

Chapter 2

Collection of Identity: Body Prints and Identification

Abstract In the second chapter genetic prints are examined as representations in relation to what they represent. In science and repressive apparatus of the state body prints are considered to be authentic indexical signs, while in some recent art projects the genetic language and the issue of identification are challenged. The relations between the signifying structures and the body are analyzed in this chapter. Collecting body prints and the issue of identification are comprehended as strategies for biopower to be profoundly exercised over individual bodies and over populations (biopolitics).

We live in an age in which societies are accelerating the development of technologies that track individuals in space and time. There are several ways of mapping identity that take place at the same time and in different manners. Contrary to the mapping of space through the body (to grasp the memory of one's experiences), which so far has been performed only for research purposes, there is another mapping that is taking place in the "real" world, in the world in which we all live. It is a mapping that is putting one into other maps, of not only cities, airports, and countries, but also those of internet locations and social networks of all kinds. In the previous chapter we discussed several attempts to map the human body in order to map "the human"; in this chapter attention is instead devoted to mapping the individual through the body prints collected in social or political maps. At the current moment there are geographical areas in which surveillance technology is already collecting so many location points of our bodies in space that for each of us there is a file with enough data to establish a personal map of our movements in that area in a certain period of time. Not only is the life of each individual being tracked and stored so that any sequence can be reconstituted in a moment and then analyzed, but also there are patterns being established from our repeated actions, trajectories, and meetings so that it is possible to calculate and draw probable future personal maps and establish possible connections with other personal maps. It is not our aim here to discuss how this information could be used or "misused" for the analysis and prediction of our behavior in the service of economic, political, intelligence, military or religious goals, nor do we intend to discuss what drives

power to do such things. We are interested instead in the fact that our bodies are being topo-graphed and chrono-graphed, and particularly in the fact that this is being achieved by processes of mediation and with techniques of body printing and body graphing. The burgeoning use of such technology to collect our body data and to map it establishes the very foundations for an unprecedented exercise of bio-power over individual bodies and mass populations.

In order to establish such maps, various sorts of body representations need to be collected, since representations are what assure information about the presence of a particular person at a particular location, the data which will then put that person on a map of a particular area. The technologies used have to be as precise as possible, they have to store as many details as possible and also collect various sorts of data: the face will not be scanned, digitalized and then recognized from one perspective only; perspectives will instead be combined to establish a three-dimensional simulation of the head, visual recordings of physiognomy will be supplemented by iris prints, etc. In this particular context, the most important aspect of such body-graphy is the basic requirement that needs to be fulfilled in order for this mapping technology to fulfill its function: representation has to be *caused* by the body, there has to be a trace of the body, the representation has to be body's *print* in order to serve as proof of bodily existence at that particular location and at that particular time. In this sense one could say that the representation has to be reliable and infallibly determine that one particular individual was present at that particular train station at the time of the bombing. In this sense the technologies of body printing have a particular function: *to establish the presence of a person with certainty*. Our aim here is thus to discuss the infallibility of these body prints. The development of technologies that will assure the greater amount of detail in a scan, the development of new technologies for body printing, the increase of surveillance locations: each of these factors attests to the fact that present technology must be insufficient, otherwise it would not need any improvements.

The other aspect that we want to discuss and that is connected with the issue of the relationship of the body print to the body itself is the issue of *identity*. It is not only important that prints verify the presence of a body in time and space, they also need to testify to the fact that the body at issue was *this* particular body, a singularity. The prints serve as *body identifiers*. This seems to be one and the same issue: to put one particular individual at a particular location at a certain time. It holds to a certain degree. But the issue of identity is worth discussing with special attention. The prints that we will analyze are not just any prints, but rather traces of an individual, such that individuality is determined exactly by means of *identification*.

If one takes this perspective, she might be surprised to find out the significance that various kinds of marks have for establishing one's identity, not only for specialists, such as forensic pathologists or doctors, but also for those in her social life and even for herself, since she too is constantly using signifiers. The identity of the dead is collected through marks; for the sake of our colleagues, we aim to build and exhibit signifiers that communicate the signified we intend; for bureaucrats we keep special marks in our pockets that they will comprehend as signifiers of our identity, etc. We are constantly collecting marks that encompass an identity—not so as to

come closer to this identity, as is usually said to be the case, but rather to establish it, to collect it altogether. And taking into account the extent to which this is a process, we see that we are in a constant process of becoming, of becoming our identity. Structural psychoanalysts have acknowledged this process of collecting the marks through which we strive to attain knowledge about ourselves, about who we are, about what our identity is. But it is another question entirely whether this process is ever completed, whether identity can ever be collected or established for certain.

