

Traces, Testimony, Paranoia

Rachel E. Cyr

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ABSTRACT

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Prior to 1984, human rights documentation consisted of eyewitness and victim testimony. Since then forensic science has become a staple of human rights investigations. The resurgence of positivism consequence of these institutional and procedural shifts inspired the metaphorical conflation of physical evidence and physical traces with narrative and personal testimony. This thesis considers this tropic drift within human rights discourse as an example and a reflection of the epistemological ambivalence and semiotic confusion that still surrounds the indexical sign both outside and within critical theory. This thesis argues first that traces constitute non-linguistic sign-events whose formal properties motivate anecdotal and narrative modes of explanation and second, that the growing cultural importance of forensic science reifies a form of paranoid knowledge at the heart of western subjectivity.

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To Nana, Song of Songs

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PREFACE

I never felt that I had chosen the topic of this work. The year prior to the commencement of my graduate studies I was in regular conversation with my grandmother who was terminally ill with lung cancer. My official excuse to see her so often that year was that she needed me to help her finish her family genealogy, which she had spent many decades researching between raising a family and tending to the community. Unlike the Mennonite communities, which hold detailed genealogical records, my grandmother's British lineage was comparatively less certain. So we spent many hours together that year trying to link the pieces together. I transcribed by hand the stories and anecdotes she wanted to pass down to later generations, and tried to memorize who was whom among the various photographs she had in her shoebox archive. Her death was imminent and so the urgency to catalogue what we could seemed all the more crucial. As the wife of a minister, her manner of speaking of death was usually theological, though occasionally she admitted to being afraid. One day she mumbled aloud on the subject of her funeral arrangements and she mentioned to me a hymn that was regularly played on the occasion. This song, Nana alleged, suggested that after death a person was present in the trees, the wind and in the remains. She insisted that she could never allow such a hymn to be played at her funeral. "I am theologically opposed to it," she said "when I am gone, nothing of me will be here. I'll be with Him. Nothing of me will stay behind." Rightly or wrongly, I read her digression as an interdiction against compensating myself for her loss with metaphor and metonymy. Nana's complaint belonged to the order of Mennonite iconoclasm but with a salient difference, she obviously understood the lure of remains and traces, where others only warned of the lure of images. I struggled inwardly

to properly place and harness the meaning of the photographs we were identifying together, as I did the deodorant and talcum powder I found in the medicine cabinet after her passing. I struggled with what was left behind. I wore some of her clothes as pajamas, clung to them as I did all the other things I inherited. I loved her and was afraid of being unfaithful, forgetting her too quickly. Strangely, I could only think the idolatry of the trace *through* forensic science, which seemed to me the facet of our culture most dedicated to the remains of the deceased. Watching *Crime Scene Investigation* after Nana's passing, I was struck by a forensic pathologist stroking the hair of a corpse, the ritualistic storytelling from remains, the ritualistic cataloguing and I quickly recognized the scene as a familiar one even if it seemed as though one had no reason to relate to the other. Theorizing traces meant putting into words something that was already familiar to me but was conceptually and theoretically amorphous. Such is the manner that I approached this topic: caring less about technology, scopophilia or power/knowledge, the question, I would later find out, had more to do with subjectivity, testimony, meaning and narration. I have often thought it lucky that forensic science remained *meaningful* to me until the very end, but if I were to give myself more credit I would have to admit that Charles Sanders Peirce had something true to offer with his theory of logical abduction—the fact of guessing correctly. I have tried, often, to explain the leap from my grandmother to forensic science and usually failed miserably to communicate their sympathy—and even if their sympathy is still lost to the reader after reading this work, I only ask that one consider that I would not have been able to think this piece without first trusting the direction of that leap in the beginning.

Introduction: Tropic Drifts

The tortured body retains scars, marks that recall the violence inflicted upon it by the torturer. In part because slaves were often tattooed in the ancient world, such marks of torture resonate in the Greek mind with tattoos, and with other forms of metaphorical inscription [...] a writing tablet. *Page DuBois*

Jean Laplanche writes in Life and Death in Psychoanalysis (1970): “The constituted is reconstructed from the constituted or, in any event, from the constitutive process which is not primal but derived” (129). Metaphor of a metaphor; the physical inscription is derivative of another derivation. The tropic genesis is not a genesis at all, it is merely an identifiable event that relentlessly defers its origin. Within human rights discourse traumatic testimony begets testifying traumas—lesions and scars that testify on their own accord and stand in for the narrated testimonies that could not, but should have, been salvaged. “Stigmata stings, pierces, makes holes, separates with pinched marks and in the same movement distinguishes—re-marks—inscribes, writes” (Cixous xiii). This is a tropological genesis spurred by the event of a marking of the skin. This is the beginning of a hermetic drift, a closed tropic circuitry based on the Renaissance precept that “the similar can be known through the similar” (Eco “Unlimited” 206). The drift is hermetic and contained because the constraints of discourse call for the derivation; discourse condones and supports the founding of a homology across the fields of the linguistic and the somatic. A witness account morphs into a splatter of blood and dermal fissures because trauma begets trauma. The ruptured spleen and the internal hemorrhage announce their status as traumatic testimony. When the communicative function of the victim’s testimony is displaced and condensed onto a dismembered limb it is *not* arbitrary, it’s not an empty figure or a ‘mere’ rhetorical trick—indeed, with Jean Laplanche and Jonathan Culler, we may ask ourselves if there is such a thing as an

‘empty figure’ at all or anything that would qualify as ‘merely’ rhetoric—it follows established etymological and semantic constraints and it corresponds to new physical contingencies. What is more, our derivation could not have happened at any time or any place; it’s happening here and now because it could and because spatio-temporal contingencies allowed for their opening. In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was passed along with the Genocide Convention, largely in reaction to the unfathomable misfortunes that befell Europe’s jewish communities during the Second World War. Prior to the mid-1980s eyewitness testimony and victim narratives, with the notable exception of the photograph, occupied the entire field of human rights documentation. Then in 1984 Forensic Anthropologist Clyde Snow, with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), now known as the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF), responded to requests coming from Argentinean citizens to help exhume graves rumored to house “Desaparecidos,” otherwise known as the forced disappearances resulting from the Condor military regime (1976-1983). *And the semiological field mushroomed.* It might have happened in 1955 when, in the name of human rights, the results of a medical investigation were presented at the Nuremburg Trial by the pathologists of the British Army (Cordner and McKelvie 867), but we know that meaning is a retroactive achievement (Lacan; Culler 18). The second event gives meaning to the first *and so on and so on.* (S ← S’) The event of a handful of British pathologists testifying at the Nuremburg trials passed innocuously, retrospectively, though, we understand that it initiated a period of gestation.¹

¹ Different sources disagree on the question of forensic science’s initiation to human rights. A politically contentious though ironic alternative genesis is the *Official Material on the Mass Murder at Katyn* drafted by Nazi sympathetic pathologists to discredit the Soviet Union prior to the Nuremburg trial (Laqueur 76).

Up until 1984, eyewitness and victim testimony constituted the primary means by which human rights abuses were recorded documented and presented (Kirshner 451). Kay Shaffer and Simonie Smith explain that subsequent to the Second World War, Holocaust testimonials were so engrained that they had become “a template for all forms of traumatic telling, response and responsibility within the contemporary field of human rights” (7). Human rights discourse relied on (auto)biographical narratives of personal and collective trauma, the adoption of which advantageously allowed for disenfranchised groups to forge a space for themselves in public spheres that had previously been their censor. South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1996-2000) is the quintessential example of a type of public forum where victim narratives and confessional witnessing sought the symbolic redress of the social inequities through the publicity of traumatic experience. The racial apartheid of South Africa, in that instance, was transformed into a shared memory, a collective responsibility, and a ground for reconciliation (Hamber 35). What also transpired (and this is noteworthy) is that the traumatic witnessing practiced in South Africa and elsewhere paved the way for a theatrics and spectacle of psychological and physical trauma.

Allan Feldman in his article “Memory Theatres, Virtual Witnessing, and the Trauma-Aesthetic” (2004) argues that a distinct culture of oration transpired where survivors presented themselves in public forums, such as the media, to describe human rights abuses and draw audiences to the horror of the traumatic events they experienced. Even if they provided disenfranchised individuals and collectives entry and access to the public sphere, the same opportunity opened on the traumatized body (Feldman 167). Feldman suggests that even before the most empathetic audiences “the trauma-aesthetic

installs and smuggles into human rights discourse a visual genealogy of witnessing and testimony-giving that sorts appropriation of the body in pain” (186). In other words, even if the circulation of and exposure to traumatic awakenings on the international stage exposed the audience to the “language of trauma,” to borrow from Cathy Caruth, and could theoretically shed light on established structures of oppression, they could also occasion the ground for its metaphorical extension to and annexation of the survivor’s body. The problematic relationship between the body and speech forthcoming in public traumatic witnessing recalls Nancy Fraser’s criticism of the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere. It is, she writes, impossible for interlocutors to erase or bracket class, gender and racial differences in the public sphere because the bodily presence of an interlocutor is always already implicated and affecting the nature of discourse (Fraser 109). The commonalities between Fraser’s reading of the bourgeois public sphere and Feldman’s take of human rights testimonials lies, however, with the fact that the optical and physical dimensions of public testimony can advantageously use the body as an alibi for delegitimization or, alternatively, as an “authenticating” (Feldman 167) presence to the traumatic event communicated in the speech act. In this way, the analogical drift from the traumatic content of testimony to the physical body reinforces and reverses the analogy at the heart of the etymological history of the term *trauma* itself—that is, between the foundational medical definition of trauma as a physical injury and/or lesion to the surface of the body and its psychoanalytic analogue, the psychic trauma. Laplanche and Pontalis in The Language of Psychoanalysis (1967) explain:

Trauma is a term that has long been used in medicine and surgery. [...] It generally means any injury where the skin is broken as a consequence of external violence and the effects of such an injury is not always present, however—we may speak, for example, of

‘closed’ head and brain traumas. In adopting the term psychoanalysis carries the three ideas implicit in it over on to the psychological level: the idea of a violent shock, the idea of a wound and the idea of consequences affecting the whole organism.” (465-466)

Because traumatic witnessing regularly involves bodily presence or the presentation of bodies, human rights trials, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), constitute rhetorical events through which the routine iteration of traumatic experience allows for the simultaneity of utterance and body, and potentially, their metaphorical conflation. The tropological foundation of the notion of trauma is the precedent that allows for this derivation as do the structural and rhetorical norms that define the discourse of human rights.² Feldman draws on Page DuBois’ work on torture in fifth-century Athens to draw out the nebulous political, scopophilic benefits and conveniences that follow the displacement and extension of textuality from speech to body. In ancient Greece, the analogical chain began with the tattoo and moved to the lesion, and the movement from enunciation to inscription that it inaugurated resulted in the full silencing of the Athenian slave. “The fusion of linguistic performance and bodily exposure here unfolds as a rite of hierarchical observation and consequent authentication” (Feldman 188). Indeed, Feldman demonstrates how the tactical conflation of body and speech (and usually the latter’s substitution with the former) traversed the history of the Abolition movement in nineteenth century America and, to this day, taints contemporary human rights discourse.³

² Michael Ignatieff writes: “To what extent do representations of human rights violations position viewers rhetorically as “voyeurs of the suffering of others, tourists amid their landscapes of anguish”? (Ignatieff qtd. Feldman 186)

³ Page DuBois’ research resonates all the more when we consider how forensic scientists are also sought by human rights organizations to detect evidence of torture in the living as well as the dead. (Kirshner 453)

Feldman's reading of the trauma-aesthetics of human rights discourse awakens us to the tropological drift at play between the transmission and representation of the traumatic event through narration on the one hand and the emergence of the traumatic lesion and/or marking as an alternative or complementary medium of testimony on the other. The discursive tension exists at the junction of popular psychoanalytic discourse that seeks to convey an "alternative truth" through victim testimony (Felman and Laub Testimony)—a truth irreducible to physical trauma—and the medico-scientific discourse that underlies and justifies the semiological drift from speech to lesion. This is a problem, and it confronts us with the historical precedents of their analogy as well as the formal differences between the utterance and physical evidence that are elided in the process.

But the unsteady relationship between narration and the public display of bodily markings is not the sole outcome of their spatio-temporal coincidence in the courts or their "trauma-aesthetic." Our *problématique* is cemented by recent but major institutional shifts within the practice of human rights documentation—namely, the application of forensic science⁴ to human rights investigations. The incorporation of forensic science meant the introduction of a *corpus delicti*, the material substrate of the crime that hints to the perpetrator (Laqueur 75): the bodies upon bodies buried in the clandestine graves of Vukovar, Croatia or the skeletal remains piled in a Rwandan church. The *corpis delicti* of human rights investigations now spans and cuts across thirty-three countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Czechoslovakia, El

⁴ "Forensic Scientists" broadly encompasses the class of scientists collectively involved in a given investigation. Forensic science brings together: forensic pathology, clinical forensic medicine, forensic odontology, medical epidemiology, anthropology, molecular biology, radiography, archaeology, ballistics, firearms and toolmark examiners, entomology, crime scene examiners, evidence handlers, photographers, mortuary technicians, fingerprint experts.

Salvador, Guatemala, Kenya, Kurdistan, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, the Philippines, Rumania, South Korea, East Timor, Taiwan, Venezuela, the West Bank of Israel, Rwanda, Uganda, Chad, while the list grows (Kirshner 456). And the international organizations launching forensic investigations are just as numerous: NGOs such as the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG), Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), the International Forensic Center of Excellence for the Investigation of Genocide, Archaeologists for Human Rights (AFHR) and other international bodies such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), the United Nations' International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY); and, national bodies such as the US Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA). Every one of these inter/national bodies has deployed forensic teams around the globe to secure and exhume gravesites.

The merit of medicolegal documentation to human rights prosecution proved so promising that in 1989 both the United Nations Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly drafted a protocol: the *Manual on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions*, which detailed the proper ways to document and detect evidence of torture and carry through with the exhumation of grave sites.⁵ And in 1992, Resolution 1992/24 was passed to provide assistance to forensic investigations. A "Standing Team" of experts was created to support international investigations. However, as Stephen Cordner and Helen McKelvie write in "Developing Standards in International Forensic Work to Identify Missing Persons" (2002), the United Nation's Standing Team was "just a list, without the

⁵ The document, as well as the United Nations attention to the benefits of forensic scientific data, results from the consciousness-raising initiatives of US Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights who earlier drafted the "Protocol for Preventing Arbitrary Killings through Adequate Death Investigation and Autopsy" (1988).

resources and logistical support required to provide it with the wherewithal to act as its name implies” (872). Similarly, the United Nations’ Manuel (1989) standardized the process of identifying human remains but beyond offering guidelines, rarely enforced them. In short, organizations, protocols, manuals and articles emerged at an unprecedented rate, but being new, the field was and still is in the process of development. What is more, the forensic documentation of mass graves and human rights abuses have had little airtime in international courts outside of Argentina and Guatemala where forensics was instrumental to the identification of deceased individuals,⁶ and so the question of the legal persuasiveness and effectiveness of forensic evidence in the courts is still an open question.

It is NGO Physicians for Human Rights and the forensic anthropologists who led their earliest investigations who are to be credited for the widespread public awareness of the potential contributions forensic science could bring to human rights investigations. Former PHR consultant and Executive Director Eric Stover (1992-1994) and illustrious forensic anthropologist Clyde Snow are personally responsible for the development of an important literature on the evolving mandate of forensic science. Eric Stover’s tawdry pocket-sized biography of Dr. Clyde Snow Witnesses From the Grave: The Stories Bones Tell (1991), Graves: Srebrenica and Vokovar (1998), PHR’s Clear Koff’s glossy The Bone Woman: A Forensic Anthropologist’s Search for Truth in the Mass Graves of Rwanda, Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo (2005) and the Smithsonian’s Dr. Douglas Ubelacker and Henry Scammell’s Bones: A Forensic Detective’s Casebook (1992) exemplify how forensic practitioners at the forefront of the movement converted

⁶ See the *Commission for Historical Clarification in Guatamala*, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission held between 1994-1996.

themselves and each other into protagonists of marketable true-crime narratives. The cultural significance of true crime narration cannot be underestimated here for, as Mark Selzter has pointed out in “The Crime System” (2004), they play a formative part of traumatic culture and healing, or what he calls the “pathological public sphere” (560). “True crime is part of our contemporary wound culture: a culture—or at least, cult—of commiseration” (Seltzer 557). Simultaneously field scientists, news correspondents and leading (wo)men of a considerable hand-full of true crime narratives, the field workers of PHR self-consciously transgressed the cultural divisions between academia and popular culture. Their variegated roles, however, also meant that practicing forensic scientists were central instrumental agents in establishing and recycling dominant tropes and already familiar images from the human rights domain. The indivisibility of physical inscription and enunciation traverses scholarly articles, official human rights publications, true-crime narratives and news reports. Consider, for example, the official mission statement on PHR’s website and the following the excerpts from books and news reports marketed for popular consumption.

PHR believes that the dead have powerful stories to tell and that accountability provides the most secure foundation for future respect for human rights and humanitarian law, assigning individual accountability for what is often seen as collective guilt. By giving voice to the voiceless, PHR hopes to ensure that the innocent victims do not die in vain. That their stories are heard and their killers brought to justice.

(Physicians for Human Rights 1)

With corpses now able to ‘speak’ to us across a span of decades, there’s a renewed motivation by law enforcement officials to right the wrongs that have gone unpunished.

(Mietkiewicz 1998, E1)

When I got the call from Bill, I was a graduate student in forensic anthropology, but I had known for years that my goal was to help end human rights abuses by providing to would-be killers that bones could talk. (Koff 7)

Equating corpses and material evidence with personal testimony is ubiquitous throughout the literature, popular, journalistic and academic. Never mind that eyewitness and victim testimony are still required to corroborate the scientists' findings, to the forensic scientist bones speak and crime scenes are messages written in code. Where the trauma-aesthetic described by Allen Feldman introduces us to a scene where the epistemological certainty of the body threateningly undermined the integrity of personal testimony, the corpses exhumed from clandestine graves invert their relationship; skeletons are invested with the communicative capacity the dead would have (theoretically) been able to enact were they alive. The tropological reversal effected by forensic practitioners consequently fulfills the complete displacement of one to the other; the full subjectivization of material evidence counters the de-subjectivization effected through the fugitive nature of voice (Connor). In a sense, the supplementation and/or conflation of vocal enunciation with the physical marking restores post-mortem the "metaphysics of presence" (Derrida), the sense of illusory transparency between a given subject and a mode of communication. Whereas Feldman's trauma-aesthetic privileged the bodily trauma because it was not tainted by subjectivity, the material inscription of the corpse articulates the impartiality of physical evidence with the subjective position that traditionally reverberates in the speech act—which is to say, the "intention-to-signify" normally encountered in the real, "the non-subjectivizable remainder" of the real (Zizek 213) made apparent in the vocal mode of signification. Not without irony, the hierarchical reorganization of speech and textual

evidence inflects the vocalic mode with a fugitive character and conversely imbues material textuality with ‘presence’ *through* their identification—meaning therefore that a performative contradiction inheres within the rhetorical transfer of authority, for it is through the appropriation of the cultural currency of eyewitness testimony that material evidence is in turn posited as both empirically reliable and, through the designation of an author-function (Foucault), faithful to the story the living victim would have shared.

The rhetoric of voice and evidential testimony, however, conceals underlying motives. Equating physical evidence with victim testimonials detracts the audience or jury from the hermeneutic and interventionist dimensions of scientific investigation. Julie Johnson-McGraph’s research on the history of forensic pathology in the United States indicates that the scientist’s dual role as medical examiner and as expert witness for the judicial system (which is still true today for many forensic practitioners) meant that there existed a real incentive to equate expert testimony with victim narratives because the American citizenry traditionally trusted eyewitness reports over circumstantial evidence. “The task before the forensic pathologist, therefore, was how to transform their interpretation of the circumstantial evidence of the body and the scene of the crime to convey it with the immediacy and authority of eyewitness testimony” (453). Johnson-McGraph’s research makes evident historical precedents of the elision of the interpretative and representational phases of the forensic investigation effected through the rhetorical rapprochement of eyewitness and expert testimony. The trope of voice and/or communication conceals the (un)conscious modes of production that go into the interpretative process. Being once removed from the actual event, the forensic scientist has no option other than to interpret the residual ruins left at the scene of the crime or

within the grave. As Johnson McGrath insists, the forensic scientist is not a “spiritualist medium” but an interpreter of scientific evidence (453).

Hermeneutic philosophers have shown and are very well aware that archival documentation is not impervious to social construction or individually determinative of interpretative outcomes; that physical evidence is both the product and agent of an organizing complex of cultural practices that have far-reaching effects on the dynamic identity of past, present and future; and, for that reason, ideological and epistemological assumptions inevitably shape and guide the scientist in his or her investigation of crime scenes. Does this necessarily imply then that we resign ourselves to radical social constructionist theories of scientific research (Hacking)? Does our awareness of the formative function of the interpreter and her epistemological assumptions mean that we must revolt against the idea of a dynamic relationship between material evidence and testimony, memory and knowledge of the past? And this, because the hermeneutic process is inflected by societal determinations and rhetorical alibis?

Ricoeur, who stands among the better-known proponents of hermeneutic philosophies of history, suggests that a sense of responsibility to the dead should guide all forms of documentary research. In Volume II of Time and Narrative (1983-85), he writes: “as soon as the idea of a debt to the dead, to people of flesh and blood to whom something really happened in the past, stops giving documentary research its highest end, history loses its meaning” (118). Positivistic theories of historical knowledge (with which Paul Ricoeur is philosophically at odds) may be replete with problems but we do ourselves a disservice, Ricoeur maintains, if we convince ourselves that the positivist’s naïveté is reason to withhold responsibility from those who have passed before us.

