people who had experienced various distressing situations and how these affected their resilience to traumatic events and found a high likelihood that individuals who have previously experienced trauma would have a stronger resilience to traumatic situations.

After a traumatic event, if one is traumatized, there is a likelihood that an individual might face a number of different psychological disorders, the most prevalent being PTSD. PTSD is an important symptom of trauma, as it comprises many singular symptoms of a

³Schwartz, A. (2019). *Resilience and Trauma - Introduction to Emotional Resilience And Resiliency*. [online] Mentalhelp.net. Available at: <https://www.mentalhelp.net/blogs/resilience-and-trauma/> [Accessed 20 Feb. 2019].

traumatic event under its definition. At the core of PTSD lies recurrence of the trauma, as a person may be subject to triggers that enable him or her to re-experience the traumatic event mentally or physically through flashbacks or nightmares, leading to issues of anxiety, anger, dissociation, or insomnia. It is important to note though, that these symptoms are associated with PTSD, but having them does not account to definitely having PTSD as they could, alone, simply be trauma responses. People suffering from PTSD may avoid situations or people who remind them of the traumatic event, and they may have strong negative reactions to something as ordinary as a loud noise or an accidental touch⁴. PTSD can occur immediately after a traumatic event or have a delayed onset, occurring later than six months after the event. As there is a large range of criteria for PTSD, one can only be diagnosed with it if the duration of their symptoms lasts longer than a month's time.

In 1980, PTSD was recognized as a disorder with specific symptoms that could be reliably diagnosed and was added to the *American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*⁵. Before its recognition, the symptoms of PTSD fell under different names throughout history, generally being related to symptoms of war with titles, such as *soldiers' fatigue*, *battle exhaustion*, *the thousand-yard stare*, or *shell shock*. The disorder came to light after the Vietnam War in response to soldiers returning home and having the symptoms of PTSD as a direct result of the trauma of combat. During the 1970s, social movements led to research of traumatic events and the effects of trauma on not only Vietnam War veterans, but also Holocaust survivors, rape victims, and survivors of domestic abuse, eventually encompassing these in the definition of PTSD.

The earliest account of attempts to treat the psychological impact of trauma is recorded at the birth of psychoanalysis, when the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud was trying to effectively treat hysterical and neurotic symptoms of his female clients, as first presented by himself and his co-author Josef Breuer in their 1895 book *Studies of*

⁴ Parekh, R. (2019). *What Is PTSD?*. [online] Psychiatry.org. Available at: <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd> [Accessed 20 Feb. 2019].

⁵ Report.nih.gov. (2019). *NIH Fact Sheets - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*. [online] Available at: <https://report.nih.gov/NIHfactsheets/ViewFactSheet.aspx?csid=58> [Accessed 20 Feb. 2019].

Hysteria. In his research, Freud used a case study of a lady who was suffering from chronically recurrent suppurative rhinitis. The subject had been referred to Freud after the physical symptoms of rhinitis had been accompanied by new psychological symptoms, the central symptom being hysteria alongside depression. Freud's method of psychoanalysis was an attempt to delve into his subject's subconscious through interpreting the subjective olfactory sensations, since they were recurrent hallucinations, as chronic hysterical symptoms⁶. By the means of this case study, Freud had begun to define the root causes of hysteria as being an effect of repressed memories of a distressing, traumatic calamity. During 1921, Freud published an essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in which he presented his theory of one's consciousness having the important ability to protect against external stimuli by using its own specific energies to convert the excessive external energies. German philosopher, Walter Benjamin explains the energy conversion aspect of Freud's theory writing,

“The threat from these energies is one of shocks. The more readily consciousness registers these shocks, the less likely are they to have a traumatic effect. Psychoanalytic theory strives to understand the nature of these traumatic shocks “on the basis of their breaking through the protective shield against stimuli.” According to this theory, fright has “significance” in the “absence of any preparedness for anxiety.”⁷”

Of course, as this was the beginning of psychoanalysis, the technique would be improved with added variables to further our understanding of the human subconscious and the effects on people who have experienced trauma.

