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The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma

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The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma

By
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A thesis presented to the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts
At Washington University in Saint Louis
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

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Abstract

This thesis is my personal exploration of what trauma is and how, if possible, it can be visually represented. The use of data collection, data visualization, and archive methodology is utilized in my project and this document examines how these components come together to understand trauma. This thesis also works through the ideology that everyone has the ability to experience trauma, of some form, in his or her life. Yet, there are different social perceptions for defining and labeling trauma. It is this social fallacy of trauma that I investigate and then seek to eliminate through the visual representation of trauma. Furthermore, this document examines how a visual representation is needed to understand that while everyone experience trauma differently, we should not distinguish traumas, but understand them all as just trauma.
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Introduction

Edward Tufte wrote in 2001, “above all else show the data.”

Though my project “The Untitled Mapping Project,” I create a fictional math of the data that is very real as it is presented in the work. This project and my other recent work comprise installation, printmaking, video, animation, sound and participation. Through the use of an archive, the work examines and visually communicates how I understand trauma. This archive counters traditional means of representing emotions because of its clean, cold, and static visual design. What I want from my audience is to see trauma and possibly question what trauma is. However, my work is not about feeling emotion or empathizing with someone else’s trauma. The removing of specific information about the person and not specifying the trauma as specific event, creates a condition in which the trauma point only relates to the next trauma point. “The Untitled Mapping Project” and my other recent work concerns itself with breaking down the hierarchy of how we perceive trauma, and to do that all referential information has to be deleted from the presentation.

In my dissertation, I answer the question of what is trauma and why does trauma need a visual representation. However, I continue to wonder whether the work truly visualizes trauma. The answer is no. Instead “The Untitled Mapping Project” successfully visualizes trauma's relationship to time, space and the self. What it represents is the event of trauma as such and the point as the marker on someone’s timeline. To say the project is a failure is false, but it does not visualize the crux of trauma. Feeling and emotions are
abstract and the only way to escape the abstract is to see the actual. Therefore to try to imagine trauma would mean to create an abstraction of an abstraction and never seeing the real, and with trauma the real does not physically exist.
Chapter 1

Giving Voice to Trauma: What is Trauma?
Throughout this project I have been trying to understand what it is I am after when exploring trauma. Before I can ask of others to address their own trauma, I feel I must understand it myself. I constantly look back and examine why is it that I ask others to reveal their trauma to me. What do I get from collecting these stories? Am I projecting and suppressing my own emotions? Or am I simply working through my own issues with the help of others? Do I even have trauma? What is trauma?

In the introduction to “Trauma and Visuality in Modernity” Lisa Saltzman writes, “in its most general sense, trauma describes an experience so overwhelming that it’s understanding is at best deferred and it’s very apprehension may only be through symptomatic manifestations.” This statement expresses my own thoughts on the matter. The first part is easy to understand: “In its most general sense, trauma describes an experience so overwhelming that it’s understanding is at best deferred.” The experience of trauma is overwhelming. Understanding it does not come until a later time or to completely understand it takes time. Saltzman continues, “and its very apprehension may only be through symptomatic manifestations.” To begin to understand what is being said here I researched the words 'apprehension' and 'symptomatic'. Clearly the standard definitions for both of these words do not apply. Apprehension not only means the anxiety or fear that something bad will happen but it also means understanding or to grasp something. Symptomatic is defined as showing the existence of a particular problem or serving as a symptom or sign, especially of something undesirable. Symptomatic is also synonymous with the terms representative and symbolic. Thus, the second part of that quote means the understanding of trauma may only be through a
representative symbolic manifestation. Therefore, the author believes that trauma is so overwhelming that to understand trauma, it must be visually worked through.

Further in to my quest to figure out what trauma is, I began with a simple definition of the word *trauma*. There are several definitions for this word⁵. Trauma can mean an injury, a mental or emotional stress, or an emotional upset. For me trauma is the epitome of complex emotions. We do not all feel the same or process our emotions the same way, however, we all experience some sort of upsetting or life altering event⁶. If we were relating this to meteorology, this event would be a storm. The storm blows in, causes damage, and exits the place until it vanishes to nothingness. But in its wake, it leaves some people completely desolate and others not harmed at all. The effect and affect the storm has on people varies, as does the impact of trauma.

Trauma can embody all forms of physical and mental emotions. It has the power to alter someone’s body and mind beyond recognition. For me, as a visual artist, trauma is an abstract notion that I felt compelled to explore. I have not decided whether it is right to make the claim that everyone experiences some type of trauma. However, whether it is right or wrong, I am making the claim that everyone does experience a type of trauma in his or her lifetime. However, I will freely admit that as a non-scientist, I make that statement purely on a level of being an artist and as based on my personal definition of what trauma means.

In my work, I equate trauma to pain. I cannot deny this is a rather general statement, but generalized statements make things more inclusive and no one person is exempt from pain. It is a pain that has the ability to be life altering and on all levels. The shift could be for the better or the worse. It is a pain that one feels mentally and
physically. The physicality of trauma can leave a lasting wound, mark, or scar to the body. Conversely, outwardly there can be no evidence of such physical trauma. However, when there is no outward evidence, there is certainly to be some inward evidence and some lasting effect or affect. Does the body ever really forget the physical impact of trauma?

Along with the physical pain, there is the mental pain, which for me is stronger and the more encompassing of the two pains. I state this because long after the physical trauma has been inflicted and healed, the mind never forgets. People can cope, move forward, or overcome it, but I do not think that you ever fully forget the pain. There is always a trace of trauma that lives with you.