Positivist criticism, at least, expresses an enduring concern for the status of the document and its relationship to the past. What is *pragmatically* necessary in the positivist illusion—the illusion that all assertions can be proven scientifically and/or empirically (OED)—is its faithfulness to a relationship between evidence and its past, regardless of how strained or tenuous that relationship reveals itself to be. Forensic science offers a positivistic reading of historical interpretation in so far as it interprets what happened at a given time and space, and the rhetorical textualization and subjectivization of physical remains calcifies the relationship between the dead and the physical document and the interpretative outcome. It is on this note that Antoinette Burton in “Archive Fever, Archive Stories” (2005), explains that the rising popularity of forensic science indexes a renewed interest in documents whose material fixity remain intact. “Indeed, the most popular archive stories of the new millennium are shaped by the belief in the capacity of material evidence to create and sustain tests of verifiability” (Burton 5). Burton notes in particular the effervescent interest in forensic science, which has become a site of “sacralization” and “renewed faith in the capacity of science to read certain types of archives (corpses, crime scenes, DNA samples” (5). Therefore, the alibi of ‘victim testimony,’ which conceals the interpretative dimensions of scientific investigations, reiterates the axiomatic layer that subtends positivist criticism. Simultaneously obscuring and rendering transparent the interpretative intervention and reiterating the physical trace’s capacity to ‘stand in’ for the dead, our tropology figuratively articulates a sense of indebtedness towards the dead through the ex-nomination of the scientist made possible by the subjectivization of the evidential body. Therefore, in representations of forensic

science the textualization of the body coincides and is bolstered by the positivistic epistemological stance. If the body is a text, paradoxically, it is also because it isn't one.

These trends, however, have wide implications; and, they raise more questions than they answer. The rhetorical textualization of the bodily trace, even if it allows for a sense of obligation towards the dead, is nevertheless based on a positivist naiveté and what is more, the distinctly semiological bias at the heart of the rhetorical extension of subjectivity, raises additional questions about the ethical issues that subtend that semiotic model implicitly upheld in their analogy. The textualization of the body and/or material world is an ethical issue that haunts humanities scholarship as much as it does the human rights. The discourse of rights is also creeping into our arguments for a return to materiality within the humanities. Consider Archaeologist Bjørnor Olsen's argument for a 'return to things':

Archaeologists should unite in defence of things, a defence of those subaltern members of the collective that have been silenced and "othered" by the imperialist social and humanist discourses. I am tired of the familiar story of how the subject, the social, the episteme, created the object; tired of the story that everything is language, action, mind and human bodies. I want us to pay attention to the other half of this story: how objects construct the subject. This story is not narrated in the labile languages, but comes to us silent, tangible, visible and brute material remains [...] Thus, the need for a new regime, "a democracy extended to things" (Latour), becomes ever more evident. (Olsen qtd. in Domanska 341)

The postmodernist claim that the body is a text evidently bears ethical implications, as Olsen's comment suggests, but so too as Ewa Domanska correctly points out, does the extension of ethical rights to material objects (341). It is impossible to disassociate the extension of human rights discourse to human remains from the debates held internally

within academia because in a very real way their rhetoric is also ours. What our tropic drift confronts us with is how distinctly thorny the category of the material trace is for us today as is the wayward cultural tick of representing the semiotic process in terms of intentionality. In addition, it underlines the central importance physical documentation to our sense of connection and indebtedness to the dead and our ability to represent the events they endured in the present. The *Dingpolitik*, what Bruno Latour calls a politics formed around a given object or material good, is unquestionably at our door.

Trajectory of the Text

Traces, Testimony, Paranoia surveys modalities of signification related to the interpretation of human remains and physical traces. Drawing inspiration from the reports and dramatic representations of the forensic investigative process, as well as the scholarly literature on material traces, it selects and organizes from among them the stories we inadvertently tell ourselves about indexical signs and takes these as points of departure for further theoretical consideration and revision. This work, therefore, develops from the implicit argument that if physical traces inspire discernible and recurrent tropes (such as the one discussed above) they, as a coherent assemblage of rhetorical figures and literary devices, provide important insight into their semiotic nature. The methodological principle driving this entire analysis is based on the assumption that tropes tell us a substantial amount about how we conceive and account for the meaning of indices and how we think they might differ formally and substantially from the other types of evidence we encounter. How material evidence signifies is a

process we love to describe and demonstrate to ourselves time and time again. Detective novels, forensic television dramas, documentaries on the subject of archaeological and anthropological digs, guided tours through a museum exhibit, rites of circumcision, mass pilgrimages to the site of a relic, each of these is a part of what together make up what could be described as the dramaturgy of the trace. *Dramaturgy*, for those of us that need reminding, is defined as “the theory and practice of dramatic composition” (OED), with drama, of course, denoting at once an instance of dramatization and a series of rousing events or circumstances. The ritualistic re-enactments and/or representations of the semiotic encounter within the field of human rights are dramatizations in their own right; they consist of a shared means for us to simulate and reinforce the trace’s importance and value historically and politically. What is more, these practices are dramaturgical to the extent that they account for a significant portion of semiotic theory. Put simply, any theory is “a set of principles” upon which we rely to explain a phenomenon and to justify our interventions with regard to it (OED), and prejudice alone dictates that it is transmitted only in the form of textbooks, scholarly articles or texts of Talmudic proportions. Because semiotic precepts are reiterated through the repetition of cultural rites, limiting theory to its explanatory function dangerously lifts it from the realm of anthropology and, worse, falsely impresses upon us the sense that the corpus of semiotic theory is integral while ‘external’ cultural practices are what change.

The fact of the matter is that our ideas of how signs signify are in perpetual flux because the manners in which signs signify also evolve across time and space. For example, Byzantine doctrine supported the belief that iconographic depictions of the saints and disciples were marked with divine influence. There was a theo-semiotic

theory pertaining to a class of visual images. The iconographic ornamentation of Byzantine churches and their place in prayer rituals is partly a consequence of their semiotic (and therefore social) function as mediators of the divine. Or consider, for instance, the recent controversy surrounding the Danish cartoons of the Islamic prophet Mohammed: the confrontation would have been very different if sacrilege were not intimately bound to figurative representation of the deity in the Islamic tradition. Perhaps it is too easy for us to grasp the political effectivity of semiotic systems and codes in circumstances such as these; it is easy to see how the Judaic and Christian traditions established dissimilar semiotic codes, which permeated culture at large.⁷ It becomes less obvious, it seems, to take note of their inception when they emerge out of the informal contexts of popular culture or human rights discourse because they are more insidiously ingrained in our cultural subconscious. What are we to make of the rise of narratives dealing with physical traces in forensic science, for example, and their lauded ability to extract infallible information from physical traces that ‘come from the dead’? In as much as they reiterate semiotic commandments or innovate new ones, even the most popular or colloquial of texts merit our consideration as a site of theoretical innovation and regeneration.

The anecdotal, the narratological and the dramatic do not necessarily lapse into the theoretical, but in the instance where they simulate, demonstrate or substantiate a semiotic event I want to argue that they are. Tropes relating to indexical signs, regardless of how they are recounted, are theoretical propositions overlaid with a poetic or literary veneer—their didactic and rhetorical edges softened by a canon of figures where desire

⁷ See Julia Kristeva’s *The Powers of Horror* (1982) for an excellent discussion of the semiotics of the abject in Christianity and Judaism.

and the imagination linger and are replenished. If our goal is to gain insight into how physical signs signify, how they come to mean what they mean, and, if we broaden and complicate what counts as primary and secondary sources and what counts as a story, then everything from journalistic reports to the digitized illustrations which are a staple of forensic science televisual dramas are suitable fodder for exploration. They, like our canon of critical theory, offer a privileged view of the epistemological and ontological assumptions we communally share with regard to indexical signs and, on that account, may potentially incite alterations and revisions in our own academic work.

Traces, Testimony, Paranoia, accordingly, grounds itself on source-based research and analysis. It works from pre-existing theoretical material and adds to this repertoire of established scholarly work, news reports and popular fictional and nonfictional works that advertise a preoccupation with physical traces and the recuperation of human remains for human rights purposes. The objective here is not to produce a hermetic theory of the index or trace—one that would seal inconsistencies or gloss over points of contradiction—rather, in resisting the lure of hermeticism, the implicit goal is to flesh out the semiotic richness traces were hitherto denied. We already observed how the textualization of the body supports the illusions of positivism, how it transformed the corpse into an communicative subjective agent; this work gambles that this is not only rhetoric but is part of the phantasmagoric and theoretical makeup always already greeting and shaping the semiotics of the physical trace. Because the trace is under theorized and because it doesn't easily fit within the representational bias of semiology, our theories of the trace are likely predestined to be phantasmatic as well.

Chapter One “The Anatomy of the Anecdote” is a genealogical effort to substantiate the analogy between testimony and trace. In other words, I open with a discussion of the metaphorical extension and conflation of physical traces with other forms of inscription as it relates to the latter’s testimonial function. Citing the widespread habit of equating writing and organic signs with one another in the human rights domain and elsewhere in humanities scholarship, I follow the self-same impulse across the works of Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Derrida and lesser-known but recent scholars who are grappling with the status of material signs. Mapping out the metaphorical, and therefore, relational origins of their equivalence, this chapter responds to and resists the rhetorical effectivity of the trope itself by drawing out the way in which they are at odds and, ultimately, how they are incommensurable. And, reaching for the work of philosopher Alphonso Lingis, I finally highlight the issues, ethical and theoretical, that are elided in the linguisticism upheld by the analogy of trace and testimony.

Whereas Chapter One is essentially angled along the issue of identification. Chapter Two “Traces *qua* Index” further deconstructs the identity between trace and testimony. In the course of this chapter, I draw out their differences by reading the trace against Charles Sanders Peirce’s theory of the index. However, the question of why their identification persists—why linguistic meaning is continually projected onto non-linguistic signs—is explained through an application of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. A Lacanian reading of the trace not only offers compelling explanations for the consubstantiation of sign and trace, but also reinforces how the meaning and significance we give to traces and remains are not immune to psycho-semiotic influences. In fact, the status of the trace as a meaning-full sign akin to linguistic signs is a by-product of the

human being's configuration as a subject of language and desire. Chapter Two, then, reads our anthropomorphism and linguisticism in light of Lacan's theory of the imaginary *imagos*.

Chapter Three "The Way of the Anecdote" returns to the question of the testimonial function of trace. While this penultimate chapter implicitly stands as an argument for greater attention to physical traces within the field of literary theory, explicitly it situates the will to narrative and testimony—in essence, the inauguration of a text—with the formal properties of the sign. Drawing on Paul Ricoeur, Charles Sanders Peirce, Susan Stewart and Joel Fineman, I argue that abductive indices force the verbalization of cross-temporal contiguity and consequently, constitute a formal constraint upon the semiotician/orator to rely on narrative. Furthermore, this chapter suggests that material traces motivate a particular narrational form, namely the medico-legal anecdote, and further suggests that this might explain why the *corpus dilecti* of our forensic protagonists is being promoted as a site of narration.

"Closing Thoughts: Aggressivity and Paranoia" is the concluding chapter in which I discuss the theoretical and ethical questions the previous chapters bring to a discussion of human rights and our culture "of commiseration" (Seltzer). My concern is that the introduction of forensics to human rights discourse might normalize and institute a paranoid subjectivity and, additionally, that the accent placed on identification in the act of witnessing raises the problem of imaginary aggressivity at the heart of rights discourse. More cautionary than prescriptive, our conclusion leaves with questions we should ask ourselves as we anticipate the effects forensics will concretely bring to human rights discourse and the symbolic rehabilitation of traumatic experiences.

To better follow the forthcoming discussion, however, it behoves the reader to read through a brief historical overview of the field of semiotics.

Thinking Through the Semiological Bias

If the attribution of intentional communication to physical evidence poses a complication it is because it accosts us with the theoretical glitches, conceptual confusion and oversights that follow from the alleged bipolarity in the field of semiotics itself. Physical markings readily interpellate both traditions but are faithful to neither. At once material and conceptual, motivated and conventional, potentially intentional or not, the material trace straddles both continental semiology and American semeiotics; and various, usually implicit conceptions of signs and their relationship to language, empirical reality, subjectivity and culture account for how a physical trace is approached and understood. Indeed, the textualization of physical trauma in the instance of forensic science is rooted in a matrix of rhetorical and historical articulations and its paradoxical (from a semiotic perspective at least) reliance on textual metaphors to describe and reiterate positivist maxims is a semiotic enigma. The rhetoric of textuality inscribes the physical trace within differing and seemingly incommensurable “regimes of signs” (Deleuze and Guattari), the physical trace is formally dissonant with semiology and yet, here they coexist. If we can readily recognize the rhetorical *uses* of semiological topographies, it is another challenge to infer from these rhetorical detours the conscious and unconscious fantasies we have about material signs themselves. The first step before actually commencing such an inquiry is to understand the historical evolution of the

field/discipline of semiotics. Finally, because histories of semiotics abound and I see no reason to subject the reader to a lecture he or she has heard several times before, the following review is angled along the question of the material sign because it relates directly with the topical dimensions of the work.

Gören Sonnessan makes the convincing argument that the field of semiotics is not only heir to Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce and more, that even if this were the case, it never led to the conquest of the Peircian tradition to the benefit of the linguistic tradition (Sonnessan “Fallacy”). However, setting momentarily aside the ‘linguistic fallacy’ which Sonnessan alleges falsely orients histories of semiotics, and also acquiescing that the fault lies with the lamentable indifference of American scholarship to Scandinavian contributions to the field of semiotics, the fact of the matter remains that the American history of semiotics is worth reiterating if only because it is the projected interpretation of the past that has shaped scholarly discourse since. Sonnessan’s interjection notwithstanding, usually the origins of modern semiotics are cast back to two male figures: Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure. Peirce titled his philosophically grounded study of signs *semeiotics*; whereas de Saussure’s linguistically inflected study took on the title of *semiology*. While the Peircian model emerged out of nineteenth-century American pragmatism, the Saussurean tradition was born out of continental linguistics. Though it is debatable whether or not the models are mutually exclusive, it is, without a doubt difficult to understand one model in terms of the other without straining their analogy or, at the very least, failing to note that each model is suited to certain inquiries and not others. From the vantage point of Saussurean semiology signification itself became a privileged index of sociological, ideological,

psychoanalytic and political determinations, whereas the Peircian model, though impenetrable and under-developed, has shown to be more inclined towards questions of ethics.

The Saussurean model is not condemned outright for its anthropocentrism and glottocentrism is cast-backhandedly as a restrictive model whenever, it seems, the opportunity arises and that may well be a better index of its influence and popularity than it is its shortcomings. Saussure in Course in General Linguistics (1916) envisioned linguistics as a part of semiology but in spite of situating linguistics as a portion of a larger science, his work came to the part that eventually coloured the whole. “Linguistics would serve as example of its basic concepts be applied to other domains of social and cultural life” (Culler 22). The linguistic bias at the heart of semiology became particularly evident when attempts were made to expand the practice to signifying systems that relied on material phenomena. Consider Roland Barthes, who, in Elements of Semiology (1964), sought to expand the influence Saussurean linguistics. In so doing, Barthes suggested that we invert the relation between linguistics and semiology as posited by Saussure before him. “In fact, we must now face the possibility of inverting Saussure’s declaration: linguistics is not a part of the general science of signs, even a privileged part, it is semiology which is a part of linguistics: to be precise, it is that part covering the *great signifying unites* of discourse” (11, *italics in original*). Barthes’ experiment, though, meant that ‘non-linguistic’ objects were subjected to linguistic analysis. The consequence, of course, was that since Saussure’s linguistic model could validly be taken as a model for semiology generally, the primacy of language and discourse was augmented. The political ramifications of this approach are wide and,

without a doubt, it has deserved the popularity; nonetheless, general complaints voiced by those who follow Charles Sanders Peirce's philosophy rightly push us to recognize the 'social' bias, the lingua-centrism that inheres within this methodology. Even if Barthes' could identify the "garment system" or the "furniture system" (Barthes Elements 63), these systems were still explained through the lens of a semiology modeled on linguistics, and as such, were interesting precisely because they were conducive to it. These systems were cultural. Of course, Barthes too recognized the potential limitations of his approach (though there is no reason to suspect, at this point in his career, that Barthes would have been unsatisfied with the anthropocentric leanings of his semiology because his disillusion with structuralist semiology only touched him in his later years):

And indeed it must be acknowledged in advance that such an investigation is both diffident and rash: *diffident* because semiological knowledge at present can only be a copy of linguistic knowledge; *rash*, because this knowledge must be applied forthwith, at least, as a project to non-linguistic objects. (Barthes Elements 11)

What we find in Saussure's disciplinary positioning and in Barthes' caveats is ambivalence with regard to the nature of semiological analysis and the merits of its ties to linguistics—and, more importantly, we already see the specter of a non-linguistic object and a method appropriate to it haunting its development. The latter has identified semiology by a relation of negativity. What does it mean to have semiology modeled upon language? It means, first and foremost, that the parameters are strictly drawn around and determined by social and cultural systems of exchange and meaning. Semiology is self-avowedly anthropocentric. Indeed, even when indexicality and iconicity enter the fray of continental semiology, they are often propped awkwardly alongside Saussure's schema; they become self-contained units divorced somehow from

Peirce's general theory of signs. Indeed, if non-linguistic phenomena were the structure of difference, the structuring and constitutive opposition term to the semiological enterprise, some philosophers have gone so far as to describe this structural dismissal within psychoanalytic terms. Elizabeth Grosz recently called, in Time Travels (2005), on scholars to "overturn the repression of materiality in its most complex forms that has dominated the humanities and social sciences in their exclusive focus on cultural construction at the expense of natural production" (44).

Where Barthes carried Saussure into realms previously considered non-linguistic only to show how everything could potentially be considered a form of speech (Barthes Mythologies 109), the American tradition situates continental semiology within an even larger field of study. Broadly speaking, to those sympathetic with Thomas Sebeok's perspectives (Peirce sympathizer), intentionality is not a pre-requisite to semiotics, as is language, as is culture. Sebeok writes, "Semiotics is further concerned with two sets of interrelated historical problems: the course of development of appropriate mechanisms for processing messages by individual organisms in *ontogenesis*; and the evolution of such mechanisms in a species of *phylogenesis*" ("Communication" 22, *italics in original*). When so wide a net is being cast, semiology dwindles in proportion; if semiology is culture, semiotics is life. For Petrelli and Augusto Ponzios the expanded definition of semiotics constitutes an opening for a *semioethics*: a sense of responsibility born of an understanding of the semiosis of life: "the implication is not just human life, but all of life throughout the entire planetary ecosystem, from which human life cannot separate" (Petrelli 534). Recalling arguments previously made by Sebeok, it is Peirce's tradition (and others deemed compatible with it, such as Mikhail Bakhtin's) that brings to

awareness the interconnectivity among life forms through semiosis. Petrelli and Ponzios present a world where interpretant informs interpretant *ad infinitum*, where every living organism is defined not as a separate entity from every other, but rather constituted through flows of intercorporeality, interdependency that defy the “private, static, conceptions of the body” (539) reinforced by the division of the sciences. Petrelli and Ponzios ‘semioethics’ is interesting because one finds that all the values of poststructuralism—the decentered subject, subjectivity as a semiotic achievement, individual as dialogical—finds a metaphorical ally in the inertia of a global semiotics. “If nothing else (global semiotics), can counter with a whole series of signs showing how each instant of individual life is interrelated to all other forms of life over the entire planet” (558). It is as though a reading of biosemiosis would reveal the imaginary structure of our ontological presuppositions, where the human subject, as reformulated through theories of dialogism, would rediscover a sort of ontological symbiosis with the world.⁸ As Peter van Wyck explains, commenting on ecological thought, “once we say that everything is connected in this fashion, we mean this in the sense that everything is, if not already, then at least potentially integrated into a framework of understanding. And it isn’t” (viii, ix). The same could be said of semiotics. Our understanding of non-linguistic signs and global semiosis is still premature even if we have a cosmic order proving their salience.

The fact of the matter is: the extra-linguistic, often spoken in terms of matter, is a problem and an unrelenting one at that. For semiology, materiality is a *loss*, an aborted

⁸ Petrelli and Ponzio unjustly ignore the role semiology (in the tradition of Saussure) has had on subjectivity, but they are able to account for this omission by assembling an impressive review of Peirce, Welby, Bakhtin and Levinas to present a semiotics of subjectivity that is consistent with the “American’ orientation of their work and yet, recalls the advances of the Europeans. In any case, it has one wonder suddenly how antithetical these two traditions may, in fact, be.

failure on the part of signification and the discipline itself. Language seemingly expulses matter even as it appropriates it in order to signify.⁹ Because meaning is constructed through a “non-phenomenal structure of differences”, Judith Butler writes, whatever meaning we ascribe to material objects must go through the detour of that structure (67-73). Even ‘the general science’ intuited by Saussure gets eclipsed, becoming instead a constitutive residue resisting sublimation and incorporation within the field. With American semiotics, we face instead a discipline predominantly centered on material signifiers that are neither arbitrarily related to the signified or linguistic, and whose recent forays into the themes of ethics, responsibility and subjectivity are so incredible in scope, one feels engulfed in a process too large to conceptualize or respond to adequately. If the tale of semiology is one of struggling to (re)capture the loss that it simultaneously occasions and secures (Butler 69), the tale of (indexical) semiosis is conversely one of being captured and drawn to ‘natural’ signs and trying to account for it.