Thus, it is clear that severe psychological effects of trauma can be caused by first-hand experience to a traumatic event, impacting physical or psychological integrity (e.g., war, rape, or extreme mental abuse); furthermore, these depend on a number of different factors, as the complexity of trauma varies across individuals and experiences. However, the purpose of this thesis is to investigate whether a similar psychological experience to first-hand trauma can be induced by witnessing trauma, i.e., experiencing it *vicariously*,

⁶ Freud, S. (1893). Miss Lucy R, Case Histories from Studies on Hysteria. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume II (1893-1895): Studies on Hysteria, 106-124

⁷ Benjamin, W., Zohn, H. and Arendt, H. (1968). *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, p.161.

through media or art, and what that experience, if any, can mean for the witnesses. This will thus comprise the content of the following sections of the thesis.

Chapter One: Trauma and Media Witnessing

Since the evolution of the digital age, world events have been accessible to almost everyone, in real time, with the use of ever updating technology, enabling a community of viewing and sharing, with the help of traditional forms of media, i.e., television, radio, and print, being compacted into singular devices. As documenting and sharing everything around us has become so frequent in everyday lives, it is inevitable that traumatizing events can be viewed by people from places far from the initial occurrence, creating masses of distant witnesses. Simply defined, 'media witnessing' is the witnessing performed in, by, and through the media; more specifically, the systematic and ongoing reporting of the experiences and realities of distant others to mass audiences⁸. In the past, access to viewing traumatic events was filtered out by authoritative channels of traditional media, such as television, which monitored the degree of exposure of the public to the output of traditional journalism (e.g., war documentation broadcasted by a news outlet), essentially establishing what the audience was allowed to see. With our current technologies, allowing people to not only be witnesses, but also always have a ready audience, the phenomenon of citizen journalism has broadened the scope of allowance, in terms of what a population is allowed and capable of accessing. The question then stands, as a witness of a traumatic event through the process of media reporting, does this traumatic event affect its witnesses vicariously?

To explore this question, it is important to establish the role of a witness and the role of media. Simply put, a witness is just someone who sees something happen. In the essay *Witnessing*, John Durham Peters describes the aspects of witnessing in the present moment and with audiovisual media. Peters writes,

"To witness an event is to be responsible in some way to it. The stream of data flowing through the unaided senses already exceeds our explanatory schemata. The present moment supplies enough sensory information to outlast a lifetime of analysis. Audiovisual media, however,

⁸ Pinchevski, A. and Frosh, P. (2008). *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, p.1.

are able to catch contingent details of events that would previously have been either imperceptible or lost to memory.⁹

Though in saying this, even with the audiovisual forms of media giving one the ability to accentuate one's own processing of events, a media witness can only be a witness to something he or she believes has *actually* happened. For example, on the 20th of July, 1969, the Apollo 11 mission to successfully land a human being on the Moon took place. This event had an estimated viewership of 600 million people watching it live on television, a record-breaking number at the time¹⁰. This was due to, of course, the significance of the event after the long competition and history between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War and the significance of space exploration for humanity itself. Since then, however, there has been a growing number of conspiracy theorists who do not believe that man has, in fact, reached the Moon. The conspiracy has grown exponentially since the accessibility of technology, allowing this media event to be questioned via techniques inaccessible to people in the 1960s; as such, the legitimacy of the Moon landing went unquestioned at the time. However, with our current state of technology, allowing us to question media content, skepticism of what is believed to be true has increased significantly; including questioning true historical events, such as the Moon landing or the Holocaust. Together with the skeptical human nature, the act of media witnessing is contingent upon the specific event witnessed; in other words, the ontology of witnessing is dependent on its context and relatability to the viewer, as different events give rise to different modalities of emotional and cognitive response. As such, the field of witnessing operates on terms of trust, which is the basic currency among the agents and the object for which they compete¹¹. With the addition of skepticism regarding the content with which one is presented, the impact of trauma and its psychological effects, in the context of vicarious witnessing, can be greatly modified.