So far we have discussed some aspects of the process and function of re-presentation as regards body imagery, but we have not yet emphasized the role of body representations for the biopower of the state. We have seen how much scientific discourse and medical practice rely upon the credibility of body imagery. Similarly, the repressive apparatus of the state strongly relies upon the credibility of technology to produce representations that can be understood as absolute representatives, thus proving the identity of the body they represent. In such a sense, these representations have to enclose the essence of the thing. If they were “merely” imitations, then there would be no distinction between them and painted images. We could thus identify a person depicted on a painting—as a matter of fact, if Leonardo da Vinci is to be believed, the painted portrait is the best possible representation; in that case the person depicted would be even more identical to herself than she could be for someone deducing her identity from her “mere” presence. According to Renaissance belief, the painter’s mediation assures a surplus, he adds something that the natural appearance itself does not possess. He has to dig into the essence of her identity and bring it up to the surface of visibility in order to represent it in the medium of a painting. The point is that this is an essence that does not appear naturally in the live presence of the person itself. It is the painter who can reveal it and display it. The mediation of the painter is crucial in getting a quality result. The essence of the person (her identity) is radiated in the depiction. However, the painting does not bear physical contact with the person portrayed, it is not *her* print, the trace of *her* presence. There is no proof, in fact, that the person ever even existed, let alone any certainty that she is *identical to herself* in this painting. Nonetheless Mona Lisa is *identical to the person she represents*, she is *the same* Mona Lisa. Because the portrayed Mona Lisa represents the idea, the concept, the existence of the person depicted in this painting in the real life is not relevant. The representation is an autonomous reality.

Painting is a constructed discourse as television news are. Painting is not a print, it is an iconic sign. The repressive apparatus of the state however requires indexical signs, i.e. signs that are physically caused by the objects. Body prints are nevertheless signs. As mediations that supposedly guarantee identity they are not to be questioned, because they are not understood as mediations. They enjoy a dogmatic status instead, one equivalent to that of myths. Photographic portraits, fingerprints, iris prints, DNA profiling, etc.—we will treat these body prints as mediations which in our political reality function as a person’s identifiers. Here we pay particular attention to the question of mediation in those biotechnological representations that enjoy the reputation of assuring a certain, infallible identification.

In forensic science, DNA fingerprints serve as the ultimate body print for tying an individual to a crime scene. Can this print be deconstructed, though? Paul Vanouse has systematically tried to question the authority of DNA profiling. In *Latent Figure Protocol* (2007), he has created visual “images” by using known DNA patterns—with the known visual outcomes that are formed in electrophoresis by the DNA of bacteria, he has put together new visual compositions, which in simple digital visual designs (consisting of light and dark spots on a quasi-pixelated surface) represent visual motifs (such as: chicken and egg, the pirate symbol of a skull with bones, ID, 01 and the symbol ©). The “representation” or final visual outcome, which on the basis of similarity represents something (for example a chicken), has nothing in common here with the singular material, that is to say the biological samples whose DNA profiles constitute the visual representation. Material here is used in keeping with the same principle a painter applies when using colors: for building a visual surface that is not motivated by its constituents, its material elements, but rather by the optical similarity of that which is painted to that which is portrayed. If the picture were motivated by its material, then red paint could not become the color of the precious cardinal’s garment, and painting would not have become the art of transubstantiation; instead a painting made out of organic pigment would become a field of massacre, and to paint would mean to massacre. The latter is exactly what Jan Fabre has done with his *Heaven of Delight* (for which he embellished the ceiling and other elements of the Royal Palace in Brussels with 1.6 million bugs of the unprotected species *Buprestidae*). This work should be “beautiful” because of the strong aesthetic effects (with colors that change with light) of the decorated ceiling of the Salon de Glaces in the most prominent Dutch building from the 18th century. Yet, the unconcealed use of animals, millions of dead corpses, for aesthetic purposes produces perverseness of this act of design. The fact is that organic pigments have become awfully rare today and the question of motivated aesthetics constituents has also become almost superfluous because of the “inauthentic” origin of the materials usually used. For pigments available on the market a demand for substantial transparency of the material’s origin is rather absurd because of the too complex mediation or chemical hybridization. Sculpture is closer to the principle of the motivated handling of a substance, which is one of the bases for the closeness of statuary art to conceptualism, insofar as the *David* is with and for Michelangelo the *David-in-marble*: it is an image of David and it is marble; it is a person evoking life and yet always dead and cold matter. It is this paradoxical duality encompassed in this unique entity that makes *David* appealing. The statue is not a deception—the marble is there, so it does not strive to be something which it is not—a living human being, for instance. In ready-mades the origin doesn’t transform, and the artifactual ready-made does not represent anything else but itself; it stands exactly as such or *it is itself alone*, it is what it is supposed to represent: the removal of the principles of substitution and reference, the equalizing of the sign with the referent assure the conditions for the instant transition from the art of transformation to the art of thought conceptualization. Duchamp’s urinal, despite putting into force the demand for artistic artifactuality and standing as a candidate for the change into a fountain, has not changed its shape in terms of form.

