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THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY THROUGH TATTOOS: A SEMIOTIC AND
PERFORMATIVE EXPLORATION OF TRAUMA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Erin Lionberger

August 2021

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Erin Lionberger

2021

THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY THROUGH TATTOOS: A SEMIOTIC AND
PERFORMATIVE EXPLORATION OF TRAUMA

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ABSTRACT

THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY THROUGH TATTOOS: A SEMIOTIC AND PERFORMATIVE EXPLORATION OF TRAUMA

By

Erin Lionberger

August 2021

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Erik Garrett

In this current historical moment, tattoos and tattooing have become a glorified cultural phenomenon that has been thousands of years in the making. The idea that tattoos can be used to express one's identity is not a new concept — various fields, such as anthropology, cultural studies, and sociology, have studied the relationship between tattoos and identity. In this dissertation, I explore the signification and performative aspects of Auschwitz concentration camp tattoos and 9/11 memorial tattoos, while also considering the changes in meaning and interpretation that occur within and throughout space and time. Chapter one introduces the topic and provides the reader with the statement of significance and literature review. Chapter two then introduces a brief review of the theory of semiotics and performance studies, followed by a review of the various concepts within trauma and memory studies that are utilized in chapters

three through five. These three application chapters explicate the important roles that tattoos play in the construction of identity as they relate to memory and trauma. Finally, chapter six provides implications, potential future research topics, and concluding sentiments. Ultimately, this dissertation explores the relationship between tattoos and identity, grounded in trauma, as a form of visual narratology within the communication and rhetoric field, guided by the semiotic tradition and the field of performance studies.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to all survivors and victims of both the Holocaust and the 9/11 attacks. May your experiences, memories, and stories be forever valued throughout history.

We will never forget.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I want to first express my sincere gratitude for my committee chair, Dr. Erik Garrett. Thank you for the guidance and support throughout this process, especially during an exceptionally difficult moment in history. And thank you to my committee members Dr. Anthony Wachs and Dr. Craig Maier - your suggestions and thought-provoking questions throughout this project were immensely helpful and appreciated.

A ‘thank you’ will never be enough for my parents, Jim and Donna Lionberger. I am eternally grateful for the mental, emotional, and physical support you’ve provided not only during this process, but all of my adventures in life. To my Mom – thank you for always being the person I can call in moments of happiness, sadness or somewhere in-between. You are so kind, loving, intelligent and determined and I am forever grateful that I get to call you mom. Leo and I love you to the moon and back.

To my Dad – thank you for passing on to me your love of proper grammar and deep desire to always be 5 minutes early to everything (at least), for editing countless (and I mean, countless) papers in the last 10.5 years of my academic career and for always being there for me with loving yet logical support. Thank you for always believing in me, even when I didn’t believe in myself. I am so incredibly lucky that I have such an intelligent, gentle, and ambitious father that I can always count on. So, thanks mom and dad! Having both of you as role models in life has been the greatest gift!

A big thank you to D&G for always supporting me from afar and being there to cheer me on. I love and appreciate you both!

To my friends – there are not enough words for me to express how grateful I am for your presence in my life. I can say with 100% certainty I would have not made it through this process without each and every one of you.. To my friends on the inside; Kati Sudnick, Mark Gardner, Basak Guven, Abbey McCann, Brandy Hadden, Emmalee Torisk, and Sarah Deiuliis – thank you for putting up with my antics, creating an atmosphere where I could be my most authentic self, and for filling long days on campus with laughter and happiness. To my friends outside the academic world – Bri Bailey, Talia Fernandez, Carla Bobak and Becca Vietze – thank you for always letting me vent or worry out loud about things outside my control (my specialty) and always being a text, phone call or knock away. Thank you to each and everyone one of you for the endless sense of comfort you bring me.

I also want to thank the various professors, peers, colleagues and friends who are like family for the support throughout my academic career.

After 207 pages, I am quite simply out of words at this point. I know ‘thank you’ will never be enough, but it’s all I’ve got!

With love,

Erin

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Chapter One:

Introduction, Statement of Significance, and Literature Review

In this current historical moment, tattoos and tattooing have become a glorified cultural phenomenon; a phenomenon that has been thousands of years in the making. With the discovery of tattooed mummies and most notably the iconic “Iceman” from the Italian-Austrian border, tattooing as a form of body modification has existed for at least 5,200 years (Lineberry, 2007). Historians have noted a variety of meanings attached to these tattoos and to the identities of the people wearing them, serving as amulets, status symbols, declarations of love, religious beliefs, mere adornments and even as forms of punishment (2007). Fast-forward thousands of years, and tattoos today still have similar sentiments, interpretations, and meanings. However, with the advancement of technology, tattoos and tattooing has evolved into a true art form. Virtually no subject matter is off limits - there are thousands of artists, styles, colors, and machinery to make your tattoo dreams a reality.

If you were to meet me on a warm summer day, you might be surprised at the amount of ink embedded in my skin. And if you paid even a sliver of attention to that ink, you might be surprised at the immense amount of my identity that is constructed, conveyed, and communicated through this artwork. In one glance, you could learn the state I am from, other states I have lived in, or my favorite season and animals. Look closer, and you’d see my parent’s inscription on either arm, surrounded by a shape that encompasses their projected identity, my fur-child and first love Leonardo the pug and an ever-growing dedication to those in my life who have passed away.

Although not all, or many, of my tattoos are currently grounded in trauma, the ones that are, tend to be the most sentimental and communicative. And some of these tattoos will *evolve* into being understood by trauma in another space or time. For instance, my parents handwriting. Both tattoos read “love you” in their handwriting, my mother’s inside the outline of a heart and my father’s in the outline of a fish. One day when they have passed on from this world, I will have these tattoos to remind me of them, their presence, and their ongoing impact in my life. These tattoos will be steeped in the trauma of losing my parents while continuing to communicate to others a portion of my identity. This process of understanding my own tattoos and how it is tied to my personal traumas and identity, is how this study came into existence. As we speak, space and time is changing the meaning of my tattoos. Contemplating how my own tattoos have a spatial temporal aspect led me to begin pondering the significance of others’ tattoos, especially those with profound historical significance.

The idea that tattoos can be used to express one’s identity is not a new concept. Various fields and areas have studied the relationship between tattoos and identity, such as sociology, cultural studies, anthropology, visual rhetoric, and even medicine. Studies have researched the meaning behind the physical tattoo, the metaphorical meaning through the process of being tattooed, and even the idea that tattoo parlors (as well as other similar places) could be seen and interpreted as a space of agency (Modesti, 2008). Within the communication discipline, there is also a widespread interest on the intersection between tattoos and identity, especially in the phenomenological realm. However, I seek to research the relationship between tattoos and identity through trauma and memory as a form of visual narratology within the communication and rhetoric field

guided by the semiotic tradition and the field of performance studies. In this tradition, ‘communication’ can be defined as sharing meaning through the use of signs and the ‘communication problem’ are misunderstandings or gaps between subjective viewpoints (Atkin, 2010).

Ultimately, I look to explore the role of tattoos as both signifiers and performances that construct identity as tied to trauma, as well as considering the spatial-temporal component in that the understanding and interpretations of these tattoos can change in space and time. Not only can tattoos be a performance of one’s identity in relation to trauma, but often-times they are more representative in nature than any other physical aspect on the body due to the symbolic performance of identity of being tattooed. The performative aspect of tattoos as related to the social concept of signs is a unique connection between semiotics and performative studies. I seek to better understand how tattoos fit into the world of semiotics acting as a tangible sign through which people have chosen as a method to express trauma. I also explore the potential performative rhetorical acts that are called out to others through these tattoos; how is someone or society being called upon to ethically respond to the trauma of others through the performance of their tattoo? This call to ethical responsibility is a unique aspect with interesting implications as it relates to the relationship between tattoos, identity construction, and trauma.

Throughout this project I use multiple theoretical foundations and the work of various trauma scholars to explore the signification and performative role of tattoos. First is a look into Charles S. Peirce’s semiotic trichotomy of icon, index, and symbol followed by a review of performance studies guided by the work of Richard Schechner

and Judith Butler. These will act as the foundational groundwork for this study as I look to explore the identity construction of tattoos through the role of signification and performance. Within each of these sections I use differing trauma concepts from various scholars. These include Gabriele Schwab, Maurice Halbwachs, Cathy Caruth, and Dori Laub. And lastly, I end this study by using the work of Emmanuel Levinas and his first philosophy on the role of ethics and justice and his concept of “I am my brother’s keeper” to explore how certain genres of tattoos illicit an ethical performance of the ‘other.’

First, I use Peirce’s theory of semiotics to lay the foundational groundwork for this study. I emphasize two main pillars within Peirce’s semiotic theory; meaning depends on experience and meaning is constantly changing as related to signs. To do this, I use his trichotomic concept of sign in which Peirce states that something is a sign or representation when we “have a mediatory interest in it, in so far as it conveys to a mind an idea about a thing” (Peirce, 1894, p. 5). In this, Peirce defines a sign as a three-part entity in that it has a physical form, is a concept in someone’s mind and is an object or situation to which the sign refers.

Next, I do a brief overview of performance studies using Judith Butler and Richard Schechner’s work on performance within the communicative realm. Judith Butler’s work on the performance of gender was groundbreaking in understanding how people ‘do’ gender. She emphasizes that gender is not something one has or is assigned, but rather it is a cultural phenomenon in that people are always ‘doing’ gender. I use this theory to conclude that these tattoos, acting as vehicles of information, are always ‘doing’ identity in some manner.

I then outline the field of performance studies using various works of Schechner, focusing on the difference between performance ‘as’ and performance ‘is’ as well as the varying actions, kinds, and functions of performances. Schechner states that previously there was a delineation between performance ‘as’ and ‘is’ but technology has all but eroded that boundary. Thanks to ever expanding technology, people now views their lives as a series of interconnected performances; performances that help construct and communicate one’s identity to others. I use this concept as I analyze the different actions, kinds, and functions these tattoos perform as constructs of identity that are grounded in trauma.

Then, I turn to Gabrielle Schwab’s work on trauma and memory as tied to history through her book *Haunting Legacies* (2010) to explore how history and historical events change and impact the identity of people, especially through the concept of transgenerational trauma. Then, I look to Maurice Halbwachs' research from 1925 on trauma as it relates to collective memory with emphasis on the concept of ‘social memory’ and its effect on identity formation. Both Schwab and Halbwachs' work will be tied to the concept of transgenerational trauma and embodiment, a theory that explains the unintentional impacts and effects of trauma on differing generations, especially those without obvious involvement to the trauma.

Next, I use two essays from Cathy Caruth’s 1995 book *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. First is Caruth’s introduction essay on trauma and experience in which she explores trauma as tied to both physical and embodied ‘place,’ concepts she has coined as latency and localization. These concepts help explore the role of tattoos as identity markers as well as a form of symbolization for both a physical and historical ‘place.’ An

example of this are the tattoos of Auschwitz survivors- these permanent scars represent much more than their physical time at Auschwitz - they also signify the perception and experience of the ‘place’ of the Holocaust, something that is now, thanks to their tattoo, inescapable (Kandyioti, 2004). These concepts are also based on the idea that, survivors of trauma do not fully realize or experience their trauma until after it has passed. Caruth adapts this idea from Freud’s work on latency and expands it to understand latency within trauma as unclaimed experiences.

I also utilize another scholar and essay from this book, titled “Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle” by Dori Laub. Laub, a prominent figure and psychoanalyst within trauma studies, explores how trauma is understood and experienced through his understanding of witnessing, providing testimony and ultimately finding the ‘truth.’ In this, he explains that there are three different levels of witnessing and that to truly support witnesses providing testimony, requires a newly developed strategy that focuses on allowing the survivor to be the narrator to an attentive, knowledgeable and empathic listener ; this is how truth is found.

And finally, I use famed philosopher Emmanuel Levinas’ work on ethics, justice and his concept that communities need to keep in mind the voiceless and powerless within all decision-making. Levinas refers to this as the ‘immemorial echo’ that is always calling others into responsibility and action for the Other (Arnett, 2017). He states that this echo is an ethical standard in that those who are in power or have a ‘voice’ need to keep those who may not have a metaphorical ‘seat’ at the decision-making table. For this study, I use these concepts to state that certain genres of tattoos, such as Auschwitz or 9/11 tattoos, retain this ‘echo’ in calling on Others to maintain an ethical responsibility to

those who perished or were/are impacted by these historical events. I conclude that these tattoos call out for an ethical performance of the other in that one must always remember those who do or did not have power or a voice and to keep these at the forefront of decision making.

Significance of Project

Often within communication the importance of nonverbal communication is meticulously studied; what is my body language conveying to others beyond the words I am saying? For decades, studies have highlighted just how important nonverbal communication is; “When non-verbal and verbal communications conflict, individuals tend to rely on non-verbal cues as a means to interpret the true meaning of communication” (Phutela, 2015, p. 43). This means what within the scope of communication, nonverbal cues tend to override with import of the verbal words being communicated. In fact, a recent study concluded that one’s nonverbal cues communicate more about intention and sincerity than verbal ones; 65% of what people understand are from the nonverbal cues given (Floyd & Cardon, 2020).

Nonverbal communication comes in a variety of forms such as facial expressions, gestures, eye contact (or lack-there-of), posture, proxemics and others. These nonverbal forms of communication help regulate and support relationships and sometimes, replaces verbal communication depending on the situation and context. Like verbal communication, nonverbal communication varies for different genders and cultures and thus their impact also varies; it can act as a bridge or a barrier. Studies have researched the importance of nonverbal communication in a variety of contexts, such as personal and professional relationships, specific occupations and locations (such as courtrooms or the

classroom) and differing cultures and languages. This research consistently reiterates not only the importance of nonverbal communication, but the variety of ways in which it is used and interpreted (Phutela, 2015; Zeki, 2009).

While body modification as a form of performative rhetoric and nonverbal communication is not a novel topic within the communication field, one unique contribution of my work will be the study of the history of tattoos as connected to ‘place’ in both a physical and embodied manner. As such, this project will study the spatial-temporal meanings of tattoos in relation to identity and trauma. Exploring the phenomenon of tattoos across both space and time will provide the discipline with a unique perspective to the relationship between these topics, especially considering the idea of transgenerational trauma and the use of tattoos as signs that are grounded in the concept of trauma.

Most accounts of rhetoric within history have been confined to the written word. However, in the late 1900s there was a push to expand the boundaries of rhetoric beyond the written word to include memory and performance as acts of rhetoric (Bent, 2012). Mary Carruthers was one of the first scholars to situate performance into rhetoric, seeking to understand that the concept of rhetoric can go “beyond manifestations of written words to include the verbal arts” (Bent, 2012, p. 43). According to Margaret Bent, Carruthers’ work on music as a performative rhetoric to explore how other acts could also be considered performative rhetoric. In particular, she explores how nonverbal acts, such as dance, painting and cooking, could be situated within performative rhetoric. To do this, she explains how the rhetorical aspects of these acts then translate to their status as performative rhetoric. For example, a recipe has a rhetoric treatise to follow; the act of

cooking said recipe, is then the performance. Although the actual act of cooking the meal itself has no written words, it is the performance of the rhetorical treatise, thus creating a performative rhetorical act (43-44).

Another key scholar within the realm of performativity and performative rhetoric is Judith Butler. Butler studies how both sex and gender can be “performatively reinscribed in ways that accentuate its factitiousness rather than its facticity” (Salih, 2002, pp. 55). This reification or performance, then constitute the subject’s agency; in other words, this performance provides a rhetorical context to be understood. Butler uses Nietzsche’s understanding of ‘being’ from this 1887 book *On the Genealogy of Morals* to explain that there is no “‘being’ behind doing, acting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction imposed on the doing – the doing itself is everything” (Nietzsche, 1887, p. 29; Salih, 2002, p. 56). Using Nietzsche’s understand of ‘being,’ Butler then situates performativity into the realm of rhetoric, stating that these acts, standing alone, can be considered rhetorical. It is here she then explains that gender has proven to be a performance that constitutes identity (Salih, 2002; Butler, 1995).

In her 1999 book *Gender Trouble*, Butler further explores and explains the performativity of rhetoric. She states that gender is “performatively produced” and practiced (p. 33). Meaning that gender, unlike the sex of a person, is a performance that constitutes identity; gender is always “doing” (p. 33). Further, she states that gender identity is constituted through these expressions of gender and that these expressions, act as a rhetorical performance communicating one’s identity (Butler, 1999b). These expressions are touted by Butler as “a sustained set of acts” in which gender is manufactured through acts (xv). Similar to that of Butler, I seek to better understand both

the process of getting a tattoo, as well as the actual tattoo itself, as a performance of rhetorically constituting one's identity.

Using Butler's and other understandings and explanations of performative rhetoric, we can then situate the performance of being tattooed as a rhetorical act. Although the process of getting a tattoo requires various verbal components such as discussing with the artist your desired tattoo, its meaning and value, placement, cost, etc., the physical act of being tattooed could also be considered as a performative rhetorical act. The 'doer' or 'wearer' of the tattoo experienced the pain that comes with being inked, but the process of getting the tattoo, along with the final product, also represents in a nonverbal way the communicative meaning and value of the tattoo. In this sense, the tattoo is 'doing' identity similarly to how one is always 'doing' gender.

While some still hold unfavorable views about tattoos, there has been a slow growing acceptance of tattoos in the Western world (Crompton, Armami, Tsur & Solomon, 2020). Two common themes that I discovered in my early research of past tattoo studies were the cultural significance of said tattoo(s) and the relationship between the tattoo and visibility (visibility meaning placement of the tattoo on the body as visible or not visible to others/the audience). Research suggests that the more visible a tattoo is, the more the person wants or is willing to engage in conversation about the meaning behind their ink (Crompton, Armami, Tsur & Solomon, 2020). This creates an interesting entrance for some tattoos, such as Auschwitz/Holocaust tattoos that were forced onto prisoners in a very visible place. These prisoners were then forced to live the rest of their lives with these extremely visible tattoos and often faced the trauma of reliving the experiences and memories of the Holocaust with strangers.

Although once thought of as ‘devious’ behavior, forms of body modification, such as tattoos and piercings, have become a popular and central method for people to express themselves (Crompton, Armami, Tsur & Solomon, 2020). This form of expression has minimal boundaries; people from all different countries and cultures, genders, social backgrounds, age and occupations have turned to body modification as a form of self-expression (2020). A better understanding of how tattoos act as a symbol of identity, especially as grounded within trauma can open the door to more studies that emphasize a spatial-temporal meaning between topics like tattoo and identity construction.

Other articles have discussed tattoos as visual argument. In their 2007 article “Hard Cases: Prison Tattooing as Visual Argument,” author Melanie J. McNaughton explores the communicative role of prison tattoos in the creation of argument. She states that the body functions as argument, especially in the realm of prisons, where inmates have severely limited options when it comes to self-expression and change for argumentation. As such, they use their bodies and tattoos as a form of visual argumentation such as tattooing the universal sign for justice, representing their proclaimed innocence (133). This article is particularly interesting, as McNaughton pushed the accepted boundaries of what constituted as ‘argument’ to include the tattoos of prisoners. This is similar to my goals for this project, as I look to expand the accepted boundary of nonverbal communication to that of tattoos and to emphasize the importance of tattoos within identity studies as tied to trauma. Ultimately, I see trauma *as* performance and tattoos grounded in trauma as repetitive rehearsals of that performance in which the constructed identity around the ink changes in space and time.

Tattoos have transformed into a communicative artifact that can visually signify and perform various aspects of someone: their hobbies, skills, experiences, talents, desires, memories, traumas, ethnicity, nationality, etc. – the possibilities are endless. Throughout history, tattoos have been considered the ‘norm’ for sailors and prison inmates and typically expressed specific but limited information about the person, such as places they have traveled to in the world or gangs they are or have been associated with. However, thanks to the expanding creative nature of tattooing and the advances in technology, there is no subject matter that is off-limits. As such, the research and studies in attempting to understand the more rhetorical and communicative nature of tattoos has become increasingly relevant and important. This study explores how tattoos can be understood as signifiers and active performances of identity that are grounded in trauma and evolve through space and time.

Like Mary Kosut’s 2008 article, “Tattoo Narratives: The Intersection of the Body, Self-Identity and Society,” which states that tattooed bodies are a form of both verbal and nonverbal communication, I seek to push the limit on that idea further to state that tattooed bodies not only act as a form of verbal communication about identity, but can physically embody the traumas and memories of that person, their family members, or others in a distinct and unique manner. With this in mind, I explore how tattoos then can be studied in a way in which they are both signifiers and performances of trauma as tied to identity. To do this, I use various concepts from a plethora of scholars and apply Peirce’s semiotic trichotomy and the understanding of performance studies to analyze how specific tattoo genres grounded in trauma nonverbally communicate identity to others.

It is also important to note that this project includes tattoos that were not an autonomous choice. Exploring the performative and rhetorical notion of these tattoos is equally important when researching the role that body modification plays in the communication of identity. This project includes an exploration into the impact of Holocaust tattoos that were forced onto victims at the Auschwitz concentration camp in German-occupied Poland. The experiences of those tattooed by Nazi camp workers drastically differ from those that make the conscious choice to be tattooed. While the performance and symbolism of these tattoos may differ in meaning, they still communicate the identity of the wearer in significant ways. Although this notion of forced tattoos may seem like an ancient or barbaric act, several countries still implement the practice of tattooing prisoners to signify varying capabilities or identities, such as manual labor or gang relationships.

I find this project both important and necessary for two main reasons. First, tattoos and other forms of body modification have become increasingly popular in our current historical moment. In the United States 30% or 98.4 million citizens have tattoos, a number that steadily grows every year (Tennent, 2018). As the popularity of this self-expression grows, so does the need to better understand the communicative nature behind them. And second, exploring tattoos as both signifiers and performances of identity is a relatively novel idea within the communication realm, especially as it relates to the change in meaning and interpretation in space and time. It is important to understand both the immediate meaning and changing meaning of these identity signifiers and performances through both space and time. Ultimately, I conclude that trauma *is* performance; through memories, people are always performing and reperforming aspects

of their identity that are tied to their experiences of trauma. These tattoos act as signifiers and performances of this trauma that are ever evolving.