⁹ Peters, J. (2001). Witnessing. *Media, Culture & Society*, 23(6), p.708.

¹⁰ Telegraph.co.uk. (2019). Apollo 11 Moon landing: ten facts about Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins' mission. [online] Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/space/5852237/Apollo-11-Moon-landing-ten-facts-about-Armstrong-Aldrin-and-Collins-mission.html> [Accessed 19 Apr. 2019].

¹¹ Pinchevski, A. and Frosh, P. (2008). *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, p.133.

To summarize thus far, to elicit a *genuine* emotional response to a reported traumatic event is dependent on whether one believes that what one is witnessing is, in fact, true. Therefore, the focus of the following section of the thesis will be on establishing whether psychological trauma can be induced - vicariously, via a media outlet - in individuals who do not doubt the legitimacy of that event. On the 19th of April, 1995, Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols were the perpetrators in a domestic terrorist truck bombing in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, killing 168 people and injuring more than 680 people. The bombing was covered by the media extensively, domestically and internationally, with many first reports from the media assuming terrorism from the Middle East. In a special CBS report, the day of the bombing, Connie Chung, co-anchor of the CBS evening news reported,

“This is the deadliest terror attack on U.S. soil ever. A U.S. government source has told CBS News that it has Middle East terrorism written all over it.”¹²

CNN News had also broadcasted its own report with their news anchor, Frank Sesno, saying,

“We have been told that a number of extremist Islamic groups have been traced to the Oklahoma area, and while there is no specific link yet [to the bombing], I’ve been told that they are among those who are being looked at very, very closely.”¹³

In these reports, before there even was a face to associate with the attack, the face was speculated to be Middle Eastern, which, at the time, elicited anger from the adult American population against Middle Easterners and Muslims in general, directly leading to harassment, stereotyping, and physical attacks following the media coverage. These incidents mainly took the form of:

¹² Campbell, W. (2019). *Media fail: The flawed early coverage of 1995 OKC bombing*. [online] The 1995 Blog. Available at: <https://1995blog.com/2015/04/19/media-fail-the-flawed-early-coverage-of-1995-okc-bombing/> [Accessed 19 Apr. 2019].

¹³ Campbell, W. (2019). *Media fail: The flawed early coverage of 1995 OKC bombing*. [online] The 1995 Blog. Available at: <https://1995blog.com/2015/04/19/media-fail-the-flawed-early-coverage-of-1995-okc-bombing/> [Accessed 19 Apr. 2019].

1) numerous threatening phone calls, including bomb threats, to mosques and Islamic centers; 2) verbal abuse directed at Muslims who appeared in public; 3) harassing behavior by co-workers; 4) direct physical attacks, such as rock-throwing, beatings, and shootings. In addition, two mosques were set on fire; one of these incidents has been officially ruled arson by fire investigators.¹⁴

Once the American born Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols were captured, it was confirmed that they were not Middle Eastern terrorists and that their motives did not align with the speculated terrorist motives against the western culture. Shockingly, after the capture and release of the terrorists' names and origin, the response of the public to the traumatic event of bombing evolved from anger to fear, and full blown anxiety, due to the realization that someone just like them would be capable of such an act and consequent uncertainty of whom to trust, as anyone in their vicinity could be, potentially, a domestic terrorist.

In 2003, a study called *Media Exposure in Children One Hundred Miles From a Terrorist Bombing* was published by Pfefferbaum and colleagues whose objective was to assess (i) indirect interpersonal exposure to the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, (ii) broadcast and print media exposure in the aftermath of the explosion, (iii) emotional reactions to media coverage, and (iv) posttraumatic stress reactions in children distant from the explosion¹⁵. Taking into account race, income status, and distance of the participants from the Oklahoma City Bombing, the methods to explore these four aspects of interest following the attack were to survey 88 sixth-grade students from public schools with a specialized survey. The results of this study show that the media coverage of such a traumatizing event can elicit a long-lasting fear response to the incident and any subsequent media coverage, even if one's immediate security is not in jeopardy. This

¹⁴ A Rush to Judgment A Special Report on Anti-Muslim Stereotyping, Harassment and Hate Crimes Following the Bombing of Oklahoma City's Murrah Federal Building, April 19, 1995. (1995). [online] p.iv. Available at: https://www.cairoklahoma.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/1995-A_rush_to_judgement.pdf [Accessed 19 Apr. 2019].