As this cursory overview of the field of semiotics suggests, the question of materiality in signification is a persistently thorny issue. Either materiality is textual or, if it is not, nothing or little of substantial use can otherwise be said about it. Similarly, the consequences of a distinctly poststructuralist preoccupation with the textuality of materiality have ended up frustrating countless scholars, such that many obviate the question altogether or mention the delusions of the high theorists to plug the merits of their comparatively grounded work. As we shall see in the following chapter, the

⁹ See Judith Butler’s *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993) for an excellent discussion of the materiality of the signifier through which we reference a pure materiality. It is through non-phenomenal detours that we can have material signs signify. Thus, even though language has a materiality is can only signify because of structures of differentiation. (67-73) What Butler does not address, however, are the question ‘non-arbitrary’ signifiers, which are those introduced to us by Peirce.

challenges and resistances posed by the semiotics of the material trace are felt even as scientists and scholars find reason to identify textuality with materiality with one another.

Chapter One: The Anatomy of an Analogy

Contemplating bodily texts is not so esoteric or inconsequential as some would suspect. In recent decades, for example, we have come to think of the body as a site upon which culture inscribes itself and so, the question of what is or is not writing and what counts or not as testimony is not without interest or without its own set of hurdles. For one, thinking of the body as passive and culture as active reinforces binaries that preclude thinking differently about our relationship to the world outside of their terms; but, on the other hand, the metaphor of culture-as-scribe is a compelling one for philosophers of the trace because markings on the skin or wounds acquired throughout one's life are, as Mark Seltzer intimates, the meeting place of history and body ("The Crime System" 572). The fact of the body's capacity to accumulate scars and to turn itself into a surface for inscription, an organic and signifying *tabula rasa*, crosses over to and colours our elementary understandings of the trace. Markings on the skin are not the same as the skin itself; the former is a disruption, an external break to the integrity of the epidermis and so also marks the difference of figure and ground.

In Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression (1995), Jacques Derrida embraces the analogy between the printing press and the rite of male circumcision in Jewish culture, asking us to broaden our definition of what counts as an inscription and what counts as archive. "Less typographical than the first [writing], as we said, it [the circumcision] nonetheless still maintains a reference to the graphic mark and to repetition, indeed to printing of the typical sort" (Derrida Archive 20). Traces found on bodies are of the same nature as inscriptions, but does that also mean that we should think of them as forms of writing? Is it fair that wounds, bullet holes and other lacerations to the body

still resonate in our mind with words inscribed on a tablet? The question evidently touches upon the merits of reasoning through tropic means, whether metaphorical thinking is enough for us, and, if so, what value it holds to our understanding of the semiotics of the trace specifically as it appears in the changing rhetoric of human rights. The metaphorical extension of writing and reading, like testimony, to all modes of interpretation generally—the idea that writing and reading are somehow involved or serve as apt metaphors indiscriminate of the hermeneutic exercise—confuses the epistemological and ontological specificities of the trace. If vestiges of the past and scars are a potential form of testimony, then what, we may ask, is lost in their conflation? Isn't the semantic transference of testimony to inscription the product of a confusing complex of analogies that controvert the differences between them? Thinking through the testimonial and typographical functions of physical traces, in this chapter I take the preoccupation of human rights advocates with physical traces as sound surrogates to eyewitness testimony, not as an anomaly, but as a drift with a precedent. However, rather than use antecedents and like-cases as a means to condone or naturalize their association, I wish to draw out the differences between trace and word that are refused by the machinations of identity. Specifically, I suggest that although the trace and testimony share a common ground, our impulse to establish a commonality between them occludes their differences and just as importantly, it reflects and subjects us to a theoretical and conceptual myopia characteristic of our western inheritance.

The application of a metaphoric of writing and reading to the entirety of the historiographical operation makes sense when we confine ourselves to the conventional,

i.e., traditional, conceptions of what it is that historians do and how we come to know the past. The hermeneutic exercise—“the reading of texts that have drifted out of their original historical setting” (Peters 149)—is principally one of cross-temporal encounters with texts produced through human interference. The definition of what counts as a historically significant trace and the appropriate means to gather information about them are complicated when the traces left behind are not first or essentially a form of writing. When past events are inferred from unintentional physical markings and disturbances to the body proper, or when the identity of those partaking in the events are given to us through inherited characters such as bodily proportions and skeletal morphologies, the interpretative exercise is one that invariably moves us from symbolic texts to the proverbial ‘text of the world’. In the documentation of human rights abuses, the recovery of historical accounts increasingly means the incorporation of forensic scientific modes of interpretation and an evolving body of criteria for what counts as historical evidence and what counts as testimony in the courts of law. As we broaden our definition of admissible documentation, however, the language indigenous to one paradigm is used to describe the other and the issue of textuality and intentional inscription is brought to centre stage. What is more, the dwindling authority of eyewitness testimony and the rise of forensic authority means that the stories we ultimately choose to represent the past are founded on the stories we tell ourselves about the validity of documentary evidence.

While semioticians are accustomed to the idea that interpretation, be it of the solar system or a Chaim Potok novel, transforms the matter interpreted into a *text*, the movement from eyewitness testimony to testimonial markings brings with it a series of questions and issues that are uneasily explained away with arguments for pan-textualism.

It is not enough to explain these discursive, and therefore institutional, shifts with the commonplace observation that the body too can be a text. The issue is not whether pan-textualism is relevant or accurate as an observation—it is, nor is it a question of dismissing what is now common knowledge within the humanities, the issue is that the textualization of the body inevitably brings with it a semiological bias that dodges the question of the interpretive process that is unique to the physical trace and the enduring hold it has on our cultural imaginary. Textual interpretation, even if it can apply both to non-intentional markings and literary works, is a broad and unwieldy category. For one, reiterating the fact of textuality in the semiotic encounter does not necessarily tell us whether we should also concede to the theory that the text, material or symbolic, is polysemic (Eco “Unlimited” 205). Indeed, even if textuality is extended to bodily markings, the reasons for our present interest in it, particularly in the field of human rights documentation, is not limited to our improved capacity to ‘read’ them, but also speaks to the belief that, unlike the eyewitness testimonies or the subjective interpretations of the witness account, the material deposits that are conducive to forensic investigation have a fixed and unalterable meaning—a stance that stands in direct opposition to what we have come to understand about meaning, signs and language. Therefore, we cannot fall for sloppy analogies between deconstructionist readings (arguably, as well, misreadings of deconstructionism) and the textualization of the body as we see it happening in the field of human rights. The institutional movement from one to the other, from word to trace, is not the result of a playful whim or from an epistemological awakening on the part of human rights activists to the textuality of the body; rather, it registers an anxiety about our capacity to know and faithfully reconstruct

the past to ourselves in the absence of survivors, as well as the latter's reputed proclivity to err when they do exist. The body and its material remains are the tangible promise that it is possible to have access to the past. It is with amazement and relief that we hear forensic scientists explain that "from one body part it was possible to determine that the owner was human, how tall he had been, and to estimate the sex, age at death, ethnic origin, body weight, patterns of locomotion [...] even possible indications of how he had earned his living" (Uberlacker 48). The resurgent interest in the corpse and the clandestine grave, if we follow official statements from forensic practitioners behind the promotional wave in human rights journals—is that material evidence is an antidote to the messiness of historical writing and interpretation (Burton; Snow; Stover). Not only could information previously inaccessible be within reach, but the epistemological framework and the fact that it was based on material evidence seemingly sets it apart from the indeterminacies that taint eyewitness testimonies (Ricoeur). Clyde Snow, commenting on the purpose of forensic investigation of clandestine graves in Vokovar, Croatia, explains:

If justice must fall victim to history, however, forensic anthropologists can at least help make sure that the historical record is correct. Fifty years from now, people in the former Yugoslavia may try to repeat their predecessors' mistakes, as revisionists assert that ethnic cleansing and mass executions never took place. [...] It is pretty hard, I have found, to argue against a skull with a bullet in it. (Snow "Murder" 25)

Snow's statement peddles several assumptions about the physical trace's persuasive capacity and its uses to human rights investigations and the historical record, not least surprising is the assumption that exposure to solid scientific evidence will prevent future mass crimes. However, the significant presupposition embedded therein is the belief

“that it is hard to argue against a skull with a bullet in it.” The idea that forensically treated evidence will stand up to scrutiny is proportionate to the dwindling authority of eyewitness testimony among the scientific and juridical communities (Ricoeur) and the enduring authority of science. However, rhetoricians know too well the vulnerability of rational argument before other modes of persuasion in the public arena; there are no guarantees that where it is countered by dissonant worldviews that rational argument will be the victor. Indeed, already there are signs that in communities where scientific conclusions contradict deep-seated narratives, the contradictory evidence brought forth before human rights tribunals is denied and discounted by interested ‘revisionists’. Ironically, it was in Kosovo in 2007, not far from Vokovar, Croatia where Dr. Clyde Snow was once excavating mass graves allegedly created by the Serbian forces under Slobodan Milosevic that other forensic factions like the Canadian Forensic Team are casting doubt on the genocide numbers presented at the war-crimes trials in den Haag, Netherlands.

Serbian forces under Milosevic are accused of ethnic cleansing on a scale between 100,000 and 200,000 civilians (Martin 1), but individuals such as Vancouver Homicide detective Brian Honeybourn, filmmaker Garth Pritchard with the assistance of the Canadian Forensic Team are expressing serious doubts about the accuracy of these numbers. Quoted in Lawrence Martin’s article in *The Globe and Mail* “Kosovo: Another Case of Mass Deception?” (2004), Garth Pritchard describes the reaction of Ms. Louise Arbour, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to news of the lack of forensic evidence. “I was standing there when the forensic teams were telling Louise Arbour there were no 200,000 bodies and she didn’t want to know” (qtd. in Martin 1).

There's no guarantee that where scientists and scientific knowledge contradicts deep-seated historical narratives, that the proverbial bullet will bear more weight than eyewitness testimonies or entrenched socio-cultural ideas of historical progression. Even if, as Clea Koff writes: "in places where government or military propaganda continually denies that certain people were killed, the exposure of graves and the analysis of remains refutes the "official story" (72), it is never certain that those who uphold the official story will accept the refutation. Therefore, the idea expounded by forensic scientists and optimistic human rights advocates that solid forensic evidence will *solve* historical disputes, lead to fairer jurisprudence and even, prevent future criminal actions is one that can only be upheld and embraced if we *a priori* separate and exempt it from those other rituals, procedures that buttress the persuasive appeal evidence is presumed to intrinsically possess. At a more fundamental level, however, it overdetermines physical traces with expectations of accuracy, infallibility and interpretative certainty when the relationship between the trace, the interpreting mind and discourse is much more complicated.

A tension clearly exists in the public presentation of forensic investigations. First, we have informational signs that can be reliably interpreted because they differ in kind from typographical signs, and secondly, can be taken as reliable and faithful substitutes to them because they are analogous to one another in some respects. The textuality of the body carries more weight than the text of the witness because it is not, at heart, a text. The analogy drawn between testimony and wound is one that follows their difference and the semantic overlap that occurs undeniably bleeds into latent mythologies about the nature of physical traces and the fantasy that is communication (Gunn; Peters). But

philosophers and semioticians corroborate the analogy as well. It is important to look to the theoretical underpinnings that support the rhetorical extension of testimony to traces and untangle the ontological confusion that results from this linguistic and or epistemological act of transfer.

In “The Material Presence of the Past” (2004), an article about the forensic excavation of the *desaparecidos* in Argentina, Ewa Domanska makes the point that the dead body is a “witness and evidence at the same time. It is also an alternative form of testimony” (344). Her observation is hardly controversial; it reiterates what is already argued by practicing forensic practitioners on a regular basis. The incessant conjunction of testimony and evidence, however, invites us to question whether or not an actual affinity exists between the two or whether we should discount it as a rhetorical convenience, a mere trope. If traumatic testimony can easily graft itself onto the wound, is it not because their analogy was already waiting—so to speak—for them? Jonathan Culler in The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction (1981) explains that a semiotic paradox inheres within the very notion of the rhetorical trope. The trope is a breach of contract; it registers the event of a deviation that turns against literal or denotational meaning. Tropes, we know, don’t mean what they say. Not literally at least, and because they are transgressions of language (in order to use language for one’s self one must also agree to its terms) these same deviations must be sufficiently codified as not to lead to incomprehensibility (Culler). “What looks at first like an inaugural creative act, a violation of the code, is accounted for by the formulation of a code on which its meaning is said to depend” (41). What this means is that the tropic drift from testimony to

physical mark was already established elsewhere, the connection or link was always already there. Here, it would register a historiographical code that would invite the equation of eyewitness testimony with forensic evidence. Indeed, Paul Ricoeur in Memory, History, Forgetting (2004) argues that a “dialectic of clue and testimony” (174) defines the very notion of the trace.

Broadly defined, the trace is anything that tangibly indicates that something has passed or existed. In other words, traces are the deposits events and people leave behind. The marking signals a passing of something and so signifies, despite its static composition, the temporal and spatial dissonance at the heart of the semiotic encounter. “In fact, these remains are themselves what seem to be carriers of the signification ‘past’ (Ricoeur Time 121). Such is the definition of the trace Ricoeur offers in Vol. II of Time and Narrative (1986), but in Memory, History, Forgetting he affixes to this definition the trace’s function as testimony. The question is why he does this? Or why this is the case? And what justifies its incorporation to the physical trace? Ricoeur contends that the notion of the trace semantically encapsulates a dialectical dynamic between testimony and evidence because the trace can be used either as a clue or testimonial. In reality, however, this is the compromise Ricoeur gives to a functional contradiction that emerges out of the secondary literature. The trace becomes an umbrella term that shelters within itself an answer to a problem made apparent through Ricoeur’s close reading of Carlo Ginzberg and Marc Bloch. Whereas the latter equates all forms of evidence, be they intentionally discursive or not, with testimony, the former’s theory of the *evidential paradigm* measures and describes the transformation of the trace into a clue. Ricoeur, facing these divergent readings of the trace, reconciles them by figuring the trace as the

root of them both: “the trace *can be taken* as the common root of testimony and clue” (Memory 175, *emphasis mine*). His reconfiguration of the notion of trace is the ontological compromise for two divergent semiotic dispositions. However, if he feels that the trace can artificially unite testimony and clue it is because, once again, they share an ‘actual analogy’. The trace *can* encompass both the clue and the testimony because the clue is an imprint, and an imprint is similar to writing. “An animal passed by and left its track. This is a clue. But the clue by extension can be taken as a kind of writing inasmuch as the analogy of the imprint adheres originally to the evocation of striking a letter” (Memory 175).

Like Derrida before him, Ricoeur compares the trace with the inscription made by the printing press, as though the act of engraving or pressing should be enough to conjoin arbitrary, intentional traces with and non-intentional ones. Ricoeur needs the trace to coincide with testimony in order to account for the transference of the semiotic function of the latter on the former. What this amounts to is that it is only through tropic means that we can relate them, again. Two etymological lines lead to our present conception of the trace, which registers two divergent definitions: a) *the discursive inscription*, which amounts to a textualization of the trace b) *the clue*, which bears a filial relation with the inferential logic of the hunter. In this way, Ricoeur’s conception ties together and causes to overlap two contrasting semiotic dispositions, the arbitrary and the motivated, and therefore invites a heterological understanding of the physical trace. The trace is split: simultaneously linguistic and indexical. If we concede that the trace harbors opposing semiotic dispositions, it means that we also acknowledge that the status of the document is founded on this constitutive schism or a dialectic, then we may wonder what this

means concretely to the archival and historiographical operations of which forensic science is becoming a significant part. We need to resist the temptation, however, to choose one over the other, to expel the deviant, for both play an important part of the semiotic reality of the trace as we live it today. The schism embodies the capacity of a type of sign to be read and approached from different semiotic perspectives, themselves made possible in certain contexts and less so in others. The “semiotic production and reception of meaning” is historical (Hutcheon 378), and the semiotic dissonance at the heart of the trace speaks to the capacity of the motivated sign to attract at different times and spaces different interpretations and different assumptions about its role in interpretation. As Spiegel asks: “what is the past but a once material existence, now silenced, extant only as sign and as sign drawing to itself chains of conflicting interpretation that [...] compete for possession of the relics” (Spiegel 270)?

The material remains under forensic scrutiny are signs of something past and while they are attracting differing interpretations (as clue and testimony) they are not so much in conflict as much as they appear to be complimentary; the investigative process is the mid-wife *to* testimony. So, although in strict philosophical or definitional terms the functional bifurcation of the trace would appear to constitute an insurmountable dialectic, as forensic practitioners are describing it, the dual status of clue and testimony is in dynamic even if it confuses the distinction between discourse and trace. Indeed, the dubious appropriateness of extending testimony to material clues might seem a matter of arguing semantics when documenting genocide is at stake. If history, as Ricoeur wrote in Time and Narrative, is ultimately about working in response to and for the dead, then the extension of testimony and voice to bits of hair and bone seems innocent enough. As

Koff writes about the excavation of the Rwandan landscape: “Even if we couldn’t positively identify certain remains and return them to relatives, the remains would at least be able to speak in the collective voice of the victims of the Kibuye church massacre” (34). These sentences and images have poetic currency—for who doesn’t warm to the idea of material remains recuperating lost narratives or lost appeals? Who doesn’t feel seduced before the idea that immaterial secrets, historical certainty and the truth of past events are recoverable through material remains?

The idea that the truth of testimony can be discerned through the scientific excavation of a grave, like a pilgrimage to the site of a violent event, is nothing new. There is a residual aura about the trace that appeals to a latent belief that a message is encapsulated in the physical confines of remains. “The site held so many secrets worth knowing,” David Uberlacker writes, “so many stories that deserved telling, and so much information that informed our own culture as well as those we were studying—all brought back to life through the careful application of science and technology” (48). Vladimir Jankélévitch in *La Mort* (1977) explains that because the remains often left at our disposal are bodies, sites and objects, we see in them a means to compensate for what was lost and a means to decipher the significance of the event otherwise communicated to us through living testimony. Add to this scientific narratives of progress and the evidential paradigm (Ginzberg) regularly dramatized in detective fiction and belief is only heightened. But take a trip to Auschwitz, Jankélévitch writes, go to the gates of hell and you will come back empty handed because there is no message to be found. The truth resides with the living for it is the living alone that can communicate the singular truth of the event, who can relive it: “c’est la personne elle-même qui porte témoignage”

(366). The message of the dead, he continues, was never relocated in space but because the *métempirique* is a constituent part of the empiricist fantasy, which is to say that what transcends or what doesn't properly belong to the evidential paradigm, has a way of finding its way back to it. Jankélévitch applies the metaphor of the microscope to this empiricist fantasy, an *ultramicroscope* that penetrates deeper and deeper, past the skin, to the chromosome, all the way to the genetic code. Here! The message! How is that different from Bergson, he asks, who imagined that memories, stories, were stored in the cerebral cortex, the tissue? "...aussi métaphorique qu'une géographie de mémoire" (361-362); as metaphorical as a geography of memory. The burrowed crevasses in Rwanda and Croatia are subject to this idolatrous treatment because they too harbor confessions, testimonies and lost narratives, and again they are twined to a fantasy of technological advancement: for were it not for the scientific and technological advances in the field of forensic science, we could not allow the dead to speak and an entire facet of historical knowledge would be beyond our reach. The story, so to speak, is *out there* in the body and grave. The truth does not lie so much with the forensic scientist but the material substrate, the marking itself. The projection of a narrative onto gravesites and the concomitant belief that with proper care the forensic scientist will 'get it right' and excavate the narrative as it was meant to be read, rhetorically equates the material trace as the source of the narrative. The forensic scientist doesn't see, or at least doesn't admit, that "there is no story *there* to be gotten straight" (Kellner 137), or that his intervention is precisely what textualizes the trace and therefore, transforms it into an intentionally signifying sign. Ultimately, this is what the transference of testimony onto bits of hair achieves: inflecting physical remains with a testimonial function—albeit a "testimony-

despite-itself” (Bloch) also inflects them with those aspects of testimony that it cannot alone meet, namely the self-referential function of discourse (Ricoeur), the intention to communicate with the other, the interpersonal dynamic it instates. In other words, it excludes the self—unless, that is, it is reinstated artificially through the scientist as relay.

There are sound reasons for ascribing intentionality to corpses when human rights documentation is at issue, but that doesn’t take away the fact that the subjectivity that we are beholden to in eyewitness testimonies is displaced and perched vicariously between the bodily remains and the scientist. And while it is common parlance to state the human remains testify to the existence of the individual who once owned them, it is a basic semiotic principle that “for all practical purposes, indices cannot testify to the existence of their objects” (Sonnessan “Indexicality” 3). Traces cannot, on their own accord, testify to this much. Indeed, the past couldn’t be “extant as sign” (Spiegel) if it couldn’t also be used to lie (Eco Theory). The rhetorical maneuver, nonetheless, brings about an ontological change in the trace. For what is the movement from clue to testimony if not an incorporeal transformation brought about by forensic intervention?