Various scholars have studied the ways in which people use tattoos to convey meaning, whether it be in a deeply personal manner, being culturally significant or historical, or the ways in which people often tie this art form to their identity. However, I look to explore the relationship between semiotics and performative studies as related to tattoos as grounded in trauma. This idea of ‘thirdness’ as explicated in Peirce’s theory of semiotics opens the door to explore the relationship between signs and performative rhetoric through tattoos. As I explain in the next chapter, Peirce explains signs as having three components which I then directly relate to this idea of ‘performance’ in being tattooed. I hope to expand the boundaries on what is considered performative rhetoric, while simultaneously intertwining the theory of semiotics into the field of performative studies based in the foundation of trauma and the relationship to tattoos and identity. Now, I turn to a brief literature review covering multiple facets between the relationship of tattoos and identity.

Literature Review: Tattoos and Identity

In this literature review, I cover various articles and books as they explore the relationship between tattoos and identity. Ranging from the impact of trauma, the performative aspect of tattooing, cultural implications and the various uses of tattoos in the modern world. I begin with a look at one of the biggest and most influential genres of tattoos, Japanese. And while Japanese style of tattooing has become a cultural and social phenomenon, it was only recently legalized in Japan. Due to centuries of cultural stigma

that revolved around both the practice of tattooing and the symbolization of tattoos, the art had never been made a legal practice.

However, Japanese tattoos have become a global cultural phenomenon. 'Body suits' were developed in the late 18th century- these, like the title, are tattoos that cover the entire body, from the neck to the ankle on both the front and back of the body and were adapted from traditional woodblock prints (Yamada, p. 5). Subject matter ranged from flowers and peonies, traditional carp and koi fish to dragons and important gods and goddesses (p. 5-6). Not only has this genre of tattoo flourished throughout the centuries, but it has become a true 'staple' in the world of tattooing. People have entire arms, legs, backs and bodies dedicated to Japanese tattoos and thousands of artists around the world specialize in and *only* tattoo Japanese subject-matter.

Similar to other countries and societies around the world, tattoo culture in Japan is practiced for a variety of reasons; body adornment, social status, religious practice, tribal recognition, punishment, and identity expression (Yamada, 2008). But also, like other cultures, tattoos in Japan have an inherently negative stigma attached to them. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, criminals were forcibly tattooed on their arms and foreheads with symbols that indicated the geographical places where they had committed their crime(s) which led to a negative association to tattoos. In fact, tattooed citizens are prohibited from a variety of public places, such as pools and saunas and business owners can prohibit tattooed people from being on their premises. Even with these inhibiting restrictions, tattoos have become increasingly popular across the country and some have begun to accept tattoos as both a form of art and a fashion (p. 3).

The stigma attached to tattoos is a result from centuries of their association with organized crime and gangs, such as the Yakuza who “pledge their allegiance with full-body markings” (Marsh, Ogura & Kobayashi, 2017, para. 3). And Japanese cultural values emphasize a focus on community and shared values that view conformity and uniformity as key to creating harmony. Known as a collectivistic culture in which goals of the group or community outweigh the needs or desires of individuals, tattoos are interpreted as a way to highlight ones’ individuality- an attribute typically frowned upon in a collectivist culture. As such, Japanese citizens often use tattoos to “express complex issues created by social currents” that are highlighted by the polarization from various Japanese citizens and the government (Yamada, 2008, p. 4). So while the art of tattooing was illegal at the federal level, many citizens were finding ways to use both the tattoo and the process of being tattooed as a way to highlight their individuality and communicate to others that they will not be suppressed by the government.

Many also turn to tattoos to emphasize cultural self-expression in the context of identity-construction (Yamada, 2008). Meaning, some Japanese citizens use tattoos to help construct their identities through their experiences of living in a culture that is revered around the globe for being one of the most intricate, beautiful and well-known genres of tattoos and yet remain culturally shunned. Yamada (2008) studies the tattoos of Japanese students studying or living abroad in Canada to better understand their identity-related meanings. In this study, he found that these tattoos represented the “historical, social, and cultural shifts and multi-layered meanings of tattooing practices” and the complicated identities that are constructed by the “hybrid” cultural form of Western influence and traditional Japanese culture (p. 4-5). According to Yamada many of the

tattooed Japanese students experienced ‘cultural tension’ between their traditional Japanese views and the Western concept of individuality that they had become accustomed to while living in Canada. And as such, the construction of their identity began to morph.

Yamada explains the concept of identity as “emerging from interactions between individuals and society” stating that our identity is an “ongoing phenomenon” which is constructed and reconstructed by our interactions with people, institutions and practices. (p. 7). He then explains tattoos and tattooing as using “coded meanings” to portray and communicate aspects of our identities to others. Similar to Yamada’s explanation of tattoos as a type of identity-construction through coded meaning, I explore the relationship between tattoos, trauma and identity where tattoos act as signs and repetitive performances. And through these signs and performance, people are constructing, reconstructing, and communicating their identities as it is tied to trauma. We can view this type of body modification as symbols and signs that are used to convey meaning and message to others. These tattoos are important signs and performances that enable others understand to not only understand aspects of identity, but how once interacts with others, society, and history. In this project, I explore how tattoos can be understood as signifiers and performances that convey meanings and messages to others about how their identity has and continues to be impacted and altered by the trauma they have experienced.

Yamada’s study had interesting findings. Ultimately, he found that the tattoos of these Japanese students had “multi-faceted meanings that combine their Japanese and Canadian environments” (2008, p. 3). Meaning, that the tattoos of these individuals acted as signs that expressed varying aspects of their identity as related to historical, social and

cultural aspects. Beyond being a ‘cool’ or unique form of art or fashion, these tattoos embodied the experiences of these people in the process of their identity-construction (2008). For these particular students, their tattoos are signs that convey their identity as both a Japanese citizen and a citizen of the world; a world in which it is illegal to be tattooed in Japan, and yet, other parts of the world immensely appreciate and welcome the art form. “Tattoos are their language, symbols, and signs of self-expression and self-determination, expressing a hybrid sense of the self, combining their home cultural identities and their Western cultural experiences” (Yamada, 2008, p. 21). And although each student had different tattoos, each of them sought to have their tattoos interpreted in a manner that expresses their identity as a Japanese citizen who respects their home cultural traditions, but also as someone who is at an intersection of their identity-construction.

The intersection between tattoos and identity has been studied in a plethora of unique and interesting ways. An interesting article written by Sonja Modesti, titled “Home Sweet Home: Tattoo Parlors as Postmodern Spaces of Agency” (2008) from the *Western Journal of Communication* explores ‘tattoo culture’ as a new form of mainstream culture due to various aspects, but most notably the “postmodern condition” (197). “Defined most significantly by temporally fragmented and eclectic, relative existence, the spaces of postmodern become essential objects of study,” I use this concept to better understand the relative nature of identity construction (197-198). The goal of this article is to explore the role of tattoo parlors as postmodern spaces of agency through themes such as materiality, embodiment and performance. In conducting this research, Modesti found that there were two main attributes associated to these themes in relation

to tattoo parlors: control and choice. Tattoo parlors provide a unique postmodern space in which the people who enter them are embodied by these performed elements of control and choice, fully-aware that the choices made in this space will permanently communicate a part of their identity to the public for the rest of their life.

Modesti first explains the importance of spatial studies within the communication realm, stating that an examination of visual rhetoric allows rhetorical scholarship to move beyond its current boundaries of purely linguistic artifacts to include more modern examinations. This includes material elements that are widespread within our culture, such as tattoo parlors. Here, she explains the role a tattoo parlor can play as a rhetorical genesis in both creating and understanding one's personal composition; "...every time I open the doors to another tattoo parlor, I literally open the doors to understanding another facet of who I am" (198). This link between the physical tattoo and the postmodern agency created by the tattoo parlor are all linked back to identity, especially as tattooing has become a mainstream form of identification in our current culture. As such, Modesti contends that this formation of identity begins not after the tattoo is complete, but where it first begins, in the tattoo parlor. Her analysis explains how postmodern spaces intersect with the rhetorical construction of agency, specifically as it is tied to tattoo parlors.

There are multiple themes that evolved from this case study of three different tattoos parlors; Freakshow! in Fort Collins, CO, Enchanted Ink in Boulder, CO and Mike's Tattoo Tyme in Hatboro, PA. Each person that received a tattoo in these shops engaged in a both a literal and rhetorical performance that is now embedded within their identity. Through these tattoos, which are uniquely created for each person that walks through the door, meaning is provided and enacted both through the end result of the

tattoo and through the process of being tattooed. Modesti states that while all serving different clientele in different cultures, all three shops provided a similar theme about the postmodern agency created by tattoo parlors: tattooing is an act of symbolic creativity and a “performance of the self,” a critical tool in the formation of identity (209). These performances of identity are designed to be “authentic representations of who we know ourselves to be” so, why would tattoos or any other form of body modification, be left out? (210). In our current society that is overrun with symbols, images, and messages, I argue that tattoos are an extremely authentic performance of self, as the result of this performance is quite literally, a life commitment. “For many, the practice of wearing tattoos has become an aspect of understanding the self within the dynamics of the everyday postmodern existence” (Modesti, 2008, p. 210). Many times, this understanding of self includes the memories and trauma from one’s past, either through their direct experiences or the experiences of those they love. These tattoos that represent and communicate to others vital and sometimes extremely vulnerable aspects of one’s identity.

In his book *The Social Semiotics of Tattoos: Skin and Self*, Chris Martin explores various realms of the symbolism of tattoos. He begins the book by stating the “devotion, command and commitment” of getting a tattoo loudly dictates a key identity trait to others: dedication. It takes a particular type of person to be so committed to an idea to permanently scar themselves with it. Through his social semiotic lens, Martin argues how tattoos provide an “anchor of stability in the treacherous waters of contemporary society” (Martin, 2019, p. 2). Tattoo enthusiasts take a type of ‘refuge’ in using their bodies to act as a sign to help create shared meaning with others. These tattoos act as signs that

represent various facets of self-identity, culture change, gender resistance, artistic endeavors or emotional signifiers. Ultimately, Martin suggests that this ‘anchoring of self’ in tattoos is an act of rebellion against the superficial and ephemeral qualities of modern society (p. 4).

Another semiotic exploration into tattoos comes in the form of ‘inked nostalgia’ of Japanese residents of Hawaii. Nearly 100 years after Japanese citizens began migrating to Hawaii, the Japanese language is no longer a stable medium within the community—rather, it is now used in a symbolic rather than literal manner to convey meaning. Many residents have turned to tattoos to both represent and signify their “true Japaneseness” (107). However, natives of Japan note that this is an unthinkable and unacceptable expression of Japaneseness, as tattoos have been long banned in the country. In fact, it was only in the early weeks of September 2020 that Japan made tattooing legal. This study explores the different perceptions of Japanese texts and identity through tattoos, especially as new cultural values are created both in Japan and Hawaii (Hiramoto, 2014).

Beyond the aesthetics of tattoos, this art form offers a unique way we can study identity through created and shared meaning from symbols and signs. From accents, to the use of slang words, hair color, clothing choices and body movement, we are always in some respect, communicating to the world who we understand ourselves to be. Before the application chapters that explore specific genres of tattoos and their relation to identity and trauma, I use chapter two to explain the theoretical and foundational works that will help guide this project. This includes two main theories; the theory of semiotics by Charles Sanders Peirce and performative studies/rhetoric as developed by Judith Butler. I

also utilize the work of three main scholars as related to identity work, embodiment and trauma: Gabrielle Schwab, Maurice Halbwachs and Cathy Caruth.

Project Overview

In six chapters, I explore how tattoos that are grounded in trauma are signifiers and performances of identity that can change or evolve in both space and time. Chapter one included the introduction to the subject matter, the statement and significance of this topic and a literature review of previous research from varying disciplines and fields related to tattoos and identity. Chapter two explains the methodological and foundational underpinnings of the theories and scholars that will be further used and developed within this project. First is the theory of semiotics from Charles Sander Peirce, considered the founder of modern semiotic theory, Peirce's work and understanding of signs and meaning can help create a unique exploration into tattoos and identity. His theory of semiotics is based on two main metaphors; understanding how signs function in the mind and second, the concept that meaning is a constantly changing thought process. This leads to his semiotic trichotomy in which he says all things can be identified as icon, index/index, or symbol signifiers. I explore how these tattoos can be identified as icons, indices, symbols, or a combination of these to communicate to others, aspects of their identity.

I then briefly introduce the idea of performance studies to guide this exploration into tattoos as performances of trauma. In each application chapter and section, I analyze how these tattoo genres can be signifiers and performances of identity, combining semiotics with performance studies to create a unique study on the construction of identity via tattoos. Then, in the last section I pivot to explore a different realm of

performance. Here, I state that while these tattoos are performances of trauma, they also illicit ethical performances from the ‘Other.’ In this, I use Levinas’ work on ethics and justice to explicate how specific tattoos, such as those steeped in social, political, and cultural phenomena require an ethical performance from those who come into contact with them. To do this, I use multiple theoretical foundations and work from various scholars whose diverse expertise within trauma studies combine to create a communication-focused project that explores how tattoos are signifiers and performances of trauma that actively construct and communicate aspects of ones identity through space and time.

I first turn to Peirce’s trichotomic concept of signs, which he explains as the three states of mind. First is feeling, which is the simple awareness of something; for instance, walking through your home in darkness. Second is reaction, the sense of acting or being acted upon. In this example, you then bump into something while walking in the dark; this requires both feeling and reaction. And third is thought, which is discovering a rule that connects action and reaction. You have bumped into this chair in the dark because your significant other returned home and moved the chair; this then requires feeling, reaction and thought. In this thought process, the bump becomes a sign that your partner is home.

For this study, this translates to the concept that tattoos have various meanings depending on the experience of both getting and having said tattoo (the act of being tattooed and the final product that is the tattoo) and that the meaning of these tattoos can change based on the trauma, people, place, and memory in which they are grounded in. The feeling, reaction and thought attached to both receiving and completing the tattoo

represent a sign or signifier of your identity to others. I look to contribute to this topic in a unique matter by emphasizing various concepts within Peirce's theory of semiotics, especially highlighting the spatial-temporal meanings that can be attached to tattoos.

This idea then plays into the discipline of performative rhetoric. As explained previously, the boundaries of what 'is' and rhetoric is ever expanding. I gave the example of how a recipe is a performance of rhetoric. Even though cooking a meal is not a rhetorical text, it is a rhetorical act. I give a brief introduction of this discipline focusing on one of its main developers, Judith Butler. And explain how this idea of performative rhetoric can be applied to tattoos. I then provide background for how semiotics and performative studies will work in harmony to provide a unique landscape for this project.

Then through the next three application chapters I use various trauma scholars to explore the role of tattoos as related to trauma and identity. Chapter three focuses on Schwab's work on transgenerational trauma and Halbwachs work on collective memory. Chapter four uses Caruth's concepts of latency and localization to explore the role of 'place' within trauma. The final application chapter begins with using Laub's concept of witness, testimony, and truth followed by Levinas' work on ethics and justice to explore the performance of the 'Other' that these tattoos call out. While each chapter focuses on different scholars, each section includes an analysis of the semiotic and performative aspects of tattoos, as well as how their meanings have shifted throughout space and time.

Tattoo Genres

For the application portion of this project I explore two specific genres of tattoos as signifiers and performances of identity construction. First, are Holocaust (or Auschwitz) tattoos. These are the infamous tattoos left on the Jewish (and some Polish,

Romanian and Soviet prisoners of war) survivors of the Auschwitz concentration camp in German-occupied Poland from 1940 to 1945. Nazis used these tattoos to be able to easily and quickly know which prisoners were capable of manual labor and to what extent. The lower the number, the longer the prisoner had been at the concentration camp. These tattoos are extremely communicative by nature; not only do they dictate to others the horrors one has seen and overcome, but they also allow for those survivors to give new meaning to these tattoos as they pertain to their identity. Their meaning as signifiers and performances of identity has drastically changed in the space and time since the end of World War I – the main theme I explore in this study of tattoos as tied to identity and trauma.

Second, I use 9/11 memorial tattoos to explore how the traumatic events of September 11th, 2001 have been inscribed on the skin of victims, survivors, and commemorators. These tattoos have a high communicative value and are often used to highlight one's dedication to the impact of the attacks and act as signifiers with various meanings. These tattoos are particularly unique in their tie to identity as many of those being tattooed with memorial pieces (to either a lost loved one, to commemorate first responders or a more general memorial piece) tend to have few tangible or direct memories tied to the event. Instead, they rely on familial stories, news coverages, books, articles, etc. written by others to form their opinions, and thus identities about and related to the trauma caused by 9/11.

Using these two differing genres will allow me to better understand the relationship between trauma and identity as tied to the performative act of being tattooed and the symbolism of the actual tattoo. I highlight the manner in which tattoos can be

understood using the constructs of transgenerational trauma and, collective memory. Latency and localization and witness, testimony, and truth emphasize how tattoos serve as signifiers and performances of identity that change in meaning through time and space. Using various theories and scholars and by expanding the boundaries of what is considered to be a ‘performance,’ I look to contribute to the communication, semiotic and performance studies disciplines.

I now turn to chapter two where I lay the theoretical and foundation groundwork that is used in the latter application chapters. First and most in-depth, I explore Peirce’s theory of semiotics which is an account of signification, representation, reference and meaning. In his account of semiotics, Peirce emphasizes the importance of the different signifying aspects in each of the semiotic trichotomy of icon, index and symbol. For this project, this could translate to: how can a tattoo acting as an icon, index or symbol be interpreted as a performance of ones’ identity as grounded in trauma? Then, I explore how this study of signs and signifying can be tied to performative rhetoric as I expand the boundaries of performance studies to that of tattoos. Then, I provide background information the five other scholars utilized for this project, being Schwab, Halbwachs, Caruth, Laub, and Levinas. Together, these theories and scholars provide a unique foundation for the construction of identity through tattoos as tied to trauma.

Chapter Two: Methodological Analysis

In this chapter, I introduce the main theories and scholars that lay the foundational groundwork that guide this project. First, is an introduction to the theory of semiotics developed by Charles Sanders Peirce, followed by an exploration into performative studies heavily guided by Judith Butler and Richard Schechner. I then explain how these two main theories work together to build cohesion between the study of signs and performances studies to create a unique entrance for tattoos as both signifiers and performances. Together, these help to create this project that centers around the symbolic and performative nature of tattoos and tattooing as tied to identity and trauma. Next, I introduce the five other central scholars to this project; Gabrielle Schwab, Maurice Halbwachs, Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, and Emmanuel Levinas. Each scholar and their subsequent research help provide a foundational ground for my study that explores tattoos as both symbolic artifact and a type of performance that helps construct identity. Finally, I briefly explain each genre of tattoo that will be explored in latter chapters.

The Theory of Semiotics by Charles S. Peirce

Put simply, Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of semiotics is a formal doctrine of signs; that is, a formal discipline that is the analytic study of the "essential conditions to which all signs are subject" (Liszka, 1996, p. 1). The aim of this theory was to understand both the "what *must* be the characters of all signs" and the "what *would* be true of signs" in which he considered to be an empirical science in that he wanted to discover both what was true and the conditions for counting something as true (Liszka, 1996, p. 1-2). It was these two conditions that differentiated semiotics from what was traditionally understood as a formal science by society. Many theories and sciences like semiotics, such as

phenomenology and ethics, were considered under the realm of philosophy. As such, these were categorized as derivatives of formal sciences as they did not study the form of their own construction, but merely the form of things that are already in existence or have already been constructed.

However, Peirce argued that semiotics, along with other disciplines within philosophy, should be considered a formal science as they share a same essential feature of understanding the conditions that makes something true. He then categorized formal sciences into three divisions based on differing modes of observation: mathematics, philosophy and empirical sciences. He placed semiotics as a subdivision of philosophy as its main concern revolves around the question of truth. However, his theory of semiotics was less concerned with what was ‘actually’ true but rather to understanding and establishing the conditions for what makes something true. He believed that since all thought and knowledge existed within signs, then the question of truth revolved around the “formal conditions of signs, their character, their employment, and their transmission and development” (Liszka, 1996, p. 5-6). Peirce characterized the semiotics as the science of the necessary laws of signs and illustrated that regardless how a sign is manifested, such as a sound, picture, thought, event, or even a tattoo, the formal conditions which make it a sign are always present.

After establishing semiotics as a formal science, under the umbrella of philosophy, Peirce then divided semiotics into three different branches. Grammar, logic and rhetoric are all still concerned with the different facets of truth yet differ in their reference to the sign. Grammar is the study of the features and modes of expression of a sign. Its goal is to understand what must be true about a sign in order for it to have and

convey meaning; or better known as, the formal conditions (Peirce, 1991). Second, is logic which is focused on the way that signs can help distinguish truth. It answers the question “what are the necessary conditions for a sign to tell us something truthful about the objects they represent?” (Liszka, 1996, p. 10). Thus, this division of semiotics establishes criteria for ‘good’ or logical, thinking. Some may view this division of semiotics as the safety; how can one avoid or eliminate errors or distortions when attempting to find truth?

The third division is rhetoric, which studies the way which signs are used for communication and expression within community and society. Peirce stated that this facet of semiotics explored the transmission of meaning via signs from “mind to mind” (Peirce, 1839-1914, n.p.) He understood the rhetoric of semiotics to be expansive in that one sign and its meaning could easily lead to the development of another sign, based on the idea that one thought often leads to another. The rhetoric of semiotics could be understood as how we render signs effective, which requires examining the philosophy of signification (Lyne, 2009). Ultimately, the rhetoric branch of semiotics studies the formal conditions for which signs can be developed, communicated, understood and accepted (Liszka, 1996).

Although each branch of semiotics is important to understanding the theory, this project focuses on the rhetorical side of semiotics, as I explore the way in which tattoos are signifiers of identity that are communicated, understood and accepted within our current society. Although these signs take on the same technical physical form in being a tattoo, the development, communication, understanding and acceptance of these signs vary due to the change in space and time. Each genre of tattoo that I explore later-on in

this project have different meanings that are being signified by the wearer, as well as drastically different circumstances that led to the creation of the tattoo/symbol. The historical significance of each genre also plays a large role in their communicated meaning. The stigma and collective memory of the Holocaust, the 9/11 terrorist attacks and ongoing deadly diseases changes the way in which these tattoos are communicated, understood and accepted (or doubted?) in the larger community context. As such, this rhetorical branch of semiotics is essential to understanding the way in which tattoos can be understood as signs that communicate meaning.