As a result, it is still a urinal, though in its essence this is not the case anymore because what Duchamp's artistic gesture accomplishes conceptually is the *trans-essentiation* of urinal into a work of art and into a fountain, and not a *transformation* or *transubstantiation* of something into something other than itself.¹

The original postscript to the art tradition of transubstantiation, which in fact accompanies the painting of the whole modern era (or the majority of painting from this period), contributes to the contemporary advocacy of painting as alchemy, as in the work of Sigmar Polke. The magical practice of transubstantiation represents the peak of the tradition of transforming materials, as well as the return to a time before art in the Middle Ages, as far back as Greek antiquity, when *chymeia* denoted occupation with alloyed materials (the technological blending of metallurgy and color techniques), and even back to non-European cultures, especially the Arab-Islamic golden age, when *al-kimyá* meant the coexistence of experiment and treatise (theoretical discussions). At the vanishing point of the European medieval program of alchemy, which searched for a way from physical (sensuous) experience to the metaphysical gaze, the contemporary archeologist Siegfried Zielinski recognizes the idea of projection.² According to Zielinski, *proicere* is essentially about a magical tradition whose genealogical roots we find in pre-Socratic philosophy, while *perspicere* supports the logic of a penetrating view through surfaces that was established by the beginners of modern sciences: Johann Kepler (*Dioptrics*), Galileo Galilei, René Descartes, and Isaac Newton, whose big accomplishment for the natural sciences of the 17th century (the "physics of visibility") was very interested in the problem of transparency (seeing through), while catoptrics were mostly interested in *proicere* (Ger. *Aufsicht*—control, view from above) or in the optics of mirrors and reflections. *Perspicere* (seeing through reality, as enlightenment) was supported in science by the development of optical technologies: microscope, telescope, and other such devices.

Vanouse is using biological material in the manner of transubstantiation so that the produced representations do not have a substantial relationship to the object they represent. The artist just demonstrates the fact of mediation. He addresses the issue of constrictiveness of DNA depictions. With *Suspect Inversion Center* (2011)

¹However, the signifier is not equalized with the signified here, which would become the referent itself; the semiologic system is in this case more complicated. In the place of the signified "urinal," what gets interpolated are at least two other signifieds: (1) the fountain as an architectonically designed and plastically decorated well and (2) the work of art. Besides, the functions of substitution and reference, which constitute the conditions for semiologic order, are in indirect connection with materiality here—materiality is subordinated to a greater totality which is the *thingness* of the urinal, it is the ceramic in its extensiveness, in its form, and it is also a ceramic with a function. Therefore, this *reality as thingness* also includes tool-being (as Heidegger analyzed in "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," 1935). But the tool-being is in this case being subverted as a urinal; in its essence it is not a urinal anymore here, therefore the major event of this work of art is the process of *trans-essentiation*, while the process of transformation that would mean the changing of the form does not take place, nor does the process of transubstantiation, which would entail a changing of substance.

²Zielinski, *Entwerfen und Entbergen*, p. 19.