The trace is just a disturbance, not yet even a clue, before the practitioners speak to their testimonial value. And the incorporeal transformation is nothing other than the capacity of a statement to instantaneously bring about an ontological transformation to what it external to it. Deleuze and Guattari describe it as a leap in the same place (81); it is a change brought about by enunciation, by language, but “applies to” bodies. If the body as corpse is a repository of stories and memory, it is because it underwent an incorporeal transformation in the circumstances for a forensic investigation. No longer just a corpse, the body is a source of information and carrier of testimonies, and a place

where communication happens. This wasn't supposed to happen this way. The grave is clandestine, it wasn't intended as a historical archive of material testimonies. *Nothing* was supposed to happen here. The bodies were meant to be abandoned, and even if they were found, before the advent of forensic science on the scene of human rights investigations, these would not have consisted of archives, at least not to the international public. Survivors were the problem, the loose threads that could testify to the event. Forensics changed that. Clea Koff writes: "I was a graduate student in forensic anthropology, but I would have known for years that my goal was to help end human rights abuses by proving to would-be killers that bones could talk" (7). In other words, the message was to prove to killers that the clandestine graves they produced were incorporeally transformed from ruin, corpse, to archive. The mass grave was not intended as a *lieux de mémoire* (Nora), it was supposed to remain an insignificant ruin. "What makes certain prehistoric, geographical, archaeological locations important as sites is often precisely what ought to exclude them from them being *lieux de mémoire*: the absolute absence of a will to remember and, by way of compensation, the crushing weight imposed on them by time, science, and the dreams of men" (Nora 21). When the documentation of human rights are at issue, when the will to remember is so evidently expressed by interested factions and populations in mourning, the idea that the will to remember on the part of the victims of man-made mass death is not essentially embodied in their remains is a difficult one to accept—especially when the will to forget is so aptly represented in the criminals' attempts to cover up the traces of their actions.

Memory. Messages. Stories. Voice. These are the properties projected on physical inscriptions, each of which approximate and defer the character of oral testimony. One individual speaks to another through the ventriloquial medium of the forensic scientist (Connor). Common knowledge dictates that oral speech, unless recorded, leaves no residue or deposit (Ong 11), inscriptions however, do. There are nevertheless deposits that are non-communicative, which is not to say that they couldn't signify something or other to the human bystander who should happen to fall upon them. The corpse for instance, carries no intention nor do the scars on my stomach left behind by surgery. Animal tracks are not writing. Although tempting, Walter Ong in Orality and Literacy (1988) rightly cautions that to do so is to "trivialize" the very real difference between the two. "Notches on sticks and other *aide-mémoire* lead up to writing, but they do not restructure the human lifeworld as true writing does" (82-84). Neither are notches on sticks testimonies, though they may second someone's testimony in court. Marc Bloch, as Ricoeur implies, could easily condense archival memory with testimony because he did not incorporate within his framework vestiges of the past (Memory 174-176). "However, there exist traces that are not 'written testimonies' and that are equally open to historical observation, namely 'vestiges of the past', which are the favorite target of archaeology: urns, tools, coins, painted or sculpted images, funerary objects, the remains of buildings, and so forth" (Ricoeur Memory 170). And bodies, DNA codes, vaginal fluids, sperm: these too are admissible for historical and juridical consideration; and again, they are not semiotic systems or communicative acts.

Alphonso Lingis in Excesses: Eros and Culture (1983) distinguishes between historical and pre-historical inscriptions. While his object of study are the "savage

inscriptions”—the willful lacerations, punctures and piercing of the body within aboriginal culture—his musings nevertheless touch upon the dangers of attributing to all forms of inscription intentionality and expression. “What we are dealing with,” he writes, “is inscription.

Where writing graphics is not inscription on clay tablets, bark and papyrus, but in flesh and blood, and also where it is not historical, narrative” (23).

Lingis ranks the savage inscription on the side of the pre-historical, meaning that the inscriptions on the body of the native are not, he claims, semiotic. This is different, for instance, from the tattoo, which in the West is purposefully communicative. The tattoo, though inscribed on the body proper, is very much an expression of the self and one’s beliefs, social status and ranking; the inscriptions Lingis describes are of another kind altogether. Bereft of communicative intention, they operate on the level of pure action, release, a play on and across surfaces, and a libidinal surge that defies the propriety of boundaries. The savage inscription is a pure material disturbance *to* materiality, itself the effect of a release that stands prior to expression and communication, prior even to the signs.

This is not yet a semiotic system. Yet it is out of this kind of distributive movement of inscription the differentiated material for a semiotic system will be taken, and on a purely lateral and libidinal function of craving and want that the intentional reference of signs will be developed. (38)

Setting momentarily aside the question of libidinal cravings, Lingis’ positioning of the bodily inscription on the savage body before the order of meaning is a compelling one for it marks a break with the semiological logic that obscures the means by which the

semiological field is born. In other words, in distinguishing the pre-ontology of the trace from the ontology of the trace-as-sign Lingis alerts us to the distinction between semiology and the possible processes, psychoanalytic or otherwise, that may have a role to play in the production and enjoyment of the trace without involving meaning. What this also brings to light is the arbitrary relationship between semiology and physical traces insofar as the projection of expression on the part of the Western individual to non-intentional signs is culturally specific. It is not an inevitable projection but is, instead, a second-order semiotic encounter, one that superimposes itself onto an already existing relationship between man and trace that may or may not have anything to do with meaning or with hermeneutics.

The analogy between eyewitness testimony and testimonial trace is a “play of sympathies” (Foucault The Order 26) that assimilates the one into the other and, through incorporeal transformation transforms the latter in the former through their identification. But, more significantly, the analogy established between the testimony and testimonial traces registers a *semiological law*, i.e. a cultural law that explains the relationship between signs across the material divide. The sympathy between eyewitness testimony and testimonial trace may be founded on the analogy between discursive inscription and non-intentional inscriptions, but the analogy nonetheless “transforms. It alters in the direction of identity” (Foucault 26) and so, the analogy between inscriptions becomes a guiding principle for the hermeneutic process. Establishing the relationship between signs across corporeal boundaries means that added to the process of reading and following clues is the need to anticipate beforehand the status of evidence as a form of testimony, as something which bears a grammatical relationship with oral witnessing. If

Lingis' meditation on the trace, and his proposition that the trace is pre-semiotic, contributes in any way to the problem of the trace's relationship to testimony it is to the awareness it raises to a unique bias within our own philosophical heritage to conceiving of all traces as forms of expression. This entrenched bias to conceive of bodily inscriptions as a form of expression is undoubtedly transferred with the extension of testimony to the physical inscription. For what, if not expression, is added to the field of the signified when disturbances to the material body are subjectivized? when voice is attributed to human remains? The projection of expression onto the trace is not inevitable (for there is nothing in the trace *per se* that would suggest that it should be equivalent to testimony) but in all evidence, there is a cultural tick, a cultural predisposition that equates one with the other. The tropic drift, so to speak, is seconded with the bias of semiology always already established within the Western imaginary. What is more, the semiological field that superimposes itself on the corpse or the clandestine grave is a projection, a production of meaning that works from the raw material of the physical trace. The play of sympathies premised on the alibi of semblance between printing press and inscription is the assimilating action that—as we shall see in the next chapter—conceals another process that lies precariously between the semiotic and the pre-semiotic, but which has no less a role to play in the relation between trace and interpreter.

Semiology, as discussed earlier, conceives of the relationship between the plane of expression and the plane of content as arbitrary. The plane of expression (the trace itself) may remain the same, but the plane of content (that which it signifies) may change and shift beneath it. Convention alone dictates how the two are connected with each other. The kinship between intentional communication and non-intentional signification

established through the forensic turn within human rights discourse is one such instance of a conventional law that prescribes how signs are related to one another. The trace isn't *just* a clue, it is also something else—it is also a surrogate for testimony. But this necessarily complicates matters because the relationship between the plane of expression and the plane of content is not fully arbitrary with the trace. Because the trace is not writing, because it is not essentially discursive, the physical is not entirely the product of convention. Even in the instance where the trace is the product of human action, as would be the case with a bullet wound to the chest and would not therefore be considered a part of natural history as would skeletal proportions, the trace registers a disturbance that could be interpreted by someone who may not be a part of the murderer's culture. The trace is "a mark, object, or other indication of the existence or passing of something" (OED), and this passing is not indicated to the interpreter because we alone agree that it does. We recognize that our roommate ate cereal this morning because they left a milk-soiled bowl on the counter. Similarly, the forensic scientist recognizes from the stage of decay of a corpse the probable time of death. The reason why this information can be gleaned from the trace is because, unlike pure writing, the plane of expression overlaps with the plane of content.

It is at this point that we can safely introduce Charles Sanders Peirce's notion of indexical sign to the discussion because it is his work that most comprehensively addresses the formal properties that set the physical trace apart from conventional signs. While historians, scientists, medical practitioners and hunters have been interpreting traces since the beginning of time, Charles Sanders Peirce was the one who, observing the

hermeneutic process they implicate, came up with a semiotic theory that accounted for the difference between physical markings and other types of signs. Caring less about what was gleaned from the trace than how it was that information could be inferred from it, Peirce dedicated nearly a third of his theory of semiosis to the indexical sign. As Thomas Sebeok quoting Rulon Wells has pointed out “it is with his notion of index that Peirce is at once novel and fruitful” (Wells qtd. in Sebeok “Indexicality” 9). The following chapter commences with the merits of applying the notion of index to the ‘turn to the trace’ within human rights investigations and delves deeper into the space already opened up by Alphonso Lingis in Excesses and Carlo Ginzberg in “Clues: Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes” (1983), namely the difference between the index and conventional signs and the logical and libidinal processes that independently and combined are constitutive of the trace’s enduring hold on a re-emerging forensic culture.

Chapter Two: The Trace *qua* Index

The inscription, then, the graphics? We proposed this work savages do on the material of their bodies from making signs, from expression. [...] All that is civilized, significant.
Alphonso Lingis

Were an index so interpreted, the mood must be imperative, or exclamatory, "See there!" or "Look out!" *C. S. Peirce*

Even C. S. Peirce succumbed to quotation marks. Although his intent was clearly illustrative, it almost seems inevitable that the indexical sign should say something eventually. "See there!" "Look out!" Peirce, with the exception of this analogical slip, circumvented the impulse to ascribe intentionality to physical signs, reiterating instead that motivated signs such as indexes or icons "assert nothing" (Peirce 111), but that simple reminder might not always resonate because it is regularly muffled by the lure of anthropomorphism. Too often, it isn't enough that traces are significant; they have to say something meaningful. We should consider, however, that maybe some traces are not meant for us. It was suggested at the end of the previous chapter that the extension of testimony registered an anthropomorphic gesture of the kind lamented by Alphonso Lingis in Excesses: Eros and Culture (1983), suggesting that the extension of testimony to the trace is the product of an assimilation of non-intentional signs to the plane of intentionality—*itself*, Lingis reminds us, a knee-jerk reaction characteristic of the Western subject. The carefully placed caveat by Ricoeur via Bloch that traces might constitute "testimonies-despite-themselves" (Bloch) still leaves us in a precarious position and doesn't really avoid the problem since it still plays on a desire to figure the origins of testimony other than where it is. But what is noteworthy in Lingis' reading of the savage inscription is how it explicitly resists the impulse to project meaning onto everything; his reading is doubly radical since the traces he studies are anthropological.

That the scars purposefully marked across the savage body should not reflect the ‘natural integrity’ of the self that corresponds to the morphological integrity of the body, let alone signify *nothing*, is a stretch to the Western imagination. If human beings were the agents behind a trace, surely it must mean something to someone or another, and secondly, it must reflect the order of the world and not play havoc with the orderliness that we have already prescribed for it. Our forensic culture is not so different and more, we are faced with a varied typology of signs: some of the traces studied by forensic scientists belong to natural history, while the others are presumably from recent human history. Some of the signs are anthropological (machete wounds, bullet holes, a button), but others are natural (a molar tooth, the shape of the cranium, the length of a femur bone). However, in both circumstances, we never stray very far from our andocentricity. The latter are usually invoked in the service of the former, meaning that they are never really divested of humanist values. The relics of natural history work towards the identification of bodies that populate a grave, making it such that natural history revivifies the historical subject. Darwinian influence has yet to dissolve subjectivity—here, it seemingly returns the symbolic back to the deceased and those who mourn them.

But putting aside the conservative and recuperative functions of forensic interpretation to the symbolic afterlife of the subject, where are we to locate meaning in all of this? Where does semiosis end (an evolutionary process), and the semiological (a cultural phenomenon) begin? What is it about indexical semiosis that makes itself conducive to anthropomorphic readings, and further, allows for the hierarchical reorganization between it an oral testimony? This chapter and the next are dedicated to these questions. Whereas the forthcoming chapter “The Way of the Anecdote” deals

specifically with the testimonial *function* of the trace and how it relates or compares to oral testimony, the present chapter deals specifically with the anthropomorphism that reinforces and subtends the analogy forged between them. First, however, a detour is needed to explain what semiotic properties the trace (qua index) *does* possess and how they compare to conventional signs. Doing so will allow for a clearer understanding of how and why anthropomorphism sets in.

In other words, this chapter formally repeats the paradox, or the schism, which Paul Ricoeur locates at the heart of the etymology of the trace, with the inscription on the one hand and the clue on the other; but my intention is to repeat it with a difference. Rather than repeat their analogy, I first introduce the indexical sign as it is theorized and discussed by Charles Sanders Peirce and his followers and afterwards look to Lacanian psychoanalysis to account for the anthropomorphic tick that seems to colour our epistemological biases. In this way, I hope to step out of the confines of Ricoeur's and Derrida's analogical reasoning, and, by turning to psychoanalysis, locate the lure of the trace and its consequences on our epistemic stance. The first part of this chapter reviews the academic literature surrounding the indexical sign a) term often used interchangeably with the notion of trace) in an effort to underline an already existing theory of semiotics that is not culturally determined. My principle intention in doing so is to say that the index *qua* trace must be thought of as an event. The second part of the chapter turns to Lacanian psychoanalysis and theorizes the event of the indexical encounter through Jacques Lacan's *Écrits*, namely "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function" (1949), "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis" (1948), "On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment in Psychosis" (1955-56), as well as his third seminar The Psychoses 1955-

1956. Both of these Lacanian psychoanalytic contributions will help us think through the event of coming across a trace and the problem of the projection of meaning. Further, I ask how it figures against the linguacentricity that characterizes the analogical reading which both Ricoeur and Derrida had adopted and was outlined in the last chapter. What is more, we will then be able to grasp where the indexical event that is the trace figures against and within language and the symbolic generally. Only once we successfully iron out these issues can we finally unpack the precise ways in which the trace is veritably tied to testimony.

The notion of index is often used interchangeably with the notion of trace. In many respects their conflation is not entirely misleading but in other respects it can lead to some confusion. If the intended purpose is to draw a faithful account of C. S. Peirce's theory of the index, the effect can be disastrous because it encourages an extremely narrow understanding of the contribution his theory of the indexical sign brought to sem(e)iotics. When the notion of trace and index are used synonymously usually it is founded on a very sound intuition, which is that traces are emblematic of indexes. But while the notion of trace is covered, or accounted for, by the notion of index, the definition of the index—as it is defined by C. S. Peirce—is much broader and for that reason cannot be reduced to traces. The trace is defined as a “mark, object, or other indication of the existence or passing of something” (OED), whereas the index as it is most commonly defined and understood is “a sign [...] which refers to its object not so much because of any similarity or analogy with it, nor because it is associated with general characters which that object happens to possess, as because it is in dynamical

(including spatial) connection with the individual object” (Peirce 107). Already, with this first definition, we see that the scope of what counts as an index is quite broad and this is especially true when it is contextualized within Peirce’s doctrine of signs, which, truth be told, is highly complex and unwieldy. But be that as it may, sufficient gains have been made over the years leaving us with a maneuverable corpus of concepts that allow us to deepen our understanding of the trace via this novel semiotic category.

Charles Sanders Peirce, mathematician and logician, developed a general theory of signs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that is difficult compared to Ferdinand de Saussure’s. Whereas Saussure’s semiology consists of a signifier (acoustic support) and the signified (concept) that together make up a sign whose meaning is the product of a culturally determined system of differences, Peirce’s theory is evolutionary and is premised on a sign made of three constituent parts. This implies that the meaning of any given sign generates and derives from its relation to other signs but, unlike Saussure, (who would privilege relations of difference within a coherent system); the modes of relationality that wield (Peircian) semiosis are considerably more eventful. Consider the following definition of the sign according to Peirce: “A *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect of capacity. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*” (Peirce 99, *emphasis in original*). Perhaps the most fundamental principle that must be extracted from this definition prior to our expanding upon it is that both the representamen and the interpretant are *signs*. Although the object, the representamen and the interpretant always together make up a sign, they—with the exception of the object (which does not exclude the possibility of mediation)—are signs

in and of themselves. Furthermore, semiosis happens in a sequence and, for that reason, meaning is the outcome a temporal process; and, what is more, the category of the 'object' endures throughout the process no matter how far along the sequential chain we happen to be. Floyd Merrel underlines the ultimate repercussions of Peirce's theory of signs when he writes: "To assert that a text takes leave of the world is to go against the entire grain of Peircian semiotics" (31). That said, while the semiotic chain initially starts out, Merrel explains, with "corporeal, visceral, physical sensations" (Merrel 300), i.e. *sign-events* involving what lies "out there," the further along one gets into the semiotic chain, the more one finds that the prominence of *sign-events* of a phenomenological nature dwindle and the more the conceptual takes over. These distinctions are particularly significant when we compare Peirce's model to Saussure's whose theory of signs led to the discovery of synchronicity as a legitimate and productive way of reading meaning and has, since its inception, severed the textuality of linguistic processes from the phenomenal world by arguing that referentiality was inconsequential to the processes of signification. Peirce's model, both in its conception and in its aftermath, is *radically* different from Saussurean semiology.

Therefore, to reiterate, whereas the Saussurian sign is composed of a Signified/Signifier (=Sign), the Peircian sign consists of three sign components: a representamen (itself a sign) – object – interpretant (itself a sign), which will generate ever more and more interpretants and therefore, more and more signs each of which will share the triadic structure of the first one, and will all be interconnected.¹⁰ Disciplinary differences still surround the respective definitions of the representamen, the object and

¹⁰ See Figure I in the Appendix for a visual representation of the semiosis process as conceived by Peirce.

the interpretant and how they relate to each other, but staying faithful to the road most traveled and substituting it pragmatically for a consensus that is not there, we will say: the *representamen* is the formal support; the *object* is that to which the signs refers, what “it represents” (Goudge 52), or that which, in the real, the sign is related to; finally, the interpretant constitutes the conceptual component of the triad. As already mentioned, there is debate about how these categories should be defined, especially with regard to the object and the interpretant. Several commentators confuse the interpretant with the individual doing the interpreting; this is clearly not the case. The interpretant is closer to Saussure’s notion of signified/concept, meaning that the interpretant is “in mind” but is not *the* mind.¹¹ Others assume that because every sign relates to an object, that that object is always a part of life-world, or that it is always referential, and it is also clear that this is not the case since this would exclude all those signs whose objects are explicitly fictional. What *is* without dispute is that this triadic structure is always at play, according to Peirce, wherever there is signification.

The triad of the sign is indivisible. And from this triad Peirce developed a complex classification of signs that attempted to discriminate the particularities of signs “first, according as the sign is in itself is a mere quality, is an actual existent, or is a general law; secondly, according, as the relation of the sign to its object [...]; thirdly, according as its Interpretant represents it as a sign of possibility or as a sign of fact” (Peirce 101). In its simplest terms, Peirce developed a series of trichotomies that approached the sign from the perspective (a) of the representamen (b) the

¹¹ It is important to note that the definition of “interpretation” and “interpretant” take on a much broader definition in the hands of Thomas Sebeok who places various biological evolutionary processes under the rubric of “interpretant”. Given that I am not entirely sympathetic or inclined to zoo-semiotics, I have chosen to abstain from broadening the definitional body of the terms more than they already are.

representamen/object relation (c) the sign/interpretant relation. These classifications tell us a great deal about the particular and variegated ways in which the representamen, object and interpretant relate to one another and their many possible combinations make for an exhaustive typology of signs (Peirce would identify as many as sixty-six).

Although Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics extends beyond his second division of signs in accordance with their relation to objects, it is, without question, the chapter of his work that has generated the most influence. Peirce's classification of the icon, index and symbol distinguishes the various relations signs have to their objects. Peirce's theory of signs underwent perpetual change and several revisions, and deciding on any authoritative definition for any of the three classes of signs, is subject to debate. Nevertheless, a glance at the disciplinary orthodoxy suggests that there is enough consensus to state that *a) an icon* is a sign "which refers to the Object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own" (Peirce 102), meaning that a motivation based on similarity inheres between the sign and the object *b) a symbol* "refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of a law" (Peirce 102), suggesting that the sign's relation to its object is established through convention and is therefore arbitrary *c) the index* is a sign that is existentially related to its object. In other words, the index is motivated by its object, not because it resembles it in some capacity, as is the case of the icon, but because it signals the existence of its object by virtue of having undergone "actual modification" (102) by it. It is important to note that although these definitions might leave us with the impression that there are some objects that are icons, indexes and symbols, and others that are not; these Peircian categories are not meant as ontological statements. As David Clarke succinctly puts it: "The index and the icon are modes of signification rather than

categories of objects, and indeed no one type of sign (whether icon, index or symbol, to use the terminology of Charles Sanders Peirce) is ever found in pristine isolation” (52). We know this because Peirce suggested that all three modes of relationality-cum-signification were involved to different degrees in all acts of signification and, also, because he warned that there is no such thing as a “pure index”.