Rhetorical Branch of the Semiotic Trivium

Many still argue that within Peirce's semiotic trivium, rhetoric's third and last placement behind grammar and logic, was intentional but, he did become more vocal about the value of rhetoric's importance in later scholarship. In his earlier studies and interactions, it appeared as though Peirce had less concern for the rhetoric branch and spent far less time systematizing its approach. However, some have noted Peirce's 'rhetorical turn' in relation to his intellectual life to which he found new meaning and importance in what he coined as 'speculative rhetoric' (Peirce, 1896, p. 229). He defines this as "the study of the necessary conditions of the transmission of meaning by signs from mind to mind, and from one state of mind to another" (pp. 229-230). After thorough digging into past work, some scholars have stated that Peirce understood speculative rhetoric to be the "highest and most living branch" although it was not until his later years that this became apparent (Colapietro, 2007, p. 17; a, 2017).

So, where did this rhetorical turn come from? Much of Peirce's later work within semiotics highlighted the importance of studying signs in their most basic form and

functions. With these studies came the most essential aspect; being able to articulate their meanings to others. As the rhetoric branch of semiotics focuses on the development, communication, understanding and acceptance of signs, it became increasingly more important and livelier to Peirce (Colapietro, 2007). Although considered his most underdeveloped branch of semiotics, many see rhetoric as the one with the most potential, fruitful and important. Peirce often linked speculative rhetoric to the “uppermost department of logical inquiry” (Bergman, 2015, p. 473). The link between the logic and rhetoric branch within Peirce’s theory of semiotics can be observed in his growing emphasis on two main elements: reason and transmission. That is, the rational development of signs and symbols means little without the successful transmission of them, which requires this third rhetorical branch.

In his lecture *Reasoning and the Logic of Things* (1898), Peirce explains new elements to the speculative rhetoric branch of semiotics as now including methodology, applications of logic and objective logic. This is an important finding, as we could now better understand how Peirce viewed the importance of rhetoric. This was the first time that he “plainly designates the development of methods as a specifically rhetorical task” (Bergman, 2015, p.477). It is also in this lecture that Peirce explains his disdain with the term ‘speculative rhetoric,’ although it is not until a couple years later that he re-introduces this third branch as “methodeutic” (Peirce, 1902, p. 93). Now defined as “the methods that ought to be pursued in the investigation, in the exposition, and in the application of truth” (Peirce, 1903, p. 2; Bergman, 2015, p. 478). Simply put, this branch now focused more on methods of inquiry and transmissions of those findings. It appears that Peirce used the two names interchangeably: sometimes referring to the third branch

as methodetic and sometimes as speculative rhetoric. Regardless of the name, this branch gained relevance and importance within his theory of semiotics.

Peirce continues his exploration into the importance of rhetoric in his unpublished manuscript “Ideas, stray or stolen, about scientific writing” (1904) in which he again re-defines speculative rhetoric as “the science of the essential conditions under which a sign may determine an interpretant sign of itself and of whatever it signifies, or may, as a sign, bring about a physical result” (p. 326). This definition is vital as it explicates Peirce’s understanding of the importance of communication (or rhetoric) as the key component between ideas and their physical effects. Meaning, producing or developing ideas will only have a physical impact or real effect when they are properly communicated (Bergman, 2015). Although many contend that Peirce would still find this branch in its rightful third-place position, I assert that rhetoric deserves a much higher rank; without the ability to develop and communicate the meanings of signs, they are rendered near worthless.

In his book “Peirce, Signs and Meaning” (1997) Floyd Merrell discusses this development and communication of signs within the “semiotic world” (p. 2). In this, he explains the mind’s relation to signs as a two-way road. He states that the mind struggles to interpret this ‘semiotic world,’ and simultaneously the same semiotic world is what the mind (or signs) places there. Meaning, that while the mind may struggle to interpret the signs of the world, it is also the place where these signs are initiated and created- Peirce called this ‘objective idealism’ (Merrell, 1997, p. 26). “Mind brings signs into existence at the same time that they serve to perpetuate the existence of mind. Each mind’s ‘semiotic world’ is a staccato of signs intermittently presented to and brought together by

a semiotic agent” (Merrell, 1997, p. 26). Per Niels Bohr, these semiotic agents are both spectators and actors in the “great drama of semiosis” (1958, p. 119). In simpler terms, minds actively take part in semiosis (sign processing) with its surroundings, which leads to the construction of meaning. In fact, the mind never stops intervening and interacting with both the ‘real’ world and the ‘semiotic’ world (Merrell, 1997, p. 27).

This then leads us to first, a brief overview of Peirce’s trichotomyology; First-second-third(ness) and second, to his categorical breakdown of the different roles a sign takes on as a signifier in the world (icon, index, or symbol.) These will both be essential in understanding the connection to both performative studies and the general goal of this project, tattoos. Peirce’s trichotomyology, not surprisingly, consists of three aspects that work together to give meanings to signs. First is an initial *sign*, second is an *object*, which is the signs “semiotically real” artifact which are “conjointly mediated and moderated” by a third or, the *interpretant* (Merrell, 1997, pp. 1-2). That is, signs must be grounded in something real for them to then be interpreted and convey meaning. This is called a semiotic agent or as Peirce calls it, the object, which can be human or other (like an animal) that is in constant interaction with the signs around them, to which they then interpret and associate meaning.

Firstness, secondness and thirdness all work together to manifest meaning. Merrell explains “the *possible*, the *is*, and *would be*” as the “true essence” of Peirce’s trichotomy (p. 27). He explains that all three work together to make sense of the sign sequences in our world, which then create meaning at both the tacit and conscious levels. In relating this back to rhetoric and communication, we could understand the ‘tacit’ meaning as nonverbal communication as it is implied or understood without being explicitly stated.

As we know, meaning is not merely created by the explicit- it is equally developed and conveyed through what is *not* said. This also applies to the theory of semiotics in that the communicated meaning through sign processing must be contextualized. The communicator is both an interpreter and a part of the interpretive act (Merrell, 1997, p. 28).

To better understand this, I look at Mikhail Bakhtin's work regarding Peirce's trichotomy of firstness, secondness and thirdness. He interprets Peirce's trichotomy in harmony with the dialogic trichotomy of *emissor-sign-object*. In this interaction, context is of the utmost importance; situatedness of the sign changes the rhetorical context and thus, the communicated meaning. Bakhtin states that this type of contextualized meaning exists at the 'style-intonaton' level, a term coined by him in the 1980s. In this level, Bakhtin states that verbal discourse is not self-sufficient; language always includes subtle yet important nuances beyond the spoken word. Meaning exists between the said, the unsaid and the self-other, and as such, contextualization is an absolute necessity to adequate understanding (Bakhtin, 1981).

Peirce's understanding of firstness, secondness and thirdness can also be related back to the semiotic or Peircean trichotomy, developed in 1904 (Jappy, 2017, p.77). As previously, but briefly, mentioned, Peirce created signifying categories to which signs exist within. He stated that signs 'take on' roles as signifiers in three distinct ways; icon (firstness), index (secondness) and/or symbol (thirdness) (pp. 77-78). Together, these create Peirce's semiotic trichotomy which work in a cyclical and correlated manner. In the following application chapters, I discuss how each genre of tattoo can be interpreted as signs and performances of identity grounded in trauma within varying trauma studies

concepts; transgenerational trauma, collective and religious memory, latency and localization, and witness/testimony.

Peirce's Trichotomy of Signs: Icon, Index, Symbol

So, what can be qualified as a sign? The options are near endless. Sounds, flavor, smells, events, acts, objects, colors...can all be considered signs. But Peirce stated that these things have no intrinsic meaning; something only becomes a sign when we *invest* meaning into them (Boghian, 2010). As such, a sign is a trichotomic entity that is formed in a thought process including a physical form also known as the representamen, an interpretant which is a concept in someone's mind (meaning this is not an interpreter, but instead the sense made of the sign) and an object or situation to which the sign refers (Boghian, 2010). A quick and easy example of this is using a fire; we see smoke (physical form), we then have then the association between smoke and fire (concept in someone's mind) and then we remember a particular fire or dire event (object or situation to which the sign refers). Nothing is a sign unless we interpret it as such, so the physical form of smoke reminds us of fire because of the attributed meaning of smoke. This trichotomic entity is then directly tied to Peirce's categorization of signs via icon, index/index and symbol.

Introduced in his Harvard 1904 lecture, icon, index and symbol are the three different ways in which signs are signified. Peirce also noted that often signs had elements of two or sometimes, all three (Harbeck, 2011). An icon signifier is perceived as resembling the signified, referred to as a "Representamen" by Peirce (De Toro, 1995, p. 63). This means that it has commonalities with another object(s) and brings the other similar object(s) to mind, acting as a form of expression (De Toro, 1995). Icons should

then have multiple traits or properties of the represented object, item, event, etc. The unique aspect of an icon as a sign is that it can refer to the object that it denotes by virtue of its own characters whether said object actually exists. An icon can virtually be anything, as long as it is 'like' another thing and used as a sign of it (think of a unicorn; it is not a real object, but an imagined object, from which we can draw resemblance from) (De Toro, 1995). Some scholars note that all icons can then be transformed into either an index or symbol, or both.

Examples of an icons are portraits, scale models, onomatopoeia, metaphors, sound effects, imitative gestures...anything in which the signifier is resembling. Understanding this, it is easy to see how tattoos could be icons; often times, tattoos are resembling or imitating other objects or events, taking on direct likeness or adding an artistic flare adding to the interpretation of the artwork. An example of this is a chef being tattooed with cooking related objects (food, tools, uniform) that resemble the objects and tools they use in their everyday life. Whether done in a realistic (called 'realism' in the tattoo world) or a more abstract manner, the tattoos are still resembling, in some manner, objects. The interesting and unique aspect with tattoos, and art in general, is the idea of taking real-life objects and inserting unrealistic characteristics or aspects to make it personalized to a person, community, or society. I grew up mesmerized by the bright colors of my Lisa Frank memorabilia and fascinated with leopards; as an adult, I combined these traits for a neon, Lisa Frank-inspired colored leopard tattoo. Although the leopard represents an anatomically correct animal, the colors represent my love of Lisa Frank; creating a tattoo that is a true form of personalized self-expression.

Next is index (also called an index) which is a signifier that is directly connected, either physically or has a causal connection, to the signified. While an icon signifies via resemblance, an index signifies via an existential relationship (De Toro, 1995). Unlike an icon, an index as a sign always has a “real existence and presence” (De Toro, 1995, p. 74). Examples of this are natural signs (thunder, smoke, footprints, medical symptoms), measuring instruments (thermometer, clock, scales), signals (a knock on the door, phone ringing or vibrating) or pointers (pointing a finger or a signpost). An index either has evidence of something or directs attention to something; we can then understand how signs as indices work.

Using the example of a natural sign, one associate thunder with a storm. Thunder as a signifier is directly connected to the bigger event, which is the storm. One can again easily comprehend how tattoos can be an index, as artwork is often directly connected to a bigger event or idea. An example of this would be a parent getting the footprint or handprint of their children tattooed. Both (the footprint or handprint) are directly connected to the signified, being the child (person) that these represent. It is also important to note that in this example the relationship between the tattoo and the object is that it is concerned with its *actual* existence, which in this example is the person that the tattoo signifies.

And lastly is symbol, which is when the signifier is arbitrary or purely conventional (Harbeck, 2011). Often, symbols are made of up either an icon or index in that its elements come from these two other types of signs (De Toro, 1995). “When Peirce speaks of a symbol, he is referring to the symbolic nature, for example, of language or logic” (De Toro, 1995, p. 75). Words, sentences, letters, numbers, Morse

code, traffic lights, national flags, some gestures (such as a peace sign) are all examples of symbols. A symbol is the most unique aspect within Peirce's semiotic trichotomy, as it requires more structure to understand. While an icon or an index may exist without an interpretant (although they do require objects) a symbol stops being a sign if it has no interpretant (De Toro, 1995). Meaning, that a symbol needs to be decodified to be understood; they work by the way of accumulation and tradition of the social, historical, artistic, etc. practices that it exists within (Boghian, 2011). Symbols are also unique in that their meaning can grow and change as they "develop out of other signs" (De Toro, 1996, p. 76).

While icons are linked to the object(s) it represents and indices are physically linked to its object, neither require an interpreter to establish the relationship. The relationship between the tattoos of cooking items or of a baby's foot or handprint to the objects or people they represent is, for a lack of better word, obvious. No interpreter is needed for the basic or obvious meaning. However, for symbols to convey meaning there must be an interpreter who creates the relationship within the greater social tradition. Icons and indices are recognized while symbols are interpreted. A clear example of this can be seen by looking at traffic lights; we only know that red means 'stop,' green is 'go' and yellow is 'slow down' because of the past experiential history and cultural contexts. In other settings, we do not interpret yellow, green, or red lights in this way but because of social settings and experience, we know the interpreted meaning of these lights in this context.

For Peirce, an icon is a *direct* relationship between a sign and an object, like a picture of a famous person. An index has a *real* relationship between the sign and the

object it points to, like smoke pointing to fire. And a symbol has a more abstract, learned, cultural or habitual understanding, like the meaning of a phoenix in literature being rebirth or a burning bush in the Bible being a symbol of wisdom. Each of these represent varying relationships to something being an aspect of a sign. Understanding how icons, indices, and symbols are understood by Peirce then makes it easier to understand how tattoos could be interpreted using this semiotic theory.

A prime example of an object that can be interpreted in multiple ways is a flag. One of the most famous linguistic interpreters of Peirce, Thomas Sebeok, gives an example of how different aspects of a flag can be an icon, index, or symbol in his book *Signs: An introduction to semiotics* (2001). He states that to fully understand Peirce, it is important to understand that it is “not signs that are actually being classified, but more precisely, aspects of signs; in other words, a given sign may – and, more often than not does – exhibit more than one aspect, so that one must recognize differences in gradation” (p. 43). Sebeok states that most objects can, depending on circumstance and context, function in the role of an icon, index, or symbol. He then provides an example using the United States flag, or the “Stars and Stripes” and the ways in which they can function as these different signs (p. 89).

As an icon, the flag acts as an interpretation of the origins of the United States by the use of the seven red horizontal stripes alternating with the six white horizontal stripes, as these represent the number of the founding colonies. Or the use of fifty white stars, which represent the number of states within the Union – a number that has evolved over the years and as such, so has the number of stars on the flag. In understanding this interpretation of the flag, it would be considered an icon as there is a direct relationship

between the sign (the stripes and stars of the flag) to the object (which in this case, is the United States of America).

In Sebeok's second example using the flag, he states that in calvary charges, the flag was commonly used to "imperatively point, in an indexical fashion, to a target" (p. 90). In this interpretation, the flag is an index signifier in that it has a real relationship between the sign (the flag) and the object it points to (being the enemy or target). And finally, he explains how the flag can be understood as a symbol using the Supreme Court case *Texas v. Johnson*. On June 21, 1989, the United States Supreme Court upheld the rights of protestors to burn the American flag, a landmark First Amendment decision (NCC Staff, 2020). The Court decided with a 5-4 vote in favor of Gregory Lee Johnson, who had burned a flag outside the 1984 Republican National Convention in Dallas protesting the policies and actions of then President Ronald Reagan. The majority argued that Johnson's actions were "symbolic speech, political in nature, and could be expressed even at the expense of our national symbol" (NCC Staff, 2020, para. 1). Sebeok states that in this scenario, flag burning present the stars and stripes of the United States flag as an "emotionally surcharged problem, being a subspecies of symbol" (Sebeok, 2001, p. 90). In this interpretation of the flag, it is a more abstract symbol as it has a more abstract, learned, and cultural social understanding. As flags are a common subject-matter for tattoos as related to identity, Sebeok's example is especially prevalent for the scope of this project.

Another current day example within the tattoo community is the symbolic use of a semicolon tattoo. Although we traditionally understand a semicolon to be a punctuation mark denoting a substantial pause between two main clauses, it has taken on new

meaning as a tattoo as a symbol of suicide awareness and prevention. A semicolon is used when an author decides to continue their sentence, rather than end it. “Project Semicolon” explains the relationship of this understanding of a semicolon to that of the tattoo: “The author is you and the sentence is your life” (Project;, 2020). And thus, a semicolon tattoo is a symbol working to change the stigma around suicide and to raise awareness around the cause. These tattoos are symbols in that an interpreter creates a relationship between the two based off the socially constructed meaning.

Together, icon, index and symbol form a progression of feeling, reaction, thought that emphasizes how the signifier and signified are related. Icon has resemblance, but no actual relation (feeling), index has a physical relation (reaction) and symbol is only related by a concept in the mind (thought). They all work together within communication to create meaning. Language (symbols) is used with nonverbals (icons and indices) when talking to create and convey meaning. And signs often combine iconic, indexical and symbolic elements. With these understanding and theories of signs, we can better understand how Peirce’s theory of semiotics implied that meaning depended on experience (think back to chapter one and the bumping into a chair example) and meaning is *constantly changing* through our thought process, space and time.

In the realm of this greater project, I apply Peirce’s understanding of signs in their differing signifying forms of icon (firstness), index (secondness) and symbols (thirdness) to better understand how tattoos are signs grounded in trauma as related to the identity of a person within a social and historical context. I lean on Peirce’s understanding that meaning is constantly changing and apply this to the spatial temporal relationships of tattoos and their wearers. I also examine the performance aspect of

tattoos; first in the actual act of being tattooed as a rhetorical performance and second, the often-ethical performance that is being called to from those who observe the tattoo and its associated meaning. With that, I now turn to an introduction to performative studies and performative rhetoric.

Introduction to Performance Studies

The idea and definition of performance is vast- but generally speaking, to perform is defined as doing something up to a certain standard, to succeed or to excel (Schechner, 2013b). But what does it mean within the realm of performance studies? While there is no historical or culturally-fixed limit as to what a performance is, there are some guidelines as it pertains to performance studies (De Marinis, 1993). Within performance studies, ‘to perform’ can be understood in four main ways: being, doing, showing-doing, explaining showing-doing (p. 22). Being is existence itself; doing is the activity of all that exists, showing-doing is performing (pointing to, underlining, displaying doing) and “explaining showing-doing is the work of performance studies” (p. 22). This last aspect of explaining is the key aspect to performance studies as it focuses on explaining the ways in which performance can be rhetorical. Explaining the ‘showing-doing’ is a “reflexive effort to comprehend the world of performance and the world as performance” (pp. 22-23). This work is then done by critics and scholars who interpret these performances and translate them to be understood within a rhetorical scope.

Simply put, performances are actions. Performance studies then interprets these actions in four ways. First is behavior, which is the ‘object of study.’ In this aspect, performance studies focus on “what people do in the activity of their doing” (Schechner, 2013a, p. 2). Second is artistic practice- a major component of performance studies. This

particular action studies the relationship between studying performance and doing performance. Third is fieldwork known as ‘participant observation.’ In these observations is where one can learn about people and culture(s). For obvious reasons, Western culture had traditionally been viewed as the norm, while non-Western cultures as the ‘other.’ However, within performance studies, one can view the ‘other’ as part of their culture or behavior (pp. 2-3). And fourth, performance studies actively participate in social practices and advocacies. Overall, performance studies are a wide and encompassing discipline that evolves as the world changes.

In earlier performance studies, there was a clear delineation studying something ‘as’ performance and something ‘is’ a performance. There are outlined limitations as to what ‘is’ performance, but almost anything can be studied ‘as’ a performance (Schechner, 2013b). Schechner outlines that something ‘is’ performance when “historical and social context, convention, usage and tradition say so” (p. 30). And, studying something ‘as’ performance has a much wider scope; any behavior, event, action or thing can be studied ‘as’ performance (p. 32). Historically, the main difference between the two is whether or not the performance can be tied to a specific cultural circumstance or tradition; if it can, it is placed in the ‘is’ performance category. “Is” performance has more definite boundaries and limitations that are marked by context, convention, usage, and tradition (Schechner, 2013a). However, within the 21st century the difference between ‘is’ and ‘as’ performance has dwindled. This is because technology and globalization has caused people to now experience their lives as a connected series of performances. Often these performances in everyday life are identity constructions; a concept I lean on within the scope of this project (Schechner, 2013a).

Performances within the discipline vary; from serious to playful to competitions, performance comes in all different kinds. In his book, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, Richard Schechner (edited by Sara Brady) explains the two main components that performance studies dissect, which are the different kinds of performances and functions of those performances. He states that performances occur in eight different situations: sometimes alone and sometime overlapping. They are everyday life (cooking, socializing, 'living'), in arts, sports and entertainment, business, technology, sex, ritual (sacred and secular) and play (p. 25). While this list is not exhaustive, it aims to include all the actions, events and situations that could be performance. Some categories are vaguer than others (e.g.: everyday life could be almost anything) these eight different listed performance kinds cover a large portion of performance. Often time, performances will fit into multiple categories; for example, sports and popular entertainment certainly fits into the 'everyday life' occurrence, and in some niche sports such as synchronized swimming, diving or gymnastics, it could also be analyzed within the arts. It is also important to recognize the roles history and culture may play in the definition of performance; the ritual objects of one cultural or historical period may be the arts of other culture and periods. For this project, I examine how tattoos fit into various of these categories simultaneously to help construct identity.

Schechner also outlines the main functions of performance; what do they accomplish? Although not a universal understanding, he pulls from various scholars, cultures, definitions, and proposals to develop seven main functions of a performance. These are, in no particular order: to heal, to mark or change identity, to entertain, to deal with the sacred/demonic, to teach, persuade or convince, to make or foster community,

and to make something beautiful/appealing. I noted that these are not listed in a particular order as the idea of importance as related to each of these is subjective. The hierarchy of these will change from person to person, depending on “who you are and what you want to get done” (p. 38). Another important note is that no single performance accomplishes all of these functions; yet it is possible, and usually likely, for a performance to emphasize more than one or two of these.