Vanouse refers to the controversy involving O.J. Simpson's encounter with DNA profiling.³ He carries out a unique deconstruction of the DNA sign: the genetic profile of O.J. Simpson, visualized on electrophoresis gel, is constructed from the artist's own biological material during the time of the exhibition by Vanouse and his assistant.⁴ The artist explains his artistic act: "Just as the term DNA fingerprinting has led to misinformation regarding its efficacy, DNA evidence is also hyperbolized in popular culture. The 'CSI effect' is a reference to the phenomenon of shows such as the CSI franchise overstating the accuracy of forensic techniques, and exaggerating the abilities of forensic science. *SIC* [*Suspect Inversion Center*] is designed to creatively counter these mass-media dramatizations that typically misinform the public, and in so doing, provide audiences with the conceptual tools to understand current issues surrounding use of DNA imaging and databasing."⁵ The question of the relation of the sign to its object and interpretant is re-opened in regard to very real issues of identification. For a lay observer, this possibility is surprising since genetic "fingerprints" are socially understood as body traces, as *indexical signs* if we may resort to Peircean terminology.⁶ The index has a crucial and direct relationship with the object which it *represents* and for which it stands; it cannot exist without it as it is its cause, its direct inducer, just as fire is the inducer of smoke or an injury is a cause of pain or a footprint the trace of a foot. In a similar fashion, a DNA profile is supposed to be the trace of a body, its representative. The other word for this technique is DNA blueprinting, a term we find more suitable. Blueprint still expresses body printing while also attesting to the mapping nature of the technique, rather than just claiming it is about the direct physical imprinting of the body into the jelly substance.

The projects performed by Vanouse point out the interposition between the body and the display of the DNA profile, i.e. the *mediation* of the biological material or DNA profile as a sign. Mediation makes space for manipulation and thus rebuts the function of proving the truth. As is the case with any medium, this one can be *deconstructed* as well, and it can be shown how it was built and how it functions; we can also *construct* it from the constituents of some other disintegrated whole, as

³Simpson was a famous athlete who allegedly murdered his wife and her lover; the main proof was provided by the results of the DNA analysis of the biological samples which put Simpson at the place of the crime. In the room where the double murder happened and in a nearby hallway, investigators found biological material, and its DNA analysis showed proof of identity with the biological sample of Simpson. However, all the criminal charges were dropped against the celebrity when his legal representatives showed a reasonable doubt as to whether the material on the scene was indeed present at the time of the crime, above all on the basis of finding that the same material contained an additional substance that acted as an expedient against the coagulation of blood, which was not present in the blood sample taken from the celebrity and that created doubt about when the sample was brought to the crime scene.

⁴First presented together with two other projects at an individual show titled *Fingerprints ...* 27th of January and 26th of March in Schering Stiftung, Unter den Linden 32-34, Berlin.

⁵See *Suspect Inversion Center*: <http://www.paulvanouse.com/sic.html>, 02-28-2017.

⁶Charles Sanders Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs," in: *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1955), pp. 98-119.

we could do were we to disintegrate a painting into its component colors and then use them in the creation of a new color composition. The artist of this project is most fascinated by cognition, by the fact that biological material and DNA profiling are so open to manipulation that in fact there is no difference between this or any other medium, especially digital ones where we can extract components and re-compose them without damaging or irreversibly changing them during the manipulation, and by doing so we can create whole new entiresities and repeat the procedure over and over again. The world becomes a computer game, and the body is no longer materiality or substance occupying space, weight, firmness, and transitoriness, *res extensa*, mortality; likewise, the body is not a unique subjectivity, but a file in a graphic program: infinite, manipulable, a photoshop drawing, optionally open, a hero with innumerable lives, a divisible and reversely constructed non-materiality, the opposite of entropy, complete reversibility, multiplicity, an avatar for anybody, for any identity (Vanouse, Simpson, whoever and whatever), infinitely changeable into something—a human or a worm, human-bacteria, pure evasion, evasiveness, escape, exodus of the owner from its own genetic profile—whose, what?