Peirce’s method has unfortunately inspired an analytic literature structured around this assumption. Indeed, some of the most significant scholarly contributions dedicated to Peirce’s index takes an approach that scrutinizes the list of definitional features which Peirce claimed the indexical sign fulfilled, unveiling inconsistencies in the model and doubting the range of its applicability. (Gören Sonnessan calls this the “orthodox approach”.) While the approach has cast doubt on the systematicity of Peirce’s thought on the subject, the result is one that leaves the specter of a “pure index” lingering, or that what the index and indexicality should be about is the fulfillment of all of Peirce’s criteria. Arthur Burks and Thomas Goudge’s seminal essays have both adopted this approach and in each, the six characteristics of the indexical sign are scrutinized in turn, and in almost every instance, exceptions to Peirce’s rules make themselves known. It has, therefore, proven difficult to formulate a systematic and consistent account of the indexical sign from Peirce’s writings. Albert Atkin, however, highlights the following passage from Peirce’s writings to suggest that Peirce theorized with idealized types in mind: “By such a process, which is at bottom very much like mathematical reasoning, we can reach conclusions as to what *would be* true of signs in all cases, so long as the intelligence using them was scientific” (98). Peirce’s writings, therefore, leave us in something of a double-bind: give up on the hope of ever finding a “pure index” but rely

on an “idealized type” (Atkin) to better understand the function and character of indexical signs. Therefore, the list of features for indexical signs always exceeds particular indexes; some indexical signs may fulfill some of the items but not others. Evidently, theorizing from an idealized type has exacerbated the tendency to objectify the category of the index, but keeping in mind the warning that indexical signs inconsistently fulfill Peirce’s criteria, we list the definitional features proper to the indexical function and this, to begin to think seriously about what we know concretely about this sign function and how it might help properly situate the notion of trace in an ecology of meaning.

Quoted here are the six features mined from Peirce’s writings:

An index has a direct physical connection with its object, or is really affected by that object, and the interpreting mind has nothing to do with the connection except to take note of it (1.372; 2.248; 2.299). (2) An index exerts a compulsive influence on its interpreter, forcing him to the indicated object. (3) An index involves the existence of its object, so that they form an inseparable pair. (4) The object is always an individual identity. (5) An index asserts nothing but only shows its object (3.361). (6) It also shows the relation between itself and its object to be a non-rational relation, a brute fact or Secondness. (Goudge 53-54)

In general terms, this list of features leaves us with a sign whose representamen is in relation to its object regardless of the presence of an interpreter, and only *becomes* a sign when the latter takes it up as a sign. Therefore, that relation (between form and object) exists in the life-world but it’s status as a sign results from the event of a (human or other) bystander coming across it and selecting it for interpretation. “Let us consider dreaming and merely sleeping. During heavy sleep a person is not usually awakened by customary sounds [...] But an unusual sound, say, a fire siren, even at a distance, may stir her” (Merrell 193). Some prospective sign-events are ignored and others are not, and, as

Merrell implies, selection is somewhere involved in choosing what will serve as a sign to someone for something. It is once we start thinking the *sign-event* itself that, I believe, the question of the indexical sign is complicated, especially if we look to Peirce's definitional features for inspiration and guidance. What does it mean that "an index exerts a compulsive influence on its interpreter" or that "an index asserts nothing but only shows its object"? These two features, I suggest, are key to understanding where meaning may or might not fit in. First, because as Atkin points out, these two features involve the sign-interpretant relation, whereas the others mainly concern the sign-object relation (164). The following section deals exclusively with the statement "the index asserts nothing" because the second feature will be dealt with extensively when Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts are introduced in the next section.

The statement, "the index asserts nothing," is so deceptively straightforward that its conceptual ambiguity is often difficult to pin down. First, the statement implies what Peirce has iterated elsewhere, mainly that the indexical sign does not describe the object to which it relates. It might signify its object through contiguity, i.e. the interpreter would recognize that a fingerprint signifies that an individual imprinted it, but it would not conjure forth or describe that individual, as in "*she has red hair.*" It is in this way that it "directs attention to its object" (Peirce), it incites the interpreter to infer the presence or existence of an object but, beyond this, little else is given. Borrowing from Louis Prieto, we could take this to mean that the indexical sign bears a "significant indication" and not a "notification indication." The distinction is a subtle one. *Significant indication* might inform a forensic interpreter that a plot of land alternatively serves as a grave, but it would not, as Paul Bouissac makes clear, contain "attention! This

is intended to contain a message!” (Bouissac 306) Only linguistic signs would carry a notificative indication of this kind. And, consistent with Prieto’s line of reasoning, Peirce himself suggests that the index has “nothing to do with meaning” (Atkin 165). But what exactly does this mean? And how can we truly bracket meaning if, as Ricoeur has suggested, that the trace is datable? As the phrasing of the last question suggests, the answer lies with the distinction between meaning, on the one hand, and information on the other and while the trace *qua* index may be informational it is certainly not meaningful.¹²

Albert Atkin’s essay entitled “Peirce on the Index and Indexical Reference” (2005) is perhaps the most significant contribution to Peircian scholarship in the way of orthodoxy as it self-consciously adopts the same method as Burks and Goudge (and publishes in the same journal). In it he insists that some indexes are informational and other are not. “He [Peirce] claims that a genuine index not only indicates its object, but provides information about it too. A degenerate index, on the other hand, simply indicates without conveying extra information” (Atkin 181). Before expanding further, an illustration is in order. Consider that I am pointing to a door. My pointing finger might be existentially related to the door but my pointing finger does not provide any information about the door. All it does is direct you towards the door, and if that movement is successful, you will infer correctly that my finger signifies that specific door. The reason why the indexical sign in this instance is not informational is because my finger and the door have nothing in common, or, as Atkin would say, it involves no “iconic involvement” (181). An indexical sign is informational when the object and the

¹² That “genuine information” is transmitted by means of the indexical sign is mentioned as early in in Thomas Goudge’s essay “Pierce’s Index”: “For the index is by definition an informational sign which enables the interpreter to identify what it represents” (Goudge 54).

sign “share a quality” (Atkin 182), such as a fingerprint and a finger, a hair sample and the person who’s hair it was. Here the “object largely determines the qualities of the sign” (Atkin 183). The specific and unique characteristics of the object make it such that the sign shares many of the same “qualitative commonalities”. Think again of the fingerprint: we can infer from a fingerprint that it stands for an individual, or minimally, a finger. This semiotic leap is made possible by the fact that the representamen (the form) also *resembles* a finger (ex: the shape of the imprint resembles the shape of a finger tip). Traces, as a sub-category of indexes, are informational because, more than just indicating the existence of an object, its actual configuration may actually hint at what object it refers to. So, while it would still not describe its object, in the best of circumstances, something of the object’s description might be inferred from it. This, let it be noted, does not bring us into the realm of meaning and textuality. Just because the representamen of a trace might resemble the object in some capacity, doesn’t mean that we are dealing with meaning. The informational aspects of signs might add to the belief that meaning is on the side of the sign but it is not. Koff’s following statement therefore makes no sense from a semiotic perspective: “I think of us as interpreters of the skeleton’s language. Experience is the key to interpreting that language as accurately as possible” (13). The data of traces, which is why it lends itself so well to empiricism of a forensic nature, is not to be confused with meaning and the upcoming Lacanian reading will help us draw out this distinction even further.

Before jumping ahead to Lacan, then, let us recap: Peirce’s writings leave us with a theory of semiotics that is perfused with *sign-events*, some of which are the product of a phenomenological interaction between the self and the world. And while Peirce

never (to my knowledge) made such an argument, I do not think it is a radical departure from his approach to suggest that if a developmental argument needed to be made that the initial emergence of meaning is one that would be built and generated from inferential accumulation. As Peircian scholar Merrell writes: “Language and logic erupt from icons and indices; the same can be said of the body, but it encompasses a subtle dynamic that language and logic only at best crudely reflect” (Merrell 328). Although inferential accumulation would not account for the entirety of the semiotic chain—for instance, it could not account for symbols that are of a purely conventional nature—it continues to have a place even after an individual masters language. This is an important caveat to our general discussion because, as we will see shortly, inductive accumulation is given little place in Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic semiology; and reading indexicality from the vantage point of psychoanalysis will call for some careful maneuvering.

It is not obvious, in structuralism’s and linguisticism’s wake; to figure out how exactly inference and indexical events fit in against the symbolic structure of differences that most of us now assume are (pre)formative of meaning. Jacques Lacan did not believe that meaning was mastered through inferential accumulation¹³ and yet, the fact nevertheless remains that the enigmatic encounter/event with external objects, disturbances and traces beyond our immediate understanding happen throughout our lives, regardless of whether we have successfully appropriated language or not. If *sign-events* involving indexicality are a fixture of our encounter with the world throughout our lives (and Lacan never contradicted this), how should these events be described? We

¹³ “For language to be born, it must always already be grasped as a whole.” (Lacan Psychoses 228)

already argued that indexical signs *qua* traces are, at best, informational and not meaningful, and therefore different than conventional signs. Yet persistently, meaning is projected onto them.

French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan might seem an unusual figure to follow a discussion of Charles Sanders Peirce and the indexical sign, but his work is as much a psychoanalytic theory of semiotics as it is a body of psychoanalytic work that incorporates semiotics. Lacan was highly influenced by linguistics and the structuralists, but unlike them, adapted himself to these linguistic theories while continuing to struggle with the question of subjectivity.¹⁴ How is the subject formed? Where is the subject? This very simple question is behind his very complex theoretical corpus, which leaves us with a theory of subjectivity that is constituted through one's relation to images, the world of objects, and to the structures of language. The relation of (wo)man to language and to signs is an arduous one, and it is one that the subject cannot curtail; but it is through these complicated relational registers that the subject comes to form a sense of a self, a sense of the other, and even a sense of the world around him. In a way, speaking of semiotics and bracketing the subject, if we follow Lacan, is to risk a multitude of deceptive *a priori* and presuppositions that would negatively affect both our conception of signs and sign-events and how we are affected by them. Reconsider, for instance, the savage inscriptions written about by Alphonso Lingis. His anthropological findings suggest that meaning and inference did *not* explain the production of the inscriptions, and more, reading these inscriptions as signs leads to error. Rather their proliferation was explained by means of Sigmund Freud's theory of the libido. The scars are linked with a

¹⁴ Structuralism and the subject were thought to be mutually exclusive. See Terry Eagleton Introduction to Literary Theory (2003)

pleasure the savage has with himself (Lingis 24) and to an unbound excitation. If there is one thing that psychoanalysis can teach us as we consider the trace *qua* index it is that signs, corporealities, can be invested with libidinal energy and can also displace it; this dynamic has more to do with the projection of meaning, the assumption of anthropomorphism than meets the eye.

Lacan rarely spoke of the index or the trace. Even when he raised the issue in his seminars it was usually to illustrate what he was not talking about or was not interested in. Lacan built his theory of semiotics from and in reaction to Saussure's model, and so the question of arbitrariness (between signifier and signified) was salient even that it become more radical once he personalized it.¹⁵ Nevertheless, even if the trace was used as an illustration of what the linguistic sign was not, his writings leave us with novel distinctions between the two as it does some alternative ways of thinking indexical sign-events. In his third Seminar The Psychoses Lacan addresses the issue directly. Forgive the lengthy quotation:

Let's begin with the biological sign. In the very structure, in the morphology, of animals there is something that has this captivating value due to which its receiver, who sees red of the robin redbreast for instance undertakes a series of actions or henceforth unitary behavior that links the bearer of the sign to its perceiver. Here you have what gives us a precise idea of what be called natural meaning. [...] Then there is the trace, the footprint in the sand, the sign about which its negative aspect draws the natural sign to a limit at which it becomes evanescent. The distinction between sign and object is quite clear here, since the trace is precisely what the object leaves behind once it has gone somewhere else. [...] But the signifier is a sign that doesn't refer to any object, not even to one in the

¹⁵ The arbitrariness of Lacan's model of semiology is more radical than Saussure's in that, according to Lacan, the Signifier and the Signified are never solidly anchored to one another. Rather, the Signified moves and wavers under the Signifier. Whereas Saussure assumed that the conceptual plane has natural divisions (like the joints of an arm, for example), Lacan rejected this outright.

form of a trace, even though the trace nevertheless heralds the signifier's essential feature. It, too, is the sign of an absence. (Lacan Psychoses 167)

This excerpt clearly displays a logical progression—which should not be mistaken as evolutionary—from the most natural (animalistic) signs to the most elevated in the culture of man, as it superimposes different semiotic registers. The trace, according to Lacan sits somewhere in between the two: it is like a signifier in that it signifies an absence (i.e., the object that is not longer here), whereas it is debatable whether or not natural meaning (a.k.a biological reactions) might be at play in indexical signification (though certainly indexicality is involved in behavioral reactions). With both the biological sign and the trace, signification is thought to be relatively stable, meaning that there is a one-to-one relation that exists between the sign and the object and/or reaction. The relation between the Signifier and the Signified, terms borrowed from Saussure but readapted to correspond to psychic reality, are bound by a tautological cultural imposition instituted during the Oedipal stages of a child's development.

Lacan represents the relationship between the Signifier and the Signified as S/s (in identical order) because, as Lorenzo Chiesa explains: “The signifier logically precedes and causes the signified” (48). The level of the Signifier is “supreme” in as much as it stands as an autonomous, differential and material plane that divvies and assigns a linguistic value to everything which it names. But unlike the trace, or the Saussurean sign, where the object on the one hand, and the signified (concept) on the other, correspond neatly with the Signifier, Lacan posits that the interplay of Signifiers constitute and order the Signified and more radically still, does not cause the signified to forever cement itself to a Signifier. This implies that the plane of the signified, an

amorphous, jointless mass is always in an unstable relationship to the Signifiers that wield them and for that reason, Lacan writes, “the relationship between the signified and the signifier always appears fluid, always ready to come undone” (261). The only reason that the two planes happen to meet or converge is because of what Lacan calls the *points de capiton*, or the “quilting points.” The image of the quilting points metaphorically convey the arbitrary but necessary way in which the Signifier and the Signified must be linked to one another in order for an individual to properly appropriate language and take one’s place in the social domain. But these quilting points are not genetically predetermined or even determined within the system of language, nor does the referential object secure the two planes to one another—the bond is imposed by culture. This symbolic function (securing a bond between the two planes) is typically handed down generationally to the father who must impose this arbitrary law upon the child because he inherits the paternal function. Lacan calls this the Nom/Non-du-père (Name/No-of-the-Father) because “both confer identity on the subject (it names him, positions him within the symbolic order) and signifies the oedipal prohibition, the ‘no’ of the incest taboo” (Evans 119). For example, *your name is Philip, you are the youngest born male of the Montpellier family and you may not have your mother all to yourself*. Thus, Philip Montpellier is named, told he occupies and must assume a term in a symbolic oppositional (+/-) structure (he is a boy, not a girl) and he will have to find a love object other than his mother because she is not his to have. This foundational law introduces the child to a roadmap that he must follow as he pursues his sexual relations and, more generally, as he maneuvers the symbolic and appropriates language as his own. We could say that it is the laws of kinship (which Lacan borrowed from Claude Lévi-Strauss)

enforced during the Oedipal stages that the child finally enters and takes his place in culture. In other words, he immerses human communication, with its contractual constraints and prohibitions, and takes leave of the modes of communication that predominate in the animal realm. The introduction of the paternal metaphor, as it is also called, not only inaugurates a system of exchange (if you give mommy back to me, you may eventually get a woman of your own) it also entails that meaning (the *conceptual* plane that rests on the side of the signified) is ensnared within these self-same structures of exchange and, not as many suppose, from the life world. Therefore, the signified is purely psychological and cultural in that the network of Signifiers affects it. The latter are determinative vectors in the economy of demand and desire. It is for the aforementioned reasons that Lacan specifies that “the system of language, at whatever point you take hold of it, never results in an index finger directly indicating a point of reality; it’s the whole of reality that is covered by the entire network of language (32)”.¹⁶

The frequency with which Lacan interpellates the indexical function in antithesis to the symbolic function of language implies: a) that the symbolic function of language is unstable, culturally determined b) that the index is stable, straightforward and not cultural in its entirety. And *yet* the trace and the signifier share a fundamental structural dynamic: they signify an absence. Ergo, the trace, like the signifier, stands for something that is no longer present. Indeed, the most productive entry into a psychoanalytic reading on the indexical sign-event is to think of it in terms of the *fort/da* game which Freud observed in

¹⁶ Elsewhere in *The Psychoses*, Lacan writes: “There is an absolute non-equivalence between discourse and pointing. Whatever you take the ultimate element of discourse to be reduced to, you will never be able to replace it with your index finger” (137).

his nephew.¹⁷ We can imagine how the reading of the trace could serve as a “cultural achievement”, i.e., once a trace or indexical sign is taken up and valued for its synecdochic relation to the missing whole, or once it is prized for its capacity to make present something in abeyance, the trace is elected to the level of the signifier. Absence and presence can also be metaphorically represented as oppositions (+/- or *fort/da*). My intention in pointing this out is not to suggest that the trace should be given the status of language, but rather to underline how the trace, while it may not have a central role to play within a post-oedipal symbolization, stands nevertheless as a rudimentary form of symbolization that makes way and prepares one for the acquisition of language. Furthermore, the mastery felt by the child in his ability to compensate for the absence of another via the presence of a sign is not something that is relinquished with the introduction of language. If anything, the semiotics of the trace demonstrates again and again how the object *in absentia* (the object indexically signified) is the accomplished sacrifice of a presence that will lay the ground for its artificial return.

If the representamen of the index retroactively substantiates the object it must necessarily have lost, the play of repetition on the part of the interpreter/child should be conceived as nothing less than the inaugural play of symbolization evidenced in Freud’s analysis of the *fort/da* game in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920). Like the toddler who experienced jubilation in the monitoring of the disappearance and reappearance of a spool of thread, traces, by virtue of their synecdochic relation to another and by the fact that they signify an absence like signifiers, always already ask that we reposition ourselves as subjects of this game of compensation and consolation—always registering

¹⁷ The *fort/da* game was a game observed by Freud in his young nephew. This young boy was observed manipulating the presence and absence of an object attached to a spool of thread. When the child would have the object disappear he would yell out “da!”, and when he would make it reappear “fort!”

the absence of the trace, but also turning this absence into an positivity (historical or otherwise) that can be known and mastered. In other words, the game also transforms the lost presences as a knowable object and a field of discovery and exploration. Therefore, the seeming puerile drama of the *fort/da* game is not contained to a phase of early childhood development; we reenact this ritual to temper our “feelings of loss” (Isaacs 76) and console ourselves with the sudden absence of another via its symbolic recovery (i.e. traces).

Lacanian scholar Lorenzo Chiesa repeatedly refers to indexes as “gestaltic/imaginary signs” because, he claims, they are bi-univocal (the signified does not move arbitrarily under the signifier).¹⁸ It is for this reason that arguments are often made that traces and other motivated signs are semiotically impoverished—they are comparatively straightforward. However, traces cease to be merely informational accoutrements the moment they are deemed meaningful, the moment that we decide that they concern us. Once a subject says to herself “this concerns me” or once she documents a trace and preserves it because “it has a greater meaning for me”, she is touched by meaning. The indexical signification involved also involves a subject. (“Dammit, we [Physicians for Human Rights] had a chance to identify these people and help make meaning out of all this death”) (Koff 34). Once we imagine ourselves to be the intended receiver of information, we have already made meaning *the* issue. And even if it is not given forthright, we are already anticipating it or paving a way for it. As Lacan reminds us: “Only a subject can understand a meaning, conversely every meaning

¹⁸ We could think of this in the sense that the existential relation that formally links the representamen and the object serves the same function as does the No-of-the-Father in establishing a relation between the signifier and signified.

phenomenon implies a subject” (Aggressiveness 11).¹⁹ The *fort/da* game might help us understand the fetishistic character of traces and why it is elected as a point of fixation for the subject. Still, it doesn’t really get us very far towards understanding the problem of anthropomorphism or the meaning of which traces continuously suffer. Neither do we make much headway by admitting the comparative inferiority of the trace against the linguistic signifier. I propose that we look to Lacan’s theory of the imaginary register and apply it in tandem with Lingis’ work on the savage inscription.²⁰ The expressive index—a semiotic category which has no place in the ‘real’ but nevertheless belongs to our psychic reality, so to speak, uncovers and reflects a libidinal function that extends beyond the conjure of absence and presence. It also sheds light on how imaginary *méconnaissance* and its anthropomorphic undercurrent does more than compensate for the presence of an absent other. It represents a “formal fixation” (Lacan “Aggressivity”) that shields us against persecutory images of “corporal dislocation” (Lacan “Aggressivity” 12). In a sense, I am proposing that we conceive of the anthropomorphic reading of the trace as an imaginary hold against the vicissitudes and dismembering effects of our interest in topographical signs (Lingis).

Representations of forensic investigations report two general themes: one theme assembles spilled guts, lesions, dismembered limbs, disfigured faces, still fleshy anterior

¹⁹ “The signified is not the things in their raw state, already there, given in an order open to meaning. Meaning is human discourse insofar as it always refers to another meaning” (Psychoses 119).

²⁰ I need to thank Peter C. van Wyck, my thesis supervisor, for suggesting that I look to Lacan’s theory of the imaginary in tandem with the index in the Fall of 2005 when I was first developing my object of study. See Peter C. van Wyck’s theory of the indexical imaginary in his paper “Emphatic Landscapes: Notes on the Ethical Itinerary of Landscape” March (2007). (*Courtesy of the author.*) To be published in the Canadian Journal of Communication Spring (2008). For more on the index’s status as imaginary see Lorenzo Chiesa. Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007.

iliac spines, mold on a forehead, cavities in skulls, trauma to genitalia, mutilated and amputated bodies in decomposition intermixed with soil, blood splatter, stomach contents, fingernails; the second theme brings together vocalic bodies, speech acts and synecdochic fragments intentionally signifying, intentionally communicating and always meaningful. Both themes combine, simultaneously upholding and undermining each other; the voices of the dead are in the same place as mute remains. It should seem rather obvious now that voices do not belong but they do nonetheless, and in the same place where others correctly draw associations with the pornographic and the scopophilic phantasies available to the witness or bystander. What else, after all, are the endoscopic visions so popular in forensic dramas if not a surfacing of the body where depth once presided?