Trauma is also an event. The word event carries a heavy meaning in my work, so it is important that I define what an event is and how I interpret it in my own practice. In the medical field an event is “an adverse or damaging medical occurrence.”8 In science it is “the fundamental entity of observed physical reality represented by a point designated by three coordinates of place and one of time in the space-time continuum postulated by the theory of relativity.”9 Knowing nothing about of physics and the theory of relativity, I explored what an event means in the theory of relativity. In “Its About Time: Understanding Einstein’s Relativity” author David Mermin puts Einstein’s complex physics into laymen terms. In physics, a basic event10 is the spatial geometric notion of a point. An event is a point in space and time (that is, a specific place and time) and the physical situation or occurrence associated with it. It occurs at a unique place and a unique time and its point can be known exactly. Also, one of the goals of relativity is to specify the possibility of one event influencing another.
So, drawing from these definitions and culminating them into one, an event, as it relates to my work, is an occurrence at a specific time and place; it is unique to an individual and has the power to influence future happenings and events. Connecting it to the scientific process, an event, also known as a point, has the ability to be plotted.

Trauma is also what shapes a person’s history. In my work a single point represents each person’s trauma. There is only one point for each person not because every person has had one trauma, but rather because that first trauma is what set the course for your life. The initial point is an annex to your former self, pre-trauma, and everything after fits into the realm of post trauma. The point signals an emotional and sometimes physical shift from your old self. You can keep shifting, though you can never go to the pre-trauma self. Psychiatrist Judith Herman wrote:

“Traumatized people suffer damage to the basic structures of the self. The identity they have formed prior to the trauma is irrevocably destroyed.”\textsuperscript{12}

In the same chapter Herman references reporter Jane Schorer: “The rape survivor Nancy Ziegenmayer testifies to this loss of self: ‘The person that I was on the morning of November 19, 1988, was taken from me and my family. I will never be the same for the rest of my life.’”\textsuperscript{13}

While it may seem like I am ignoring post trauma and trauma, I am thinking of trauma through the terms of the beginning of a personal history. The initial infliction of trauma to the person is so raw. Comparatively, a woman may have three children. However, with the first birth, while it may not always be the most intense in physical pain, the emotions experienced can never be recreated. Each birth after is only measured
to the one before it. Like with any infliction of pain to the body, it is measured to the
prior bout of pain. Herman believes “the reconstruction of trauma is never entirely
completed; new conflicts and challenges at each new stage of the lifecycle will inevitably
reawaken the trauma and bring some new aspect of the experience to light.”14 In order to
be reawakened, you have to have had an initial awakening. In my work, the point is the
representation of the awakening.

The point carries a variety of meanings in my piece, “The Untitled Mapping
Project: Case Study Trauma.” First, the point is the event of trauma itself. The point
means a different type of trauma to each person, but as a group it represents universality.
In trauma recovery, sharing stories in groups is encouraged. Herman states, “as each
survivor shares her unique story, the group provides a profound experience of
universality. The group bears witness to the survivor’s testimony, giving it social as well
as personal meaning.”15 My work is not meant to be therapeutic or even attempting to
disguise itself as part of trauma recovery. However, the shared story and universality of
trauma is something that interests me. This project is also not a monument that
immortalizes or reconciles trauma. I am redefining how we socially present and represent
trauma by presenting it as an archive. With the use of point as a visual metaphor, I am
also reinterpreting what trauma is by equalizing the size of the points (understood as
marking of the traumatic event) rather than defining each individual one. In the unity of
the sizes, there is universality. In universality is where I break down the fallacy of the
viewpoint that there is a hierarchy to trauma. Even in the definition of trauma there seems
to be a hierarchy. It is ordered from the physical, to mental, to the most subjective
definitions possible.
Trauma Further Explored: Spatial Tensions; Giving Voice to Trauma

In my installations, interactive projects, and other multimedia works, I create systems which documents points of intersection and events within families and within the individual. Through the use of an artistic algorithm that utilizes age, birthday, and other important demographic and personal dates, I am able to create a drawing that visualizes the connection between one person and their emotions or the connection between two or more people. The same idea of charting history through a circular timeline is explored through the performative action of counting, such as in my video and sound project, “The Science of Relationships: Spatial Tension.” By having one woman count, and the repetition, as she counts to her current age, this activity demands of you, the audience, to reflect upon her history and the possibility of trauma within. Ultimately, it is the variance and tonal shifts that sonically map the history and create a portrait.

Hearing a well thought out narrative description of something can create just as powerful, if not more, of a visual representation for the real thing. With that idea in mind I began to think about a way of visualizing the circular maps with the use of sound. Can the same idea of time passing and charting trauma be presented through just the use of sound?

I did not arrive at an answer right away, but rather, over time. I began to consider more deeply what my circles represented. On the very surface, the meaning was a visual timeline of a person’s life with each ring representing an age. Then, the idea to have someone count to his or her current age came to me. Instead of using the rings to represent someone, their own voice could represent them. While a voice does create a
circular form, because it is a wave pattern, it is not a timeline narrative of a life, but a visual representation of the voice.

Many of my projects begin with my family. They are the people you should know the best and be the most comfortable around, yet at the same time your relationship with them is always complicated. However, I still choose to work in my art projects with my family because of that dynamic and to build a further connection with them. So, when choosing someone to count for me I chose my mother.

My mother’s personal narrative is very complex, all the details I do not even know. Therefore, I struggled with even asking her to participate in my project, but ultimately I did. When recording her voice, I sat in front of her with the recorder in my hand. I had her count to her age, 64, twice. The first time was to get an understanding of the task. By the second time, the goal was for her or any other individual to reflect on their life as they counted. The idea was that you would be at ease to the point that you start to really think about what the task of counting to your age means. Usually, in my art practice I give rules to guide a person’s thought process, however, in this case I chose against that. I wanted to test the outcome before dictating it.

What I hoped would occur was a reflection of life as she counted. I wanted to see if my mother would think about her life as the number passed through her lips all without receiving any direction to do so. I wanted to see if that history would be marked with her voice. I would state that my goal as an artist was realized. When my mother counts to 64, almost every number is said almost painfully and with a strain.

The first time she counted at a faster pace, as if she was rushing through the years in order to not think about them. The second time, I set her pace slower-- one, pause, two,
pause, etc. Whether that forced her to think about life or it came naturally, I do not know, but there is clear difference in the second recording from the first take.