Shaking the indexical authority which ties the DNA profile as a sign tightly to its own object, to the human being who is being profiled, to whom this biological material belongs, the sign moves to the other pole, where the connection to the object is not essential; the object might not even exist, so what becomes important instead is the interpretation of a sign based on convention, therefore the primary thing here is *social codification*. At this pole the sign becomes a *symbol*. The symbolism in DNA profiling is of interest to Vanouse since he connects it to racially motivated stereotypes and prejudices. “Controversial criminal cases show that today’s focus on genetic pool opens the door to racially motivated clichés and judgments that are mixed together with the suspects’ genetic profile” is written in the foreword to the exhibition *Fingerprints*. If, on the one hand, the absolute authority of DNA profiling is established in a society in such a way that shows itself as true transparency through which we can see the truth, then we are presented with the regime of *perspicere par excellence*; on the other hand, if we believe Vanouse and Hauser, the exact opposite proves to be the case—the bond of the DNA sign with the suspect is questionable, thus the space opens for *proicere*, above all for the projections of social ideologies. The *Suspect Inversion Center* thus combines two scopic regimes, *perspicere* and *proicere*. As with machines for visibility (microscope, telescope and television), genetic inscription also helps us see what is invisible to the naked eye but nevertheless already here; we can understand it as piercing the surface, penetrating into inwardness, even to the utmost inner essence, to the real substance of the body. At the same time, genetic inscription is a typical case of the sort of projection which Zielinski sees in machines used for creating pictures (Ger. *Bild Maschinen*), like camera obscura, laterna magica, diorama/panorama, cinema.⁷ The DNA visual display of the profile is namely a

⁷Zielinski, *Entwerfen und Entbergen*, p. 13.

form of transfer, translation, and projection onto another carrier, into another material. But the regime of projection does not simply mean the technical transfer of the picture, but also its active transfer, which is more than an intervention; it is projection in a manner similar to the way drama is constructed and or the way magic works. Vanouse does not want to be the cold observer who through the electrophoresis expedient in the genetic diagram sees an essence concealed even to the eye but uncovered here as the truth of the body. His role is active, his intervention constructive; instead of *un-covering* veils that obstruct the object of observation, he uses the technique of *creating*, not exactly as the creation from nothing, nor even in keeping with the principle of *proicere*, but as a process of breaking and decomposing and then composing and joining, of hybridization and even the alchemical technique of transubstantiation.

What restores the function of the *provability* of the DNA profile is the fact that it is a sign that substitutes its object (body), represents it, and stands for it as its *print*. This sign is supposed to prove the *presence* of something that is *absent* in the sign. That which is absent is thus supposed to become present. Re-presentativity, *repeated* presentation means to show again, once more; the second time the presentation must be *identical* with the first, the mark must be *genuine* and *credible*. Such a mark expands in a dimension of truth/non-truth that is superfluous (as acknowledged by Austin and the followers),⁸ as the semiologic level (formal, expressive, occurring) which is tied to the semantic level (the level of meaning, content, sense) cannot possibly join with the outside-referential level (reality as thingness),⁹ since between them there is a rupture, a crack, a *différence*. The essential predicate of a mark is iteration. Every mark is at the moment of its

⁸When he was thinking about utterances, the British philosopher of language John L. Austin (*How to Do Things with Words?*, 1955) discovered that the question about truth/non-truth, which had been an eternal question concerning language, is meaningless, since when I say: "It is raining outside" the question to ask is not: "Is it really raining outside?" but rather what is the force of my utterance and what have I achieved by it. For Austin the question thus shifts from constative statements to speech-acts. Austin supports the notion that reality is produced at the semiologic level, in the medium and with it; therefore we cannot distinguish between the "fictitious" and the "actual" when referring to outside reality. After Austin, John R. Searle was explicitly devoted to the question of truth/non-truth by opening up the question of the fictional discourse ("The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," 1975). If fiction "pretends" to refer to some reality outside itself and so uses such references, so too in "realistic" discourses we don't see the reality that supposedly exists out there; we always have to deal instead just with the one that is in front of us. The examples of realistic and fictional discourse show that we actually always have in front of us just the reality of the discourse and not that of the outside-discourse reality, even though some discourses present themselves as credible in the relationship to the reality out there, as its proof, for which we have no guarantee whatsoever, except the sole one expressing the medium itself. Thus there is no difference between them—reality is always established at the level of the discourse.