No doubt mass graves and crime scenes are sensational as they lay the ground for a theatrics of trauma and cruelty that arrests and excites. “All that excites some dark dredges of lechery and cruelty in us, holding our eyes fixed with repugnance and lust” (Lingis 22). To borrow from Lingis, the excitations and pleasure we experience in reading and seeing these morseled bodies and the inscriptions of violence that cut across them is to libidinize the disturbances and the crime scenes that harbor them. The forensic scientist leads the camera and our eye to each perforation, cavity and orifice—opens the mouth and runs his latex-gloved fingers under and above the tongue, around and behind the lips, along the teeth. We read as she runs her hands along the bones, gathers bits of hair. The forensic inscription (meaning the scientific documentation of the trace) is a social practice that extends the libidinal zone ever wider and wider. There’s a stain on the sheet, a hole in a sweater, a suspicious thread between the deceased’s teeth. Like the

savage inscriptions (Lingis), graves are sites of libidinal investiture, where scientists are scouting the ground first. There are no signs yet, no identities, nothing has been counted and no voices. As of yet, it is just earth and bits. The surface, so to speak, is being laid out. But this process is cast against another theme, an absence experienced as a positivity (Isaacs 88). The disarray and the dislocation will be set to order, and if it is felt to require order it is *because* that order is also an absence felt as presence. Skeletal remains will be reassembled, identities will (hopefully) be recovered, bodies will be counted and the sensuality of the trace will give way to expression.

In “Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis,” Jacques Lacan explains that similar scenes of dismemberment, perforation and mutilation constitute “spontaneous themes of our imagination” (13), which are themselves revelatory of a primordial relationship we have with our own bodies and the world around us. These morbid fixations represent unconscious fantasies that are structurally concomitant with the fantasies of unity, consciousness and corporeal integrity of the subject. These tormenting scenes, or images, (be they actually represented or simply inferred through our violent acts) satisfy an aggressive impulse in man that is spurned by the nature of (wo)man’s relationship to his or her own ego. Which is to say, that although these scenes disturb us they also satisfy something in us and serve a function in our imaginary relationship to the world. Indeed, these “phantasmagorias” of corporeal dislocation are so fundamental that Lacan insists that they are reflected in practices such as “tattooing, incision, and circumcision rituals in primitive societies [...] in that it [they] contradicts, in advanced societies, respect for the natural forms of the human body, the idea of which is a latecomer to culture” (Lacan 13). Essentially, what Lacan is suggesting by positioning ‘savage’ inscriptions against

'civilized' conceptions of the body is that the idea of an integral body, of a coherent self, of the body as a property of one's own, is a necessary idea that has the unfortunate habit of making us suffer. This suffering, which we inadvertently inflict on ourselves, is represented in these voluntary practices and rituals of mutilation, dislocation and de-centering. In a sense, the satisfaction we get from these phantasmagorias of fragmentation and cruelty represents back to us an aggressivity spurned by our conception of self. But let us look closer to Lacan's seminal theory of the mirror stage and the imaginary to substantiate and make sense of this thesis.

Jacques Lacan's theory of the subject of the imaginary emerges out of his early work on the mirror stage (years 1936 to 1949 approx.), a phase in child development during which the ego and the conscious self are allegedly constituted for the first time. Although the mirror stage is meant as an empirically verifiable stage in a subject's becoming, it is also a developmental metaphor for the various ways in which the subject *qua* ego is (re)constituted throughout one's life by means of his or her relationship to the procession of imagos to which she will invariably be confronted on an ongoing basis. Essentially, the mirror stage, even if we re-present it here as a singular event, is never fully overcome by the subject. Even if external factors will later quell the subject's subjugation to its dynamics (Lacan calls this the Symbolic order), he is perpetually structured by it. Therefore, the mirror stage is not something that the child overcomes and leaves behind; rather the hold of the imaginary persists as a structuring and (de)formative event for the individual until death. The following description of the mirror stage is a combined reading of Lacan's Écrits "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function" and "Aggressivity and Psychoanalysis".

The mirror stage is deceptively simple considering the extensive contributions Lacan's reading offered in terms of understanding intra- and inter-psycho development: a child between the ages of six and eighteen months (Lacan "Mirror" 4) recognizes himself in a mirror (or, where there is no mirror, recognizes himself in what others around him reflect back to him about him). This might appear an innocent and even banal event in a person's development, but this ocular drama between the child and her own image is foundational of a self-conscious subjectivity. It occasions the birth of the "I" for the child, a self-consciousness, in short: an ego. Forgive the spoiler, but it bears underlining that the tremendous gains a child will get from this event are marred from their inception—meaning that there is a structural dehiscence at the very heart of the subject of the mirror stage that will always undermine him. The child will come out of the mirror stage with a sense of possessing a coherent ego, of being an integrity in a world of integrities, but unbeknownst to him, his situation is always already perilous.

The child staring into the looking glass is nothing less than larval in maturity, "still trapped in his motor impotence and nursing dependence" (Lacan "Mirror" 4). He is plainly inadequate. But what he finds in his double-cum-image is something that represents to him the promise of something greater. The child finds himself seduced, fixated and "lured" by the image of himself and akin to animal instincts (Chiesa 17), he experiences the image as a *gestalt* (a whole that is more than the sum of its parts). Enamored as he is by this ideal image, he identifies with it. The gestaltic image gives the child a sense of unity which he does not yet have, and it is for this reason that Lacan insists that the reflection serves an "orthopedic" function (Lacan "Mirror" 6). It allows the child to think of himself as more than he is in actuality. Out of this event, the toddler

forms and assumes an ideal-I, or an ideal-ego. The gap between the idealism of the image and the child remains, however, because whatever assimilating and pacifying effects identification may have brought to the subject, Lacan insists that this identification is founded on false premises.

But the important point is that this form (Ideal-I) situates the agency known as the ego [...] in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any singular individual or rather, that will only asymptotically approach the subject's becoming, no matter how successful the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve, as I, his discordance with his own reality. ("Mirror "4)

The fictional direction of which Lacan speaks in this quote is elsewhere described as "misrecognition," a psychic process whereby the individual identifies so thoroughly with the idealized image of self that he consubstantiates himself with it. This consubstantiation, however, is a fiction. The child recognizes himself in the mirror but doesn't quite recognize his or her relationship to it. This is why, as Lorenzo Chiesa points out, identification ironically coincides with alienation and why the ego, for Lacan, is spoken of as an other. This irreconcilable and therefore unending dialectic (between identification and alienation) will form the first structure of human subjectivity.

But the subject suffers—despite the jubilation and excitement that the mirror stage affords her. Even when she grows out of her infantile stage, in the eyes the child the idealism of the imago will always cause her to experience a discord between it and herself. Because alienation is never neutralized through identification, because the two coincide and mutually constitute each other, the subject will always strive for an idealism beyond her reach. The subject suffers this idealism, this *gestalt*, even if it is necessary for her to survive. This is where the problem of aggressivity presents itself within the theory

of the mirror stage: the subject is constituted by the image but is also reminded of his inadequacy because of the gestaltic halo that is always in excess and pressing on the subject's (un) conscious. The subject's relationship to his body, refracted as it is through the other specular 'body' in the mirror, is simultaneously secured and undermined by the tragic vacillations of alienation and identification. However—and this is worth noting—the subject does not experience his alienation in its permanence, it is always something which the subject unconsciously believes he can overcome even if it is an impossibility. Essentially, his constitutive alienation in the externalized other of the imaginary constitutes a form of knowledge that does not want to be known or assumed by the subject. Nothing short of the individual's survival would be at stake should alienation be assumed over identification with the image.

The dialectical movement of alienation and identification, it bears repeating, begins the moment the child identifies with and introjects the image; because their effect is an Ideal-ego, or a consciousness of self, for the child it is *only through the mirror stage* that *both* the bodily gestalt and corporeal dislocation are given to experience. The issue is not just that the Ideal-ego is troubled by dis-individuation but that it is only in so far as there is an Ideal-ego that fantasies of dislocation are felt as troubling. Lorenzo Chiesa rightly corrects those who read the orthopedic function of the specular image as a corrective to an experience of dislocation that is thought to precede it. "The two imagos can only emerge together. The baby recognizes the fragmentation of his real body only when he starts to be attracted by the completeness of his specular image" (Chiesa 18). Because identification is the seductive process of the two, it also leaves us with an illusion that we have pacified something. The fact is we only suffer phantasmagorias of

dismemberment once we have assumed the identity/ontological coherence for the world and ourselves. The imagos of the fragmented body emerge in tandem with the imagos of bodily unity.

Reading this, it should no longer strike us as a contradiction that the dual themes of corporeal fragmentation and ‘spectral’ voices coincide in representations of forensic scientific investigations. Just as the infant’s fantasies of dislocation cast out “into the world the disorder that constitutes his being” (Lacan “Aggressivity” 21), our libidinal attraction to the *pêle-mêle* terrain of forensic investigation is a topography of “aggressive images” (Lacan “Aggressivity” 14). Though it is presented as a necessary detour to the revivification of intentional expressions, the topographical movements across dismembered corpses are obstinately horizontal—it re-incises against the grain of the “natural form of the body” (Lacan 13) before piecing it back together and made to speak. Our subjectivities are ephemerally morseled, so to speak, and then solidified. If these are signifiers, they do not mean anything. They are eroticized. Alphonso Lingis describes these libidinal nodes of investiture “subjectivity effects” and fleeting egoisms invisible to the epistemological biases of the Western subject—where everything is assumed to occur within the realm of intentionality. Where everything is subjected to the other side of the imaginary.

On the other, colonizing, side of our imaginary episteme, the world of objects, things and animals are vehicles for our imaginary delusions of unity, coherence and ontological self-sustainability. “The individuation and inorganic beings alike is possible only on the basis of an underlying imaginary anthropomorphization” (Chiesa 22). In the imaginary register, all that is other is a recognizable other—an other that is like us. An

other that keeps us to ourselves. The forensic scientist steps into a grave and sees herself reflected back at her. She finds a handful of marbles in the pocket of the deceased. She is at the scene of a crime. She (and we) find comfort in the belief that there is meaning in this, that this gravesite with the marbles, is a semiological problem. Seeing ourselves where there is no message is a defense, it is orthopedic in its anticipation. The forensic scientist tells us that the dead have a story to tell and he points at a speck that means nothing to me or to you. We wait for a message.

Chapter Three: The Way of the Anecdote

The trace demands a story. She who stumbles across a scar is aware of its literary character when she recognizes that the disturbance compels language, stimulates and transforms it. A scar does not possess the intrinsic qualities we ascribe to literature but it draws language to itself, cajoles and moves it in some directions and not in others and for that reason, infringes on the terrain of literary theory. Isabelle Stengers notes in passing in The Invention of Modern Science (2000) that indices have the capacity to “nourish the power of fiction as well as constrain it” (142.1). And if we were to translate this blithe remark into Deleuzian vernacular, we would have to say that indices have the ability to take open flight towards the literary and latch on to other systems of signification. It is true that territorial signs, such as indices, “would be nothing without the movements that deposit them” (Deleuze and Guattari 55) but it is also true that they inspire other movements that widen exponentially the sphere of expression. Helene Cixous’ Stigmata: Escaping Texts (1998) is exemplary in this regard. There she treats scars as a means of autobiographical positioning—precious remnants and souvenirs of prior traumatizations and ultimately, she writes, “the promise of a text” (Cixous xiv). Cixous esteems her scars, first, because they conjure an analogy with personal signatures, *signifiers*, and, second, because they incite her to write. “I do not want the stigmata to disappear. I am attached to my engravings, to the stings in my flesh and my mental parchment. I do not fear that trauma and stigma will form an alliance: the literature in me wants to maintain and re-animate traces” (Cixous xiv). The promise and potential for open textuality residing within or around the lesion means that it is also a privileged site of play, a site where language is simultaneously and precariously attracted to and repelled away from the

vorticular pull of physical trauma. Physical deposits/disturbances are intimately tied to the pleasures of telling and hearing stories and the literature they inspire take forms ranging from mainstream detective fiction to philosophy. In other words, indexes are not closed semiotic systems—they leak, they double, they are repeated and animated by language. The need to recapture organic signs inaugurates the linguistic.

Ernst Bloch's recently translated Traces (2007; 1969), for example, transforms the inconspicuous habit of writing from traces into a self-conscious art of philosophizing. In his chapter "The Mark!" he explains his method outright, and like Cixous, themes of repetition and storytelling invariably come to the fore. "How such things came to notice will be retold here, and tentatively marked; lovingly, marking in the retelling; by marking intending and retelling [...] It's reading of traces every which way, in sections that only divide the frame" (Bloch 6). His approach is noteworthy for several reasons but concern us in two important respects: first, reading marks and storytelling are, in Bloch's mind, inseparable. The mark is deeply tied to narration, such that one repeats the other *ad infinitum*. Storytelling is inscriptive, it displaces the trace elsewhere than where it is and so extends and doubles it. Secondly, the formal structure of his work is such that it assigns an anecdote to each trace, imparting the reader not with a grand narrative but rather a catalogue of anecdoted markings each of which is pointed in different directions. Bloch recalls each of the traces that invited his fancy and follows each on a chain of self-contained philosophical and literary tangents. Though simple, the formal dimensions of Traces rings true because it is what writing from traces effectively resembles: brief anecdotes, descriptions, and morals that might have easily been overlooked though, when pointed out, strike us as the more accessible of profundities. Structurally, at least, Ernst

Bloch's Traces is the diluted, elevated and un-adorned version of what we find elsewhere in detective fiction, in Cixous' stigma-texts or in forensic narratives. The only significant difference lies with the fact that they are catalogued, their relationship to traces assumed rather than demonstrated. The difference is trivial, however, because what interests us are the literary effects of traces. Bloch's is still, regardless of the fragmented nature of his work, a literature of traces because it is through a distinctly divinatory modality of philosophizing and writing that the work is strung together.

Bloch's Traces and Cixous' Stigmata constitute academic examples that simulate and expand on the power of indices "to nourish the power of fiction" (Stengers 142.1) even as they self-consciously perform and remain faithful to modes of reasoning that are at heart divinatory, meaning they proceed from particular circumstances, particular traces, and write the event of their production and their significance. Indexical reasoning and literary discharges are unquestionably enmeshed, so much so that pointing it out might even seem to some a "banal" observation (Culler 172). "The hunter could have been the first 'to tell a story' because only hunters knew how to read a coherent sequence of events from silent signs left behind by their prey" (Ginzberg 89). The will to narrative spawned by traces is the bread and butter of Holmesian fiction and medical detection dramas, and the true-crime renditions of forensic detection are certainly no exception in that they too constitute a variation of the genre. In actuality, forensic practitioners, especially those who double as human rights advocates, never tire or reminding audiences of the deep-ties between the forensic excavation of remains and storytelling. A femur bone and a story are a grammatical unit according to our popular imaginary—we know through repeated suggestion that these items fit together. Forensic markings are the

eventful abrasions, the material fixtures and fragments that are the commonplace furnishings of crimes scenes and clandestine graves but their eventfulness is no less related to the production and proliferation of stories and the pleasure had on hearing and spinning a yarn from wayward fragments. And whether or not we are convinced with evolutionary hypotheses that indexical reasoning was at the origin of storytelling (Ginzberg, Sebeok "Communication," Deleuze and Guattari), the fact nevertheless remains that the potential for emplotted narratives of past events (such as the event of a horse escaping an abbey and making his way down a path to a dung heap, an event that captured the imagination of Eco's readership in The Name of the Rose) is posited and reaffirmed with every suspected grave.

It is when we consider the function of the trace that we find that the testamental value of the indexical sign lies with its unique relationship to narrative. The meaning of traces, unlike icons or symbols, is in many respects dependent on description, demonstration and the anecdotal. Peter Brooks, commenting on Freud's hermeneutics of dream interpretation, says the following of the meaning-making process as it is represented within the detective genre: "the detective story exhibits a reality structured as *a set of ambiguous signs which gain their meaning from a past history* which emplots the production of these signs as a chain of events, eventually with a clear origin" (Brooks 74, *emphasis mine*). If the meaning of the signs resides with the history of the movement that deposited them (alternatively, we can say that the meaning of the territory is in the histories of territorialization), and if these histories need to be established (in other words, written, since meaning cannot reside in the event itself) for meaning to be apprehended, then it seems only a reasonable assumption that the formal properties of the physical trace

are tied to historical and narrative explication. The trace demands a story, which is to say that the trace, in order for it to be semiotically embodied, must rely, if not on the assimilating thrust of the proto-semiosis and on the uncanny manifestations it stimulates, then on the productive conveniences of anecdotal modes of demonstration and explication. *See this scar on my forehead? I was a child of four on a speedboat with my father when I fell off the deck of the boat and the propeller of the motor nicked my head.* Where resides the motivation to narrative? the pull, the tug, which we invariably feel before traces? This chapter attempts to answer some of these questions, first drawing out the mutual dynamic of literary and divinatory modes of reasoning around indexicals, and eventually seating this dynamic within the broader context of historiography at large. The dual promise of anecdotes (read textuality) and re-inscription (read repetition) are such central components of the psycho-semiotic dimensions of the trace as they are to historiography that they merit closer revision. In this chapter, I draw on Paul Ricoeur, Roman Jakobson, Joel Fineman and Susan Stewart to suggest that the formal dimensions of the trace, namely its abductive character, serves as a motivation to a specifically anecdotal mode of narrative explication that is the product both of the formal constraints posed by traces and a desire for the recovery and exchange of personal, situated stories of trauma within human rights discourse. While this is not meant as a mapping of the economy of narrative exchange in the human rights arena, this chapter suggests itself as an attempt to recover the testamental uses of traces as well as the conveniences of medico-legal historiography to the human rights arena. In a sense, it seeks to get to the heart of what it means to find a story in every grave and why such a banal truth is perpetually intriguing to contemporary audiences.

For better or for worse, narrativistic readings of historiography have attuned us to thinking of historical understanding as the effect of narration and not, as was commonly believed, the strict application of logic to historical evidence. What are truth or historical realism if nothing other than narrative coherency? Though few ever denied the existence of the extra-symbolic, narrative accounts of historical events became a contentious issue because we were made re-aware that historical meaning is captive to semiological and rhetorical mediations. It seemed the last nail was hammered to the coffin when fictional and historical narratives were shown by Hayden White to depend on identical formal and figurative techniques (White Fictions 22) and, indeed, the widespread application of semiological and narratological interpretative methods had a heavy hand in shifting our attention away from the semiotics of logic and towards narrative structure and/or issues of representation animating historical discourse. The general effect was the shattering of generic boundaries; beyond their claims to truth and accuracy, historical narratives followed the same structure, the same grammar, as their fictional counterparts. The narratological approach, elsewhere criticized for subordinating the richness of individual narratives to geometric application (Gibson 5), and by some for sending the referent into permanent exile (Ricoeur; Runia), radically altered our readings of historical texts: representation became the political and disciplinary battleground and whatever persuasiveness historical evidence was assumed to possess turned out a mere effect of representational processes. Factuality and evidentiality were posited by and through language and were considered the effect of rhetorical maneuvers; they were constituted through language more than they were thought to constitute it.

Looking to the linguistic behavior of historians and novelists and finding them to be the same, representationalism and narratology pulled the rug from under positivists and empiricists who denied the primacy of signification to historical reasoning. However, in the same breath, its accent on narrative representation and written texts distracted from the archival encounters and the semiological/semiotic dramas regularly held there. The deconstruction of narrative fidelity also meant that we explained away, or had no use for, the desire for referentiality expressed in the “referential impulse” (Butler) of historicism. If we’re not careful, the narratological perspective risks impressing upon us the sense that the writer’s task is only to plug a ‘geometrical’ or coherent ‘structure’ with data, but matters are never so simple even if we accept that narrative codes are the same across disciplines and accept that they are formative of historical meaning. This explains why the self-declared return to materiality and move away from historiography announced by those who are planning a rebellion against “narrativism” and “representationalism” does not in actual fact stray very far from issues of narrative concerns. One only has to recall that the archival encounter as forensic pathologists and anthropologists represent it *is* an alleged encounter with narratives, a site where stories are born and spun. The recuperative, and therefore nostalgic, thrust of the archival stages to the historiographical debate inadvertently redirects us to the material imperative to writing and to textuality; so, while the appeal of going back to the archive might be, for scholars, the prospect of distracting themselves of theories they have tired of hearing, the enduring appeal for human rights advocates and forensic scientists is not the muteness of the archive but its spectral and testimonial attributes. In a sense, the movement amounts to a topographical migration from the finished text to the site of ongoing literary

production. For us to “return to the archive” and bracket narrative for the sake of changing topics of discussion would be irresponsible—not only methodologically (our general purpose here is to read a tropology)—but also because it would be ignoring what stares us blankly in the face: the ritual of storytelling is perpetuated by the indexical properties of human remains. The repetition of narrative is promised in the archival drive (Derrida Archive).

There are psychoanalytic explanations available to us that would explain the craving for narration caused by and expressed for material remains or traces (some of which will be brought up in this chapter) but before entangling ourselves in issues of affect and desire, it would be wise to pause and consider the formal semiotic properties of organic traces that distinguish them from other modalities of signification and how they might offer formal stimulus to narrative. In other words, our task is first to consider the motivations that stand on the side of the sign before taking into account psychogenetic influences that might complicate and add flesh to the interpretative process. Before moving to extrinsic relations, the following detour draws on Paul Ricoeur’s reading of the trace, on a selection of basic distinctions established by narratologists, and on Roman Jakobson’s canonical Fundamentals of Language (1956) to isolate the formal and intrinsic properties of the indexical sign that motivate or function as a motivation to narrative in the semiotician. Therefore, having previously surveyed what distinguishes indexical signs from its counterparts, and having already established that traces are explicitly indexical, we can now address the indexical properties and laws that lend themselves to anecdotal and narrative explication. It begins with time.

