



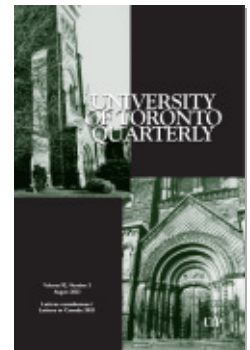
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Languages of Trauma: History, Memory, and Media ed. by Peter Leese, Julia Barbara Koehne, and Jason Crouthamel (review)

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Peter Leese, Julia Barbara Koehne, and Jason Crouthamel, eds. *Languages of Trauma: History, Memory, and Media*. University of Toronto Press, 2021. xi, 408. \$100.00

It has been argued that the twenty-first century has ushered in a post-trauma age. Humans are no longer only haunted by singular, inexplicable, and unrepresentable traumatic images, the argument goes, but deal with the ubiquity and frequency of traumatic events (private, collective, global) on a daily basis. Post-trauma in this context signals the move from the expression of debilitating physical, mental, or emotional traumatization to the proliferation of what Michael Basseler, in “Stories of Dangerous Life in the Post-Trauma Age,” refers to as “pluralistic theoretical and methodological” frameworks that are culturally and politically dependent. This is the fundamental argument successfully supported through Peter Leese, Julia Barbara Koehne, and Jason Crouthamel’s 2021 edited collection *Languages of Trauma: History, Memory, and Media*. Applying a revisionist reading to trauma, according to which representation of the traumatic event is not only possible and necessary but also, importantly, engenders a new poetics, the contributors to this collection seek to investigate and identify the diverse representations of “traumatic imagining” as well as its “historical particulars.” Unapologetically veering away from officially accepted definitions of trauma and the restrictions of clinical thinking, while, at the same time, redefining what it means to have a traumatized perspective or belong to a traumatized body, the essays at hand work interdisciplinarily and transculturally toward articulating a new poetics of trauma.

This is naturally not an easy feat, and no collection on trauma can ever be said to be complete; however, an important argument made through this collection is, on the one hand, that a re-evaluation of “how trauma is processed, narrated, and remembered” needs to take place, while, on the other hand, the case is made for a methodological change to how trauma is academically investigated, especially in the face of climate trauma. These concerns are categorized into four sections that balance words and silences, explicit and implicit representations, victimhood and responsibility, as well as the tension between epistemology and the visualization of trauma. Perhaps inevitably, the essays of the volume are concerned with the post-ness of trauma: language and image after the traumatic event, post-memory, redress, and forgiveness. Defending the body as the site of trauma but moving toward understanding the language that the traumatized body produces, all the contributors suggest that there can be a meaningful and critical aftermath to trauma if we pay close attention to (hi)stories and how they are instrumentalized to construct our separate and collective realities.

Specifically, Jennifer Anderson Bliss’s critical exploration of Art Spiegelman’s dynamic mammoth of a graphic novel *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004) explicitly rejects the unrepresentability of traumatic experiences while connecting the legacy of trauma with artistic legacy and political teleology. As Anderson Bliss writes, Spiegelman brings together his “unmediated ... lived

traumatic experience of 9/11; the secondary pain of the US government's co-opting of the attacks for its own agenda," and the event's oversaturated media representation that loomed larger than the event itself. Anderson Bliss convincingly writes that it is the instrumentalization of Spiegelman's transgenerational trauma – namely, his Holocaust legacy – that affords him the formal ability to “move in multiple temporal directions at once” in his work, thus creating a richly articulated experience out of a profoundly unspeakable traumatic moment. This is a new direction in the popular representation of trauma indeed: a similar narrative trajectory is followed by the 2022 television show *Patient* in which a Jewish psychoanalyst, Alan Strauss, is abducted by one of his patients who is revealed to be a serial killer, and is forced to live in his patient's basement, chained, in order to offer his therapeutic services and help him stop killing. Strauss only reckons with his predicament and his troubled personal life after he explicitly “remembers” his Holocaust heritage. For both Spiegelman and the creators of *Patient*, representing trauma becomes largely instrumental for representing the self.