⁹Even in the contemporary philosophy of society, authors are fascinated by discovering the dominance of *proicere* in places where *perspicere* was supposed to be operating. For instance, in 1996 Bourdieu said that "television, which claims to record reality, creates it instead." Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television* (New York: The New Press, 1998), p. 22.

construction separated from its source and also from its reception, therefore it can never be identical with what it is, i.e. itself.

We are discussing the question of identification, but we have not yet discussed the issue of identity. Martin Heidegger begins his lecture “The Principle of Identity” with the usual formulation of the principle of identity that reads “ $A = A$,” which is considered the highest principle of thought. He asks whether it is possible for this formula about equality to say that one is equal to another. “Obviously not,” he replies. “That which is identical ... means ‘the same.’”¹⁰ If somebody repeats himself, he speaks in a tautology. The formula says: “every A is itself the same,”¹¹ or rather “every A is itself the same with itself.”¹² Heidegger is aware that “[s]ameness implies the relation of ‘with,’ that is, a mediation, a connection, a synthesis: the unification into a unity.”¹³ This is how and why Western thought has comprehended identity as a unity. In this regard Heidegger reminds us that since speculative idealism it is no longer possible to represent the unity of identity as mere sameness and to disregard the mediation that prevails in such a unity. It was Hegel who first discussed “ $A = A$ ” as a principle of contradiction; for him identity is dialectical. Derrida radicalized the notion of the rupture in the unity of identity and offered the concept of *différance*, speaking about the differential mark and the recognition that nothing can ever be identical to itself.

Derrida discusses the medium of writing and argues that a written sign is not a “progressive extenuation of presence” or supplementation (continuous modification) as it is in Condillac; instead, writing is determined by the break in presence, *différance*. A written sign breaks with its context, which includes the moment of inscription, the presence of the writer, the entire environment, and the writer’s intention animating the inscription at a given moment. This holds true even for oral utterances, on which point Derrida opposed Austin, who did not doubt that the “source” (Derrida’s term for Austin’s “utterance-origin”) of an oral utterance in the present indicative active is present to the utterance and its statement. There is a *différance*: “the irreducible absence of intention or attendance to the performative utterance, the most ‘event-ridden’ utterance there is, is what authorizes me ... to posit the general graphemic structure of every ‘communication.’”¹⁴ This force of rupture is tied to spacing [*espacement*] and iteration or repeatability, both of which constitute the written sign. The written sign possess a characteristic of being readable even if the moment of its production is irrevocably lost and even if the moment of reading is delayed. The very identity of a written sign (its iterability, its repeatability) does not permit a sign to ever be a unity that is identical to itself. The unity of signifying form only constitutes itself by virtue of iterability, the possibility

¹⁰Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 23.

¹¹Ibid., p. 24.

¹²Ibid., p. 25.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 18–19.

of being repeated in the absence of its referent and the absence of a determinate signified or the intention of actual signification. The identity of signifying form is the “division or dissociation of itself.”¹⁵ For the same reason (the reason of iterability) Derrida opposed Austin’s claim that a signature tethers the written utterance to its source. Derrida does not deny the occurrence of the absolute singularity of the signature as an event; this is the everyday effect of signature: “But the condition of possibility of those effects is simultaneously, once again, the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity. In order to function, that is, to be readable, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form,” and this makes it the same kind of mark as the ones described above. It must be detached from the present and singular intention of its production: “It is sameness which, by corrupting its identity and its singularity, divides its seal.”¹⁶

Perhaps it sounds bold to apply Derrida’s theory of a differentiated mark to body prints, but it is often said that a fingerprint or a genetic fingerprint is a signature left at the scene of a crime. The written signature could be compared to other sorts of graphemes produced by bodies. There is not much sense in speaking about intention regarding a fingerprint, or at the very least there is no information available regarding intention. Regardless, if we agree with Derrida that the context of inscription is irrevocably lost in any mark, the issue of intention is irrelevant because, given the rupture with the source, there is not any difference between the identity of a written sign and a body print. Furthermore, body prints have a repeatable form; a fingerprint actually is quite similar to a written signature. It presents an absolute singularity, and at the same time it is repeatable. The signified is determined—the mark leads to a particular person, her individuality, her singularity. The mark is not only her signifier, but even her identifier. The meaning is shallow and deep at the same time—it only leads to her, nothing more, but nothing less, it is all she is. The signified is her identity. Still, it is a mark, torn from its context, the body, functioning on its own. As a mark it is subjected to differentiation, it is a *différance*, a “non-self-identity.”¹⁷

