

THE FAILURE OF MEDIA MEDIATION AND DIGITAL TRAUMA

Amit Pinchevski: *Transmitted Wounds: Media and the Mediation of Trauma*, Oxford University Press, New York 2019, 200 pages.

A new approach to media theory is explored throughout “Transmitted Wounds: Media and the Mediation of Trauma”. Amit Pinchevski shines a bright light into how the digital world has found new ways to not only reshape and tell the story of traumatic memories, but feed into the traumatic itself. There are a few noteworthy chapters that I highly recommend to all journalists, students, and readers interested in examining the association between media, trauma, and simulated realities. Pinchevski encourages readers to view trauma within the scope of media technology as something that cannot be fully approached but yet somehow must be (Pinchevski 2020, p. 4). While drawing on media theories, e.g., the work of Marshall McLuhan, and others, “Transmitted Wounds” brings together the ethical, cultural, and clinical responsibilities of addressing trauma in the digital age of media technology while raising a series of thought-provoking questions and perspectives. This book also seeks to explore the ways that media technology and logic shape the social life of trauma from a philosophical perspective as well in five distinct and easy to follow chapters.

Pinchevski takes a step away from traditional media theories that focus primarily on how the media positively and negatively influences the human experience. He is able to achieve this by focusing on the human experience itself in the past and present condition with the traumatic at the center of the discourse. This work of art is rooted in the thesis put forth by Pinchevski that “the media bear witness to the human failure to bear witness” (Pinchevski 2020, p. 4), making trauma reproducible and virtually transmissible. He brilliantly cites, “Trauma entails media just as media entails trauma” (Pinchevski 2020, p. 14). This is the best way to describe the story that Pinchevski wants to tell without giving too many spoilers. The story of trauma as told through the media and how the *real* has become indistinguishable with the traumatic itself (Pinchevski 2020, p. 16).

Historically, technology has served as a window into the soul of the past. It has allowed for the memories of historical tragedies and triumphs to be captured and preserved much to the liking of a digital time capsule. Andreas Huyssen argues that

it is impossible to think today of Holocaust memory apart from the media's memory, or museums, through documentaries and photographs, to internet sites (Pinchevski 2020, p. 9). Our earliest memories of historical tragedies (e.g., the Holocaust) can only be experienced through the use of technology and media that act as digital time capsules. The question if technology is helpful or harmful in regard to understanding the traumatic experiences of others is explored early on throughout the first two chapters. Chapter 1 features testimonials of the radio broadcasts of the 1961 Eichmann trial. Chapter 2 is devoted to the testimonies of Holocaust survivors. The book raises important question for readers if there is a growing acceptance to the risk of trauma through the media?

The topic of media and the social life of trauma is explored in a highly informative and reflective way through the use of testimonials and insights from media theorists and researchers interested in the reconstruction of trauma in the digital age and technologically advanced media environment. Pinchevski tells the story of shortcomings and failures of mediation while discussing how the media shapes the social life of trauma: living through it, reliving it, and remembering it while attempting to overcome it all in ways that often exceed individual consciousness (Pinchevski 2020, p. 141). Pinchevski offers a great contribution not only to media research but to the social and behavioral sciences through his exploration of the media project devoted to the testimonies of Holocaust Survivors.

Marshall McLuhan famously stated that, "The medium is the message". While Pinchevski draws upon McLuhan's perspectives in the introductory chapters, he is more concerned with the failures of the media as the medium. In the case of the Eichmann trial, Pinchevski and McLuhan appear to be on the same page in regard to the social effects of technology as a necessary medium that significantly influenced how the trauma was received during the Eichmann trial. Pinchevski brushes the surface of the sociology behind how people accept and interact with the stories of experienced trauma.

In her influential book "Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other", Sherry Turkle describes the social reality of trauma and media technologies that Pinchevski brilliantly unpacks in the chapter devoted to the acoustic memory of the radio broadcast of the Eichmann trial early on in the book. Turkle writes: "The ties we form through the internet are not, in the end, the ties that bind. But they are the ties that preoccupy (...) We defend connectivity as a way to be close, even as we effectively hide from each other" (Turkle 2011, p. 280).

Similar to this account, Pinchevski expertly executes and explains his working thesis: media bears witness, to bear witness through describing the experience and memory of Eichmann trial that is said to have brought a profound transformation to Holocaust memory in Israel:

Taking to the airwaves meant an opportunity to speak away from the tattooed, traumatized body, clear of the label of madness and unintelligibility. For it was precisely the transfiguration induced by radio of the speechless body into disembodied speech that rendered survivors' testimonies universally accessible. It is as if the logic of radio dictated a necessary trade off: in order for the traumatic experience

to gain voice, the presence of the body had to be removed. By removing survivors' voices from their bodies, radio effectively redefined the conditions by which trauma could find public articulation (Pinchevski 2020, p. 34).

Pinchevski's analysis of the media theory that offers a radically different viewpoint on how the brain chooses to cope with the complexity of human existence and the social life of traumatic memory. The Simulation theory carries both the burden and contribution that technological advances offer when considering the relationship between trauma and technology. It's a theory that has been explored and analyzed by Plato (with "The Cave") and Descartes (with "Meditations on First Philosophy") that bring together a wide range of theories that are briefly addressed towards the end of this review. As such, "Transmitted Wounds" breaks down the complexities behind the role the media plays in private traumas becoming collectively shared cultural trauma that Pinchevski namely refers to as the mediation of trauma through highlighting the earlier works of media theorists (Pinchevski 2020, p. 37).

17th Century French Philosopher Renee Descartes described the world of optical illusions in "Meditations on First Philosophy". Pinchevski's work subtly raises similar questions: Are we living in a world where the *real* can only be understood through digitalized mediums? Is the future of healing from traumatic conditions dependent upon the use of optical illusions?

The final chapter is one to read closely as it discusses the future of therapy for trauma. Pinchevski introduces a new connection to media theory through his analysis of Freudian and Lacanian themes that focus on two parts of the media position in failing to mediate trauma: as overwhelming to the human mind, a Freudian theme, and as a providing channel into the mind, a Lacanian theme (Pinchevski 2019, p. 12). He allows readers to arrive at their choice of understanding by the end of the book that everyone interested in media and trauma should read. The pioneering question regarding whether or not mental health professionals should be involved in the future of media coverage of tragedies and disasters is explored in the final chapter of this must-read book for all journalists and students interested in trauma and media studies.

Bibliography

- Pinchevski A. (2019). *Transmitted Wounds: Media and the Mediation of Trauma*. New York.
 Turkle S. (2011). *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York.

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