The second recording is slightly edited and becomes the final piece. What I’d like to think you are hearing as she speaks are markers of emotions that may equate to trauma. In some parts of the recording you can hear her voice catch, or there is an extended pause to the next number. As she counts higher, there is often a deeper intake of breath and at other places you can hear the strain in her voice. My mother does have throat problems, so at those points in the recording the strain is a combination of the natural health issues as well as a reflection of a time wrought with many emotions.

The ending of the recording is the most powerful portion of the piece. She finishes by saying 64 with a heavy sigh. However, she does not finish as if it was a statement. Rather, it sounds as if it is a question of her really being sixty-four, or as if there is a complicated story that has lead her to this age. At the same time, the question of her age also sounds rather hopeful. It sounds as if the words mean that even though the journey to sixty-four may have been complicated, there is still a celebration of life. Ultimately, the ending leaves an invitation to the viewer to reflect on their lives. While the recording is played, it is hard to hear it and not count along with the voice. At some point you have to think about your own life story, usually that point being once the recording ends. The ideal presentation for this piece would be in a dim lit room with just rows of chairs. There will be just enough light for you to see, but not enough for you to question whether something should be on the walls. The voice is played out loud. It is meant to command the space. Your thoughts are your own, but the sound is communally shared with others. You hear my mother counting on a loop, however and once she says
there is a delayed pause before the counting restarts to the beginning. In the interval between the first and second recording is where the listeners begin to reflect.

As I stated previously, in my art practice I usually give rules to guide a person’s thought process. However, in this case I chose against that. I wanted to test the outcome before dictating it. I know that my mother was thinking about her life as she counted because she told me afterwards, “Wow, I just thought about my own life.” These words were not spoken humorously nor were they spoken with any trace of sadness. They were stated as a fact. However, there was still a weighted tension in the air after that statement. It was as if the memories filled the space and the pressure became the memory of trauma.

In my work, I always withhold from the viewer some of the systems for making the images, as well as the information about the people represented in my work. In “The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma”, when I mail the letters, at the end I ask everyone to write me a letter about their trauma, but only if they want to do so. The reason for this option is because I understand some things are too hard to be retold with words. It would be selfish and ethically wrong to “force” information from a person, so I only take what is freely given. And what is given, I do not feel needs to be shared with the audience. It is not important for the viewer to understand the full extent of the complexities of each trauma. It is only important that they understand that everyone feels the effect of trauma and that everyone’s trauma is important.

With my mother’s counting, it is the unknown history and unspoken memories marked by vocal variance that make the piece a success. Knowing too much information
would take the focus away from the voice and shift the perspective solely to her story. I want the listener to not only experience her life, but also to think about theirs as well.
Chapter 2

A Contextual Analysis: Comparative Traumas, The Archive and Chronotope
Since being introduced to Susan Hiller’s work, she has become one of the few artists to whom I can relate my work. As a trained anthropologist, her methods of presenting ideas through the use of the index and archival praxis align with how I communicate the complexities of trauma in my work. While many of her works have some element that I can draw from, the “J.Street Project” not only visually correlates with my work, but the presentation of history and memory through the use of a pictorial archive also relates to my work’s method.

“J. Street” began in 2002 when Susan Hiller was invited to Berlin for an artist’s residency. While exploring the city, she encountered a street sign bearing the name Judenstrasse (Jews’ Street). The sign is meant to commemorate and memorialize the Jewish community that once inhabited the area, “but for Hiller it marked instead a history of discrimination and violence.” This project eventually turned into a three-year journey throughout Germany, documenting every street with the prefix Juden in its name:

“These signs now function as inadequate memorials to the destroyed communities, marking locations dating back as far as the eleventh century where Jews had lived, sometimes completely segregated from public and municipal life.”

The project is realized through a wall installation of 303 photographs (Figure 1.), a corresponding map of Germany and list of the street locations, a book, and a 67-minute video. Hiller stated, “J. Street recalls, with bitter irony, the loss of Jewish communities by using the type of classification terminology that the Nazis employed to destructive ends.” In the introduction to the project exhibited at the Jewish Museum of New York, it states, “the work’s title suggests the dangers of reducing individuals and groups to an
abstract bureaucratic code. By probing the tension between past and present, Hiller has said that she hopes ‘the work will provide an opportunity for meditation not only on this incurable, traumatic absence, but also on the causes of more recent attempts to destroy minority cultures and erase their presence.’”

In Hiller’s piece, the 303 photographs are individually framed and displayed in a grid format (Figure 2.). There are 7 rows and 44 columns. The last column has two photographs instead of 7. On another wall, there is a map of all of Germany along with a list of the street locations. In addition to the photograph and the map, there is a video that gives life to the photographs. On the surface, Hiller and I share the same four components, the photographic image, a map, a video, and a book.

First, the photographs in both Hiller and my work are meant to show the enormity of information. However, in Hiller’s work, each photograph (the individual image) is important to see, so the size of the image (based on what I can see from the documentation of the work online) is bigger than 8x 10 in, allowing the spectator ample viewing space. While the street signs have the same name, the signs themselves and the locations of the signs are different. What she is attempting to convey is the trace of memory and the evidence of a history. The envelopes in my project are not individually framed. There are 4 grid groupings of the envelopes. Each grouping has 7 rows and 6 columns of envelopes printed on one 44x48 in piece of paper, meaning one photograph of an envelope is smaller than 4x6 in. The envelopes are also presented in portrait viewing format instead of landscape. What this does is slightly obscure the names of the people, by having the typography presented vertically and thus illegible. This conjunction of the images is about the evidence of a letter sent and not about whom it was sent to. It must
also be noted that important information such as the street addresses have been digitally removed from the letters as well as other information that could possibly compromise the safety of the people who volunteered for the project. In the mapping project, the letters are not about a history, but they give a context to the “results” presented and archived in the piece. A part of a bigger system that my work entails, the image of the envelopes serve as witnesses to the trauma itself.