Even if body prints are linked to the singular identities of the bodies that produce and therefore exhibit themselves as examples of pure self-identity, they are nevertheless torn from the context of their production and therefore are graphemes, which function as differentiated marks. There is one dimension which we would like to expose that Derrida does not discuss: body prints, like signatures or handwriting, are tracks of the body. Although a signature breaks with the presence of the inscriber, it also reveals the rhythm, the force, the dynamics, vehemence or modesty of the inscription; and even if all of this can perhaps be faked, handwriting is a trace of the body, a print of the extended ink-stained fingers on the surface. A finger- or a palm-print, even a print of a shoe, tells less about an individual’s psychology or behavior (though some information can still be communicated), but it surely

¹⁵Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁷This is Derrida’s description of *différance*. Ibid., p. 145.

comprises a physical link to the body, even if it is essentially ruptured, since the body is absent and the reading delayed. Additionally, our bodies not only leave printed traces in the spaces in which they appear, but they also leave smells or “smell traces,” micro-organisms or “microbiological traces,” and organic matter produced by the body. For some of these “physical traces”¹⁸ left by bodies, we have developed technologies of visualization (while some are still used rather “primitively” in the sense that direct reading, i.e. recognition, is performed by other living creatures that already possess the ability to do so, like dogs or pigs), whereas body traces themselves have been ruptured, torn from their context, and the visualizations possibly produced are themselves as ruptured as the marks themselves. Genetic blueprints are thus especially interesting marks—they are doubly ruptured. Their identity as marks makes them subjectable to manipulation. This is what Vanouse has performed: he “misuses” their identity as marks and treats them as a grapheme, the signifying form of the sign. He has transformed the signifier (originating from his organic material or body trace) so as to make it into another signifier, one that is tethered to a particular individual and thus supposedly constitutes a unity that is identical with itself. However he does not transform the physical trace itself, the trace that “has been read by Vanouse.” Notably, the O.J. Simpson case had issues with the purity of the traces themselves. If anybody were to take over the job of re-reading the trace analyzed by Vanouse by using the standard method of DNA blueprinting, she would come to a different conclusion, i.e. she would discover or establish the link to Vanouse’s and not O.J. Simpson’s body. Despite the incredible nature of Vanouse’s methods, artists have demonstrated that even such credible marks as genetic fingerprints are only graphemes. Whereas iterability is present here not only in the repeatability of the signifying form, but also in production, traces could be reproduced and will in that case ensure the same results, unless the method ends up being “misused” as it is by Vanouse. What makes this particular example interesting is that eventually there is even a third level of iterability possible in certain cases: the very body traces that are required for genetic blueprints could in particular cases and under particular conditions simultaneously be body elements from which an entirely new, *genetically identical* body to the one traced and signified is *re-produced*. This iterability however makes little sense if we acknowledge the role that cultural *milieu* plays in the process of identification. In other words, the iterability of identity *par excellence* proves to be a misfire in achieving identity.

Mice constantly pee and thus leave a trace that enables the eagle to find them. A human is actually not much different. Not only does it secrete, but the body itself is constantly spread around through dead skin and other cells left behind. The body prints that we particularly focused on in this chapter are media depictions produced by body particles left in the environment. But in the environments that are

¹⁸The term “physical traces” seems a bit clumsy since even the prints are physical impressions, but they are rather impressions in another matter while with physical traces we mean particles of the body left in the location.

particularly rich with microorganisms (such as soil), these particles soon become useless as identifiers because the microorganisms literally digest them, so that parts of DNA get erased and biological material becomes non-identifiable. In this boundary zone, the body (not necessary a dead one, but a dispersed one) switches over into another process, that of decay. This is a process of transformation into energy and other forms of life. We participate in this process continuously. The body dissolves. Identity dissolves into non-identity. In such a manner, this non-identity happens to constitute identity itself, though at the same time the body constantly re-establishes its identity, recreates it, but not from scratch. This is a constant process of regeneration, the regeneration of identity and the regeneration of the body. Regeneration is to be recognized as constituting the essence of life.



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