For example, a play often emphasizes multiple of these aspects. The musical *Rent* by Jonathon Larson (1994) has a variety of these functions rolled into one performance. It entertains, as it is a play for people to go and watch. It fosters community, as it asks the audience to empathize and sympathize with the characters and their real-life struggles. It teaches the audience the sad and tragic history revolving around the AIDS epidemic. It creates a beautiful story about a sad topic. And some could say it seeks to heal those impacted by AIDS, either directly or indirectly. This one performance encompasses various functions; entertainment, building community, healing and to make something beautiful. The performance of this play calls out different functions depending on the individual, the historical moment, the space, the location, etc. Much like the kinds of performance, the functions often overlapped with analyzed.

One of the main scopes of my project is to explore how performance is tied to identity through tattooing. To understand how this is possible within the realm of tattoos and tattooing, I turn to one of the most important figures within performance studies, Judith Butler. In her revolutionary book *Gender Trouble* (1999a) Butler explores how “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender...identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results (p. 33). She explains

that gender is performative in that it is “always doing” and that the “deed [of doing or performing] is everything” (p. 33). Butler states that as a society, we need to reconstruct our views on gender; it is not something ‘we are’ but something ‘we do.’ We identify ‘sex’ as biologically being male or female. But gender is culturally dictated, constructed and “consensually validated form of identity” (Gender Trouble, 2006, para. 2). Meaning, rather than having a gender, we actively perform our gender through a variety of facets.

As humans, often the most well-known and definable aspects of our identities are these culturally and socially bound and constructed performances. But we always have the nagging sense of our social responsibilities as tied to gender; men are this, women are this; men act this way, women act this way because ‘that’s just how it is.’ This is the narrative Butler actively pushes back against; gender is not something we are, and it never has been. It is a performance of our identity that we are always ‘doing.’ An example of this is the term feminism; in chapter one in *Gender Trouble* (1999a) focuses on this term as it relates to women. She takes time to explain that this term is misleading in that there is an assumption that it equates to a common identity among all feminists or women; “if one ‘is’ a woman, that is surely not all one is” (p. 6). Meaning, the performance of feminism looks different for different people. This is similar to her construction of gender. Gender is not something a person is, it is performed in an intersection with race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture, etc. She states that with this in mind, gender then becomes impossible to separate from the political and culture influences in which it is both “produced and maintained” (pp. 6-7). Butler asks her readers to help disseminate the narrative of the binary view of sex, gender, and sexuality by introducing this theory of gender as performance; hence the name gender ‘trouble.’

Ultimately, Butler argues that gender is not merely a lingering quality derived from biological sex or an inherent identity, but an “act which grows out of, reinforces, and is reinforced by, societal norms and creates the illusion of binary sex” (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018, p. 1). One of the key metaphors within Butler’s work is that gender as an identity is not essential; we do not need to have a defined gender to make sense as a person. Instead, we should view gender as repeated performances based on and reinforced by societal norms. This performance of gender is than performative in nature in that it creates an idea of gender. So, rather than ‘being’ women or men, individuals ‘act’ as women or men, and thus these categories are created. And there are harsh and critical consequences if people fail to ‘do’ gender wrong. This is the narrative Butler is pushing against, stating that gender is actually created by its own performance which may fall outside of these binary norms.

Butler’s work calls for the end of these problematic structures and practices and to focus on the narrative that gender is something one does or performs; not something one is (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018). Her work within performance studies, gender studies and queer theory are critical; she is one of the pioneers within the concept of performative studies. Her work created the possibility for expanding the possibility of what could be considered performance and be studied within performance studies. Including looking at what at once was considered merely rhetorical, as acts of performance. It is with this theory and the work of Butler that I work towards expanding on the narrative of identity performance through tattoos, and that it is not only the finished product or tattoo that is an expression of identity, but the circumstances, events and situations that led to the performance of said tattoo. It is not the ‘being’ of the tattoo, but also the ‘doing.’

So, how do rhetorical acts fit into this realm of performance studies? In chapter one I gave the example of cooking a recipe as a rhetorical act that is understood as performance. The recipe is the rhetorical or literal aspect, but actually cooking said recipe is the performance of the rhetorical act. But I want to give a couple other examples of how rhetoric works within performance studies. In his 1991 article *Rhetoric and the Performative Act of Declaring War* James Benjamin explores how the act of declaring war has a very obvious performative aspect:

The communication pattern when a president requests war is a part of the performative speech act in which the communicative act brings into being the existence of a define social state. Just as the umpire declaring a runner 'out' is different from a fan in the stands making the same statement, some rhetorical acts are performative rather than strictly descriptive or persuasive utterances (p. 73). Throughout the article Benjamin uses a variety of analysis to explain how a president declaring war is more of a performative act than merely a rhetorical one. One way in which he does this is by likening declaring war to the analogy of a priest's rituals within church. Although both have an actual verbal or rhetorical component, the accompanying meaning that is emphasized throughout the words leads the audience to view these more as performances than speeches.

He also explains that understanding the process for how war is declared is imperative to understanding how it can be understood as a performative act. First, the president presents a war message to Congress, then a resolution is introduced to Congress and referred to the committee. Lastly, the president signs the declaration. Benjamin explains that this procedure is no different than any other message requesting legislation;

however, typically the act of declaring war is so important that it is swiftly passed, rather than the usual slow and drawn out deliberation of Congress. And with the passage of the legislation, there is a shift in power relations. This is important to understand in relation to the performative aspect of declaring war; rather than being a normative or fundamental ritual, declaring war causes a shift in power that impacts both the government and the governed (Benjamin, 1991). The act of declaring war temporarily restructures the power balance of the government, which has real life ramifications; and as such, is as a performance rather than a mere rhetorical act.

For this project, I seek to explore the role of tattooing as a performance of identity in various facets, all centered around the idea of tattoos as signs grounded in trauma. Although some tattoos can be read (texts, sentences, scriptures, numbers, etc.), I explore how all tattoos have some sort of communicative aspect, commonly grounded in the concept of trauma and actively and nonverbally construct one's identity. I focus on this idea that tattoos are a performance - as Butler stated in reference to gender, it is not something you are, but something you do. I lean on this theory within this realm of tattooing; tattoos are not something that just 'are', but they are something the wearer actively 'does.'

Regarding performance, another interesting aspect that I explore in this project is the idea that tattoos grounded in trauma, such as Holocaust or 9/11 memorial tattoos, also call out an ethical performance from the 'other.' To do this I lean on Emmanuel Levinas' concept of the 'Other' as tied to human responsibility. He explains "I understand responsibility as responsibility to the Other, thus as responsibility for what is not my deed, or for what does not even matter to me; or which precisely does matter to me, is

met by me as face” (Levinas, 1979, p. 95). In this, Levinas refers to an ‘immemorial echo’ that calls us into responsibility and action for the Other (Arnett, 2017). That is, one must maintain an ethical standard of responsibility for those who are not present, who do not have a voice, or who do not have a metaphorical ‘seat at the table” (Arnett, 2017). In relation to this project, we can understand this ethical call to action as a necessary performance. When we see tattoos such as those from Auschwitz survivors or those memorializing 9/11/2001, these tattoos call out to us to perform in an ethical manner in remembering the Holocaust and September 11th, their prominent place in history.

Although it may seem like an uncommon pairing, semiotics works in unison with performance studies for this project. I conjoin parts of Peirce’s theory of semiotics to the discipline of performance studies to understand how tattoos are signs, grounded in trauma and are simultaneously performances that help others understand aspects of one’s identity. Then, I will look at the spatial-temporal relationship between identity, trauma, and memory; how do the meanings of signs and performances of identity change throughout and within space and time? A key aspect to understanding how semiotics and performance studies work together for this study is to understand that tattoos can act as signs grounded in trauma, which are performed in different ways and functions, that communicate varying aspects about identity.

I recognize that there are various aspects of both the theory of semiotics and performance studies that could have been used to conduct this study. However, I chose to focus on Peirce’s trichotomy of icon, index, and symbol as it created a clear and specific way for me to explore the different ways that these tattoos could be interpreted and understood within the communication discipline. These components, icon, index, and

symbol, all have clear definitions and boundaries – I seek to expand those boundaries and apply this Peircean trichotomy to more non-traditional canvases, such as tattoos on the human body. As I explore how each of these tattoos fit into this trichotomy, I also observe the varying ways in which they are acting as a performance of identity. This performance of identity then ties back to the symbolic meaning held by these tattoos, as categorized by Pierce’s trichotomy.

For semiotics and performance studies to work in conjunction, there must be a common narrative ground between them. For this study, the common ground is trauma; for symbols to be symbols and have and convey meaning, Peirce explains that some component of these objects, artifacts, etc. must be grounded in reality. For this project, this grounded reality is in trauma is something all wearers of these tattoos have experienced, although in vastly different ways, in different spaces and different points in history. As such, this combination of semiotics with performance studies under the lens of a spatial-temporal relationship, opens up a new realm of what we could consider communication. Tattoos and other body modifications have oftentimes been researched as a type of communication about ones-self, but this project expands the idea of what tattoos can represent and communicate, as well as suggests an ongoing performance of identity.

The last two sections of this chapter focus on the five scholars that help build the foundation for understanding the importance of tattoos within trauma and identity and help explain why these specific tattoo genres were chosen for this study, as well as an explanation of both tattoo genres.

Introduction to Schwab, Halbwachs, Caruth, Laub and Levinas

This final section gives a brief introduction to the remaining scholars that will be used throughout this project. Each provides expertise on varying concepts that will work together to provide the lens for this project centered around tattoos as signs and performances of identity as tied to memory, place, and embodiment. It is important to note that both genres of tattoos will not be explored in each section due to space and time constraints. However, overlap will occur, and each analysis will have a clear connection back to the bigger theme of tattoos and tattooing as signs and performances of identity as tied to trauma.

As a survivor of extreme transgenerational trauma herself, Gabriele Schwab's book *Haunting Legacies* (2010) focuses on the evolution of trauma and memory as they are tied to violent histories. She begins by reflecting on her childhood; growing up in post-WWII Germany and the countless stories told to her by her parents and family members. She states that it wasn't until mid-life that she began to realize that the purpose of these stories were "not to remember but to forget...they were to cover up, to mute the pain and guilt and shame...to fill the void of terror" (p. 43). It was now that she began to realize that the trauma of war experienced by various family members had an equal impact on her; it did not matter that she did not have a first-hand account of the horror of war, the trauma lived on in her. It shaped her days, weeks, months, years, life without her knowledge. It impacted her view on family and relationships and even her own self-worth. This is how she came to write about the transmission of transgenerational trauma. She wanted to better understand how the trauma of someone directly impacted others closely related in real and life altering manners.

From *Haunting Legacies* come two key concepts for this project: memory as embodiment, and the transgenerational identity issues of survivors of traumatic events. She begins the book by stating that “the legacies of violence not only haunt the actual victims but also are passed on through the generations” (Schwab, 2010, p. 1). This sharing of past experience and trauma impacts others beyond the survivor in a variety of manners. As Schwab states diversely throughout this book, trauma comes in various forms and impacts many more people than the direct victim. For this project, I choose to apply Schwab’s work on transgenerational trauma to Holocaust/Auschwitz tattoos and the ways they can be interpreted as signs that signify memories attached to specific events and situations in differing manners. Within these memories that are now inscribed in the skin of the wearer, is a subsequent performance of their identity, an identity that changes in space and time. I chose to focus solely on the transgenerational impacts of Holocaust survivors due to the extensive research that has been conducted on the emotional, physical, political, social, and historical impacts of the Holocaust since the 1940s. This research allowed for a more thorough understanding and analysis of the true transgenerational impacts comparatively to the trauma of the 9/11 attacks.

On the other end of the spectrum, many people used the terrorist attacks of 9/11 to call for a deep union among the country and a public closeness that had not been felt in decades. The 9/11 attacks drastically altered how others viewed both their own and others’ identity as they relate to 9/11. As Schwab states in chapter one, “we need stories to get to what is unspoken, but the never said – the cannot be said – is constitutive of how we narrate our lives, particularly in the wake of personal or historical trauma” (p. 7). Both historical moments caused mass amounts of trauma and thus, transgenerational trauma

that are signified through tattoos and act as both an involuntary and voluntary performance of identity.

Next I turn to Maurice Halbwachs' work on collective memory which adds a unique take on how tattoos can be interpreted as signs and performances of identity. Halbwachs is a famed French sociologist and considered the 'father' of collective memory studies (Gensburger, 2016). His book *On collective memory* (Halbwachs & Coser, 1995) focused on the impact of collective memories; time is not understood through a past-present distinction but rather time passes collectively. This is because evolution is "marked by the social nature of mankind" (Gensburger, 2016, p. 400). Meaning that memory does not have a specific origin outside of the social individual who lives through it; we understand the world through collective or social memories of others. In this 1995 book (originally written in 1925 but edited in 1995 by Lewis Coser) Halbwachs work on collective memory can be used to understand the presence of the past in modern society.

First is the concept of the reconstruction of the past; he states that we "preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced" (Halbwachs, 1995, p. 46). This can be seen in a variety of fashions as tied to tattoos; people often use tattoos to preserve memories, whether it be a resemblance of something or someone (icon), something directly connected to another situation, event, person, etc. (index) or something more abstract that has deep personal and collective meaning that is understood through our social traditions (symbol). These tattoos are also constant re-enactments of identity- they represent points in time that changed or altered in some manner, the identity of someone, a group of people, a culture etc. And this ongoing performance of

identity changes in space and time; Auschwitz tattoos have a vastly different meaning in the space and time of the 1940s than they did even 20 years later in the 1960s. Their meaning (acting as signs) changes through space and time, and thus, the performance of identity communicated through these tattoos also changes. It is an ever-evolving process constantly impacted by the collective and constantly reproduced memory of society, or as he states: “whatever epoch is examined, attention is not directed toward the first events, or perhaps the origin of these events but rather toward the group of believers...” (Halbwachs, 1980, pp. 234-235).

I also utilize another concept from Halbwachs for the specific genre of Holocaust tattoos. In his studies of collective memory, Halbwachs explores the idea of religious collective memory. Here, he states that there are symbolic forms of history that both create and impact the public’s memory (p. 84-85). These symbols act in both positive and negative manners, such as the construction of Christian churches act as a symbol of the ways in which the religion has evolved over history. Holocaust tattoos are a societal preservation of a very specific time in history. These tattoos hold a symbolic representation of the history of trauma, World War II, and the Jewish faith. They have remained a symbol to the Jewish faith, as a way to preserve the past and ensuring the Holocaust remains an important aspect of history. When we insert Peirce’s understanding of a symbol as needing an interpreter to make sense of them using social and cultural traditions, we can better understand how these symbols are much more than a sign of a moment in history, but also a performance of identity that changes through space and time.

Next, I use the work of Cathy Caruth from various articles and her 1995 book of collected essays *Trauma: Explorations in memory*. I use two major concepts from this book: one from Caruth's essay on trauma and experience, and the other from Dori Laub's essay on witnessing, testimony and truth. First is Caruth's work on the connection between trauma, time, and place; defined as latency and locality by Caruth. A key theme throughout her research is that the memory of an event or time-period is closely tied to the localization of the traumatic experience. She states that traumatic events are not experienced as it occurs, but rather they are fully acknowledged and remembered later in life and are only "fully evident" with another place and another time (Caruth, 1995, p. 8). I tie this concept of latency and locality to multiple tattoo genres. While these tattoos may have a certain or specific meaning at the time they are done, those meanings change later in life when the traumatic memory the tattoo is tied to actualized, realized, or better understood. As the meaning of these tattoos change in space and time, so does the performance of identity attached to them. A tattoo from Auschwitz once represented one's ability to perform hard labor; fast-forward 30 years and these tattoos have a completely new and realized meaning that is directly connected to how the person now identifies with the trauma of the Holocaust. This concept of 'place' as tied to tattoos will highlight new and unique ways in which we can interpret the signification of tattoos and the role they play in identity.

Next is Laub's work on witness, testimony and truth which is an important and unique concept within trauma studies. He explains that there are various 'levels' of witnessing trauma: "the level of being witness to oneself within the experience, the level of being witness to the testimonies of others, and the level of being a witness to the

process of witnessing” (p. 61). With witnessing, comes testimony. Laub explains that with any level of witnessing, comes the urge and ‘imperative’ to tell. While working with survivors of the Holocaust, he stated that listening to testimonies of survivors and their children, he found that “survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive” (p. 63). He states that this is the imperative to *tell* and thus *know* one’s story; both witnessing, and testimony are equally important in understanding trauma. Laub’s differing level of witnesses and unique definition of testimony provide a creative way to interpret these tattoos as signifiers and performances of identity.

Laub then explains that these levels of witnessing and providing testimony play a large role in how one processes trauma and how these ultimately impact identity; both of those directly involved with trauma and those that the trauma is passed onto. As such, I tie this into Schwab’s work on transgenerational trauma to better understand how transgenerational trauma is an attempt to ‘witness’ trauma and provide ‘testimony’ to the trauma of parents or grandparents. Both original Holocaust tattoos and the recreations of these tattoos by younger generations are signs in which we can see a performance of identity taking place that involves the witnessing and testimony of trauma. I also explore this concept of witness and testimony to that of 9/11 tattoos, and how the trauma witnessed by multiple generations was passed on to the next, who were born after the terrorist attacks yet still maintain an emotional and traumatic tie to the events.

And finally, I flip the script on the performative aspects of this study to include the ethical performance of the ‘Other’ that these tattoos command using a Levinasian perspective. Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), a French philosopher of Lithuanian and

Jewish descent, contributed to the field of philosophy in a multitude of ways. His works extended past the boundaries of philosophy into existentialism, ethics, phenomenology, and ontology; fields he grew and expanded upon during his lifetime (Bergo, 2011). This essay will focus on Levinas's development of his "first philosophy," identified as neither traditional logic nor metaphysics (Bergo, 2011). Rather, he identified his first philosophy as "an interpretive, phenomenological description of the rise and repetition of the face-to-face encounter" or, simply put, being called by another, and responding to that other (Bergo, 2017).

Branching from his "first philosophy" are the concepts of human responsibility to the Other, and the interweaving of ethics and justice. Levinas's devotion to human responsibility for the "Other" is constituted in various ways in which implications or actions of some will inevitably impact someone or people who are not present. In his own language, Levinas explains how he understands responsibility: "I understand responsibility as responsibility for the Other, thus as responsibility for what is not my deed, or for what does not even matter to me; or which precisely does matter to me, is met by me as face" (Levinas, 1979, p. 95). His ethics is driven by the assumption that "one must act in obligation and responsibility to and for the Other with full recognition that ethics is an unending commitment devoid of perfection and a priori assurance" (Arnett, 2017). Levinas speaks of this as an immemorial echo that calls us into responsibility and action for the Other (Arnett, 2017). That is, one must maintain an ethical standard of responsibility for those who are not present and do not have a voice, while understanding that recognition for these acts is not only rare, but unnecessary. Ethics are everlasting and although not perfect, they are indispensable.

Next, is the relationship between ethics and justice. Although Levinas was a leader in the philosophical idea of human responsibility to the Other, this idea has been developed and expanded upon throughout the decades by various scholars. However, his work on ethics and justice is unique and a significant factor in the selection of Levinas for this dissertation. He employs a distinctive yet crucial understanding of justice, ethics, and the interruption of each (Arnett, 2017). Levinas's understanding of justice requires attentiveness to those not empowered or present in decision-making, but beyond that he emphasizes that he is concerned with both the 'proximate Other' and those "unknown and unnoticed" (Arnett, 2017 p. 134). This is a unique understanding of justice specific to Levinas, in that he calls for people to recognize the influence of decision-making and/or actions to those not empowered yet visible, and those *not* empowered and *not* visible. With this understanding of ethics and responsibility to the other, I explore how specific genres of tattoos, such as Holocaust of 9/11 tattoos, demand an ethical performance from the 'Other.'

About the Tattoo Genres: Holocaust/Auschwitz and 9/11

While there are hundreds of different styles and genres of tattoos that could have been used for this project, I chose these two genres for specific reasons. Holocaust tattoos add a unique yet dark dimension to my study, as these were not tattoos of choice but rather of force. As such, not only did this ink have a vastly different meaning in the moment of the performance of the tattoo, but the meaning behind them drastically transformed within the spatial-temporal dimension - more so than any other genre I discuss here or, any other tattoo in existence. The wearers of this ink did so involuntarily for years until their death or freedom arrived. As such, the meaning and performance of

these tattoos as tied to identity, changed. This change in symbolism and performance through space and time is a key element I explore in latter chapters.

The second genre are tattoos that memorialize the September 11th, 2001 attacks on the United States. I chose this genre for one main reason; the emotional and physical tie that Americans who witnessed this horror play out on live television lives on in, and sometimes on, us. As a young 11-year-old, I have vivid memories of September 11th, or 9/11 as it is remembered today. Images burned into my memory, sounds stuck ringing in my ears, the pit in my stomach as I watched from the desk of my 6th grade classroom the second plane crash in the South tower live on TV. For myself and others, this is a moment in history that changed the trajectory of our lives. Something 2,000 miles away would forever impact me and play an ongoing role in my life. As such, I chose this genre as it was a pivotal moment in the lives of millions of Americans, many who like me, were children at the time and now as adults, carry the trauma with us. I seek to explore the different symbolic roles and performances of identity these tattoos represent both now and throughout the last 20 years.

Holocaust/Auschwitz Tattoos

Tattooing Jewish prisoners was conducted at two of the three Auschwitz camps beginning in 1941 (Rudoren, 2012). Although intended to become common practice in concentration camps, only Auschwitz is known to have tattooed its prisoners. It's unclear how many people were forcefully branded with numbers, letters and symbols, most often on their left forearms, although some survivors are known to have them scrawled across their chests. It was assumed that placement on the left forearm allowed for easy access to and recognition of the prisoner and their labor capabilities.

Why tattoos? After confusion of which prisoners were ‘able-bodied’ and capable of labor, tattoos were instituted as a way to easily identify those who were deemed ‘fit to work’ (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). Those bearing tattoos often saw them as a badge of honor, especially those with ‘low’ numbers, as this represented the many years spent surviving the brutal conditions of Auschwitz. In his memoir *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi noted “Everyone will treat with respect the numbers from 30,000 to 80,000” (p. 3). After the war ended and the prisoners of Auschwitz were freed, there were mixed reactions as to what to do with this emblem of hate that had been permanently etched into their flesh.