¹⁵ Pfefferbaum, B., Seale, T.W., Brandt, E.N. Jnr, Pfefferbaum, R.L., Doughty, D.E. & Rainwater, S.M. (2003). Media exposure in children one hundred miles from a terrorist bombing. *Annals of Clinical Psychiatry*, 15(1), 1-8.

investigation also suggests that posttraumatic stress reactions may increase with increasing exposure to media coverage as the reaction to that coverage intensifies¹⁶.

Exploration of trauma through the events of the Oklahoma City bombing is important for a number of reasons; chiefly, for the emphasis on the fluctuation of emotional response that was caused not only by the act of terror itself, but also by the media. It is evident that media witnessing can cause an emotional reaction and studies confirm that it can also elicit a post-traumatic stress response. Importantly, this example of the media creating immediate and long-lasting emotional response, similar to the experience of first-handed psychological trauma, highlights the inevitable possibility of manipulating human emotion and behaviour for political factors.

One of the most iconic examples of traumatic events manipulating society and culture through the media to garner a political response with every aspect of the crisis was the terrorist attack of 9/11. When numerous planes were hijacked on September 11th, 2001, by the al Qaeda terrorist group and crashed into the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the event was subject to media frenzy, watched by the entire world. This was an event that was designed as an act of communication, as the *ultimate* media event. In fact, it became identifiable as a particular instant (planes being flown one after another into the Twin Towers) that became meaningful as a symbolic performance staged for global television audiences. Its nature as an instance, an image to be widely distributed, repeated, and symbolically transmuted, is precisely the reason for its occurrence as an unrepeatable and unique instant¹⁷. It is pivotal to understand that the media were used as a tool by not only al Qaeda, but also the United States of America, to construct the political atmosphere and consequent emotional response of the public to justify the invasion of Afghanistan thereafter. On the one hand, al Qaeda was relying on the fact that Americans witnessed the annihilation of a strong symbol, which was rooted in American culture, inducing a fear response in an entire society, and thus, inevitably, changing American culture. On the other hand, what followed was the political response

¹⁶ Pfefferbaum, B., Seale, T.W., Brandt, E.N. Jnr, Pfefferbaum, R.L., Doughty, D.E. & Rainwater, S.M. (2003). Media exposure in children one hundred miles from a terrorist bombing. *Annals of Clinical Psychiatry*, 15(1), 1-8.

¹⁷ Pinchevski, A. and Frosh, P. (2008). *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, p.8.

of the United States of America, which relied solely on the media to promote its political agenda and gain the support of all the emotionally distraught Americans who felt that they themselves were a part of the traumatic event. In addition, although the event was devastating to Americans specifically, the attack was witnessed globally, and the message that the untouchable superpower of the USA was touched and, possibly, in shambles, psychologically affected not only Americans but anyone who media witnessed the event.

As manipulation by media increasingly permeates society, it is impossible to discount the extreme impact that media has on society, especially in their aim to provide content for mass consumption. By creating the possibility of indirectly witnessing traumatic events, the manner in which these events are reported and the psychological impact on the witnesses are undeniable. Due to the necessity of perspective and truth playing major roles in experiencing trauma vicariously, the most important responses, when presented with media manipulation of traumatic events, are the emotional reactions elicited by the belief that the trauma is personally relevant to the witness. Although not on such a global scale, in a similar fashion, trauma is frequently portrayed through contemporary visual art, such as photography, performance, painting, or installation art, in which artists create a modified representation of their subjective traumatic experiences, in order to elicit a psychological response from the viewers with the goal of their experiencing the trauma vicariously. The final section of the thesis will focus on two contemporary artists whose work, depicting their own traumatic experience, has deeply affected their audience.