Paul Ricoeur's second volume of his trilogy Time and Narrative offers the most thorough and extensive reading of the trace's relationship to time. Ricoeur's thesis is that the trace signifies first and foremost a passing of time, which, he argues, is conveyed in the trace's capacity to paradoxically communicate the event of something past by the fact of it enduring in the present. Reflecting on the semantic reverberations between past and passing, he writes: "Note the apt homonymy between 'passed' (*être passé*) (in the sense of having passed a certain place) and 'past' (*être passé*) (in the sense of having happened). This is not surprising" (Time 119). In other words, if traces and remains bear an existential connection to their object it follows that the event of the object leaving a trace should have happened in the past. How else, after all, would it exist in the first place? This basic rule of regularity and apparently banal truth is what makes it possible for us to apprehend the semiotic modality of traces prior even to determining their precise 'meaning'—the event, the object-cause, respective to each one. I can, for example, presume that a disturbance to a wall was caused by friction of something or someone against that wall without knowing what exactly caused it. Because I can apprehend a passing without identifying what did the passing means that temporality can be signified without my possessing the knowledge or the instruments to infer a precise sequence of events from the trace. Ricoeur's observation that 'pastness' is the preliminary meaning of the trace is really another way of saying that traces are abductive indices. Abductive indices are signs that have drifted from the contexts in which they were produced and endure in the present (Sonnessan "Indexicality" 2-3), but they also constitute the subcategory of indexes that builds on our assumption that a contiguous relation exists between the trace and the object. Unlike an arrow or a pointing finger, abductive indices

don't perform or establish contiguity but simply draws on the semiotician's assumption that contiguity is a part of the semiotic ground. Abductive indices, as Gören Sonnesan writes, supposes that a regularity exists between facts (Bouissac 307) or presuppose a law in the world, and it is this law of regularity which must be inferred and followed. This pre-semiotic moment is significant first because, as discussed in the last chapter, the indexical mode of relationality is that upon which such impalpable and loose attributes as "connection" and "presence" hinge, and it is also that which signifies the distance that separates the event of creation from the event of interpretation.

Ricoeur concludes that two conceptions of time "in mutual contamination" overlap and are accessible to observers by means of the trace: lived time or "calendar time" and universal or "astral time" (Time 104-120). The former refers to a linear and measurable conception of time. This perspective is highly empirical; being itself based on the "empiricist prejudice" that time is, in reality, linear (White 22). This empiricist prejudice also represents what most of us conventionally think about when we invoke "time." Calendars and clocks are fitting emblems since they metaphorically represent and measure the various segments with which we calculate the progression of time. Astral time, on the other hand, is the perspective of time to which vestiges apparently belong. The latter perspective is best described as existential. Ricoeur's thesis suggests that the spatial embodiment of pastness is in perpetual dynamic with but is distinct from the physical trace's *traceability* (i.e. the informational character of physical traces and the ever-increasing capacity of various actors—forensic scientists, medical practitioners, historians—to calculate the time that passed between the event of the trace and the event of analysis). All of this means that the trace functions as more than a mnemonic device

(vestige) but simultaneously serves as a record of linear temporal progression, both of which resonate and draw on a different conceptions of time even if they constantly bounce off one another.

How could the trace left in space refer back to the passage of a sought-for-object without our calculations concerning time that passed between them that is between the time of the passage and the trace it left? Immediately, datability with its “now,” “then,” “earlier,” and so on, is brought into play. However, no hunters or detectives would limit themselves to these vague references.

Datability without a specific date is of no interest to them. (Ricoeur Time 124)

The impulse to draw out the ontological relation between an event in the past and the brute fact of the trace’s presence presupposes that the semiotician registers the formal aspects of the indexical sign. The formal property of the trace *qua* sign (its existential motivatedness) must be inferred before the will to actualize it/trace it makes itself felt. In other words, temporal dissonance must first be glimpsed from the trace through the realization on the part of the semiotician that one particular (the representamen) is ontologically related to another particular (object). The temporal dissonance signified via abductive indexicality, itself a preliminary semiotic feat, is invariably motivated by the formal constraints of the trace as a ‘natural’ sign. Temporal dissonance is not up to convention; rather, it is only the first in a series of interpretants emergent from an initial acknowledgement that the presence of the trace is dependent on a relation to another that exists independently of the interpreting mind.

In directing attention towards the object, the index does not generate or characterize the object of our understanding as it would if we were attending the characteristics of the object itself. Instead, the interpretant of an index is just our understanding that the sign is standing for some object, nothing more. The later interpretants will complete this. (Atkin 164)

When the index is abductive as is the case with traces, completing the picture necessarily involves a tracing that is historical through and through. Thomas Sebeok, quoting Roman Jakobson, describes this property as “renvoi, or referral [...] The index, as it were, inverts causality [...] the vector of the index points to a bygone day in that a signans, the imprint of some foot in the sand, *temporally rebounds* to a signatum, the highly probable presence of some other” person (“Indexicality” 16, *emphasis mine*). The preliminary semiotic awareness of the trace’s status as sign and the motivated impulse to establish a correlation between it and an event in the past, in turn, motivates specific figures of speech and it is there, I want to suggest, that we can locate the stimulus to narrative. Flights of territorialization are calculable and “the trajectory of the passage like the tracing of the trace, is relentlessly linear” (Ricoeur 124). There is nothing banal or trivial about the property of traces that coincides and supports our belief in the orderly succession of time. The very measurability of traces reflects a structural motivation to the use of figures of speech (a.k.a. rhetoric) to transmit the conclusions drawn by the semiotician from material data. How are we to theorize this bond between form/intrinsic structure and explication? Simply: that even though the meaning of the trace cannot be attributed to the general structure of language (difference in signification), the intrinsic structural characteristic that *is* abductive indexicality (the representamen/object relation that crosses temporal boundaries) *is a motivated relation that must be followed through across time if it is to be followed at all.*

The trace is not a figure of speech for the obvious reason that there is nothing remotely linguistic about it, but the lapse of time glimpsed or abducted from the material trace must be “*actualized* in rhetoric” (Sebeok “Indexicality” 12). How does one

establish the anteriority inferred from traces if not by adopting tropic strategies? by emplotment? If we approach the issue from the perspective of the sign, and not from the finished text, we find that it is the meaning of the trace, the actualization of the trace's significance in language, which *needs* rhetoric. And is this not at heart why we can claim with confidence that traces lead to writing (Ong)? that there's a story to be had in every grave (Koff, Stover, Snow, Kirshner)? In effect, the will to narrative effected by the semiotics of the trace stems from the fact that it is difficult to describe the significance of the trace without having recourse to narrative modes of explication and this, precisely because temporality is a central component of indexicality.

Anteriority is fundamental: "Temporal succession, relations of cause/effect or of an effect to its cause, or else some space/time vinculum between an index and its dynamic object [...] lurk at the heart of indexicality" (Sebeok "Indexicality" 13); and, we are up for an incredible challenge if we think we can describe causation without having recourse to rhetorical operations. As Jonathan Culler drawing on Nietzsche explains in The Pursuit of Signs (1981), any temporal sequence requires a "tropological operation" typically deployed in narrative structures (183). Consider, for instance, that I should notice a bruise on my thigh one evening and, thinking back to the events in my day, conclude that the bruise was probably caused by bumping against a table after breakfast. The fact of the matter is that one can't explain or draw out contiguity without borrowing, at least minimally, on the building blocks of narrative structure.

Roman Jakobson's Two Fundamental Aspects of Language (1956) is the clearest on this point. While it is generally agreed that contiguity overlaps with and/or simulates causality in language, Jakobson's seminal analysis of contiguity and metaphor obviates

the question of causality altogether. True to his structuralist influences, Jakobson doesn't need to look to externalities such as causality to locate a will to narrative at the heart of contiguous relationality. Keeping in mind that registering cross-temporal contiguity characterizes indexical abductive reasoning, I want to revisit Jakobson's position on the similarity disorder identified in some language aphasiacs. My intention is not to reiterate the oft-cited and well-known analogy between indexicality and contiguity (so much is obvious) but to situate for the reader the contribution Jakobson's analysis brings to a literary theory of the index. Jakobson's work, I want to suggest, clearly situates narrativity at the heart of contiguity.

Jakobson's Fundamentals of Language is a deceptively rich analysis of language and speech. The argument is familiar even half a century later. The entire work hinges on the twin tropes; metaphor and metonymy, both of which are said to reflect the structures of language and speech selection. Looking to emissive and receptive aphasics, Jakobson concludes that speech is achieved through selection and substitution based on similarity and contiguity. These "two modes of arrangement" (Jakobson 75) are always operating in speech. The interlocutor must pick and choose linguistic units among a series of equivalents (i.e. child, infant, kid) and then organize these linguistic units in a specific order (i.e. My child is sick with the fever). Jakobson describes the former process "selection" and the latter "combination": "The addressee perceives that the given utterance (message) is a COMBINATION of constituent parts (sentences, words, phonemes, etc.) SELECTED from the repository of all possible constituent parts (the code)" (75, *capitalization in original text*). Ultimately, what this amounts to is that every single speech act is related to two groupings of linguistic signs, one of which is obviously

present (the utterance) and the other set which is presupposed but in abeyance (the words that could have been selected but were not).

However, it is when Jakobson illustrates the dual axis of language through the analysis of speech aphasia that we notice that his theory of a double-jointed linguistic structure does not preclude a discussion of environment and context, and this is because Jakobson must consider external relations of contiguity because it is used as a crutch by the aphasic who suffers from similarity disorder. So, while most of us are familiar with Two Fundamental Aspects of Language as a work that had major implications to our understanding of deep-linguistic structures, i.e., when Jacques Lacan applies Jakobson's theory to the unconscious (Chiesa 52), it is important to realize that Jakobson's clinical illustrations of similarity (and contiguity) disorder offer us a vantage point from which to consider the interaction of language and contexture. In the interest of clarity, a short summary of the similarity disorder is provided, after which we will consider its implications to a literary reading on the trace.

Jakobson's general contention is that the two patterns of speech aphasia reflect language's structuration across both paradigmatic and syntagmatic lines. Similarity disorder manifests itself in an aphasic's inability to initiate conversation, name objects, repeat words, or grasp the meaning of a sentence or word without relying on the context and surrounding environment. This form of aphasia is described as "reactive" (Jakobson 77) and "embedded in the verbal and non-verbal context" (Jakobson 78). This means that for the aphasic the metaphorical (paradigmatic) axis of language is entirely corrupted. The implicit linguistic codes that dictate that *flower/blossom/pansy* are equivalent units do not reach the speaker, nor do linguistic shorthands that would allow him or her to

shorten a word or sentence with conventionally agreed upon substitutes. In other words, even though the aphasic can speak, he is alienated from the socially contractual nature of language that direct the exchange and substitution of units in the abstract. That said, however, the aphasic suffering from similarity disorder has “intact contexture” (Jakobson 83), meaning that her speech reflects her unimpaired ability to grasp internal and external relations of contiguity. The aphasic patient can react to a sentence fragment, the same way that she can ascertain the relations of contiguity that make up her surrounding context (be it linguistic/conversation or external/environment). She immediately grasps the “gestalt” (87) to which a given object/linguistic unit belongs but would not be able to substitute any of its parts for another without getting lost.

In order to compensate for their respective dysfunctions, we are also told aphasics rely heavily on the rhetorical tropes that structurally parallel their bias. Those with similarity disorder are said to depend heavily on metonymic figures of speech (Jakobson 83), while those with contiguity disorder would rely on metaphoric language. On a certain level, this implies that the former is capable of substituting one lexical unit for another, but in line with Jakobson’s prior observations, this substitution is offered and suggested by the context (be it actual or linguistic) in which a given object of reference is embedded. Metaphor and metonymy fall along different patterns of verbal aphasia, and Jakobson reads the preference for one or other figure a speech, not as an abnormality, but as the extreme embodiment of broad cultural trends. “In normal verbal behavior both processes are continually operative, but careful observation will reveal that under the influence of a cultural pattern, personality, and verbal style, preference is given to one of the two processes” (90). Forensic fiction, for instance, clearly exhibits degrees of

similarity disorder since it bases itself on the contiguous relations in the context of a crime/genocide. The drama of contiguity is a territorial movement that assimilates different elements across and within a landscape, a horizontal movement that draws the gaze from one object to another within a given context. How, then, does the horizontal thrust of contiguity relate to narrative?

In delineating the aphasic's incapacity to speak without leaning on contextual markers and/or grounding himself on structural/external relations of contiguity, Jakobson writes: "To the stimulus *hut* one response was *burnt out*; another, *is a poor little house*. Both reactions are predicative; but the first creates a purely narrative context, while in the second there is a double connection with the subject *hut*: on the one hand, a positional contiguity, and on the other a semantic similarity" (91, *italics in original*). The aphasic with a similarity disorder, relying as he must on contiguity, is prone to offer forth a "narrative context"—the "house (is) burnt out". Earlier in the text, Jakobson cites similar instances where patients express their language disturbance by taking recourse in descriptions of the use or the action associated with a given object when they are at a loss to name it. I want to suggest that alongside the propensity to use synecdochic or metonymical figures, which Jakobson clearly considers the manifestation of a verbal preference by those with similarity disorder, that we bring to the foreground narrative as a second order repercussion of a heavy reliance on contiguity that are not offered in the spatial contours of the context: the verbs, actions that are presupposed and which must be provided a "narrative context" in speech. The incorporation of events within the field of contiguity echoes Susan Stewart's observation in On Longing (1984) that the

metonymical movement is not limited to objects alone, but also extends to experiences and actions (136).

Perhaps the reason why we ignore the narrative imperative latent in contiguity and contextualization is that Jakobson's later turn to literary analysis (92-96) of poetic and prosaic genres makes it incredibly difficult to make a point of it in the midst of literary texts, where that impulse to narrative would itself be subsumed within greater narratives. Forensic and detective dramas are probably the closest examples of narrative contexts at our disposal since they thrive on the peculiarities of similarity disorder: while they have no problem naming objects, the full meaning of the traces they detect are in the external and presupposed relations of contiguity. In any case, Jakobson's analysis demonstrates how presupposed external relations of contiguity, which are not offered spatially but also temporally) serves as a productive contingency to narrative when an interlocutor needs to communicate this in speech.

Metonymy is not a highly regarded figure of speech, principally because it isn't reserved to the conceptual level as metaphor allegedly is, and for that reason, is considered by many to be less creative, even less interesting. Hugh Bredin's article "Metonymy" (1986) tracks former attempts by various schools of thought (principally Group *u*), to situate metonymic relations along purely conceptual terms, i.e. "connotative connections" (49), in order to break its dependency on the referent and elect it to the platform of structuralism. But reading Bredin it seems these attempts were never too successful. The movement of metonymy repeats the map of temporal and spatial coordinates that most of us already assume to be true and even if these are 'assumptions' effected by the structures of signification, the phenomenological is difficult to bracket out

entirely. “A metonymy neither states nor implies the connection between objects involved in it. For this reason, it relies wholly upon those relations between objects that are habitually and conventionally known and accepted” (Bredin 57). If metonymy is the taken-for-granted of the workings of the life-world, what then are we to make of relations that are not widely presumed but must be demonstrated by an esoteric community to the general population? Is this not, after all, the case with forensic science, where the relations of contiguity between the length of a femur bone and life-span of the former owner of the bone is not readily available to the layman but is to a select group of knowledgeable individuals? In those circumstances textual and visual metonymic explication must turn itself over to narrative means, and in this way, becomes ‘creative’; while it may not create new relations among things (as would metaphor), it is creative in so far as it inaugurates its own withdrawal and paves the way for the production of a text. And texts, we know, are difficult to contain.

The argument that we could describe contiguity without narration (not simply presuppose it) is even more preposterous because describing an abductive context collapses the narratological distinction between description and narrative. In A Dictionary of Narratology (1980), Gerald Prince explains: “description is the representation of objects, situations, or (non purposeful, non volitional) happenings in their spatial rather than temporal existence, their topological rather than chronological functioning, their simultaneity rather than succession” (19). In other words, description biases space whereas narration biases chronological succession. The generic distinction between description and narration is a weak one; and, as Peter Schwenger and Hayden White have recently shown, description is not any less interventionist or subjective than

narration²¹. Nevertheless, I believe the distinction carries pedagogical merits here because the distinction, as fragile and contentious as it might be, serves, as a useful exercise in thinking of what description without narrativity would actually entail.

To underline the gravity of narrational operations to the description of indexicality, we only need to consider what describing indexes without recourse to the basic figures of narration entails: the tautology of enumeration and the ahistoricism of synchronicity²². “The index asserts nothing,” reminds Charles Sanders Peirce. Abductive indexes are dumb. Like all metonymic figures, they merely incite you to move somewhere else. Suspend the abductive index’s link to linear time and beneath the topological adhesive, strings give way to the staticness of dots.²³ Fingerprint. Tooth. Dent. Scratch. Groove. Hair. Saliva. Semen. Blood. Bullet. Laceration. Mark. Shoe. Fissure. Flake. Thread. Trauma. Track. Smell. Spill. Drift. Oil. Feces. Patch. We love enumerating traces—each carries so much potential because we know enough of them to recognize that they displace the past in the present, but all of them are still fumbling dumb artifacts before we take up their cause (no pun intended). In its medium as vestige or artifact, pastness is valued in of itself and datability serves no purpose.

The performative, and therefore rhetorical, gesture required for the re-animation of ‘mute signs’ should be obvious now: “The archeologist’s craft consists in transforming indexicalities of decayed cultures into proto-indices and indices accessible to us. The

²¹ In “The Fictions of Factual Representation” (1976) Hayden White writes: “The issue of ideology points to the fact that there is no value-neutral mode of emplotment, explanation, or even description of any field of events, whether imaginary or real, and suggests that the very use of language itself implies or entails a specific posture before the world which is ethical, ideological, or more generally political: not only all interpretation, but also all language is politically contaminated.” (34-35)

²² I borrow from Susan Stewart’s *On Longing*: “The collection seeks a form of self-enclosure which is possible because of its ahistoricism” (151).

²³ Consider a poignant Norman Bryson quote selected by Peter Schwenger in *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects* (2007): “Still life is the world minus its narratives or, better, the world minus its capacity for generating narrative interest” (Bryson qtd. in Schwenger 99).

signs which he reads aloud for us where merely indexical grounds in the ongoing process of the bygone world” (Sonnessan “Indexicality” 3). What Goren Sonnessan means by “indexical ground” is nothing other than the relationalities always already cementing every trace within the fabric of the world. Everything is connected or contiguous to something else. What the archeologist, forensic scientist and other diviner professions do are isolate and trace those indexical relations such that those specific to a given trace are made intelligible to their audience. Knowing this, we can clearly discern the necessarily oratorical facet of divinatory methods, especially when their epistemological validity is not yet known among the greater public. The autopsy theatres of the 18th century were oratorical performances, a theatrics of scientific observation (van Dijk); the news coverage of Dr. Clyde Snow, Eric Stover, and other forensic practitioners on the field are no different. A case has to be made about the merits of the advances in medico-legal analyses of bodily remains. The place of narration, oratorical explication required for the communication of the “laws of nature,” the relations of cause, contiguity and effect presupposed or inferred from traces is not solely the outcome of formal stimulus on the side of the sign. True, the trace must be traced across temporal boundaries, contiguity must be inferred and communicated due to the very nature of the sign itself; but, there are other motivations that come from without. Hippocrates, himself considered by many the father of semiotics, made it very clear that narrative explication is crucial to building the authority of the semiotician of ‘natural’ signs.

For if he discover and unaided by the side of his patients the present, the past, and the future, and fill in the gaps of the account given by the sick, he will be the more believed to understand the cases, so that men will confidently entrust themselves to him for treatment. Furthermore, he will

carry out the treatment best is he know beforehand from the present symptoms what will come later. (Hippocrates qtd. in Fineman 66-67)

So, while the skilled doctor may infer the 'cause' and estimate the progression of a disease, its narration is doubly rhetorical in that it both fleshes out the relations that are inferred by the doctor and persuades the patient of the truth of his inferences. While the relations in the 'real world' between symptom and disease only exists to the patient through the performative aftermath of narrative explication, to the doctor their relation is discerned through inference and sign alone. In circumstances of public scientific explication, the historiographic detour serves as an authenticating gesture both to his episteme and to the actuality of the relation uniting the trace to its cause by making publicly available forms of knowledge normally honed by professional enclaves. However, the ritualistic narration from physical signs invariably naturalizes the assumption that traces are sites of narration. It is not just that non-intentional signs are metaphorically equated with typographic markings as we saw in "The Anatomy of an Analogy," it is that the contingent need to draw out contiguity is necessarily historiographic. The question now is: what kinds of histories are produced by the actualization of indexicality/contiguity?