Survivors coped with the aftermath of Auschwitz in various manners, yet to most their tattoos remained a physical representation of the horror they had experienced. Holocaust tattoos are unique in that they weren’t a choice made by the wearer, and in fact, signified to others their obvious status as a victim of trauma. However, they still hold a special yet difficult place in history for both individuals and communities.

Figure 1

Detail shot of the prisoner “mark or tattoo” of Bethesda, Maryland resident and Holocaust survivor, Mr. Henry Greenbaum, born in Starachowice



Note: Photo provided by Department of Defense by Marvin Lynchard located at United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

9/11 Memorial Tattoos

The next genre of tattoo has been used in various manners to preserve both individual and collective memories of the space and time surrounding the historical moment in which the event occurred. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, there was an emergence of tattoos related to the traumatic event. From survivors, victims, witnesses, first-responders, people rushed to preserve the historical and horrific moment into their skin. Many of these pieces are memorial in that they dictate, in some manner, the impacts of the attacks. Often, they also communicate the after-effects; the call for unity and peace from US citizens, the demand for the U.S. government to take action, and for the world to remember the lives lost both during the attacks and as a result of them (such as first-responders who later died from complications during their time at the 9/11 sites).

September 11th memorial tattoos often contain similar aspects, such as including the American flag, a bald eagle or the word ‘Never Forget.’ These attributes seek to remind people of both the trauma and the hope that came after the attacks. One first-responder, Tom Canavan, says that the significance of his tattoo is communicated nonverbally “without ever saying a word to anyone, just by showing [this tattoo], they're going to know. And they're going to think of 9/11, and it will stay in their conscience” (9/11 Memorial Museum, n.d.). Sprawled across his right arms are the twin towers with the word ‘SURVIVORS’ above in the clouds. This black and gray piece has many meanings for Canavan. He states that this tattoo is a representation of his trauma,

perseverance and healing. These tattoos hold a special place in US history, as we still lament in the traumatic events of September 11th, 2001.

Figure 2

September 11th, 2001 Terrorist Attacks on the Twin Towers



Note: Image provided by Flickr and can be found at

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/ludiecochrane/4979788076>

Trauma as Constructing Identity

Trauma is a feeling, a thought, a reaction; it is something everyone in the world has in common. In some moment, event, situation, or experience, we have all experienced what trauma is and felt its impact. No matter how big or small these traumatic moments are, they change people's understanding of who they or others are, in this sense, we understand trauma like Butler understands gender. Trauma is not something we 'just' experience, it is something we 'do' when it comes to identity. In this study, tattoos act as signs that are grounded in trauma, that signify specific experiences, people, events, situations, etc. that ultimately help us perform parts of our identity, as they are tied to various aspects of memory.

In the coming chapters, I use varying concepts by the aforementioned scholars to explore how tattoos are both signifiers and performances of identity grounded in trauma. By analyzing how both genres of tattoos acts as a sign and a performance identity within a spatial-temporal relationship, I seek to expand the boundaries of how the communication discipline views the communicative nature and functions of tattoos as it relates to identity and trauma of individuals, communities, societies and history as a whole. However, it is important to note that in each chapter, these tattoos will be interpreted differently using the same foundational theories. Meaning, while Holocaust tattoos may be interpreted as an index/index signifier in one section, this may change for another audience or in the next section. The guiding works of Schwab, Halbwachs Caruth, or Laub intrinsically changes the way in which we understand and interpret these tattoos and the ways in which they act as signifiers and performances of our identity as tied to trauma.

Ultimately, I explore the ways in which we can interpret tattoos as signs and performances of identity, that are grounded in trauma, and communicate this trauma in varying ways. I also explore the way that space and time, or the spatial-temporal relationship, of these tattoos change. Each section will use the semiotic trichotomy, various principles of performance studies as well as have a main focus using one of the aforementioned scholars to guide this study through the multidimensional contexts that are tattoos and the important communication-heavy role they play in constructing identity.

One of my main goals within this project is to contribute to the ever-expanding boundary of this literature to include the notion that tattoos are much more complex than

what literally ‘meets the eye.’ In understanding Peirce’s trichotomy of icon, index, and symbol, most people would consider tattoos as *merely* an icon; a picture or image that directly represents something (such as a butterfly, a portrait of a loved one, a landscape, etc.). However, I have chosen examples within this study that problematize a simple reading of tattoos. These are much more than meager representations of an object, but something much more complex and symbolic that invoke an embodied relation to the world through this understanding of trauma.

The next chapter is the first of three application chapters in which I apply the various theories, foundations and concepts to both Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos. This chapter has three sections; first, I explore the impact of transgenerational trauma on both direct and indirect victims and survivors of the Holocaust and 9/11. Second, I analyze how Holocaust tattoos have transformed into a symbol of religious collective memory and lastly, how both tattoo genres act as artistic social reconstructions of the past that are used to form collective memories about each of these moments in history.

Chapter 3: Transgenerational Trauma, Religious Collective Memory and Social Reconstruction of the Past

In this chapter I focus on the concepts of transgenerational trauma, religious collective memory, and the social reconstruction of the past. While not every genre of tattoo will be analyzed in each section, I touch on the various differing tattoos (Holocaust/Auschwitz and 9/11 memorial) throughout this chapter and chapters four and five. I begin with transgenerational trauma and explore the role this plays within Holocaust tattoos, their symbolic meaning, performance of identity and the spatial-temporal relationship of these tattoos as they relate to both individual and social history. I then explore the role of Holocaust tattoos as they relate to what Halbwachs coins as ‘religious collective memory’ and the significant religious symbol these tattoos represented in the mid-1900s and their change in meaning now, 80 years later and a much different social space. And finally, I turn to the idea of ‘social reconstruction of the past’ in which I explore how 9/11 tattoos, their signification, and performances of identity are created and recreated within and throughout memories of both the individual and the greater society.

In each of these sections I look at these tattoos in three specific yet interconnected ways, their meaning according to Peirce’s signs trichotomy of icon, index or symbol. Then, I explore how this sign helps in the performance of identity as either an individual, generation or as a reflection of the greater society. Then, with the signs and performance components analyzed, I explore how these have changed within space and time. For this section, this could mean an actual change in time and space (for example, the change in meaning in Holocaust tattoos from 1940s to the 2020s) or a more abstract understanding

of this spatial-temporal relationship (personal understanding of time and space as related to the meaning of disease awareness tattoos). I look to explicate the important roles that tattoos, and body modifications play in the construction of identity as they related to memory and trauma.

Schwab on Embodiment

Before I begin the application portion of this section, I want to also explain the important role that the concept of embodiment will play in every application section in the next three chapters. In the first paragraph of her 2010 book, Schwab defines what her title, *Haunting legacies* means: "...things hard to recount or even remember, the results of violence that holds an unrelenting grip on memory" (p. 1). She explores the idea of traumatic memories tied to the 'legacies' left behind from a violent past, and their impact on the world and its construction of history. It is in these legacies that often-times people attempt to embody the pain, experiences and ultimately, trauma of others in an act of solidarity. It is in this understanding of embodiment that I explore the role of tattoos within trauma.

These tattoos act as a form of embodiment that occupy space between two parallel universes: daily life and past trauma (Schwab, 2006). In her 2006 article in *Literature and Medicine*, Schwab states that in real-life, the intertwining of daily life and trauma is dangerous; they become almost inseparable from each other and re-traumatization occurs. But in written form, these two universes' must converge;

Otherwise, stories remain cut off, their words stranded in the silence they try to cover, orbiting trauma like satellites. Writing from within the core of trauma is a

constant struggle between the colonizing power of words and the revolt of what is being rejected, silenced (p. 95).

Although body modification, and in particular tattoos, may not be considered a traditional form of the written word, they can be interpreted and understood as a rhetorical performance. And at the heart of this rhetorical performance is the concept of embodiment; tattoos can act as an eternal embodiment of another's experiences and trauma.

Both of these genres of tattoos are acting as an embodiment of trauma; their own, someone else's or society's. Throughout the following application chapters I explore the different ways that these tattoos can be understood in a communicative nature through signification, performance of identity and ultimately, the embodiment of trauma. Now I turn to understand Holocaust tattoos through Schwab's work on transgenerational trauma. Although I could have also explored 9/11 through this lens of transgenerational trauma, I made the conscience decision to keep this section dedicated to Holocaust tattoos due to the extensive research that has been conducted on the impact of this trauma in the nearly 80 years since the end of World War II.

Transgenerational Trauma

Schwab's contribution to trauma studies is unique in that she emphasizes the importance of including 'others' outside direct victims and survivors within the impacts of trauma. Specifically, she emphasizes the "necessity to include perpetrators and their offspring in a discourse normally preserved for victims" (Van Der Wiel, 2012, p. 856). In her work, she argues that the legacies left behind from trauma are intricately woven into future generations- although the direct victims and the latter offspring will have vastly

different accounts of the trauma, she argues that the impact is heavily intertwined and has transgenerational effects. Although the effects of this trauma translate differently for people, she notes that most often this occurs in the form of identity trouble and issues. She states that both victims and perpetrators carry a “transgenerational responsibility” (p. 105) in that they are both actively working to develop a better sense of understanding this trauma and the ways it has impacted them.

Schwab continues by stating that to understand this concept of transgenerational trauma, both victims and perpetrators require a “cultural translation” (p. 106) and a humanization of the enemy. Through these cultural translations, or stories, are told by victims, witnesses, and perpetrators for the goal of better understanding and realizing the trauma that was endured. She notes that some violent histories are beyond ‘reparation’ and are simply unforgivable (p. 105) but it is through these attempts at better understanding of trauma that these histories can be acknowledged, mourned and worked through, with the ultimate goal of a breakthrough of understanding.

Violent histories have a uniquely haunting quality on individuals and families alike (Schwab, 2010). The memories of this violence, often passed down through generations, leave a lingering effect on those who retain the memories as well as on those who experience the re-creation of those memories through oral and literary manners. As I explained in chapter two, Gabrielle Schwab’s work on transgenerational trauma plays a key role in understanding the powerful and continuous impact of trauma throughout generations. She starts by telling readers of her intimate relationship with past trauma as experienced by her parents and grandparents and how that trauma has progressed through these generations to have direct and complicated impacts on her and her life.

However, Schwab states that it was not until mid-life that she began to recognize that the trauma her grandparents and parents had navigated and survived, had also impacted her. As she states, the stories told to her by her parents and grandparents were not to ‘remember’ the trauma, but rather to forget, to “cover up, to mute the pain and guilt and shame” and to ultimately “fill the void of terror” (Schwab, 2010, p. 43). It is in these stories and realizations that the reader can better understand the concept of transgenerational trauma and the impact that one generation’s trauma can have on future ones.

Further in the chapter, Schwab explores the idea of narrative as a carrier of transgenerational trauma. She states specifically that memoirs and literature can function as “practices of mourning” and “transformational objects” that are tasked with carrying trauma from generation to generation (p. 20; 145). It is here where this chapter begins its work; instead of looking at memoirs or literature as the only carriers of transgenerational trauma, I turn to tattoos. In this section, I seek to explore and explain how, like these written objects, tattoos can be seen as a carrier of trauma that expand beyond the victim into latter generations. Specifically, I look at both Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos and analyze both under the guise as carriers of transgenerational trauma within Peirce’s trichotomy of signs, a performance of identity, and the changes throughout space and time.

As stated in Chapter Two, Peirce explains that something only becomes a sign when we invest meaning into it/them; as such, I explore how both Holocaust tattoos and 9/11 tattoos can be seen as signs using this Peircean perspective. One of the basic claims of Peirce’s basic sign structure is that signs consist of three inter-related parts: a sign, an object, and an interpretant. The sign acts as the signifier, for example smoke as a sign of

fire. The object is what is being signified, which for this example would be the fire that the smoke signified. And the interpretant is the relation of understanding in the mind. In this smoke and fire example, the interpreter understands that fire causes smoke (Peirce's Theory of Signs, n.d.). The interpretant is a vital component in understanding Peirce's sign structure, as the relationship between sign and object is only realized or understood in being interpreted.

Although Peirce had an exhaustive typology of signs, including icon, index, and symbol, it is important to recognize that these all emerged from these three elements of signification of sign-vehicle, the object, and the interpretant. When it came to understanding how signs signify, Peirce considered that signs do not signify through all their features, but "in virtue of some particular feature" (Atkin, 2013, para. 23). He stated that central features of sign-vehicles could be divided into three broader areas: virtues of qualities, existential facts, or conventions and laws. As such, these sign-vehicles are classified as qualisigns, sinsigns, and legisigns.

Similar to understandings signs as being classified according to their sign-vehicle function, he thought signs could also be classified according to how their "object functioned in signification" (Atkins, 2013, para. 29). For Peirce, objects determine their signs, meaning that the nature of the objects limits the potential success for signification. Again, this led him to three differing classes: qualitative, existential or physical, and conventional and law-like (Atkins, 2013). It was these classifications that led to the creation of Peirce's trichotomy of icon, index, and symbol. The Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy entry "Peirce's Theory of Signs" explain this as follows:

If the constraints of successful signification require that the sign utilize some existential or physical connection between it and its object, then the sign is an *index*. And finally, if successful signification of the object requires that the sign utilize some convention, habit, or social rule or law that connects it with its object, then the sign is a *symbol*. para. 29).

And finally, interpretants are also divided into three categories: rheme, dicent, and argument. A rheme sign focuses on the understanding of the sign based upon the qualitative features, while a dicent sign focuses on the understanding of the sign on the existential features it uses. And lastly, if a sign focuses on understanding some conventional or law-like features, they are considered arguments (Atkins, 2013).

For this project, I choose to focus on the secondness or object as this is where objects ‘determine’ their signs. It is in this concept that Peirce explains how a sign stands for an object, which is the goal of this study that focuses on tattoos as signs of an object that actively signify and perform one’s identity. Emphasizing Peirce’s understanding and division of object, I explore how Holocaust tattoos can be interpreted as performances of identity and how this identity construction is impacted by the spatial-temporal relationship of these tattoos from their origination.

Holocaust Tattoos and Transgenerational Trauma

When it comes to understanding and exploring Holocaust tattoos as signifiers in relation to Schwab’s concept of transgenerational trauma, I conclude that they can be best understood as index signifiers for the victims, and symbols for those in differing generations. An index or index is a signifier that is directly connected, either physically or abstractly, to the signified. In simple terms, an index signifies via an existential

relationship. In Peirce's understanding of this sign, an index has evidence of something or directs attention to something- in this sense, a Holocaust tattoos acts as an index in which it signifies two major concepts; both the existence of the Holocaust and the trauma experienced and endured by victims. As such, we can understand how this tattoo genre has both a direct tie to a physical and abstract event/situation as well as signifying an existential relationship.

Indices as signs have a real, material existence and presence- although their connection to a bigger event, situation, etc. may be existential, their existence is tangible. Although this may be more difficult to understand in this sense, we can see how tattoos can be an index; they are real, made of material and exude a presence within the skin of the wearer. These may not be tangible in the traditional sense; tattoos can be physically touched although not always recognized without a visual component. Current technology allows for tattoos to heal with almost no physical alteration to the skin, meaning when a tattoo is healed, there is no damage done to the skin that can be felt. However, older tattoos, such as those done during the 1940s, were often conducted with trauma to the skin, leaving a raised aspect to the tattoo when healed. Regardless of whether their tattoos can be physically felt by others, it does not change the fact that these tattoos signify the Holocaust and the trauma experienced by millions of Jewish people. During the mid-1900s.

As an index signifier, these tattoos have both a direct connection and an existential relationship to the Holocaust. The average person could see this tattoo, its aged form, and placement and recognize its significance as tied to this historical event. These tattoos represent both the person's status as a victim and survivor of the Holocaust

and as a physical reminder of the trauma. This trauma transgresses through generations- the children, grandchildren, etc. of these victims are, in a sense, handed down this trauma in a way that intentionally and unintentionally affects them. This is where Schwab's idea of transgenerational trauma comes into play; these tattoos and their meaning not only impact the wearer, but those related to them. Many of these younger generations are choosing to embody the trauma of their elders in unique ways. This idea of trauma and tattooing as an immediate experience extends beyond just the survivors and onto their families/younger generations, many who are choosing to be inked with the same tattoo as their elders. These tattoos are symbolic for the children of survivors through this concept of transgenerational trauma as representing not only the Holocaust, but also the trauma of the parent or grandparent.

However, this concept of transgenerational trauma also impacts people beyond the direct victim. In this way, these tattoos can be best understood as a symbol; symbols are understood within Peirce's semiotic theory as more arbitrary or conventional. Symbols are the most unique and complicated and yet most conventional of the three within Peirce's trichotomy because they require more structure to understand. Icon or index signifiers can exist without an interpretant, however for a symbol to be a symbol, it requires this interpretation context. Meaning that, symbols need to be decoded to be understood. They often work through historical, social, or traditional practice that already exist. And with this input of historical context, we can then understand how symbols can grow and change, or as Peirce states, they "develop out of other signs" (De Toro, 1996, p. 76).

With this in mind, we can then understand how, within this concept of transgenerational trauma, Holocaust tattoos acts as different signifiers for the different generations related to the victim. Instead of having this direct existential relationship to the Holocaust, the recreations of these tattoos act as symbols in that they have a more arbitrary meaning that requires interpretation or explanation from the wearer. These recreated tattoos have a completely different meaning and association to both the victim and the Holocaust; often times, these later generations are tattooed with the same Holocaust tattoo as their elders to stand in solidarity, represent them, their trauma, experiences or act as reminder of this specific period in time. To do this, these symbols require interpretation and communication of the tattoo and often-times, it is this form of interaction that the person is seeking. They wanted to be asked about it, so they can explain the significance to them, their family, and the greater society. It is in this communication about their tattoo that the meaning is understood. And thus, these tattoos act as symbols for these generations rather than indices.

So, how does this idea of Holocaust tattoos as indices and symbols intertwine with Schwab's concept of transgenerational trauma? Younger generations have begun tattooing themselves with the Holocaust numbers of their elders to internalize their suffering and trauma in a direct and tangible way. The Holocaust was a traumatic period for the world; specifically, for those of Jewish faith. In a unique sense, the pain of being tattooed can be tied back to the pain and suffering of those during the Holocaust, while the end result is a tattoo that signifies to others the trauma of the Holocaust that is felt by the world, even now eighty years later, in an existential yet critical manner.

To fully understand the ways in which these tattoos could be interpreted as a performance of identity, I first look at Schechner's understanding of performance within the realm of something being 'as' performance or 'is' performance. He explains that performances are actions, and these actions can then be interpreted in four different ways, as I explained in chapter two. These four ways are: behavior, which is the object of study, artistic practice, which is the relationship between studying and doing performance, third is fieldwork which is observation, and fourth is the participation of social practices and advocacies.

When it comes to Holocaust tattoos under the realm of transgenerational trauma, the associated performative action would be fieldwork. In this action, people take part in observation focusing on learning about people and culture. Few tattoos are as significant and important as this genre; just by simply observing this mark on the forearms of people, there was an instant learning process that occurred as to 'who' these people were, 'what' they had endured as a concentration camp survivor and how this historical event drastically and permanently impacted the culture of the world, but also religion.

An article written in 2012 by Jodi Rudoren for the *New York Times* explores how Holocaust survivors have coped with their tattoos in the years since their freedom. In this article, she shows picture of various survivors with their offspring. One picture shows Livia Ravek with her grandson Daniel Philosoph. Embracing each other, Livia has her arms wrapped around her grandson while he displays the same numbers as her tattooed on his left arm. This picture represents the symbolic meaning behind both his grandma's tattoo, his recreation of it and her reaction to his dedication to and impact of her trauma.

Daniel states that this number, 4559, represents much more than his grandma's time in Auschwitz- it is a physical representation of her trauma; trauma that has impacted him in a variety of ways through transmission from his grandmother. Daniel states that although he finds it hard to relate to people he does not know and places he has not been, he says that this tattoo represents his relationship with his grandma and his attempt at understanding her trauma and pain as it relates to her experiences of the Holocaust.

Daniel notes that both he and his father have the number 4559 tattooed on their left forearms, matching that of Livia. But Daniel states that at first, his grandma was upset with him. After explaining the reasons behind this dedication to her, he said they both sat and cried together. Daniel and his father, Oded, both echo the same message; they want to be intimately and eternally bonded to Livia as the matriarch of the family, and they wanted something that would provoke questions and conversations. His grandma's trauma is his trauma, and his devotion to her through this matching tattoo ensures that the world never forgets what she and others went through.

It is in this example of Daniel, Oded and Livia we can more fully visualize and understand this idea of transgenerational trauma and how these tattoos can be seen as index signifiers. Although Daniel nor his father Oded lived through the Holocaust, they've found a way to realize the trauma experienced by Livia, to understand the ways that that trauma played out in each of their lives because of said trauma, and use this tattoo as a signifier of the physical and emotional pain experienced by those who lived and died in Auschwitz and other concentration camps during World War II. Livia's tattoo helps signify the direct connection and relationship she had with her time in Auschwitz; Daniel and Oded's tattoos help signify the existential relationship that they too have with

Auschwitz and the Holocaust. And together, these tattoos help explain the deep impact and realities of transgenerational trauma.

Now I turn to discuss how these tattoos act as performances of identity. Now that we understand their role as an index signifier- having both a direct/physical connection and existential relationship to the Holocaust, I explore how the signifying aspects of these tattoos are also constant performances of one's identity. As I explained in chapter two, there are various kinds and functions of performances. For this study I understand Holocaust tattoos to be a performance of the arts, as well as a ritual performance, with its main function being to heal, to mark identity and to teach. With this in mind, I explore how these tattoos signify performances of identity as related to trauma.

With lingering memories of the Holocaust, many survivors struggled to reclaim their lives and reconstitute their identity after being freed from concentration camps. Emotion played a key role in the construction of identity that can both emerge due to or act as a direct response to an event. Feelings of pain and solitude that are created by a particularly traumatic experience do not simply disappear after the event; rather they embed themselves into the person, altering their outlook of the world and their own identity (Hutchinson & Bleiker, 2008). As Schwab notes in her chapter "Identity Trouble," people who have been forced to become aware of their racial, religious, ethnic, etc., differences by outside forces such as opposing political forces commonly begin to have identity issues both during and after an event or experience (Schwab, 2010).