Chapter Two: Trauma Through Art

Throughout history, it has been said that art has the ability to elicit emotional response. The complexities of how an emotional response is induced by art vary, though in contemporary art a large aspect to eliciting emotion is association of personal memory relative to witnessing the presented material form of visual stimuli. Artists have the ability to manipulate their subjective experiences to create something visually and emotionally stimulating. Besides the psychological response to aesthetic imagery *per se* (i.e., what emotions would be elicited through primal visual stimuli, such as patterns, colours, or textures), the critical aim of art depicting trauma is to elicit a psychological response in the audience akin to that of the artist's.

Widely regarded as one of the most significant artists of the 20th century whose art and career were significantly influenced by the trauma he had experienced, Joseph Beuys is an artist whose practice is deeply rooted in the experience of trauma. Joseph Beuys, born on the 21st of May, 1921, is known for his experimental art, delving into forms of sculpture, painting, installation, and performance. Beuys' traumatic experience occurred by means of a near-death experience during World War II. Stationed in Crimea as a gunner and radio operator in the German Air Force, on a mission in 1943, he was badly injured when his plane crashed in the Crimean peninsula. As the only survivor, Beuys recounts the initial facts of the experience to the family of the co-pilot who perished in the crash,

“The next thing I can remember clearly is the soot. Workers and women (in our territory) pulled me from the wreckage, cared for me, washed the blood from my face and, at my questioning gesture, gave me the news that Hanne, my dear Hanne, had embarked on his flight into eternity¹⁸.

¹⁸ Knöfel, U. (2013). *Joseph Beuys: New Letter Debunks More Wartime Myths - SPIEGEL ONLINE - International*. [online] [spiegel.de](https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/new-letter-debunks-myths-about-german-artist-joseph-beuys-a-910642.html). Available at: <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/new-letter-debunks-myths-about-german-artist-joseph-beuys-a-910642.html> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2019].

When Beuys detailed his experience later on in his career, he described the Tartar tribespeople in the area who nursed him back to life with the use of primitive techniques, most importantly covering him in fat and wrapping him in felt to insulate his body heat, materials which would later act as strong symbolism in his work. Profoundly affected by the crash, the severe trauma, the near-death experience, and his rescue, which he perceived as a "rebirth", Beuys no longer saw himself, other people, or society as a whole in the same way as previously¹⁹. From the catharsis of transforming his trauma into art, Beuys was able to represent his world views and political statements, inducing emotion and intrigue, with the merit of not only living through one of the most turbulent eras in history, but also being seen as a moral authority whose wartime experience shaped a unique and different perspective for people experiencing his subjective trauma vicariously.

For instance, in 1974, Joseph Beuys presented his widely known performance piece *I like America and America Likes Me*. The performance commenced upon Beuys' arrival at the John F. Kennedy airport, in New York City, where he had assistants meet him and wrap him in a large piece of felt. He was then put into an ambulance and driven to the Rene Block Gallery, which was transformed into an enclosure in which Beuys would spend three days, enclosed in periods of eight hours. Among the items it contained were a bale of straw, a felt blanket, a shepherd's crook, a stack of 50 copies of the Wall Street Journal and a live coyote²⁰. During these three days, Beuys interacted with the coyote and viewers would watch the development of human and animal interaction in a primal fashion. Beuys defined his experience by claiming,

"You could say that a reckoning has to be made with the coyote, and only then can this trauma be lifted,²¹"

¹⁹ Ottomann, C., Stollwerck, P., Majer, H., Gatty, I. and Muehlberger, T. (2010). *Joseph Beuys: trauma and catharsis*. - PubMed - NCBI. [online] Ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21393290> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2019].

²⁰ Laing, O. (2016). *Fat, felt and a fall to Earth: the making and myths of Joseph Beuys*. [online] theguardian.com. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/jan/30/fat-felt-fall-earth-making-and-myths-joseph-beuys> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2019].