Literary theorist and new historicist Joel Fineman conjectures that Hippocrates' "medico historiographic method" marks the beginning of historiography because it was, he explains, the model upon which Thucydides would later draw upon for his 'scientific' and 'objective' historical method. However, Fineman goes on to argue that Hippocrates' medical semiotics was formative of a distinctly anecdotal historiographic form that subtends, disrupts and stands simultaneously against and with *les grands récits* (Lyotard)

of history. His chapter “The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction” (1991) explains that the anecdote is a literary form, the brevity and scale of which sets it in tension from the teleological inertia of historical narratives. The potential for “small stories” to fissure the fabric of grand histories and at once stake a claim to historical reality, made it such that the anecdotal form has received significantly more attention among academics. The anecdote’s alleged claim to the “real”, Fineman’s most dubious though most seductive claim, is attributed to the reality effect of the mass of details visible from the smaller scale. The smallness, the peculiarity, the irreplaceably and the extremely contingent nature of the event which anecdotes communicate is why Fineman considers the anecdote the building block of all historiography, the “*historeme*, i.e., the smallest minimal unit of the historiographic fact” (67). The anecdote, we could say, is the historiographical equivalent of the microscopic.

The anecdotal, as a formal category, overlaps and brings together two distinctly different historiographical forms. We can welcome an analogy between eyewitness and medico-legal testimony. Consider, for example, the definition of “anecdote” offered by the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “a short or amusing or interesting story about a real incident or person ii) an account regarded as unreliable.” Joel Fineman’s description of medico-legal histories *qua* anecdotes distances them from the stigma of unreliability; whereas the first-person narrative accounts of eyewitness testimonies are tainted with expectations of fallibility. Medico-legal micro-histories are not first person narratives, but rather narratives spun from the contingencies of having to explain and account for the presence of a trace in the present. The anecdotal form—especially when put forward as evidence, hovers precariously between hearsay and the distressing vicissitudes of first-

person narration and memory. It constitutes the form of testimony that is inherently “self-referential” (Ricoeur)—*I was there. I saw it, it’s true.* While is also a privileged entry into the complex articulation of personal and political (Gallop), it is also insurmountably private.

Fineman’s interjection allows for a better understanding of the limits, but also the appeals, of forensic historiography for human rights documentation. The trace offers a formal stimulus to narrative, but it is a narrative so peculiar and so specific to a time and space and a specific individual event in the past, that each could not on their own tell the story of, for instance, the Rwandan genocide. Forensic historiographies also conveniently and sizably fit the already anecdotal nature of eyewitness testimonies—the potential of which is often presented by NGO advocates practitioner’s as a threat to the coherency of larger narratives offered by governments or political factions. The “small story” of the individual rape victim, the murdered child, may contradict larger historical narratives or corroborate them, but they cannot in themselves form them.

The sheer mass of anecdotal narratives published in the news, fictionalized and dramatized in forensic dramas such as *Crime Scene Investigation*, *Bones*, *Autopsy: Confessions of a Medical Examiner*, etc., or reported back from the field from Physicians for Human Rights investigations suggests that medico-legal narratives have a value other than the need to establish scientific authority. Why is it that the bodily archives of the forensic scientist *as sites of narration* are so compelling? Why is our appetite for medico-legal histories seemingly insatiable? Schaffer and Smith’s work on the rise of personal testimonies, and trauma narratives in the human rights domain, suggests that the

postmodern practice of storytelling reflects and is shaped by capitalist/Western economic and cultural forces where the “individual’s uniqueness and unique story, and in individual rights, has gained international currency” (11). There is, they write, “an international market for local stories” (20)—one could say, a commodification on the anecdotal form, the “small story” that infuses every person’s spatio-temporal trajectory with the prospect of the archivable, unrepeatable. The personal, local, *anecdotal* story is unrivaled in its particularity. The medico-legal micro-history is also unrivaled in its uniqueness. No two fingerprints are the same. Small stories (small details) are what give criminals away (Ginzberg), and like the sorrowful personal stories of traumatic suffering that have dominated human rights discourse since the Second World War, the medico-legal history is rife with sensational accounts of suffering and physical affliction.

The particularity of the medico-legal anecdote hinges on the peculiarities of indices: “The body of any vertebrate, including human, is composed of a veritable armamentarium of more or less indexical markers of unique selfhood” (Sebeok 19). The infinite diversity of the human body, which the ‘father’ of forensic anthropology Jean Bertillon is famous for having discovered that no two individuals shared the exact bodily proportions, also means that the information gleaned from the medico-legal investigations serves the liberalist values of individualism embraced by the human rights movement. They approximate the biographical by remaining unique to the here and now of the body and of the crime scene, but in their identity with personal testimonies they also instill a hierarchy among them: medico-legal anecdotes are superior to eyewitness accounts because the materiality of the trace externalizes the experience of the deceased victim. Testimony from traces takes the interiority of the personal anecdote and

externalizes it through the material crutch of the organic sign, thus outdistancing the hermetic interiority of the living victim's memory. The personal and inaccessible are made share-able, someone else's private moments now available and disposable within the exchange economy of trauma narratives. The trinketry of forensic details takes on value when they are taken up by medico-legal histories—they become, for the moment, accessible, communal. “Après la deuxième guerre mondiale nous sommes tous des juifs” (Finkelkraut).²⁴

If medico-legal histories fit the discursive model of human rights advocacy in its particularity and its singularity, it also feeds into contemporary human rights discourse by conceptually and chronologically collapsing the archival and the narrative. Drawing on Susan Stewart's writings on the souvenir, I want to suggest that the instrumentality of medico-legal anecdotes to the general economy of contemporary story telling is sustained and posed by the irreplaceable (and therefore non-reproducible) status of the physical trace. Irreplaceability attracts story telling but when irreplaceable traces form abductive contexts it renders narration exigent. This is true not only because abductive contexts rely on narration for the purposes of actualization and authentication, but also because the distance between the trace and the event acts as a formal stimulus to a desire to recover the past and simultaneously ensures the prospect of narrative repetition.

The cleavage of time signified by the organic sign is a void “experienced as loss; it is also experienced as a surplus of signification” (Stewart 135). The muteness of physical traces

²⁴ This is inspired from Alain Finkelkraut's The Future of a Negation: Reflections on the Question of Genocide (1998) and Le juif imaginaire (1980) and is meant to hint the perverse repercussions of the mass appropriation of victim narratives, where the division between victim and perpetrator is circumvented through identification. Finkelkraut, for example, considers the euphoric identification of the European community with the Jewish victims after the Second World War a rhetoric that is ethically fraught.

drag along with them is excessive in their potentiality. The negative space hollowed out by the distance separating the sign from the moment of its production surfaces as a gnawing meaningless-ness in the same place where a semiotic relationality is already discerned. Signification is already happening—something is related to something else—but everything is still abstract except for the trace that is pain-full, both too full with content and yet too empty of everything else. It is frustrating to discern a relationality and lack the data to actualize it. That structural lack, so to speak, never really goes away for even in the phantasmatic movements of synecdoche or metonymy, the recuperative movement is always already a movement—a move away—that figures loss even as it tries to abolish it (Butler 71). Such is the plight of language, every attempt to grasp anything in full is also to displace, to move things about and to seek satisfaction by being once-removed from that which we seek. With the trace we are always once removed and through narrative we repeat our fate even as we delude ourselves of its opposite. With the trace, as with the trope, you can't stay put in the same place. *Meaning is in the drift*. The referent, or the object, to which the trace relates is always somewhere else—and like the referent which theories of language lost with the rise of semiology—the referent of the trace is a loss that we fumble to regain through its intermediary: the waste it leaves behind.

Susan Stewart's chapter "Objects of Desire" is primarily concerned with the language of longing and nostalgia that surrounds the souvenir and the collection, but in it she masterfully maps out the dynamic between anteriority experienced as loss and the concomitant and ritualistic inauguration of narrative. According to Stewart, narrative is

motivated by the experience of loss and in an exchange economy; this loss is also experienced as a promise of reportability. She writes:

We do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative. [...] Yet is only by means of its material relation to that location (where the event took place) that it acquires its value.” (135)

The longing for experiences that lie beyond our reach and cannot be re-experienced arises, Stewart explains, from the fact that our postmodern experience of the world is increasingly mediated through mechanical modes of production that heighten the sense that ‘authentic’ experiences are further retracting in the distance. While her comments concern souvenirs, the interaction between lack and textuality is one that can easily be transferred onto forensic traces within the human rights domain for the very reason that forensic traces are valued as sites of narration that will report events that would be otherwise forgotten or impossible to recover. The experiences of genocides where witnesses are absent are forever lost, their stories enduring only in the exchange and reiteration of testimonies. Thus, traces are prized in their incapacity to reproduce experiences and in their ability to “promise a text” (Cixous).

The question of repetition, however, is not circumvented altogether in that the reporting of experiences and events that have escaped us emerges as a derivative pleasure—the pleasure experienced from momentarily recovering the facts of the event is extended and displaced onto the pleasures of hearing and telling stories, such that the practice of collecting traces also coincides with the pleasures of reporting the findings. It is precisely because traces don’t speak for themselves, precisely because “indexes assert nothing” that the pleasures of reportability and narrative exchange are sustained, upheld

and expressed in the archival drive. The enduring muteness of organic signs is the structural abyss that ensures the ritualistic repetition of a narrative.

Derrida reads the archival drive as the death drive. However, against more wide spread interpretations of the death drive as an instinct to self-annihilation, other contemporary scholars have emphasized the productive effectivity of repetition animated in and through the drive. Slavoj Žižek argues that the death drive is “the Freudian term for immortality” (qtd. in Delpech-Ramey 33), where the very insistence constitutive of repetition inadvertently emerges as a process, or practice, that works, despite itself, against the disappearance it supposedly yearns. As Lacan, quoting Sade, explains: “A philosopher in antiquity called war *the mother of all things*.” (Sade qtd. in Lacan Ethics 210, *italics original*) Žižek’s qualification is lacanian in so far as he aligns the death drive with culture and the symbolic²⁵, and not, as Freud did, with a biological impulse to return to an inorganic state. Putting aside the contradictions and complex hermeneutic disputes surrounding the death instinct, I want to reiterate the Lacanian reading of death drive as an expression of the will to start anew, to create something from nothing. Hence, the paradoxical insistence of a destructive drive actually triggers a cycle of production. The death drive is productive, and the insistence of the signifier is only the refusal of desire to surrender. Precisely because the event of the past cannot be recovered, because it belongs to a beyond that is only available to us in the fragmented deposits we later take up as traces, the struggle to overcome the mediation of language and, in the end, the erasure of the archive that is expressed in the death drive, only multiplies the signifier.

²⁵ See the chapter “The Death Drive” in his Seminar on Ethics and Psychoanalysis, where Lacan aligns the death drive with history. Hence, the appropriation of Sade, who proposes that crime and destructive practices contribute to a sort of equilibrium. Lacan writes: “Production is an original domain, a domain of creation *ex nihilo*, insofar as it introduces into the natural world the organization of the signifier” (214).

Longing for what would bring about the death of desire and the death of language is to inaugurate language in the world.

The productive aftermaths of the archival death drive are anecdotal narratives. It is an expectation that is marketed and sold by human rights practitioners, human rights groups and charlatans. The forensic turn within human rights ultimately means is that we are witnessing a veritable rise of medico-legal anecdotes as a genre of historiography that suggests itself as the equivalent of spoken testimonies. The repeated insistence of forensic scientists of the testamental value of forensic evidence is at once a reflection of the productive consequences of abductive indices and the place of the latter in an exchange economy where trauma narratives, small stories, circulate in the name of human rights.

Closing Thoughts: Paranoia, Aggressivity and Human Rights

It is difficult to offer forth a conclusion when our tropology leaves us with several questions and few certainties. There are nevertheless a few worth repeating outright. This piece reflected on a historically verifiable transfer of oral testimony to testimonial trace in the rhetoric of forensic human rights advocates. Each chapter read this tropic drift against a grounded, and I think consistent, conception of the limitations and possibilities of indexical signification. Traces do not tell stories, do not possess any intrinsic meaning, do not testify to their objects; but within our forensic culture they are libidinal zones caught in economies of desire that also constitute formal motivations to narrative explication and anthropomorphization. It is tempting, given the comparative semiotic ineptitude of physical traces to want to cease reading or seeking meaning. But if I cared only for what was real about the materiality of traces, I would have had to lead you to trauma, the Lacanian Real, the Kristevan abject. I do not deny the place of the abject, trauma or the Real—especially when death and genocidal scenes are at stake—but if my analysis angled itself along these terms the theatrics and the drama of meaning, with all that is ethically fraught about it, would disappear before our eyes.

Eelco Runia, Dutch historian and psychologist, recently complained that trauma literature “cater(s) to the same need to reflect on time and memory, failure and success” but in a way that is politically correct in today’s alleged crisis of representation (4). The politics of representation and trauma are copular; they belong to a “structure of feeling” (Williams) and both struggle with the duplicity of language and its incapacity to assimilate and offer a perfect reflection of the real; and both, regardless of the

misappropriations of a handful of historians, struggle with our relation to events of the past. Broaching the topic of history and representation today means to be subject to “widely held assumptions about the constitutive failure of linguistic representation in the post-Holocaust, post-Hiroshima, Post-Vietnam era” (Leys Genealogy 268). Ruth Leys explains in Trauma: A Genealogy (2000) that the catastrophic events of the last several decades are thought to have inaugurated a “post-traumatic century” (Felman and Laub qtd. in Leys 268) where our perennial inability to assimilate them meaningfully causes us to re-experience the violence of the events even as they elude us. To over-simplify things, the post-traumatic era places survivors in the paradoxical position of “listening to [,] truths that are unspoken—or unspeakable” (Felman and Laub xiii-xiv). Much of the post-modern interest in the question of representation and history, therefore, bears a filial relation to the supposedly ‘original’ trauma (the Jewish Holocaust of the Second World War). The “taboo against meaning,” which Runia perceives at the intersection of representationalism and trauma literature, indexes the ubiquitous influence trauma literature (and the Holocaust as phantasmatic origin) has had on discussions of historical representation, as it does the corresponding rhetorical and ethical crisis brought about by linguistic scepticism. In fact, Runia’s disparagement registers an ethical conundrum at the heart of the postmodern historiography: how should we respond and where are we confronted with a need to respond?

The modality of address generated by some adherents of a popular brand of trauma literature could be said to correspond to “a mode of existence” (Caruth 100) conditioned by the impossibility of responding to traumatic events. The impasse preventing the symbolic rehabilitation of difficult events not only retains the witness

and/or survivor in a state of suspended consciousness but this self-same cluelessness actualizes a bond, a sense of obligation, between the living and dead, victim and perpetrator. Indeed, submitting and familiarizing others with the “impact of incomprehensibility” (Caruth 6) is central to the performance of this scholarly literature and proposed rhetoric. Because the psyche is fissured by the traumatic event, theorist Cathy Caruth has argued that the address of the other (the dead, if you will) is located precisely in the “language of trauma,” in the unwitting repetition of the traumatic event in the survivor and interlocutor alike. Repetition, as a form of deferred action, is what allows the *voice* of the other to be heard despite its elusiveness. “The language of trauma,” a language constituted through the aporias of language, is a performative achievement that precludes understanding of its cause even as it makes itself felt. The reenactment of trauma or, alternatively, the *transmission* of trauma (Caruth; Leys) is presented as a mode of a-symbolic action generative of encounters with the real (Lacanian); “a speaking that awakens others” (Caruth 108) to the experience of trauma. Thus, the repetition and transmission of traumatic incomprehension is a rhetoric; the summons of the dead and of the traumatized are conveyed precisely in the lapses of signification. Caruth’s theory explicitly exposes the willed functional effect of her scholarship: it places the interlocutor in a position to listen “to the address of another, an address that remains enigmatic yet demands a listening, (and) a response” (9). Caruth’s work on trauma is questionable (and Ruth Leys makes a convincing case that it lacks any credibility whatsoever, principally because it is based on faulty empirical research) but it is emblematic of a widespread impulse to privilege those occasions where the orders of signification are unsettled. We do well to take notice of the incessant way in which

discussions pertaining to death, corpses, and their witnessing lead us to aporias, structural gaps, and the limits of signification. But is this academic analogue of a ‘moment of silence’ the only reasonable way to respond to the conundrum we face?

Cathy Caruth wants us to situate the “voices of the dead” in the language of trauma, forensic scientists want us to see the voices of the dead on the side of physical traces. I am suspicious of both. Should we substantiate the presence of the dead—the meaning of their trauma—in the aporias, there where representation slips away because we can’t face the truth? or with physical traces where representation also seems to evaporate as an issue? Trauma and traces both promise the same thing: an escape hatch from the messiness of representation; both want a rhetoric without mediation because both claim they are *really* tied to the past. At least that is how the story goes. We *really* have to wonder how far the analogy between traumatic testimony and testimonial traumas really extends—even their genealogies seem to overlap. If a rhetoric of traumatic witnessing is traced back to the Second World War, the same goes for the Humanities preoccupation with trauma. But what about meaning?

Meaning is messy. Meaning is where we think we are and where we project ourselves. Meaning is ethically contentious. If there is one substantive (but symmetrical) difference between traumatic witnessing and forensic trace, it is that trauma *takes the place of* meaning with the former and forensic traces ask us to anticipate meaning. And so the question is what impact will this have on a wider scale (i.e. what sort of subjectivity does this create)? And what might this mean for human rights?

Paranoia

The question of anticipation was regularly brought up throughout the previous chapters. The rhetoric of forensic science asks us to wait for meaning. Eric Stover and Clyde Snow in Srebrenica do not know what exactly they will find, but they have an inkling that it is worth their time and ours. A forensic pathologist leads us to an autopsy chamber and informs us that every corpse tells a story. The fact of meaning is posited but as of yet, it is not embodied. This is suspicion; like a woman suspicious that her husband might be unfaithful starts to record his comings and goings, the time he calls and the times he does not. She avoids washing his trousers. She smells his shirt collar. He mentioned the neighbor twice last week; maybe she's the mistress? When the forensic scientist is called to a place suspected of holding proof of war crimes and rights abuse, everything felt to be significant must be recorded. If there is a mishap, the scene is "contaminated." Such is the cumulative effect of abductive indices, which we explored in "The Way of the Anecdote": "It doesn't matter what it means, it's still signifying. [...] The paranoid shares this impotence of the deterritorialized signs assailing him from every direction" (Deleuze and Guattari 112). The forensic culture reinforces our already paranoid subjectivity. We can never know in advance what will signify what, but we are certain that the substance of the grave is meaningful. How is it possible that a sign be meaningful and not signify anything? Chapter Two "The Trace *qua* Index" distinguished between meaning and information, and we saw that information is not a requisite to meaning. Meaning is a subjective phenomenon that is implicated even when it is merely assumed. Because "meaning always refers to another meaning" (Psychoses 119), as Lacan says, anything

can become meaningful. Information has nothing to do with it. Information is not compulsory for meaning to be an issue, culture is.

Aggressivity and Human Rights

We are all paranoiacs, according to Lacan, given that our egos are structurally paranoiac. As subjects of the imaginary we are so desperate to fully embody the Ideal-ego that once we recognize that ideal in another we fear that it will take our place, and so we compete with it and, in the extreme, desire the death of our rival.²⁶ The paranoia of the imaginary differs slightly from the paranoia of the forensic scientist, but both in historical and subjective terms occupy the same place. The paranoid subjectivity that presents itself in our forensic episteme coincides with an aggressivity discernible in human rights discourse. Human rights discourse is structurally paranoiac as well. Being premised on a rhetoric of identification it has the advantage of serving as an imaginary lure for the witness and bystander and so, involves the other emotionally and has him ‘step in his shoes.’ Lacan shared a poignant anecdote: ‘“Take upon yourself, he [the patient to the analyst] tells us, “the suffering that weighs so heavily on my shoulders; but I can see that you are far too content, composed, and comfortable to be worthy of bearing it” (“Aggressivity” 15).’ There is a frustration that comes from sharing one’s suffering with the other. The victim resents the unnecessarily interested bystander but also, the bystander responds in kind with his own imaginary aggressivity.

It would seem counter to logic or common sense that we should envy the victim but the culture of human rights and its heavy reliance on identification is already showing

²⁶ See Lacan’s dissertation La psychose paranoïaque et ses rapports avec la personnalité (1975)

its aggressivity. A television advertisement for the Campaign for Diversity airing at the present time demonstrates the conundrum perfectly: "I am a Muslim when I read about discrimination. I am a Jew when I read about the Holocaust." The fact is that the teenager who is coming to this realization is *not* Jewish, and the girl who is standing upright in the commercial is *not* disabled. Do we really have a reason to be surprised to find aggressivity wield its head when testimony leads to pan-traumatism? When divisions between self and other are blurred? The problem of aggressivity is doubly felt when resentment and envy are directed at the victims. Alain Finkielkraut in The Future of a Negation: The Question of Genocide (1998) is concerned that the widespread identification with the victims of the Jewish Holocaust has doubled into a perverse anti-Semitism, where advocates of the victims of other atrocities (no less worthy of our attention) feel that the "Jewish question" is monopolizing. This is imaginary aggressivity in its extreme and it is what makes it commonplace for two individuals to hypothetically argue with each other whether or not the gay white man has it worse off than the brown hetero woman. Rivalry is a symptom already making itself apparent in the identification between victim, indifferent bystander, and perpetrator and it is still an open question what the combination of traumatic transmission and imaginary rivalry will do to our conception of man-made mass death and/or structural oppression.

We do not know what forensic science will bring to human rights investigations because like the child dead-set on his own image in the mirror, we are still in a phase of anticipation. Forensics is still only a promise to the human rights domain, a promise that already has a considerable number of international organizations, factions and political

bodies sharing in the gamble. If anything, our tropology leaves us with a few important questions about its future. What will we lose or gain if eyewitness testimony is superseded by forensic evidence? What kind of subjectivity are we upholding and cementing as more and more of our world acquires a forensic value? What are we risking, within and beyond the academy, as we veer our attentions away from meaning? And, what, we have to ask ourselves, will be the consequence of a discourse where human rights, trauma and victim testimony are only iterable via identification?

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