As identity refers to the use of memories as a mean of self-understanding and growth, traumatic memories can have dire impacts on people and their identity (Bohlmeijer, Westerhof & Pot, 2011). Identity issues are a common side-effect from

emotional conflicts of trauma, such as the Holocaust. Survivors often had issues reintegrating into society and reclaiming their identity, and those who left Auschwitz tattooed had a physical representation of these memories that made it even more difficult for many of them to reclaim their identity (Kellermann, 2001). Grappling with the aftermath, many could have seen the tattoo as a representation of different identities; as a person of Jewish faith, a survivor of the Holocaust, a victim of the Holocaust, and the subject of a man-made genocide. However constructed, these tattoos act as ongoing performances of identity; in a tragic yet beautiful manner, they represent the trauma that one has lived through and function in a special way in that without a single word spoken, someone can realize and understand a deep and intimate part of their identity.

As identity is partially constructed from reminiscing about the past, emotion and memory, Holocaust survivors struggled to find their identity after the end of World War II (O'Rourke, et. al., 2016). Much like the Star of David marked them as 'unworthy' Jews during the war, Auschwitz survivors now had a permanent scar that communicated their identity in various ways; Jewish, victim, prisoner, and survivor. "This reminds me of my past. My parents. Everything I went through during the war" (Medalia et. al., 2012). Although now 'free' from Nazis, their tattoos acted as a barrier, making it difficult for people to move past the trauma they had incurred and the identity they had forced upon them in concentration camps. Coherence and meaning in one's life are sought by remembering, so the impacts of trauma can be extreme, as in the case of Holocaust survivors and particularly those who live with a physical daily reminder of these memories (Bohlmeijer, Westerhof & Pot, 2011).

In an article by *United Nation News*, Nina Weil shows the camera her tattoo from Auschwitz while hiding her face with her arm. She is one of the last Swedish survivors of the Holocaust, spending time in both Theresienstadt and Auschwitz concentration camps beginning at the age of 10. She remembers crying after seeing the tattoo- not because of the pain, but rather because she had lost her identity, she was now just a number; she was now only 71978. And this tattoo, forcibly branded into her left arm at the age of 12, was there to forever signify a part of her identity that is deeply personal and yet always publicized. It is in these moments that we can truly recognize the poetic performances of identity that tattoos can signify in our lives.

The violent history of the Holocaust is one that haunts the world, victims, survivors, family members, perpetrators, governments, etc. alike. And while survivors may view their tattoos in varying ways, a common theme remains: “the world must never forget” (Medalia et. al., 2012). Although their tattoos are over seventy-five years old, the memories attached, and being re-invented by their youth, allow for the idea of a constant and ongoing experience. When asked about her tattoo, Eli Sagir, granddaughter of Holocaust survivor Yosef Diamant, replied, “I decided to do it to remind my generation: I want to tell them my grandfather’s story and the Holocaust story” (Brouwer & Horwitz, 2015).

This act of children of Holocaust survivors or other family members tattooing the numbers of their elders has become a cultural phenomenon and as an act of embodiment. In a similar story, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor decided to have her father’s Holocaust number tattooed on her ankle as he laid on his deathbed (and died one day later). She stated that this number, 65640, “has been in my life since childhood,” in

various ways (Medalia et. al., 2012). Three weeks later, when she is opening her family's safe, she has the realization that she had the wrong number tattooed; 64650 instead of 65640. She broke down, unsure of what to do but was adamant that this is a misrepresentation of her father, his experiences and memories. That was not his number and thus did not embody him and his essence. She has the incorrect tattoo covered with black dots, and her father's correct number tattooed just below.

Here, the tie of trauma and tattooing to embodiment is explicated by the rhetorical and symbolic meaning behind both the end-result of the tattoo and its historical significance to both the survivor and his family. In this situation, she was horrified she had somehow had the incorrect number tattooed on her ankle; not just because it was a (permanent) mistake, but that this number held no meaning to her, and did not embody the memory and experiences of her father as a Holocaust survivor.

Immediacy, involvement, or embodiment of the tattoo can cause a multitude of feelings derivative of the memory associated to it. Those bearing the original version of the tattoo may express feelings of pride mixed with sadness; happy they survived, but hopeful history will not repeat itself. Some survivors stated that at first, they often covered or hid their tattoos from their children. "My children asked about the numbers for many years. I thought that if I shared with them the horrors of my past, they'd be sad and I didn't want that" (Medalia et. al., *Gita*). However, many younger generations or family members later became inked with the same tattoo as their Holocaust surviving kin. This enabled an almost instant feeling of embodiment in the memory and experience tied to the original tattoo and thus, they took on the responsibility of never letting the world forget the history of the Holocaust.

With the understanding of these tattoos as an index signifier and a performance of identity, we can then turn to explore the changing in meaning and significance within space and time. Unsurprisingly, the meaning of Holocaust tattoos has drastically changed in both space (meaning the ‘space’ we currently occupy) and time (historical moment). In fact, I would be confident in saying that few tattoos or tattoo genres have had as much of a transformation in meaning as these tattoos have in the last eighty years. One of the most unique aspects of these tattoos are the varying ways in which survivors’ feelings towards them morphed over the years - some for the better, some for the worse.

To explore the change in meaning within the spatial-temporal relationship, it is important to first look at the meaning of these tattoos where they originated. One of the most common themes that Auschwitz survivors have noted in attempting to understand their tattoos was the concept that this tattoo marked them as ‘lesser than’ in the eyes of society. People become aware of racial, ethnic, religious, etc., differences when they are “imposed on us from the outside” by the community, dominant national or political parties, members of a foreign culture, or opposing religion (Schwab 2010, p. 93). In this case, these tattoos served as permanent reminders of their religious differences that led to the death of over six million people who had similar beliefs and lifestyles. In the space and time of the Holocaust and World War II, these tattoos represented this ideal that those of Jewish faith were not worthy of life; an ideal that many survivors have had to cope with.

Nina Weil, mentioned above, states that when she first received her tattoo at the age of 12 in Auschwitz that she lost her identity. She was no longer a person, but rather just a number. A number does not have feelings, or emotions or humanity- rather, it just

exists. She notes that she was upset by this feeling of losing her identity and she did not know how she would cope with having this number tattooed on her for the rest of her life. However, she does remember her mother, who died in Auschwitz due to exhaustion, telling her to not cry and that this tattoo changes nothing; “When we get home, you visit the dance school and get a big bracelet so no one sees the number” (Gamaraal Foundation, para. 9). Nina never returned to dance school and never got the bracelet- and she has spent decades learning how to cope with the trauma and identity issues associated with her tattoo.

Survivors all coped with their new tattooed reality in different ways. Some wore their tattoos with pride, seen as a battle-wound and scar. They thought of their tattoos as honors as witnesses to the horrors they had endured and overcome. Some saw them as trophies; “I don’t see it as a scar; for me it’s a medal” (Medalia, et. al., 2012, p. 7). Some used the numbers as lottery picks, codes to locks, passwords and in other creative ways to ‘never forget’ the past. In a sense, this number was incorporated into the fabric of their lives; various aspects of not only their lives, but the lives of their offspring revolved around the trauma of the Holocaust, many which were dictated by the numbers inscribed on their forearms. Others rushed to have the tattoo removed (and in the 1940s that meant having a skin graft) or kept it covered from public view (Rudoren, 2012). However, viewed then and in the mid-1900s, the narrative of these tattoos changed in space and time.

Below is an excerpt from Primo Levi’s book *Survival in Auschwitz* in which he explains his feeling towards his tattoo in the latter part of his life. Levi was a survivor of

Auschwitz who published various works detailing and explaining his life as a prisoner of the Nazis. He was considered one of the leading experts of the Holocaust:

With time, my tattoo has become a part of my body.

I do not display and do not hide it.

I show it unwillingly to those who ask out of curiosity.

Readily and with anger to those who said they are incredulous.

Often young people ask me why I don't have it erased.

This surprises me: *Why should I?*

There are not many of us in the world to bear this witness.

#174517, Primo Levi (1958)

Here, Levi attempts to explain his relationship with his tattoo; although he does not intentionally hide or display it, he recognizes that it is now a part of his body. He expresses his sadness in showing it to those who are curious and his anger towards those who are doubtful of the Holocaust's existence. And when asked why he did not have it 'erased' or removed he is shocked; why should he be burdened with this endeavor after involuntarily being branded? Ultimately, he states that although not proud nor ashamed of his tattoo, he recognizes the importance of it- as he says, there are not many people left in the world that directly experienced the Holocaust. Levi took his own life in 1987- some say as a result of survivor's guilt for making it out of the Holocaust. His number remained on his left forearm and was carried with him into his death, as his family had it engraved on his headstone.

Figure 3

Primo Levi. Matricula 174517



Note: Photo taken by Francesc Abad on display at Centre d'Art La Panera (Lleida)

What was once seen as a signifier of hate or shame, has now become a harrowing reminder of the evil that can exist in the world and within humanity. There are few survivors of the Holocaust left in the world, and even fewer who bear their trauma with a tattoo. But that does not change that these tattoos have left a lasting impression on the world. We can see these tattoos, whether in person, in photos, on the television, and recognize their importance and the importance of the story of those who wore them. Many Jewish prisoners of Auschwitz were physically scarred by the Nazi regime, which would forever mark them as a multitude of identities; Jewish, prisoner, victim, and survivor. These identities often collide; some seeing their tattoos as a badge of honor being both Jewish and a survivor, while others stated that their tattoos ensured an everlasting feeling of captivity as a victim of Hitler and the Nazis. However, interpreted, we know that the meaning and representation of these tattoos have changed in the last 80 years, and will continue to change as space and time continue.

Ultimately, we can understand the immense role these tattoos have played throughout history, the construction of identity and the transmission of trauma. Acting as both indices and symbol signifiers and as performances of varying aspects of one's identity, we can understand why these tattoos are important to understand, analyze and explore in our current historical moment. Although they may be 80 years old, the trauma and experiences of these survivors live on in the generations after them. Now I turn to explore Holocaust tattoos in a new light; utilizing Maurice Halbwach's work on religious collective memory, I explore how these tattoos have signified different aspects about the Jewish faith throughout the last eight decades.

Religious Collective Memory

Maurice Halbwachs was a famed French philosopher and sociologist and considered the father of the concept of 'collective memory.' Within this chapter, I focus on two different aspects of collective memory: religious collective memory and the social reconstruction of memory. First is this idea of religious collective memory as tied to Holocaust tattoos, while I then look at the impacts of the social reconstruction of memory of 9/11 tattoos. Both concepts emerge from his book *On Collective Memory*, which was published after his death in 1980. These state that, in a general sense, time is not understood through a past to present distinction, but instead on the idea that time passes collectively. As social beings, mankind understands the past through the social or collective memories of others. Halbwachs focuses on ways in which we can use this idea of collective memory in modern form to better understand the presence of the past.

First is the concept of religious collective memory. In this realm of his work, Halbwachs explores the idea that there are symbolic forms of history that have both

created and effected the general public or societies memory. These symbols can have both positive and negative connotations or meanings but have the common theme of creating and disseminating some sort of meaning as tied to collective memory. In this section, I explore how Holocaust tattoos can be interpreted as a social preservation of both World War II and of the Jewish faith- moments within history that have been heavily researched, with various and often overlapping narratives impacting how individuals, communities and greater societies remember these historical periods. Here, I explore the ways in which we can interpret and understand how these tattoos became a symbolic pillar of the Jewish faith and through space and time, changed the collective memories of the Holocaust and World War II.

Holocaust Tattoos and Religious Collective Memory

In the above section, I explored how Holocaust tattoos act as signifiers for the offspring of direct victims for them to be adequately understood within the concept of transgenerational trauma. Similarly, here, I explicate why these tattoos would be categorized as a symbol. Without the historical and societal context and understanding surrounding the Holocaust, these tattoos would simply exist as numbers. In fact, children who have not learned about the Holocaust or World War II would not be able to immediately grasp the significance of these tattoos, it is only after the explanation or interpretation of these symbols that they are understood.

The main difference within this section is the religious component, interpretation, and understanding that these tattoos left in the world.

Although originally intended to maintain order at Auschwitz by easily marking those prisoners capable of intense manual labor, these markings soon became a religious

symbol of courage, bravery, strength, and valor within the Jewish faith. We can make sense of these tattoos as religious symbols as we understand them through the cultivation of social and cultural traditions; not only do these tattoos represent the trauma associated with the Holocaust, but they act as religious symbols that transcend time and boundaries. What was once viewed in a casual and organizational manner, these tattoos slowly evolved into a religious symbol in which the world and its inhabitants would forever remember what happened to the Jews of the world during the mid-nineteenth century.

For those who lived in the Holocaust, these tattoos have an indexical signification as they represent the direct subject-object relation of experience. However, for the younger generations, these tattoos are indirect signifiers of both the Holocaust and World War II. The meaning behind them are culturally learned and thus, symbolic in meaning. For Peirce, objects that require the sign to use some sort of “convention, habit, or social rule or law that connects it with its object” is a symbol (Atkins, 2013, para. 29). For these following generations, the important meaning of these tattoos has been through social and cultural rule and learning, so their interpretation of the Holocaust through these tattoos is in a symbolic manner.

Figure 4

A Holocaust survivor shows his tattoo



Note: Photo provided Baz Ratner/Reuters

However, this genre of tattoo could also be interpreted as an index/index in that they can also understood as directly connected, in an existential manner, to the Holocaust. Although these tattoos represent an event that has already come and gone, they still represent something that has a real existence and presence- we can see the impacts of the Holocaust and World War II all around the world in the form of museums, dedications, sculptures, scholarships, etc. We, as a collective society and global community, constantly work to ensure that the over six million Jewish people executed during World War II are not only not forgotten, but remembered in a way that continues to impact and change the modern world. In this sense, we can see how these tattoos are indices of the Holocaust and highlight the existential, yet very real, relationship the victims and their offspring remember and carry the trauma of the Holocaust with them.

So, how does these combine to form a symbol and more specifically, a religious symbol that works as a representamen of the Jewish faith? Symbols require more

structure to understand, this means they ask for more participation from the ‘other.’ So, understanding these tattoos as icons that denote the Holocaust and as indices as they are directly connected in an empirical manner to the event, the formation of a symbol signifier is created. And in understanding this creation of a religious symbol, the meaning of it changes according to social and cultural traditions as connected to the Jewish faith.

While these tattoos may have been symbolic in one way during World War II and in the immediate years after, their meaning transformed through historical practices as interpreted by the world and those of Jewish faith. Although some would say that these are not necessarily positive or happy symbols within Jewish culture, the fact remains that they act as symbols in that it requires interpretation and has the constant and often fluctuating influence of social and cultural traditions and the demands of the current historical moment.

It is in this analysis that Peirce’s full trichotomy can be understood in practice; together icon, index, and symbol form a progression of feeling, thought, reaction. In this progression, one can understand how the signifier and the signified are connected. These tattoos as an icon have a direct connection to the Holocaust, that cause a feeling. As indices, they have a physical and existential relationship that cause a reaction, and as symbols they create concepts in the mind, which causes thought. This chain reaction between thought, feeling and reaction ultimately ignite to create meaning, and in this case, form a collective memory produced by both individuals and communities that remain a religious symbol of what it ‘meant’ to be a Jewish during the 1940s in Europe. These tattoos are representative of the Jewish faith and work within our collective memories to preserve the horrors of the Holocaust.

Although some would say that Judaism transformed after the end of WWII, others would argue that the Holocaust and the attempted genocide was unable to break the faith of the Jewish people. Regardless of narrative, the Holocaust did cause both historical and cultural changes that forced Jews to come to terms with their identity in a post-Holocaust world (Diner, 2009). Various symbols arose in the aftermath, both positive and negative. The Warsaw Ghetto and its uprising emphasized the fighting spirit of the Jewish community and the Star of David reclaimed its identity as a positive memento for those of Jewish faith (Diner, 2009). However, the tattooed flesh of Auschwitz survivors also became a symbol; one that served as a demarcation of history, war, and trauma. As with other religious symbolism, these tattoos were a physical reminder of the necessity for societal preservation of history. And, acted as blatant and painful reminders that one aspect of their identity, deemed them as unworthy of living.

Halbwachs states that religion produces a symbolic form of history; in this case, tattoos from Auschwitz acted as a symbol to both preserve the history of the Holocaust and ensure the traumatic events and its impact on the world are never forgotten. “When people see the number, they know that this person has endured a great deal” (Medalia et. al., 2012). These tattoos took on a symbolic form in various aspects. A symbol of war and trauma, of the Jewish faith, and as both a survivor and victim. In essence, these tattoos could be seen as becoming symbolic in a religious sense, for individuals and collective memory alike.

For survivors of Auschwitz, their tattoos represented a multitude of identities and memories, but they also could be seen as a symbol for the religious collective memory of Judaism. These tattoos symbolized a societal preservation of the past, a physical

representation of the torture and pain millions of Jewish people endured during World War II. For some, their tattoos symbolized both good and evil "...it symbolizes the dark but it also symbolizes that we got out of the dark and that's what I want to remember" (Brouwer & Horwitz, 2015). As such, one could view Holocaust tattoos as both a symbol of trauma and hope.

Many prisoners of Auschwitz were often recognized as Jewish survivors of the Holocaust because of their tattoo. As such, they were asked about their experiences and memories more often and by an assortment of people beyond just family and friends. Reciting their memories to another survivor was vastly different than telling a person who had not experienced Auschwitz - their memories and the way they told them changed depending on the social situation and audience. Dependent upon the social structure, their memories could be changed, elaborated, more/less detailed, shortened, etc., to fit what was necessary for that time in history. Many note that since their tattoos marked them as a survivor of the Holocaust, they used it to their advantage to share their memories and experiences, in hopes that it would spark enough interest that people would become aware of any similar events in the past, present or future (Rudoren, 2012).

In reading and watching testimonies from survivors of Auschwitz, one theme remained common; these tattoos are and continue to be unintentional performances of their identity within their everyday life. And yet again, this performative action is observational; we can observe these people and their tattoos in an effort to learn about them as individuals, World War II and the culture that created the circumstances for the Holocaust to occur. And when looking again at the various functions of performances, this performance of identity can fit into multiple categories. They can act as performances

in that the person is searching for healing in coming to terms with their trauma. They can be seen as a way to teach or persuade others of the existence of the Holocaust if they are non-believers, or to teach those willing to listen. Or to attempt to change the narrative associated with their tattoos into something beautiful; that while these tattoos may have originated in an evil place and time, they no longer need to be representative of that time or that space. They can instead be seen as symbolic of the hope that can come from humanity when we choose to do good. However, interpreted, these tattoos are performances of one's identity- an identity that evolves and changes with the world. The last section of this chapter utilizes another concept from Halbwachs work on collective memory using 9/11 memorial tattoos.

Social Reconstruction of the Past

A second concept from Halbwachs is the idea that social memories play a large role in the way that individuals, communities, societies, cultures, and the world remember and associate with certain events, situations, and periods of time. In chapter three of Halbwachs' *On collective memory* explores collective memory as it is tied to the past, the preservation of memory and the ways our memories can morph, and transform given the pressures of society. "We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives; and these are continually reproduced..." (Halbwachs & Coser, 1995, p. 47). He continues, stating that as our lives progress, people recite and share their memories of the past in different ways depending on the current moment of their lives. An example of this could be a survivor of a tragedy or traumatic event could give a very different version of a memory one month after the event occurred versus one year later versus a decade later. Many of the victims, survivors and witnesses of the September 11, 2001 attacks shared similar memories and

emotional responses in the immediate aftermath, but these memories can evolve and change over and with time.

Halbwachs asks the rhetorical question “How do we use mental images of the present to reconstruct our past?” (Halbwachs, 1995, p. 1). In this chapter, he explores how volatile the human mind truly is, especially when it comes to memories. He states that often times, our reconstruction of memories is selective; depending on how one identifies, where the event occurred/proximity, age, social status, etc. all impact memories and the reconstruction of those memories. Different groups of people will have a different collective memory- for example, the USA remembers 9/11/2001 very differently than any other country, society, or community in the world. These memories and the social reconstruction of them, lead to different behaviors and actions and thus, different histories.

In the next section, I explore the varying ways in which 9/11 tattoos represent memories attached to 9/11 while recognizing that these memories and associations with 9/11 are not the same across the board and, that the memories and association of this event change over time. I again emphasize Halbwachs work on social collective memory, specifically focusing on how these memories are socially reconstructed. These tattoos act as both signifiers of 9/11 and as performances of identity in representing the ways people have coped with the trauma of the terrorist attacks and how they have carried this trauma with them into the future.

9/11 Tattoos and the Social Reconstruction of the Past

The events of 9/11/2001 were so significant and traumatizing yet memorable that objects, pictures, stories, etc. representing it take on various narratives and signifiers.

However, Peirce denotes that often-times, things that are categorized as icons are often transformed into either indices or symbols; this is why I use this section to analyze 9/11 tattoos first and mostly as symbols. These tattoos would typically be interpreted as icons as they signify a direct likeness to the object. However, I seek to explore how these tattoos can rise above this direct representative likeness found in the icon and be understood as something more complex and symbolic invoking a spatial-temporal and embodied relation to the world.

Per Peirce, symbols require that the sign utilize some convention, habit, or social rule or law that connects it to the object (Atkins, 2013). This is where Halbwachs idea of the social reconstruction of the past plays out so clearly in relation to 9/11 tattoos. The people that were so moved, traumatized, or touched by 9/11 to permanently ink themselves with a memorial tattoo often interpreted and thus represented the event drastically different; and thus, the memories attached to 9/11 have been left to the social reconstruction of those memories which have transformed into symbolic understandings. We can see how a handful of these memories have played out in the memorial tattoos of the attacks, which differ in meaning and representation based on various factors such as age, geographic location, direct or indirect involvement, desire for unification after and a multitude of other aspects.

This reconstruction of the past plays out in varying 9/11 tattoos; realistic drawings of the towers, inclusion of other patriotic or uniquely American attributes, paying tribute to those who lost their lives, the people and organizations that played a large role in the aftermath and even some choosing to memorialize the events in a more tragic way with tattoos depicting the towers engulfed in flames. Many 9/11 tattoos choose to highlight the

World Trade Centers as they once were, as two of the tallest buildings in the world, holding thousands of hard-working Americans. And often, these tattoos include either other ‘American’ attributes or words/numbers representing the moment.

