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Trauma and Consumption

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This volume aims at opening new theoretical vistas in conceptualizing how the notion of trauma may be fruitfully applied to consumer research, as well as offering fresh perspectives on how traumatism may modify, moderate, re-orient and re-evaluate consumption experiences. The increasing emphasis in consumer research that has been laid over the past few years on the unconscious in an attempt to identify and account for psychological processes that pass under the radar of a homeostatic ego that is driven by the pleasure principle calls for an extensive and multi-faceted scrutiny of the notion of trauma.

The concept of traumatic neurosis that was originally popularized by Freud in his seminal treatise *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) marked a critical turning point in psychoanalytic theorizing. It laid the foundations for one of the most heavily researched topics in contemporary psychologically oriented research, namely PTSD, while it has been instrumental in the consolidation of cultural trauma theories which constitute common conceptual currency in cultural studies and cultural sociology, among other disciplines. To a lesser extent and at a less speculative level, traumatic experiences have been scrutinized in consumer research, largely in the context of psychologically inflected experimental studies.

At the heart of Freud's original theory of traumatic neurosis lies repetition compulsion. As a result, the subject places himself in distressing situations that repeat a prior experience, without the latter being necessarily recalled. The repressed object or event that is repeated in situations involving traumatism resurfaces obliquely in the form of jokes, parapraxes, displaced and distorted. Freud went even further as to question the necessity of a primal scene (whether actually lived or imagined) as the object of a traumatically lived repetition. As remarked by Laplanche (1992), trauma may as well be an instance of afterwardness, or, in Žižek's (1992) terms, a case of retroactive causality. In this context, Freud highlighted the role performed by the death drive that works unconsciously, and in dissonance to the pleasure principle, towards reinstating subjects to a state of inertia. The construct was operationalized in order to offer a putative account of the destructive impulses that mitigate the pleasure principle and that may not be attributed to the reality principle. Lacan later opened up new interpretive horizons by contending that traumatism is a necessary condition for entering the symbolic order whereby the subject is split.

Subsequently, selected facets of psychoanalytic approaches to traumatism have informed sociological and culturological readings of sociocultural phenomena. On an individual level, traumatic re-enactments surface as moments of disintegration, discontinuity, as an uncontrollable space that unfolds and breaks the subject (Ratti & Estevao, 2016). While

recognizing the paramount influence of affect in the return of the repressed, Neal (1998) contends that traumatic events resurface in feelings of anxiety and despair. In this context, priorities in consumptive acts, practices, and occasions tend to shift in various and often unforeseen ways, from complete withdrawal to compulsive purchasing, from a penchant for luxury products to a reorientation towards consumptive experiences, rather than products. On a collective level, according to Alexander (2012), cultural trauma occurs when members feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. Collectively enacted trauma presents a paradoxical co-existence of two antagonistic forces, according to Smelser (2004), between repression and obliteration, and compulsive reliving.

This volume adopts a pan-consumptivist approach to social phenomena, by endorsing the thesis that consumption is not necessarily dependent on organized markets, while extending it to ideologies, belief-systems, sociocultural practices. Furthermore, it adopts a non-clinical orientation in theorizing, accounting for and empirically investigating trauma-related consumption phenomena. It does not seek to pass pathologizing judgments (Parker 2014, 2015), and even less to ascribe symptoms causally to solipsistically self-enclosed entities. This would contravene both Freudian and Lacanian premises that have been most influential in trauma theory, as, for the former, the cause of traumatism may not even rest on a determinate object, but on the overdetermination of the pleasure principle by the death drive, while the latter, allegedly, never sought to 'cure' patients, i.e. reinstate them to a symbolic order which is responsible for the generation of symptoms in the first place. By recognizing the paramount importance of trauma theory as a cultural hermeneutic tool (Alexander 2012), we seek to map its ramifications vis-à-vis consumption phenomena, but also to challenge salient facets, and, above all, to advance existing theories in the light of concrete cases.

We endorse both disciplinary, as well as methodological diversity by being particularly receptive to submissions from researchers in various humanities and social scientific disciplines who are keen on applying either quantitative or qualitative or mixed methods research designs, encompassing, but not being restricted to, cultural analysis, interviews, videography, ethnography, online ethnography/netnography, conversation analysis, phenomenological research, semiotic analysis, DA/CDA, to name a few indicative avenues.

The following constitute indicative (and by no means exhaustive) areas for framing and analyzing the relationship between trauma-related theories and consumption studies:

- Traumatic experiences as antecedents and/or moderating factors in the purchase and usage decision making process of products and services
- Compulsive purchase behaviors that may be attributed to traumatic experiences
- Autoethnographic accounts of consumption related experiences in the light of traumatic events

- How traumatic experiences are represented in entertainment products and how they are decoded by audiences
- How PTSD has impacted the purchase and consumption behaviors of specific segments (e.g. war veterans)
- Conceptual approaches to the operationalization of the concept of trauma as outlined in specific psychoanalytic theories
- How the death drive is inscribed in repetitively enacted harmful consumptive acts
- How cultural traumas that affected local or global populations are experienced through simulative re-enactment events
- Psychoanalytic discourse analysis of movies, TV shows, music lyrics and other popular cultural artefacts that leverage facets of traumatism
- The semiotics of traumatic advertising
- How culturally traumatic events are transformed into consumable media spectacles
- Traumatism and the memory of trauma as entry requirement in the constitution of imaginary collectives or the symbolic order of social collectives

Manuscripts should be submitted to the volume's editor, Dr. George Rossolatos, Chief-Editor of the *International Journal of Marketing Semiotics & Discourse Studies* (University of Kassel, Germany) via email @ georgerossolatos123@gmail.com no later than February 29, 2020, by using APA formatting style. Authors are encouraged to contact the editor for an informal discussion of their selected topic. The authors will receive further information about the volume upon acceptance of their manuscript.

Project milestones

Deadline for initial manuscript submission: Feb 29 2020

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