²¹ Mann, J. (2017). *When Joseph Beuys Locked Himself in a Room with a Live Coyote*. [online] Artsy.net. Available at: <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-joseph-beuys-locked-room-live-coyote> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2019].

Heavy symbolism within his performance - gesture, felt, the coyote, and the behavioral uncertainty - was Beuys' honing in on his subjective traumatic experience, manipulating it to symbolize a perspective of witnessing the values in American society larger than his own experience. The use of natural material in Beuys' work (fat, blood, animal hair, and wax) is symbolic, as these were embedded into his psyche via the trauma he had experienced. From his being nurtured back to health by the community of natives who found him, Beuys became obsessed with the process of healing and would represent this with the materials used to heal him. In many of his works that use natural material, Beuys uses this symbolism to contrast his own healing experiences with the natives to represent the practice of community healing, which he understood to be needed within society. As his use of symbolism was so strong in his statements, Beuys abstracted trauma in a way that was never needed to be directly shown to elicit emotion. His understanding of art and the relationship needed between him and his audience, in order to elicit an emotional response, is expressed by him,

"The work of art enters into the person and the person internalises the work of art as well, it has to be possible that these two to completely sink into each other ...²²"

In direct contrast to the indirect, abstract presentation of traumatic symbolism used in Beuys' work, artist Tracey Emin uses themes of trauma response to directly showcase the product of psychological distress. Tracey Emin is an English artist who uses a variety of different mediums to present her work, which explores subjective honesty through her autobiographical, confessional, and confrontational methods. One work in particular has been subject to controversy - her installation *My Bed* - exhibited for the Turner Prize at the Tate gallery in 1999. The project was an installation of the bed in which she had been lying for days during a distressing phase of her life when she had been dealing with relationship problems, causing her to enter a state of suicidal depression, which led to her succumbing to living in filth. The installation of the bed and its surroundings exhibited

²² Laing, O. (2016). *Fat, felt and a fall to Earth: the making and myths of Joseph Beuys*. [online] theguardian.com. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/jan/30/fat-felt-fall-earth-making-and-myths-joseph-beuys> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2019].

the honesty of the state in which she was: with sheets that were stained with bodily fluids, condoms, panties stained with menstrual blood, tissues, and chaotic placement of everyday items on display. It was clear that the distressing experience had induced trauma responses and Emin confronted her audience to witness the brutal reality of psychological dismay. At the time, surprisingly, the response to her work elicited shock and disgust towards the raw nature of presentation, rather than sadness and empathy, although it did bring into question mental health and psychological trauma shortly afterwards. Art historian Laura Lake Smith comments on the work,

“Looking at *My Bed* makes the viewer consider the events and mishaps that led up to the wreckage. The piece is expansive in its ability to conjure a full narrative about depression, self-harm, and eventual redemption: The bed is empty, of course, because Emin decided to leave it and sublimate her troubles into art.²³”

When exploring themes of trauma and its effects on the witness, in the context of *My Bed*, comprehending Emin’s perspective and the relatability factor is necessary in order to explain the initial reaction of being disturbed rather than empathetic or understanding. For the most part, we can assume that in the scenario of the gallery exhibition for the Turner Prize, it would be unlikely to find someone dealing with severe suicidal depression or other psychological disorders, in the nature of what Emin had herself experienced, as those people would be similarly debilitated and most likely not attend the exhibition. This is not to discount that some members of the audience could not have had or experienced psychological turmoil in the past, though it is unlikely that the majority would have experienced much more than a singular depressive episode. As such, the degree of pathological turmoil which Emin experienced, would have left them with an emotional response of confusion and anger when witnessing her work. Thus, paradoxically, the debilitating nature of the state in which Emin produced this piece succeeded in eliciting a response to her trauma, but not that of understanding, but rather

²³ Cohen, A. (2018). *Tracey Emin’s “My Bed” Ignored Society’s Expectations of Women*. [online] Artsy.net. Available at: <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-tracey-emins-my-bed-ignored-societys-expectations-women> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2019].