The second element of Susan Hiller’s work would be the map of Berlin with points indicating location (Figure 3.) and a corresponding list of the cities in which she photographed the streets. In my work, the map is more abstract and pertains to the individual life of a person. Visually, my maps are evenly spaced concentric rings centered on the page. Each of the 10 maps represents a different person of a different age. The number of rings equals the participant’s age; therefore, each print has a map of a different size and density (Figure 4.). On each map there is the same size point, but varied in location and in color. Hiller’s points represent places where these signs could be found, and within that history of those locations there is trauma. The points in my work directly correspond to trauma, but indirectly it is about a memory and history because all the traumas I am presenting have happened in the past.

At the locations where Hiller photographed the signs she also took video footage. The footage is edited and compiled into a 67-minute long video. For some of the street signs she flashes by, for others she dwells longer. In one portion of the video, Hiller pauses on a scene for a full minute. That full minute is in direct relationship to the seconds on a clock next to one of the street signs. With the video, Hiller says she wanted to see how long a person would stay with an image, as a kind of test to the viewer’s
patience. The duration of my video is 30-minutes long. The content of the video is composed as collage of the maps. However, each map is revealed and animated slowly and mimics a drawn line. My video, like the Hiller piece, is not meant to be viewed in its entirety; it is about the compilation and interweaving of traumas, which ultimately speaks to the meshing of histories and memories.

The last part of the “J.Street Project” is the artist’s books. In the book, all 303 photographs, and a recreation of the map with the list of cites are included, as well as an introduction by an art writer. What the book represents is an access to the images that the video and the wall installation do not fully provide. In the wall installation, many of the images are out of the height range for the viewers to see and the video is too long for the average museumgoer to spend time on, especially not being in a viewing room. With the book, the images can be seen at a pace set by the viewer. It is a chance for them to spend time with each image and dissect what is going on in each image. I am also especially inspired by how the book reveals the information that the presentation in the gallery does not. However, my book is not a direct reiteration of what is hanging on the walls. Additional information into my process and its system is presented. My book helps you to better understand how I came to certain visual conclusions in my work.

I believe although Hiller’s work and mine speaks about different ideas, some of the same themes are explored. The “Jews are gone,” Hiller has said, “but the street names remain as ghosts of the past, haunting the present.” For me, while the trauma has passed it is never really forgotten. There will always be a trace of that experience. While the remnants may or may not be physical, there will always be a mental scar or ghost of the
past trauma. The initial scar serves as a marker that dictates how the future will be realized.

**The Archive & Collecting**

For me, an archive is a means of presenting a variety of information to an audience. The information presented is a discovery of my data, which I have collected over the year. There is a system to what is being shown and through the system there is a revelation of what all the data might mean. My work utilizes the archive to exhibit the exploration of the possibility of visualizing trauma through graphical mapping. It also complicates the viewer’s notion of what trauma is and how outsiders view another’s trauma.

Collecting is a key aspect to building an archive. “The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma” is a fairly new project with a shallow archive. The collection began with soliciting participants for the project. The question I asked myself was, where can I find a community of people who are willing to give me--a complete stranger to them--their home address so that I can mail them a letter. The community would need to span over America, because a diverse grouping of people would be needed. I did not want to limit my self to just one area. When limited to one area the trauma speaks only to a local community and how that social environment lends to the trauma. While that interests me, for this section of the project I was attracted to a broader audience. Extending across America opens the conversation, and in turn dismisses any association to one specific location. Trauma is presented as just trauma, rather than a social construct of a community.
Eventually, I had to post ads on Craig’s List as well as physically posting adverts around Washington University in St. Louis, which I would describe as my immediate community. Craig’s List is a very peculiar community, but it reaches people from all over America. I targeted capital cities or towns with a high population because logically it would have more traffic and also the website often redirects small towns to adverts for larger towns. However, I am aware that while Craig’s List is an invaluable resource and key component of this project, it is problematic. While it spans America, its limitations lie in the demographics and age of the people it reaches. Yet, it must be understood and emphasized in “The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma”, that the diversity amongst the trauma is what is important and not the demographics of the people. Not all people experience trauma the same, but I do believe that all people have the possibility of experiencing the same type of trauma.

In addition to posting on the Internet, I wanted to engage my immediate community on the school campus. On the college campus, bulletin boards still exist where information and solicitation happen via a printed flyer (Figure 5.). When printing the flyer, a new conversation arose about of how to lure and entice a person to want to participate. Therefore, a more aesthetic choice of design like font, paper, as well as language had to be considered. Yet, like my Internet ad, my physical poster was also buried under new adverts and constantly had to be reposted or re-revealed. So while different, as methodologies the two were similar in effect.

Once the posts were sent out, I had to wait for people to respond to the ads. The Craig’s List post drew people immediately while the posting around campus happened more sporadically. The next step was to respond to inquiries from people and get their
addresses. All emails were sent through my school email account and all letters were addressed from a school P.O. Box to not only legitimize myself, but the project as well. It was important that all participants take the project seriously and attaching my name to Washington University in St. Louis reinforced the seriousness of the project.

The letters were sent out in a series of 5 batches (Figures 6, 7, 8, 9). Each letter was hand-addressed by me. Although the handwriting appears to be different (Figures 10, 11), I credit the different penmanship depending on the time of day and how many letters I addressed that day. The same marker was used to address the letters to the sender. This was done to maintain consistency and because it felt very poetic to use only one marker to address everyone. Two different envelopes were used so they vary in the value of the orange color and the size of the envelope, but they each only required one stamp for mailing. All envelopes where photographed before they were mailed out, as well as when they were returned. They were also photographed in batches, so the background and light vary in each batch.

The photographic evidence of the addressed envelopes is presented because this body of work is what Anne Moeglin-Delcroix calls “respectful parody”\textsuperscript{21}, or mimicking of the scientific process. Where artists like Alfredo Jaar are working through the symbolic representation, my work is about process and the presentation as such. Thus, while blank envelopes placed on the wall can represent letters that were sent out, it is not about presenting the evidence of the letters, but rather about the process itself.