Often times September 11th memorial tattoos use other ‘American’ aspects in relation to the attacks to emphasize the hope and push for unity that occurred in the aftermath of 9/11. These objects, often important American symbols and sculptures, help signify the important role 9/11 has played in the lives of those who lived through it and those who experience through the reconstruction of others memories. Two common examples of this are using the statue of liberty and a bald eagle in conjunction with the twin towers. These help signify to others how the wearer remembers and carries the trauma of 9/11 with them in symbolic manners as the meaning of these are both cultural and learned. These tattoos are symbol signifiers in that they have various traits that are working to represent the event that was 9/11; although we recognize this as a traumatic event with immense loss of life, many remember the feeling of hope and harmony that emerged afterwards.

Uniquely American symbols such as the Statue of Liberty and bald eagles help communicate the pillars which the United States stands on, such as freedom, unity, and the fight against people or organizations that attempt to diminish those qualities in a truly learned and thus symbolic manner. Below is an example of a 9/11 tattoo as a symbol signifier; using the Statue of Liberty in conjunction with the shadows of the World Trade Centers, this tattoo communicates one understanding of 9/11 by reconstructing the towers in their past form with the boost of hope and unity projected by lady liberty. This addition of the statue of liberty adds a conventional connection between the sign (the tattoo) and

the object (the September 11th, 2001 attacks) and emphasizes this individual's reconstruction of the 9/11 attacks adding in both cultural and learned aspects of the sign, creating a symbolic meaning.

Figure 5

World Trade Center/ Statue of Liberty



Note: Tattoo and photo done by artist Sam Stokes at the Instagram handle

@samstokestattoo

Memorial tattoos from September 11th include various other aspects that would be considered a symbol signifier. These symbolic traits include aspects such as words, numbers, or flags. With Peirce's understanding of symbols and Sebeok's excellent example of how flags can act as symbols, we know that these require an interpreter as well as social and cultural traditions to be fully understood. Some tattoos include several aspects that aim to represent not just the 9/11 attacks, but what it 'means' and 'looks' like to be an American. This construction of identity as tied to nationality is one that is symbolically signified. An example of this is the below tattoo by Ower Hernandez. This

piece encompasses various attributes as it relates to the 9/11 attacks as well as including other aspects that communicate symbolic understandings of America and Americans. This tattoo has not only the World Trade Centers, but an American flag, a bald eagle and the Pentagon that was also attacked September 11, 2001 – all of these combine to create a sign (the tattoo) that connects it to the object (9/11 attacks) utilizing both culture and convention creating a space where the tattoo can be understood as a symbol.

Figure 6

Eagle 9/11 memorial



Note: Tattoo and photo done by artist Ower Hernandez at the Instagram handle

@ower_hernandez

Different than the first tattoo, this person’s reconstruction of the past includes various other factors; they understand and signify the terrorist attacks in a different way. By including the flag, which is understood as a symbol in that we give meaning to these artifacts, and the inclusion of the pentagon and an eagle, this tattoo is constructing the memories attached to 9/11 to incorporate more than just the ideas of hope and unity, but

freedom and bravery. This tattoo highlights how an icon and symbol can work together to create a unique signifier.

There are many other depictions of 9/11 in tattoo form and these all reconstruct the past memory of the attacks in different manners. Some tattoos work to pay tribute to the fallen heroes, such as the fire stations and police departments that lost countless members of their community in the aftermath and clean-up of 9/11. Examples of these tattoos are helmets of firemen with the ‘FDNY’ logo and station number or the NYPD logo with precinct numbers. These tattoos pay tributes to those lost and represent the trauma of 9/11 in a unique and more personalized manner. Others depict the terrorist attacks in their worst moments, the explosion and collapse of both the North and South buildings.

An example of this is firefighter T.C. Cassidy’s backpiece that memorializes the 9/11 attacks with a full color illustration of the towers on fire, surrounded by angels and a list of all his fallen brothers. He states his tattoo is a living portrait of grief- one that took 10 months and \$5,000 to complete (Ferreri, 2011). The photographer, Jonathon Hyman stated that Cassidy said very little during the photo session. But even then, Hyman noted that he could tell that even though Cassidy spent months searching and cleaning up the ruins of the World Trade Center but that that he got the “distinct impression that his backbreaking work in the World Trade Center wasn’t enough” and this he needed to do something more to memorialize his friends (Ferreri, 2011, para. 19). This was Cassidy’s way of coping with and memorializing the trauma of 9/11; his reconstruction of that memory being very different than the average person as he was at Ground Zero frantically searching for survivors and colleagues. This tattoo is a culmination of Peirce’s

trichotomy of signs; it can be interpreted as an icon as it is a model and an imitation of the events of 9/11, an index as it is both directly connected to the attacks and communicates an existential relationship to the past event, and a symbol, as various aspects of the tattoo require structure to understand. We only understand the significance and symbolic meaning of the angels and of the names when we understand the context of the other aspects that work together to signify and reconstruct the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

All of these represent the different ways in which society has constructed and actively reconstructs the memories attached to 9/11. And as such, these memories change the ways we understand and interpret 9/11, as well as the ways that society carries the trauma forward into our history. Halbwachs emphasizes that within this concept of social memory as related to the past, experiences and memories attached to the event often change and morph, especially depending on the social situation and audience. Survivors of 9/11 recant their memories in very different ways depending on audience; are they talking to other survivors, people who witnessed it on television from afar, maybe even those who were not alive or old enough to remember it? The ways in which they reconstruct their memories, stories and experiences about 9/11 are dependent upon the social structure- the memories could be elaborated, given more/less detail, shortened, etc., to fit what was necessary for that audience and the social situation. We can better understand how these tattoos act as signifiers of the past with Halbwachs concept of collective memory; although these tattoos may all have a common theme, they can be interpreted in varying ways that all represent the different ways in which people have attempted to cope with the trauma associated with September 11th, 2001.

Along with this concept of reconstruction of memories, we can also understand how 9/11 tattoos act as performances of identity. Schechner notes that something 'is' a performance when history, social context, convention, usage or tradition play a part. Meaning, the main difference between something being 'as' performance and something 'is' performance is a tie to specific cultural circumstances or traditions. And, when it comes to the terrorist attacks of 9/11/2001, few things impacted our cultural circumstances and traditions as much as that day and those select hours. We can then understand how these tattoos act as performances of identity in both the observational and social practices actions within performance studies.

The observational action is where people learn about others and other cultures, while social practices examine the ways in which communities and societies work together within practice and advocacy. September 11th, 2001 is a day few will forget; even if one wasn't born or old enough to remember, the trauma of that day is carried by every person and generation with the United States in the construction and reconstruction of the memories associated with it. And when these memories are permanently etched into the skin of survivors, witnesses, etc., these can be interpreted as active performances of identity. However, this performance varies in kinds and functions.

For this genre of tattoo and as related to Halbwachs work on collective memory, there are multiple kinds and functions of performances taking place. The 'kinds' overlap between art and ritual. These tattoos act as artistic interpretations of one's self while also representing a moment in history in which the wearer of this ink has deemed ritualistic; we commemorate this moment every year on September 11th. In understanding this, there is an ongoing performance of identity that can be understood from their tattoo in that this

person or these people have deemed 9/11 such a significant memory to them, that they felt inclined to permanently ink themselves with this specific moment in time.

There are also varying functions of performances; what does this tattoo accomplish in this specific realm? These tattoos can vary in functionality; for some they act as a way to heal from the trauma of 9/11, either from personal loss or ceremonial loss. They can act as a teaching moment, in which these tattoos act as an object from which others can ask and thus learn about. And they can also be seen as fostering community; in fact, many argue that the United States had not seen such bipartisanship and unity as a nation as it did in the aftermath of 9/11. This genre of tattoo can act as a function of performance in which one actually fosters community- to those who resonate with the trauma of the day and with those who were not yet born or have no tangible memories. These tattoos act as identifiers for others to understand aspects of 'who' they are and what's important to them, without them even having to say a word.

And like every true art form, the meaning of these tattoos has changed within space and time. After the events of 9/11, people found solace in the tattoo studio. Overwhelmed with emotion, pain and trauma, people found different ways to cope with the loss of loved ones and to commemorate one of the biggest yet most tragic moments they had ever, and maybe will ever, experience within their lives. These tattoos acted as memorials and created a unique way for people to grieve; in fact, some stated that they never envisioned themselves getting tattoos until 9/11. In a 2016 USA today article by Laura Petrecca, tattooed survivor Brian Branco stated "I would have never gotten any tattoos if it wasn't for September 11 and my need to keep the memory alive of my friends

who died that day” (para. 4). His tattoo shows a ripped American flag with the words ‘Never Forget,’ a common mantra that survivors of 9/11 picked up.

Michael Casico III states that his 9/11 tattoo acts as both a reminder of what happened that day and impacted his future career choice. Michael’s tattoo, a realistic drawing of the NY skyline with two beams of light representing the Twin Towers laying against an American flag with the words “Strong men stand up for themselves. Stronger men stand up for others,” represents much more than just 9/11, in fact, he has very few direct memories. Michael was only 4 years old on 9/11/2001, but he says it is his earliest childhood memory; when he thinks back to the first tangible memory he has, it’s of that day. He recalls the trauma as displayed by his parents and family members, but he more vividly recalls the stories of hero firefighters heading into the blazing buildings to save people. It was in that moment that Michael decided that’s what he wanted to do for a living. His construction of 9/11 and someone like Brain Branco, are very different. And while their tattoos have different signifiers and communicate different aspects of their identity, the meaning behind their tattoos have changed throughout space and time.

In the space and time of 2001 and immediate years after, many survivors and witnesses of 9/11 lined the armchairs of tattoo shops to commemorate their feelings of trauma and pay tribute to loss loved ones. But, how do the meaning of these tattoos change now, as we near the 20-year anniversary of the attacks? These tattoos can now be interpreted as more historical artifacts, like sculptures and artworks in museums. What once represented the immediate moment, now ensures that the history of this event is ‘never forgotten’ and the people that perished that day live on in the collective memories of our society and culture.

In this chapter, I explored varying ways in which we can interpret and understand the meaning of tattoos far beyond a mere body modification. These concepts of transgenerational trauma, religious collective memory and reconstruction of the past are highlighted in new and unique ways as associated with the symbolism of tattoos, their performative aspects, their evolving meaning in space and time, all ultimately grounded in the narrative of trauma. Now, I turn to new concepts from various works of Cathy Caruth in understanding the latency and locality of 'place' as associated and understood through tattoos.

Chapter 4: Latency and Localization: The Delayed Experienced of Trauma and ‘Place’ as Tied to Tattoos

This chapter now turns to the concepts of latency and localization as tied to trauma. Strategically placed after the use of transgenerational trauma and collective memory, this chapter now focuses on understanding how these tattoos act as an anchor between embodiment, delayed trauma and “place.” I use various scholarship by Cathy Caruth on latency and localization to explore how tattoos can often represent our delayed understanding of trauma, as well as tie people to “places” both metaphorically and physically. These ties, explained again using Peirce’s trichotomy of signs and interpreted as performances of identity, can help those of us on the outside better understand how these tattoos act as signifiers and performances of trauma through these concepts of latency localization and embodiment: the idea that trauma often becomes clearer and more memorable long after the event has occurred, that the localization, or place, of the trauma lives on with us as we change through space and time and that ultimately through these tattoos we are seeking a form of embodiment of said trauma. And as such, these tattoos help signify that trauma and identity in a unique and quiet manner.

We as people say so much about who we are, what we believe in, what we want and what we think of ourselves by little, nonverbal things we do daily. Every morning we awake and get dressed and maybe think, ‘what does this outfit say about me?’ or we color our hair with the attention of blending or sticking out, silently asking others to either accept or acknowledge us. And although still considered somewhat taboo, body modifications ask for this same interpretation; what does this tattoo say about me? What does this piece represent to me, about me and convey to others? Slowly but surely, tattoos

have become a cultural phenomenon, especially in the West. People use tattoos in a variety of ways to nonverbally communicate about themselves.

One major theme in this form of body modification is to convey to others about trauma: specific events, actions, deaths, periods of time, etc. And often times, the meaning of these tattoos is concealed or delayed. It is only after a delayed period of time that people are often confronted with this trauma. And then, these tattoos act as anchors of that trauma to a certain physical or metaphysical place. Maybe it represents the trauma you experienced in the city or state you grew up, or maybe it represents the mental ‘place’ you were in that caused an event to occur. Either way, through these concepts of latency and localization, one can understand how tattooing can act as an embodying practice and a performative rhetorical action.

Using Caruth’s work on latency and localization and combining with Schwab’s work on embodiment creates a unique chapter that focuses on how tattoos represent the idea of a delayed understanding of trauma that are tied to a ‘place’ and ultimately act as an embodiment of said trauma. I use all three genres of tattoos in this chapter and explore each one as signifiers and performances of identity as tied to these concepts of latency, localization, and embodiment. Ultimately, I seek to explore how tattoos can change in meaning due to latency, create a tie to ‘place’ whether that be physically or existentially and how people use tattoos to embody the trauma of both themselves and others.

Latency and Localization

Cathy Caruth’s work on latency and localization is some of the most well-known and respected when it comes to trauma and memory studies. While I was initially introduced to these concepts in her 1995 book *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, I also

pull from various other books and articles by Caruth, as well as reviews of her work to fully understand how these ideas of latency and localization help people understand how trauma is often experienced and understood. The two key ideas for this section are the delayed or ‘unclaimed’ experiences and memories that come with the aftermath of trauma and that often these memories tie those to a physical and/or existential ‘place.’ Explicitly, Caruth defines latency as “being in a state of existence but not yet developed or revealed” (Caruth, 1995, p. 8-9).

In Caruth’s 1996 book *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative and history* she explains the root of her use of and definition of the term latency as tied to trauma. She pulls from Freud’s work on trauma, in which he states that people often find different understandings of trauma once they “leave and return” (Caruth, 1996b). Freud continues, stating that people can escape, unharmed, from a spot or event that caused shock and surprised and be seemingly fine. However, in the following weeks, they can start to develop physical and/or motor symptoms which can only be attributed to the shocking event – Freud calls this “traumatic neurosis” (Quoted in Caruth, 1996b, p. 112). This delayed onset of symptoms is what Freud termed latency. And it is in this understanding of the term that Caruth expands upon, stating “The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself” (p. 17). She states that often with trauma, the experiences associated with the event are not fully recognized or revealed until this period of latency has occurred. In fact, she states that with extreme trauma, it is not relived or recalled in the aftermath, but it is here that is truly experienced for the first time.

Freud gives an example of being in a car accident; one does not fully realize or recognize the trauma of the accident until a period of time after surviving the accident. However, he states that this period does not mean the trauma or experience was forgotten; instead, he notes that the victim was not fully conscious during the accident. So, rather than simply ‘forgetting’ the experience, the survivor has actually not truly experienced it yet. “The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all” (Quoted in Gay, 1989). In this understanding of trauma, I can then explore a unique spatial-temporal relationship as well. One can experience and understand trauma in one way, and that understanding and meaning can change with this period of latency. Often time, these tattoos represent that shift in understanding.

In Caruth’s understanding of latency via Freud she explains it as an act of ‘unclaimed experience’ (hence the book title) in which people who have experienced a traumatic event only face the true impacts of said trauma in the aftermath of survival. “It is only by recognizing traumatic experience as a paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival that we can also recognize the legacy of incomprehensibility at the heart of catastrophic experience” (Caruth, 1996, p. 58). Caruth explores how latency works within trauma, ultimately stating that the experience of trauma is only fully understood, experienced, and recognized in the delayed survival of the trauma. She uses the term latency in a very similar manner as Freud, in which latency is a period during which the effects of the experience are not apparent until later on in the survivor’s life. In her 1995 book, she specifically explores this latency as it impacted survivors of the Holocaust. I seek to expand upon this with the inclusion of tattoos acting as signifiers of

this trauma and performances of identity in which the idea of ‘who’ these survivors were and are changed after World War II, in a large part due to their tattoos.

I also explore this concept of latency as tied to both Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos. Both of these circumstances and events, survivors experience a latency period, whether it was coping with the after-effects of Nazis or terrorists. This delayed period of recognition after a traumatic event causes an abundance of reactions and emotions that impact both victims and survivors. Caruth states that within this latency period, people do not simply ‘remember’ experiences they had forgotten during the trauma but rather these are being experienced for the first time (Caruth, 1991, p. 187). This in a sense, can re-traumatize someone and thus cause new reactions and feelings associated with it. Caruth reimagines Freud’s understanding of latency as tied to trauma in the form of temporal deferral (Caruth, 1996, p. 65). She ultimately argues that trauma victims “carry an impossible history within them” and that survival in itself can be considered a crisis (p. 65) This concept of latency creates a unique entrance for this study of tattoos as tied to semiotics and performance; how can these tattoos express an understanding of this latency period moments and years after the trauma has occurred?

Within this understanding of latency as tied to trauma comes the concept of localization. In this, it is understood that in this delayed period of understanding and the ‘unclaimed’ experiences trauma, the localization of said trauma also plays a role. This idea of locality within trauma is based around the idea that although the experience or event may have happened in a specific ‘place,’ we carry the trauma with us into new spaces and time. This idea of ‘place’ as tie to trauma is unique in that it does not always mean a physical place, but rather an existential or mental place in which one can

experience during trauma, and often times is a space that is only realized within this latency period. In this understanding of localization, 'place' is both physical and existential; it's a physical place where the trauma took place and an existential place where the traumatic experiences live on within us, which forever tie us back to a 'place' and a specific space.

Together, these work in unification to enable those of us on the 'outside' to have a better understanding of what trauma, how it affects people in various and delayed manners, and how often times, the memories of trauma leave people with both intentional and unintentional ties to 'place' both physical and existential. As Caruth states, "...the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time." These concepts combined with Peirce's trichotomy of signs and performance studies creates a unique entrance into the discipline of trauma studies as tied to tattoos. In the next four sections I explore the role of latency and localization within Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos as they act as signifiers and performances of identity and end the chapter with an overview of the ever-changing spatial-temporal relationship between these concepts and tattoos.

Holocaust Tattoos and Latency and Localization

These concepts of latency and localization tied to trauma connect to the topic of Holocaust tattoos, as the idea of 'place' is a key aspect. Caruth states "...since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time" (1995, p. 8). This concept of latency and locality can be applied to the experiences and struggles of those who left Auschwitz with tattoos,

replacing repression of those memories with latency and yet stuck with a physical and tangible scar that inevitably would forever signify their 'place' in World War II and the Holocaust.

Within these concepts of latency and localization, Holocaust tattoos can be best understood as both an icon and index signifier. As icons, these tattoos are perceived as resembling the signified; in this case, the Holocaust and World War II. These tattoos are unique in that they are tied to a very specific moment in time and place in history; in other words, they have commonalities with and bring to mind other objects and events related to the Holocaust and the Jewish faith. As such, these tattoos act as a form of expression. Without even the mumble of a single word, one can see this tattoo and instantly know pieces of their past, their heritage, and their religious beliefs. These tattoos as symbols refer us back to the Holocaust in both cultural and historical manners.

As symbols, these tattoos signal the learned relationship between the sign (the tattoo) and the object (the Holocaust) to the current historical. As Peirce noted in his work on signs as symbols, these are interpreted through convention, culture, and social rule or law. Although these tattoos had no obvious or explicit indication of the Holocaust - meaning, the tattoos did not use verbiage designating these people as Jewish or former prisoners of the Holocaust— they do represent these survivor's relationship to it in a symbolic manner. These tattoos can be interpreted as an object in which we interpret their symbolic meaning. Few artifacts or objects symbolically signify the Holocaust more than these tattoos. And it is in this latency that these tattoos have created new and unclaimed experiences of this trauma for both survivors and witnesses.

As indices, these tattoos are directly connected, both physically and existentially, to the Holocaust. Rather than being understood as a resemblance of World War II and the Nazi's, they can also be understood as signifying the existential relationship between victims, survivors, and witnesses to the Holocaust. Unlike icons, index signifiers have evidence of the event or object and directs one's attention to something. For the Holocaust, these tattoos are one of the main forms of evidence used to convey to others the horrific and inhumane treatment of Jews during the 1930s and 40s. And these direct one's attention to the event – they are historical stamps that exhibit both a physical and existential relationship to the Holocaust.

In chapter two I gave the example of an index signifier of a parent who gets the hand or footprint of their child tattooed onto them; this tattoo is both physically and existentially connected to the child. As each hand or footprint is unique to a person, by tattooing this, the parent has created a direct and physical connection to the child. And in a more existential manner, this tattoo represents said child. We can understand this genre of tattoo in a similar way; the numbers tattooed on the survivors directly connects them to the Holocaust and more specifically, Auschwitz. And in a more existential manner, these tattoos represent for all, not just victims and survivors, the actual and real existence of the Holocaust. Indices as signs are concerned about this aspect, being the *actual* existence of something, and in this case, these tattoos are tangible and permanent evidence of the existence of the Holocaust.

Some Holocaust survivors have noted that in the years after their release from Auschwitz, every time they saw their tattoo, they would remember something from their imprisonment. Whether it be a new memory, more detail to an existing one or something

they had blocked out in the moment, these tattoos created an unintentional connection between their trauma and these unclaimed experiences. This period of latency brought forth experiences they had not known or remembered before. And as such, the localization of this trauma is carried with them in every aspect of their life. No matter how far geographically they were, or how many years had passed, survivors could always return to the 'place' of the Holocaust with a simple and sometimes unintentional glance at their arm.

Now I turn to explore how these tattoos, under this guise of latency and localization, can be interpreted as performances of identity. As discussed previously, all performances are actions, but each of these actions have different meanings and interpretations. Analyzing Holocaust tattoos within this scope translates to this being both an observational and behavioral action. Observational actions focus on learning about people and cultures, while behavioral focuses on what people do within their performance; meaning, is what they are doing considered 'as' performance or 'is' performance? In both of these actions of performance, aspects of identity are being communicated to others nonverbally through the mediated channel of a tattoo. These specific Holocaust tattoos dictate and teach others about some of the worst times within the human race, as well as highlighting the different behavioral aspects that come with coping with extreme trauma. At the intersection of tattoos and performative action, is the idea that one's identity can be communicated in a unique yet substantive manner.