Anderson Bliss's analysis of Spiegelman's intentionally, formally disjointed artwork and the links with his transgenerational trauma echo Ulrich Koch's argument from the same volume on the ambiguous normalization of discontinuity of life after the traumatic experience. Just as Spiegelman satirizes the new normal of post-9/11 traumatization by constructing his own visual language to represent not only the traumatic aftermath of 9/11 but also his entire identity as a traumatized subject, Koch contends that caution should be exercised when discussing trauma as a normal, everyday experience. In his chapter titled “Between Social Criticism and Epistemological Critique: Critical Theory and the Normalization of Trauma,” Koch genealogizes trauma's normalization, arguing that the theorization of trauma is ambiguous at best since it relies on the paradoxical notion that trauma is both the exception as well as the rule. At the same time though, boosted by the 1990s humanities faction of trauma studies, this idea has enabled the transdisciplinary study of what Koch calls “the mode of disjointed experience, which is also the medium of socialization in late capitalist societies.” In other words, for Koch and for the rest of the contributors to this volume, for that matter, it is the lived experience that can and should produce new languages with which to articulate traumatic stress and not the other way around.

Lastly, living after trauma, escaping its purported unrepresentability and its gaping silences, and explicitly identifying the locus of traumatization as either the body, the mind, or the socius itself are the subjects of many stellar contributions to this collection. That trauma is an exceptional, abnormal circumstance nevertheless seeping into our everyday routine is tackled in Part Two of the collection, titled “Music, Theatre, and Visual Arts.” In this highly original part, artists and research practitioners from various parts of the world describe their own attempts to create languages of trauma through music and performance and to reflect on what Dyah Pitaloka and Hans Pols describe as

“the everyday challenges of being a survivor.” Ultimately, it is suggested that the way in which to reckon with trauma’s aftermath is, as contributor Katrina Bugaj writes, “to transform the personal into the political through a communal act of storytelling and imagination.” Perhaps this is what the post-trauma age consists of: the production of pluralistic, visible languages of trauma and their transfusion into collective encounters.

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Lily Cho. *Mass Capture: Chinese Head Tax and the Making of Non-Citizens*. McGill-Queen’s University Press. xxvii, 244. \$39.95

Lily Cho’s *Mass Capture* delves into a little-known archive of Canadian history: the “Chinese Immigration 9s” (CI 9s). Part of the Chinese Immigration Act (1885–1923; 1923–47), CI 9s were “certificates of leave” for which all Chinese migrants registered to leave Canada temporarily. Despite the staggering number of documents – Library and Archives Canada holds over forty-one thousand certificates on microfilm – and the wealth of information in each file, few scholars have worked in this collection. With reference to high-resolution photographs of the microfilm record, Cho organizes her study along thematic lines, first illustrating how the state used CI 9s to track Chinese subjects. The subsequent chapters reclaim these documents as expressions of migrant agency and perseverance. Cho’s expertise on diasporic subjectivity and Asian Canadian studies enables her to read the CI 9s as a “technology” of state surveillance and capture that creates non-citizens. She theorizes non-citizenship as an iterative process: the non-citizen is “not simply there” but “made and then made again” via the completion and filing of each certificate. Cho’s monograph is an obvious choice for those interested in Chinese Canadian histories of citizenship and labour, but her focus on aesthetics extends the project’s disciplinary boundaries and potential readership. *Mass Capture* addresses key questions in museum studies, digital humanities, artificial intelligence, photography, and affect. Seeking moments of beauty and resistance in these photographic texts, Cho examines how the CI 9 images “exceed and escape” the “repressive instrumentality” of the colonial document.

The first chapter outlines “mass capture” as a technology of exclusion that relies on the twofold collection of information and bodies. Cho’s understanding of “mass capture” as “both documentary and corporeal” integrates existing uses of the term in new media studies and the biological sciences. Her analysis merits particular praise for its endeavour to read across lines of racial difference. Extending discussions about the deeply racialized history of biometrics and surveillance, Cho considers the CI 9s alongside the tracking and regulation of Blackness,