Not only do the photographs verify what has happened, but they also keep the direct relationship to each person participating. Displaying the individual names on the original (photographed) envelopes addressed in my own hand, illustrates how much care
was taken when contacting the people. I could have easily printed labels from the computer. However, given the topic of trauma I felt it was necessary to set my letter apart from junk mail associations. I also wanted the receiver to understand that while I am doing a public posting and the rules are systematic, as an individual they are important to me as well as the information they choose to share.

**Warm Data**

Mariam Ghani uses the term warm data in her ongoing project, “Index of the Disappeared” where she attempts to create portraits of immigrants that keep their anonymity as well as restore their humanity when their true identity cannot be revealed. She creates a questionnaire where each response provides “a unique and highly individual dataset – a data description of a person -- which at the same time lacks the identifying details that would usually link it to a real person.”\(^{22}\) The responses to her questions are what becomes warm data. For Ghani warm data is a portrait, not a profile.

Ghani understands there are different forms of data and to set her project apart from the rigid or governmental type of data, she has to create and define her unique results as warm data. So the definition of warm data is defined by what it is not. Warm data is not hard facts and in its nature it is too subjective. She writes “it cannot be proved or disproved, and it can never be held against you in a court of law. Warm data is specific and personal, never abstract.”\(^{23}\) Furthermore, she states warm databases are public, but can only be collected voluntarily. The respondents always have a choice to answer or not and to what degree of anonymity they wish to preserve their identity. In my project “The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma” all the information that I receive in the mail, prior to my re-imaging, is in a sense also a form of warm data. I do not ask a set of
questions, but I do provide a set of rules\textsuperscript{24} to be followed. I believe the most important aspect of warm data collection, besides it being voluntary, is its consistency throughout the whole process, whether the same questions are asked or the same rules are provided.

While our work is aligned, Ghani’s ideology begins to diverge from my own when she says warm data cannot be abstract. Ghani’s definition of warm data states it is not abstract, because it is subjective and does not contain hard facts. How can warm data be subjective and not abstract I wonder. I believe the data can be both abstract and subjective. To be abstract means to be non-representational, non-concrete and subjective. It is about individual perception, therefore to create a portrait where all identifying details are removed, as Ghani does, becomes an abstract portrait.

“What describes you but could never be held against you in a court of law? What would be the right questions to ask to know you without knowing your name?”\textsuperscript{25}, are some of the questions asked in “The Index of the Disappeared” questionnaire. I would argue my rules produce less abstract and subjective data. While “The Untitled Mapping Project” is about trauma, which is subjective, it is also relating trauma to an event, which in turn has an approximate, if not exact, time marker. The visualizing of the time marker on the circular time map is an abstract portrait of the self. Any evidence of a person-- a photograph, painting, video or written description-- is an abstract presentation or a portrait. The only way to escape the abstract is to see the actual. In Ghani’s and my work the actual is the people with whom we collaborate. The work is not about seeing them, but representing them through data. Therefore, the work cannot escape being abstracted.

Ghani’s and my work never profess to be factual, but nonetheless it is containing data. We ask questions, and through the collection of data we receive responses, not
answers. Having an answer signifies an end while the issue of identity and trauma never ends. To avoid disregarding the effort of her project, Ghani legitimizes her process by using and defining warm data. Warm data is applicable to my work to a great degree, but the definition is not without fault. I propose warm data is the voluntary collection of social data where the responses can be subjective and abstract, while still maintaining constant variables.

**Presentation Through Foucault**

“It is obvious that the archive of a society, a culture, or a civilization cannot be described exhaustively; or even, no doubt, the archive of a whole period.”

My project “The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma” cannot define trauma (nor does it want to) because as Michael Foucault writes, no one archive can define one thing completely. What the project does is visualize different types of trauma and that visual information supports my claim that there is no level or hierarchy in the conversation of trauma.

The mapping project is an installation. It is housed in a room with black walls. On one side, the photographs of the batches of mailed envelopes are displayed and on the opposite wall the circle time maps that visualize the trauma of those who responded are displayed as individual portraits. The back wall houses a video project, which plots all traumas of those who responded, onto a universal timeline. This is done because while all traumas happen individually, there is the potential for people to experience trauma at the same time, but in separate places [or, also in the same places, as in the case of historical catastrophes, genocides etc]. All the evidence is not presented; only a fragment of all the documentation is displayed on the wall. The hand drawings, the letters written to me,
dates of birth, and the specifics about the trauma are not revealed. In this iteration of the project, to remove the collaborator’s hand removes any association other than trauma as a representation of trauma through a visual form.

At only a few months old this is a young archive and so the data is limited. Foucault wrote that the archive “emerges in fragments, regions, and levels, more fully, no doubt, and with greater sharpness, the greater the time that separates us from it.” When I visit archives, I sift through aged information. The information more often than not dates years back. The depth of the archive is great due to time that has passed. Time lapse supports the understanding of the information. The information “reveals the rules of a practice that enables statements both to survive and to undergo regular modification.”

New information can, and does get put into an older archive, but a larger grouping supports the new information. Therefore, “The Untitled Mapping Project” is an ongoing project, and what is presented is the birth of an archive and initial findings.

The Chronotopic

Allan Sekula was a photographer, filmmaker and writer whose last work, The Dockers Museum, was centered on the depiction and life of ship and dockworkers. Through Sekula’s “diverse actives he sought to image the invisible processes that generate the contemporary global economy.” His biggest project, “The Dockers Museum”, he created an image of the world through the perspective of the dock laborers. The aim was to “re-create the world of single human beings-- the same human beings who have labored under ruthless oppression for hundreds of years” and “not represent the state.” The museum is an unfinished collection of over a thousand graphic images,
sculptures, painting and vernacular objects— all made by others— and acquired, most via eBay, by Allan Sekula between 2010 and until his death in the spring of 2013. This collection has been describe as an “anti-museum and an anti-archive” because “it refuses as much a hierarchy of images as the need to document all and everything.” In Sekula’s Museum there are no major objects, but instead the collection is made up of minor objects and images “brought together in small groups that enhance a potential of meaning in each of them.”