of hatred. Adrian Searle, a writer from *The Guardian* wrote about the piece saying that it was an,

“endlessly solipsistic, self-regarding homage” to the artist, and chided: “Tracey, you are a bore.”²⁴

What we can perceive from these examples is that the presentation of trauma through art, and whether it elicits an emotional response in viewers, is not dependent on a direct threat to one’s being, physically or psychologically, as it would be through media witnessing of traumatic experiences, but the *relatability* to the depicted experience, akin to that of first-hand trauma, in conjunction with the resilience of the audience. As such, vicariously witnessing one’s presentation or product of a traumatic experience can lead to not only strong emotional responses from the viewers, but also a deeper exploration of the complexities of the subject matter, which is presented by the artist who utilizes the strength of a traumatic experience as a powerful artistic tool.

When we explore the characteristics of vicarious trauma and its impact on the society through media or art, the question then stands: how will vicarious trauma evolve? In the conclusion of the thesis, the hypothetical evolution of vicarious trauma will be examined.

²⁴ Cohen, A. (2018). *Tracey Emin’s “My Bed” Ignored Society’s Expectations of Women*. [online] Artsy.net. Available at: <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-tracey-emins-my-bed-ignored-societys-expectations-women> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2019].

Conclusion:

The Future of Vicarious Trauma

As discussed throughout the thesis, it is clear that vicarious trauma is an experience worth investigating within our society. Since the 1990s, the definition of trauma has evolved, as its effects have been continuously investigated, in order to have a better understanding of both its physical and psychological impact. Importantly, a significant change can be seen in the understanding of trauma in the more recent edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V; 2013), in which the diagnostic criteria for PTSD have been updated. The first criterion now stipulates the originating factors:

A. Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways:

1. Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s).
2. Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others
3. Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend. In cases of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental.
4. Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s) (e.g. first responders collecting human remains; police officers repeatedly exposed to details of child abuse).

Note: Criterion A4 does not apply to exposure through electronic media, television, movies, or pictures, unless this exposure is work related²⁵

With this latest definition, it is evident that the threat to psychological integrity has now been officially accepted as an essential factor of trauma, but the exposure to trauma through media is only acknowledged, within the note, *if* such an exposure is work related. Although, paradoxically, while barring media exposure as a possible cause of trauma, the

²⁵ American Psychiatric Association: *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*. (2013). 5th ed. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, p.271.

note nevertheless admits, by way of exception, that under certain conditions, media may in fact have a traumatic effect.²⁶

Categorizing and predicting such circumstances is exceedingly difficult, however. As discussed in the first section of the thesis, psychological trauma is a consequence of an individual's inability to cope with an overwhelming amount of stress from a singular or recurring distressing situation, and being traumatized cannot be easily diagnosed, especially until clinical symptoms of anxiety disorders or depression appear. It is, thus, important to realize, that if vicarious trauma through media witnessing is not addressed as a serious and relevant issue, it can and it already has been used as a new form of mass manipulation. For example, in recent uncovered events of manipulation, *The Observer* and *The Guardian* exposed what is now labeled as the Cambridge Analytica Scandal. Essentially, due to a whistleblower named Christopher Wylie, it was made evident that the company for which he had previously worked, Cambridge Analytica, was using user profile data from Facebook to create individually targeted ads for the use of political manipulation. In fact, Wylie was the creator of this manipulation technique, not realizing the legality issues associated with it; currently, it is still under investigation and, at the moment, remains in a grey area of legality. Writer of *The Guardian*, Carole Cadwalladr, who was able to expose the story and work with Wylie, describes,

“Aged 24, while studying for a PhD in fashion trend forecasting, he came up with a plan to harvest the Facebook profiles of millions of people in the US, and to use their private and personal information to create sophisticated psychological and political profiles. And then target them with political ads designed to work on their particular psychological makeup.”²⁷

Due to Facebook ads not being archived and the information of who buys these ads and how much was spent on them is thus unattainable public information, it is difficult to prove as a deliberate act of deception, but from what is known to-date, this new form

²⁶ Pinchevski, A. (2015). Screen Trauma: Visual Media and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 33(4), pp.51-75.