As a photographer Sekula’s work has been described as a not great image-maker, when compared to traditional photographic aesthetics. However, for Sekula this argument misses the point of his images. They were an attempt to “visualize the social forms of the contemporary world in their diversity and linkage” and not make visually pleasing images. Steve Edwards, one of the few people trusted to carry on “The Dockers Museum” by Sekula, relates the work to the Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of chronotope. Bakhtin wrote:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.

Edwards goes on to write “photography (and film) is necessarily chronotopic-configuring a particular moment and a specific place.” Chronotope literally means time and space and is used to connect the temporal and spatial relationships. “Sekula’s chronotope is the sea or maritime space” and with that it challenges our perspective of that space. In my piece “The Untitled Mapping Project” trauma is the chronotope. Just as
Sekula is working to give form to political geography (the politics of the sea and the people who work on and around it), my work seeks to generate a visual for trauma.

“The Untitled Mapping Project” is not a museum for trauma nor is it a recreation of trauma. In fact, this work lays in opposition to what is written about Sekula’s work because it is about the presentation of the visual of trauma and it is the beginning of an archive. Despite the difference, my work aligns with Sekula’s museum philosophy; where it changes our perspective and challenges the traditional notions of what a photograph is and can do, as well as minor objects used to understand a larger issue.

Sekula’s minor objects are things that make up his collections. In my work, minor objects are the people who participate in my work and what I receive back from them. While I compare them to minor objects they are not minor or major objects, but rather they are just everyday people who have experienced trauma. Each person’s individual trauma works to visualize overall trauma and as I have said before—which is now supported with the philosophy of “The Dockers’ Museum”—there is no hierarchy to trauma. All traumas stand alongside each other in the larger realm of time and space. Just as Sekula’s work creates a space where “a football signed by Pele- hero of the Santos longshoremen-can stand on par with famous sculpture of a dock worker by the Belgian artist Constantin Meunier, in which a Japanese foghorn acquired from an Indian source can be a crucial witness on the same level as a group of postcards might be”38, my work is a space where trauma can be anything from a broken arm to sexual assault. The point is trauma means something different to everyone and if a person’s life has been greatly impacted or altered because of that event, then they have the right to feel the same; no trauma is lesser, all trauma is great.
Chapter 3

Data Visualization and Trauma
Data Visualization and Trauma

“Data visualization is the presentation of data in a pictorial or graphical format. It enables decision makers to see analytics presented visually, so they can grasp difficult concepts or identify new patterns.”

The concept of using pictures to understand data has been around for centuries, like the use of maps and graphs in the 17th century. Because of the way the human brain processes information, using charts or graphs to visualize large amounts of complex data is easier than poring over spreadsheets or reports. Data visualization is a quick, easy way to convey concepts in a universal manner.

Edward Tufte believed that graphical data should

- Show the data
- Induce the viewer to think about the substance rather than about methodology, graphic design, the technology of graphic production, or something else
- Avoid distorting what the data have to say
- Present many numbers in a small space
- Make large sets coherent
- Encourage the eye to compare different piece of data
- Reveal the data at several levels of detail, from a broad overview to the fine structure
- Serve a reasonably clear purpose: description, exploration, tabulation, or decoration
- Be closely integrated with statistical and verbal descriptions of data set

Various kinds of information are easier to understand when they are presented on paper or written out. I am able to process and understand the information that is presented as visual form better than just hearing something alone. I need that visual component to truly understand, to the extent that I have to watch movies and television shows with subtitles to fully grasp what is going on with the plot.
On another personal level, blueprints and geographic maps have always interested me from a young age. Floor plans seemed akin to magical diagrams because of a flat paper was able to convey a three-dimensional space. The representation of land formation, bodies of water, homes, businesses, and the complex weaving of roads are what drew me to road maps. In my printmaking undergraduate thesis work, all the prints incorporated some kind of topographical mapping (Figure 12.) sourced from Google maps, but always abstracted into minimal shapes. It was the way that location and place could be represented in an abstracted but still recognizable way that kept me using the maps.

When entering the graduate program I began from the experience of my undergraduate work. I did not immediately begin to map people within the home or plot their personal trauma, but rather I was looking at a new way to visualize the location of the home. The longitude and latitude gives the home the most mathematical marker of place. However, it would take an exceptionally gifted person to find that on a map in a few seconds. So I began to ponder what those numbers would look like visually.

It was in the exploration of the new visual representation that the term data visualization appeared on my radar. Having taken several sociology classes, the use of maps and diagrams as a way of presenting information was not new to me (besides using it in its most basic form in middle school map). However, the taking of very complex information, like the genealogy of life, and simplifying it into a visual chart (Figure 13) opened my eyes to the possibility of how I understood and visualized time, locations, and how people relate to it.
Data visualization is a tool to clearly present and communicate data sets through images. It enables decision makers to see analytical and statistical information presented visually, so they can grasp difficult concepts or identify new patterns. However, whether people understood what I was showing them was not foremost on my mind nor whether people grasped the concept right away, which was not something I particularly wanted. I was more drawn to taking the complicated system of geographical coordinates and creating an even more complicated visual for it. If I wanted it to be easily read I could look at a standard map. It was the abstracting of abstract data that I was interested in. Although Tufte would disagree, I felt (and still feel) that we needed to visually complicate the standard viewing process and understanding of information. The longitude and latitude numbers alone are abstract, but type those numbers into a search engine and a visual for the location is produced. However, creating my own personal system for viewing those numbers was a radical thought for me.

I questioned why do we need a new visual representation for location if we already have one and why in the form of circles. These were some of the questions. It was from there that I discovered the concept for visualizing people in the home setting. It was from there that the concept for visualizing people in the home came to me. I was already working with circles and I began to think of tree rings. When a tree is cut at the log there are growth rings that indicate the age of the tree. I took that reference and created a circular time line for a person. By using concentric rings I could span it to any number and that would represent a specific age and person. Now, instead of a line as standard visual mapping of time, I used circles. A circle going from smaller to larger, to me, is more of a representation of time, life and age, than a straight line.
I had a series of concentric ring drawings of different sizes to represent different people of different ages. The next thing I began to think about is the family picture. What the picture represents is everyone in a home (except if someone has moved out). A photographic picture is a literal visualization of a situation or object. It is almost a form of solid evidence of relationships. What would a portrait of the people living in a specific home look like as a chart? Can you create a non-direct representational portrait of a family, while still representing them? (Figure 14)

At that point, I stared to think of the clock as a means for aiding in my task. Similarly to 12 hours (on a clock) contained in one day there are 12 months on one year. I replaced the hours with months on a clock. The circle is 360 degrees, meaning that each month has a degree of 30, directly correlating to the amount of days in a month, at least for most months, since some months have 31 days. With artistic license, I tweaked certain things. What this allowed me to do was plot people on a timeline, using a system based on birthdays.

This way of visualizing people was important because it was about examining my family in such a way that I had never done before in hopes of finding a connection. Maybe if I represented a person and based on visualized/ fictional math and a made up system, then I could see them in a different way (beside a photography that conveys an emotion) that would make the emotional disconnection I felt easier to understand. It was also about visually linking these families together. The visual representation allows us to see a connection between people. Certainly, we can feel a connection with our parents and siblings, but a feeling is not tangible. If data visualization is a way to present intangible ideas like numbers, it can be used to represent feelings.
For me the visual representation of a link was more powerful than a feeling. The visual form made it real for me, not that it wasn’t to begin with. However, “The Science of Relationships, changed how I looked at my family. Edward Tufte wrote, “graphics are instruments for reasoning about quantitative information” and “often the most effective was to describe, explore a set of numbers-even a very large set-is to look at pictures of those numbers.” Though I am rejecting the principal of data graphics by using unquantifiable data when I translate people to numbers, with my fictional math it becomes quantitative. Seeing a connection disconnected the emotional component but better described it. The maps became a visual of people residing in a home sans emotion. However, the project was not totally void of emotions as this is an entrenched given.

Because I know that you cannot truly escape emotions I began to embrace that idea and started mapping feeling and emotions. My work began to explore the trauma of many people, instead of the connection between families. I use trauma because it is the epitome of physical and mental pain. It can both affect you and effect you. If trauma is an event, then just like mapping based on birthday, I could map based on the day of the trauma. But this time, I was examining marking a singular timeline as opposed to looking at people as units.

This project could only be successful if I had an index of people to present. A singular image with a point is too abstract. However, multiple images of similar aesthetics and points at different spots and of different colors start to suggest something dissimilar. Data visuals do not primarily present images to suggest something, they presents facts and numbers so that you can understand something. Emotions are not facts so they cannot be neatly and visually represented in one image. However, through
varying repetition, as an artist I can provide visual clues to suggest something more elaborate happening.

The real cannot be represented; it can only be repeated, indeed it must be repeated. [But] repetition is not reproduction. [Thus] repetition in Warhol is not reproduction in the sense of representation (of a referent) or simulation (of a pure image, a detached signifier). Rather, repetition serves to screen the real understood as traumatic. But this very need also points to the real, and it is at this point that the real ruptures the screen of repetition. It is a rupture not in the world but in the subject; or rather it is a rupture between perception and consciousness of a subject touched by an image.  

I would agree when Hal Foster says the real cannot be represented because the real is in the past and therefore it can only be repeated. In my work it is repeated through a letter. Foster goes on to say that the repetition serves to screen the real understood as traumatic. To put this in context, Andy Warhol took scenes from newspapers of disasters (Figure 15) and presented the same image multiple times. What I believe Foster is saying is that the repetition of the same image was not about the reproduction of the mass market for which Warhol was known, but rather the numbness you have which causes you to forget there is a real trauma to the image. However, the fact there is the need to numb the audience makes the emotions real. Once you recognize that what you are seeing and feeling is real, there is nothing blocking your mind from the trauma that Warhol’s images depict. You then are left with the repetition of trauma. In my work, it is the repetition of multiple traumas that make it real and rather emotional without being messy.

Having a clean visual form is key to this project. Trauma is the messiest of emotions. These maps do not start off as a clean representation of a muddled concept. In fact, in the letters I received, the maps are hand drawn by the participants. While some
are drawn with care, others are drawn free hand and look askew (Figures 16, 17). But data is always presented cleanly and visually understandable, so I present my work cleanly but not to be so clearly understood. On top of the dynamic of messy emotions, a clean minimal visual information is so out of the norm that it makes the trauma ‘real’ to use Foster's term.

My main question concerns the reasons why do we need to see any of this. The need to 'see' goes beyond the simple saying “seeing is believing.” Before written language, thoughts were presented visually for understanding, like in the case of cave drawings. I would argue that it is going against the norm to not put things into a visual language. We cannot see inside our bodies, so there are charts that give a generic view of what lays under the skin, and there are also machines that can photograph our insides. We can never really see the whole world, but there are maps for us to look at. There are maps and charts to understand almost everything. There are even diagrams to understand trauma: I have made a visual for what trauma looks like. My thesis is only visualizing what has been looked over by others.

**Conclusion**

Emotions are intangible. They cannot be seen, but only felt. They have the ability to influence our lives and dictate the paths we take. They leave invisible markers on the timeline of our lives. Some emotions and feelings can be categorized as “good” while others work in opposition and can have a negative impact on our lives. It is the negative feelings and emotions that linger long after. The impression does leave your mind and the
mark is engraved in your history. Trauma encapsulates every negative emotion and
feeling. Trauma is visceral and physical.