²⁷ Cadwalladr, C. (2018). *'I made Steve Bannon's psychological warfare tool': meet the data war whistleblower*. [online] theguardian.com. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/data-war-whistleblower-christopher-wylie-faceook-nix-bannon-trump> [Accessed 30 Apr. 2019].

of emotion manipulation has been greatly impactful. In the context of vicarious trauma, if the information from an individual's psychological makeup through social media elicits that individual's fear response, (e.g., anxiety of Muslims being a threat to that individual's way of living) the use of targeted vicarious trauma propaganda could be the strongest manipulation technique yet conceived. It can be argued that the threat of personalized environments of traumatization, i.e., shock doctrine combined with social networks used for individualized fear-mongering, does not necessitate the witnessing of traumatic events anymore, just a constant reminding of the potential threat, to keep the individual in a daily state of fear and anxiety. In other words, solely the insinuation of a relationship between an individual and their own personal traumas can have dire consequences on society. Carole Cadwalladr recently hosted a *TED Talk*, discussing the Cambridge Analytica Scandal, and delved into the aspect of targeted advertising within the context of the Brexit referendum. Cadwalladr said,

“This was the biggest electoral fraud in Britain in the last 100 years. In a once-in-a-generation vote, that hinged upon just one percent of the electoral vote.²⁸”

referencing to the use of targeted advertising to elicit a fear response to a threat, which did not even exist, to sway the Brexit Referendum in favour of leaving the EU. She continues later saying,

“What the Brexit vote demonstrates, is that liberal democracy is broken.²⁹”

The aforementioned evidence clearly highlights that our social structures are being challenged with the use of media witnessing and exploitation of vicarious trauma. If

²⁸ TED (2019). *Facebook's Role in Brexit - and the Threat to Democracy*. [video] Available at: https://www.ted.com/talks/carole_cadwalladr_facebook_s_role_in_brexit_and_the_threat_to_democracy/reading-list?language=en&fbclid=IwAR1HKwvXTYTWMHh3CQFlzhi8gytaqj4gwLliFkuDOujDVGfQtBETcasXw88#t-746138 [Accessed 29 Apr. 2019].

²⁹ TED (2019). *Facebook's Role in Brexit - and the Threat to Democracy*. [video] Available at: https://www.ted.com/talks/carole_cadwalladr_facebook_s_role_in_brexit_and_the_threat_to_democracy/reading-list?language=en&fbclid=IwAR1HKwvXTYTWMHh3CQFlzhi8gytaqj4gwLliFkuDOujDVGfQtBETcasXw88#t-746138 [Accessed 29 Apr. 2019].

advertising continues to utilize the concept of human relatability to others' trauma, as evidenced for being a powerful tool in art *per se*, and fear mongering through media witnessing, the change in our culture may be imminent.

In conclusion, whilst exploring vicarious trauma through this thesis, it is evident that vicarious trauma can be highly impactful, both for individuals and the masses. It is also apparent that the degree of trauma prevalence in our society, and the already fragile and highly reactive psychological profile of most human beings create the perfect conditions for social media manipulation for individual or political gain, as people are highly susceptible and inherently trusting. Though, of course, one would hope that our understanding of the negative psychological effects of vicarious trauma would lead to a more positive outcome of healing, mindfulness, renewed insight, and learning of effective coping strategies, rather than feasting on human misery for a personal gain. Beuys' quote symbolizes just that, hoping that the alleviation of a traumatic experience lies in its thorough exploration.

“You could say that a reckoning has to be made with the coyote, and only then can this trauma be lifted.”³⁰

³⁰ Mann, J. (2017). *When Joseph Beuys Locked Himself in a Room with a Live Coyote*. [online] Artsy.net. Available at: <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-joseph-beuys-locked-room-live-coyote> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2019].

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