No one is exempted from experiencing trauma. However what that trauma is and
how it effects and affects a history is personal and unique. “The Untitled Mapping
Project: Case Study Trauma”, is an archive that explores trauma and the relationship to
the self and time. The project examines the traumas of multiple people and asks the
questions-- what is trauma really? What does trauma look like and why does it need a
visual representation? Borrowing from, as well as rejecting, the principles of data
visualization, the mapping project takes non-quantitative information (emotions) and
seeks to visualize them so that I, and you, can better understand trauma. “The Untitled
Mapping Project” also creates a layout where all traumas are presented the same not in
order to disregard the gravity of different traumas, but to acknowledge the importance
and magnitude of every experience.
Notes


5 According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary Trauma is a very difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems usually for a long time.


7 Mermin defines event as such:” Before embarking on such a reexamination, it is necessary to take a careful look at the term event, which plays a fundamental role in the relativistic description of the world. An event is something that happens at a definite place at a definite time. It is, if you like, the space-time generalization of the purely spatial geometric notion of point.”


11 Mermin breaks down the relation ship of the event and the point with the example of points a straight line. “Two or more events that happen at the same place and at the same
time (space-time coincidences) are represented by one and the same point, so a single point can represent either a single event or several coincident events. Distinct points in the diagram are associated with distinct events that happen either at different place, at different times, or at both different places and different times.”


12 Herman, Judith L. Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror. (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 56.

13 Quoted by Judith Herman in Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror. Jane Schorer, It Couldn’t happen to me: One Woman’s Story (Des Moines, Iowa: Des Moines Register reprint, 1990), 15.


15 This quote says her, but the “her” is still a representation of a group, so the “her” can be also be read as their. Herman, Judith L. Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror. (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 221.


20 Although I am not requesting nor examining the ethnicity of the people who participate in the project, the diversity of the people is important because I do not want it to be one sided. However, the diversity amongst the people is not important for how I define and present trauma. As I have stated before I want to break down the how we perceive trauma in society, and the perception is some traumas are “greater” or more significant than others. In order to do away with this fallacy, race and ethnicity have been eliminated from the project all together. Race and gender can contribute to the social fallacy of trauma and the inclusion of the two negates how I define trauma.

The rules that are sent out to the people are:

- Draw a circle that takes up most of the paper
- Draw a line across horizontally, halving the circle
- Draw a line vertically, creating quarters
- Turn the quarters into thirds so that you end up with 12 sections
- Label each section as a month
- Now go to the middle (center) of the circle
- Starting with a small circle draw $X$ amount of rings (concentric circles) spanning out ($X =$ your age). The image produce should look similar to tree rings.
- Now think of an event that has been traumatic for you, something you feel has altered your path in life, your mental state, something that has changed your thinking and being.
- Go to the month section where this event has happened
- Now within that section, starting from the center count the rings to the age you were when the event happened. If you do not remember your exact age or month you can estimate it.
- Plot the age you were within the month section using an X
- On that point make a drawing, expressive marks, or scribbles that reflect how you felt during that time.

On a separate piece of paper please write a letter to me about the event.


36 “A term taken over by Mikhail Bakhtin from 1920s science to describe the manner in which literature represents time and space. In different kinds of writing there are differing chronotopes, by which changing historical conceptions of time and space are realized. Thus the ancient Greek novel is dominated by “adventure time”, in which the adventures of hero and heroine occur but which has no developmental impact upon their characters; like the space in which their adventures happen, it is effectively empty. By contrast, the time and space of the chivalric romance, though it retains elements of this adventure time, is dominated by the irruptions of the miraculous, which manifest themselves in narrative terms by the presence of “suddenly”. Chronotopes can become condensed in fundamental organizing metaphors like the chronotope of the road, by which basic conceptions of time and space get translated into narrative terms. Chronotopic analysis thus seeks to address literary history at a very fundamental level; it mediates between historically created and thus changing conceptions of time and space, and their realization in the underlying narratives of literary texts.”


44 Foster Hal. Taken from *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*. (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press ;, 2006), 112.

Figure 4: Wyndi DeSouza, Detail of *The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma*, 2015-2016. Vector Drawing. Dimension variable.
Figure 5: Wyndi DeSouza, Photographic Documentation of Flyers around Washington University in St.Louis (2015)
Figure 6: Wyndi DeSouza, Detail of *The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma; Batch 1 and 2*, 2015-2016. Inkjet Print. Dimension variable.
Figure 7: Wyndi DeSouza, Detail of *The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma; Batch 3*, 2015-2016. Inkjet Print. Dimension variable.
Figure 8: Wyndi DeSouza, Detail of *The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma: Batch 4*, 2015-2016. Inkjet Print. Dimension variable.
Figure 9: Wyndi DeSouza, Detail of *The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma: Batch 5*, 2015-2016. Inkjet Print. Dimension variable.
Figure 10: Wyndi DeSouza, Detail of *The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma; Amanda*, 2015-2016. Inkjet Print. Dimension variable.

Figure 11: Wyndi DeSouza, Detail of *The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma; Jesse*, 2015-2016. Inkjet Print. Dimension variable.
Figure 12: Wyndi DeSouza, *Ground Zero*, 2011. Intaglio Print. 11”x 6.”
A universal tree of life based on ribosomal RNA sequences, sampled from about 3,000 species from throughout biodiversity and constructed by David Mark Hillis and colleagues at the University of Texas at Austin.

Figure 13: David M. Hillis, Derrick Zwickl, and Robin Gutell, University of Texas, *Tree of Life*, 2003, medium unknown. Available from: University of Texas, http://www.zo.utexas.edu/faculty/antisense/downloadfilestol.html
Figure 14: Wyndi DeSouza, *The Science of Relationships: DeSouza Family*, 2016. Wood Cut. 15”x 22.”
Figure 16: Wyndi DeSouza, Detail of *The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma; #22 Dawn*, 2015-2016. Ink Drawing. 8.5”x 11.”
Figure 17: Wyndi DeSouza, Detail of *The Untitled Mapping Project: Case Study Trauma; #22_Dawn*, 2015-2016. Ink Drawing. 8.5”x 11.”
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Bibliography