Figure 7

Gloria Hollander, Holocaust survivor



Note: Photo copyright permission given by owner Laura Reoch

Interpreting these tattoos as different kinds and functions of performance also debuts a new understanding of one's identity. In relation to these concepts of latency and localization, these tattoos fit into the multiple categories, everyday life, and ritual. In the performance of everyday life, one's identity is both constructed and communicated just by 'living.' Although these tattoos permanently marked those of the Holocaust as victims and survivors, they also became a normalized aspect of their everyday life. People coped with the trauma of the Holocaust in different ways in the months and years after liberation, but these tattoos remained a constant reminder of how different 'everyday life' could look. The unclaimed experiences of people that suffered through concentration camps came roaring back in the aftermath of freedom; and these tattoos were as much a

part of everyday life during their imprisonment as they were during their eventual freedom.

In a ritualistic performance of identity, these tattoos became both cultural and historical objects that represented both the present and past. In the historical moment performed by Nazi's at Auschwitz, these tattoos were used in a very specific and ritualistic meaning; designated those prisoners suitable for hard labor. Yet in the years after the end of World War II and during this period of latency, these tattoos claimed new identities for those who had suffered and eventually escaped. And in the end, they represented both new and old identities of the wearer; both of these identities steeped in cultural and historical meaning that had changed within this latency period and yet forever remained tied to the 'place' of the Holocaust and World War II. Although these people may have physically left Auschwitz, their tattoos became a cultural object in which their suffering and trauma would follow and re-traumatize them, regardless of how much time had elapsed and how far they may have ventured. These tattoos act as performances of identity in which the most vulnerable aspects of one's self is on display.

Many survivors often struggled with reclaiming their identity after the Holocaust. After being released from concentration camps, survivors took different approaches to coping with the memories with which they were left. However, those with tattoos had the difficult task of 'moving on' with their lives with a constant and permanent reminder of their imprisonment at Auschwitz. Zoka, a survivor of Auschwitz, asks another former prisoner; "Have you ever visited Auschwitz since your release?" to which he replies, "many times." After a moment, she responds, "So I say, you were never really set free" (Medalia, et. al., 2012). She later discusses that she had no desire to return to Auschwitz,

as she had a permanent reminder of her time there and she didn't need to 'go back' to 'be back;' her tattoo tied her physically and mentally to Auschwitz.

Developing stark and explicit memories only after her release, Zoka could recall a plethora of times she wished for death. "It's from another epoch of our life," she states, recalling memory after memory of her years at Auschwitz. "I was jealous of the German Shepard [dog]. He sat, warm by the fire." She had developed a death-wish, jealous of the Nazi's dogs who were treated with more grace and sympathy than any person of Jewish faith. This reminiscing of memories and experiences is often more traumatic than the actual experience, as it does not simply end as the event does, but rather lives on in the mind. For some, their tattoos become equated to a place of death and sorrow. The perception and experience of the 'place' of the Holocaust lives on in their flesh (Kandiyoti, 2004).

In his 1963 book *The Reawakening*, Primo Levi perfectly encapsulates the trouble of latency and localization in respect to his time in Auschwitz. In his second book, he takes time to describe his life in the months and years after his liberation from Auschwitz. In this, he states that he felt as though he was a "displaced person" (p. 206) as he endlessly wandered through Europe and the then Soviet Union in an attempt to find his place in the world. Ultimately, he finds his way back home to Italy in 1945 after what Primo calls his metaphorical "rebirth" that he experienced after being released from Auschwitz (p. 53). Levi discusses how his identity, both how he identified himself and how others saw him, drastically changed after World War II and the Holocaust. In his review of Levi's book, Jonathon Druker states "...the historical trauma of Auschwitz does not merely color Levi's second memoir but dictates its form and, therefore, its

meaning” (Druker, 2011, p. 1). He explores how Levi’s book perfectly exhibits Freud’s three stages of trauma: extreme shock, latency, and recurring trauma.

This concept of localization also goes beyond merely the walls of a concentration camp. As stated by Kandiyoti in a 2004 article about the idea of ‘place’ and the Holocaust, “Death and destruction permeate places...The range of spatialized representations of Holocaust experiences includes pre-disaster villages and cities, ghettos, places of hiding, transitional spaces of the postliberation period, and sites of exile and resettlement” (p. 300-301). So, this tie between trauma, place and tattooing can go beyond the memory of the act and encompass the wider scope of reality after the trauma. Their tattoos signify their internment at Auschwitz but can also represent a turning point in world history, their struggling identity and their personal experience with death that can all be tied back to a specific ‘place.’

Interpreting these tattoos with Caruth’s concepts of latency and localization open new boundaries for how we can understand cultural and historical moments through body modification. Holocaust tattoos created an unintentional yet permanent link to the one of the most horrific times in human history. Survivors cope with this trauma and the new re-traumatization that occurs with latency over and over; constantly struggling to find themselves in a sea of unclaimed experiences all tied back to a specific place and moment in history. Now I turn to explore how 9/11 memorial tattoos can be interpreted and understood within these same concepts.

9/11 Tattoos and Latency and Localization

For many Americans, the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 were a defining moment in their lives; a moment that is forever memorialized. Although 9/11 was not as

impactful as the Holocaust or World War II in a global sense, it is considered one of the darkest times in U.S. history. Many first responders and direct victims had an abundance of mental and physical health issues after 9/11, including Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Therefore, I want to quickly differentiate between PTSD and Caruth's concept of latency as related to trauma. While both speak to the effects of trauma in the aftermath of the event, they are different in their understanding of how trauma is carried and internalized.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is a mental health condition that is triggered by a specific event(s) by either directly experiencing it or by witnessing it (Mayo Clinic). Symptoms of PTSD include flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, panic attacks and uncontrollable thoughts of the event or events. Symptoms include recurrent and unwanted distressing memories of the event, full revival the event, nightmares and emotional and physical reactions to things that may remind someone of their traumatic event. This also includes changes in physical and emotional reactions and mood swings. PTSD can also causes victims to part-take in attitudes and demeanors in which they are fully avoiding thinking or talking about the event- this can include avoiding places, people, activities or any sort of material that may trigger a flashback or memory. A common example of this is the triggering caused by fireworks on war vets. Often times, the exploding noises caused by fireworks cause a war veteran to have flashbacks to their time during combat, which can cause severe mental, emotional and/or physical reactions.

Freud and Caruth's concept of latency as it relates to trauma differs in their understanding of memories and experiences as it relates to the event. PTSD as a disorder focuses on the idea that the traumatic event causes flashbacks to memories and

experiences that occurred, which impacts the survivor in a multitude of ways. The latency period as explained within Caruth's work focuses on the concept that survivors and victims of traumatic events have 'unclaimed' experiences in which they fully realize in the aftermath of the event. This latency period does not have an expiration date; these unclaimed or unrecognized experiences can resurface at different points after the trauma has ended and cause the survivor to fully realize the extent and potential damage of said trauma. So, rather than re-experiencing or remembering these memories, they are experiencing and realizing them for the first time. This is a key difference between latency and PTSD, the idea of flashbacks versus unclaimed experiences. Although both have a variety of impacts on people, the effects of PTSD have been much more extensively studied within a scientific matter, while this latency period has been explored in a more abstract and distanced manner.

Despite their differences, there is an overlap between latency and PTSD. Often times, people who experience PTSD have a difficult time adjusting back to life or coping with grief after the traumatic event, similarly to people who experience their trauma during this latency period. Both of these concepts can impact how people feel, act, and communicate about their trauma. Some internalize this trauma and attempt to keep it to themselves, some go to therapy, and some choose to express their trauma in more unique ways, such as tattoos and body modifications. Often these expressions are incredibly communicative in a subtle yet powerful way; tattoos are one way that people can nonverbally communicate parts of their identity, experiences, and trauma with others.

The aftermath of September 11th left many feeling uncertain, anxious and grieving those they lost or the sense of security the country had lost, but it wasn't until after this

latency period had elapsed that people and communities began to experience the full impact of the attacks. And in those moments, thousands turned to tattoos to help express their sadness, cope with loss, and memorialize an unimaginable moment in America's history. In this section, I explore how 9/11 tattoos fit into these concepts of latency and localization play a large role in the signification and performance of identity for those who either directly experienced or witnessed the unfathomable day of 9/11/2001.

When looking at Peirce's trichotomy of signs as they relate to latency and localization within 9/11 tattoos, a key aspect is recognizing that these tattoos will have different signifiers for different generations. For those born before 2001 and that were old enough to have their own tangible memories of the event, these tattoos can be interpreted as icons and indices, as they signify both a direct and indirect relationship between the sign (the tattoos) and the object (9/11 attacks). However, for those born after 2001 or were too young to have any of their own memories, these tattoos are interpreted and thus signified in a different manner as symbols. When discussing these concepts of latency and localization as tied to 9/11 tattoos, icon and index signifiers represent the resemblance to and physical relation victims and witnesses have to the event; most can recall where they were, what they were doing, what they were wearing because the gravity of the situation called for extreme attention.

Icon signifiers resemble the signified through associated commonalities that ultimately bring other similar objects, events, etc. to mind; they act as a form of expression that represent another thing. When examining 9/11 tattoos while considering the impact of the latency period, we get a wider variety of tattoos that encompass both the immediacy of the event, as well as the emotional toll and grieving that took place in the

aftermath. Tattoos that encompass the trauma of 9/11 often depict the Twin Towers; what they used to be, what they stood for, and sometimes even in their most vulnerable form as they began to burn and crumble. These acts as icon signifiers in that these are memorializing 9/11 in the form that many people remember it; resembling the Twin Towers and the City of New York.

Understanding these tattoos in relation to the ‘unclaimed’ experiences of 9/11 has a wide scope, including all three signifiers of Peirce’s trichotomy. For some, these unclaimed experiences were cherishing the New York skyline as it was prior to 9/11/2001; the glory of the Twin Towers, the Empire State Building, Park Avenue, Central Park Tower and various other buildings that comprised the busy New York culture the U.S. and world had come to love. In the aftermath of the attacks, many people began to long for the New York they once knew, and it was not until after the Twin Towers collapsed that people began to realize the gravity and permanence of the situation.

Various 9/11 tattoos lament the New York skyline, often times highlighting with different colors or hearts around the Twin Towers. However, connecting the NY skyline to that of the 9/11 attacks transforms this from an icon to both index or symbol signifiers. Index signifiers point to a particular even in time, and these tattoos signify a particular lived pain that revolves around the 9/11 attacks. Index signifiers act as indices of evidence that something has or will happen, and often directs attention to something. Various 9/11 tattoos focus on the Twin Towers; however, there also an abundance of creative and unique tattoos related to 9/11 that are outside this scope, yet still signify 9/11 in a more existential manner and presence. In the aftermath of the attacks, many people

began to realize how many people they knew that were directly impacted and how their memories of 9/11 could be recognized and realized in new and different ways. A common theme throughout this genre of tattoos are the words ‘Never Forget.’ This became the unofficial slogan of 9/11 as millions of people attempted to cope with the trauma associated with the attacks.

However, it was in the latency period that people started to realize the experiences of 9/11 they had that had been unclaimed in the moment; visions of people throwing themselves out of the Twin Towers, images of thousands of first responders rushing into the massacre, thousands of people crying on live television as they watched in horror. Many of these experiences came to the surface in the aftermath of 9/11; the temporal delay of the trauma is only understood in the ‘deferred act’ of understanding and interpretation (Greenberg, 2003, p. 31). Many of the tattoos within this genre represent this delayed act of understanding and interpretation; tattoos of individuals impacted or loss, societies or communities greatly impacted, American ideals that came under attack; these can all be understood as index signifiers in an attempt at understanding the hidden or unclaimed experiences from that day. All directly connected to the events of 9/11, but emphasize the different aspects, people, ideals, etc. that were affected and many that were not realized until months and years after 2001. These then create larger cultural and social understandings and meaning which Peirce would consider as symbols.

An example of this is the delayed health issues that various first responders began to experience in the months and years after 9/11. More than 2,750 people died in the 9/11 attacks – and more than 2,000 first responders have died since then from illness and disease associated with the clean-up (Cancer Treatment Centers of America, 2009). Many

of these illnesses morphed into deadly cancers from the toxic dust of the collapse of the Twin Towers. In the nearly 20 years after the attack, studies have shown that first responders had a 41% higher risk of getting leukemia, 25% higher risk of prostate cancer and a 219% higher risk of contracting thyroid cancer (Cancer Treatment Centers of America, 2009). But the kinds of illnesses and cancers for the first-responders and survivors of 9/11 aren't limited, scientists have also said being near Ground Zero on 9/11 and during the clean-up process has led to higher rates of breast cervical, colon and lung cancer as well (Brueck, 2019).

John Walker, an NYPD worker who was on scene during 9/11 and during the aftermath, now has stage 4 colon cancer. He spent nearly 400 hours at Ground Zero in the days after September 11, 2001; cleaning rubble, filling buckets of evidence and even digging out body parts (Brueck, 2019). He says that it wasn't until his diagnosis that he began to experiences of the trauma that he had never recalled- in a sense, his latency period associated with 9/11 did not come to the surface until his own health crisis. And, like many others, he sought a unique and permanent way to signify his 9/11 trauma. He thought of the tattoo idea as he was sitting at the hospital alone during chemotherapy, wishing his family could be with him. It was here that he began to think of ways he could incorporate his family into his tattoo that would also commemorate his fallen brethren at the NYPD.

In the spring of 2018, Walker had the DNA of his wife, son, daughter, and a fellow NYPD officer inserted into the ink of his tattoo. Using Everence powder, Walker was able to use the hair of his loved ones to turn it into a powder that could be mixed with tattoo ink and inserted into his skin. "Each grain of the powder acts as a tiny plastic

container that holds one strand of extracted DNA, ash, or hair. The coating is sterile and won't erode over time, so it sits under a person's skin forever” (Brueck, 2019, para. 23). Through this, Walker states that he no longer feels alone during his cancer treatments and that his tattoo is “...something tangible, something I can physically touch” (para. 26). Although it was not until the delayed understand of his trauma that he began to recognize and realize the impacts of 9/11 on himself and his family, Walker now says that he feels at peace for whenever he is called ‘home.’ And as an index signifier, his tattoo is directly connected to the two things that have impacted him the most in his life: his family and September 11th, 2001. However, it is important to note that with this technology and application of the tattoo, some would note that this is no longer be a mere sign but is literally the ‘Other’ as their DNA is mixed with tattoo ink. I contend that while this is still an index signifier, it could also transcend the boundary beyond being a sign since it contains literal components of other people.

It is after the time of latency that the culture of a community, society, and even a country, can begin to perceive the victimization of its past and attempt to work through it by understanding and interpreting these unclaimed experiences (Giesen & Eisenstadt, 2004). For many Americans today, 9/11 is one of the most collectively traumatizing moments in their lives. A moment in which we were watching history in the making in the most horrifying of ways. And in the latency period, not only do we remember the memories, but new ones are uncovered. And in this uncovering of experiences, we create a new culture associated with the trauma. It is in this creation of culture where these tattoos as icons and indices play a vital role in the interpretation and understanding of the trauma of 9/11 in last twenty years.

In this section, I want to explore both the ‘place’ of 9/11 that lives on in the collective memory of the U.S., but also the forgotten places of September 11 as a combination of icons, indices, and symbols. In Peirce’s explanation of this trichotomy, he states that the same sign can have *aspects* that make them simultaneously an icon, index, or symbol. And these meanings and interpretations can change over time as the original relation of the sign-object-interpretant change over space and time.

This is the case for the 9/11 tattoos when focused on the localization of trauma; both the mental and physical ‘place’ that trauma takes place plays a large role in the ties to people feel to their experiences. And a more unique aspect I explore within the realm of these tattoos and localization of trauma are the forgotten ‘places’ of September 11th, 2001. In this, I explore how the genre of 9/11 tattoos as a whole leave a gap between New York and the other highly impacted yet often forgotten places of the attacks.

First, I want to explore how these tattoos act as icon signifiers within localization to represent the ‘place’ of 9/11 in a multitude of ways. Caruth notes that those who have been traumatized “carry an impossible history with them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (Caruth, 1995, p. 3-4). This history then surfaces and culminates with people in different ways, some turn to formal therapy or the use of humor, some turn to body modification. Icons are perceived as resembling the signified, while indices directly connected either physically or existentially. Unlike icons, index signifiers always have a connection to a real existence and presence, while sometimes, icons are resembling things that do not exist currently or never have. I gave the example of a unicorn in chapter two; although unicorns do not exist in reality, we still understand how they look and their unique aspects that enable

something to resemble them. In this understanding of icons and indices, one can see how 9/11 tattoos can be both an icon and index at the same time while signifying the ‘place’ of 9/11. For some, the twin towers have never existed; yet we know what they are supposed to look like. For others, we know the real existence and presence of these buildings even though they no longer have a physical existence.

This genre of tattoo is unique in that for many, 9/11 will always remain one of the events that people remember the most in their lives. Horror, tragedy, death, unity. Hope, freedom; these are all themes that arose in the aftermath of the attacks. And many people chose to memorialize this moment in history in their very own flesh, depicting one or multiple of these themes. And in doing this, they are creating signifiers for the way in which themselves have interpreted, understood, and now communicate the trauma from that day and the historical moments afterwards. Throughout the other chapters, I have shown multiple examples of these tattoos, many which focus on and depict the Twin Towers and include other uniquely American symbols such as the flag or bald eagles. The inclusion of these outside objects come together to form an expression of two main themes; the impact of 9/11 on Americans and the ideals of what it ‘means’ to be an American that cannot be broken by evil.

By using these outside emblems and artifacts, these tattoos act as icons in that they are using multiple traits and properties of the represented item, being 9/11, to liken itself to the event. Again, for some people the Twin Towers never existed; they have seen pictures and heard stories, but never lived in the same world where these towers were the heart of the New York skyline. And in this understanding, they are icon signifiers in that they are representing the signified that no longer exists. However, this localization of

trauma still exists; the ‘place’ that this event took place lives on in people’s memories and unclaimed experiences. And this idea of ‘place’ as tied to trauma creates commonality for all people in the sense that the physical place 9/11 happened is the same for all, whereas the mental ‘place’ varies.

Those varying other ‘places’ for which trauma and localization occurs is unique in that people interpret and understand, and thus carry the trauma with them in different ways, including index signifiers. An example of this is the use of the NYPD and FDNY as key ‘places’ this trauma exists; even though it was neither of these stations that were attacked or destroyed, many people associate 9/11 to these institutions for the role they played during and after the events of 9/11. Various people, many first responders themselves, took it upon themselves to memorialize their lost brethren by tattooing the logos of these institutions, often with the names of the fallen. Tattoos in this category include FDNY, NYPD and other tattoos in which they are recognizing the people included in the ‘place.’ As icons, these tattoos are linked to the object/event it represents, and as indices they are physically linked to the object/event.

However, I also want to briefly touch on what I have designated as the ‘forgotten places’ of September 11th, 2001. As I combed through thousands of 9/11 tattoos on various websites, Instagram pages, articles, and magazines I found a common theme; 9/11 is most often connected to and associated with New York and the Twin Towers. If someone, whether a US citizen or other, were asked what the first thing they think of when they hear the words nine-eleven, most commonly their response would revolve around New York and the World Trade Centers. Ground Zero became the epicenter of 9/11, the main area in which the localization of this trauma began and ended. In this

remembrance of the ‘place’ of 9/11, there are two major forgotten places that lives were lost, and heroes were made. First is the attack of the Pentagon, in which 184 people were lost. And second, was United Flight 93 that crashed into the ground in Shanksville, Pennsylvania killing all 44 on board. In comparison to the memories and experiences of 9/11 in New York, these places of this trauma are seemingly forgotten within the public sphere and narrative.

Although the Pentagon attack had a prominent impact on the general Washington D.C. area and Flight 93 directly affected those in the surrounding Pennsylvania area, in the international landscape and narrative on 9/11, these ‘places’ of this trauma have become the forgotten places of 9/11. A *Business Insider* article written by Mark Abadi from September 12th, 2020 commemorates the 19th anniversary of 9/11 by discussing the various headlines of newspapers from around the world the day after September 11th, 2001. The article shows 18 different snapshots of various front-page stories across the US and globally. Of these 18, every single photo used in the front-page story were pictures from New York and the Twin Towers; of these 18, only three headlines mentioned the Pentagon, and none mentioned Flight 93 or the Pennsylvania crash in the immediate headline or cover story. This same sentiment crosses over into this genre of tattoos – in my general research of 9/11 tattoos, I was hard-pressed to find tattoos that commemorated the Pentagon attack or Flight 93. The example tattoo showcased in chapter three by Ower Hernandez is the only tattoo I could find that memorialized both the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. In this, the Pentagon is wrapped around the Twin Towers, both being overlooked by a bald eagle and an American flag. Although not forgotten

in a local sense, these spaces have been severely overlooked at the national and international narrative when it comes to the localization of the 9/11 trauma.

For those who have their own tangible memories of 9/11, these tattoos act as icon and index signifiers as they resemble the attacks, are directly connected and emphasize both a physical and existential relationship that people who experienced or witnessed it can connect to and revel in. However, it's also important to understand and explore the ways these tattoos could be interpreted to those who were not yet born in 2001 or were too young to have their own memories and experiences and rely on the stories and memories of those around them. For these people, these tattoos act more as symbol signifiers as they require some sort of interpreter or interpretation to be fully understood. Peirce understands symbol signifiers as being arbitrary or conventional; these often are made up as icon or index signifiers. Unlike icon and indices, symbols require more structure to be understood and communicated effectively. Icon and index signifiers exist without the need of interpretation; symbols stop being a sign if they have no interpretant (De Toro, 1995). In this understanding, symbols need to be decoded to be understood and work through a tradition of social, historical, or artistic practices.

When exploring this genre of tattoos as associated to the generations of people who were not yet born or too young to have their own memories and experiences tied to the trauma of 9/11, it is easy to understand how these could be interpreted as symbols of latency and localization. Instead of resembling the attacks or being directly linked to them both physically and existentially, these tattoos act as symbols that require some sort of interpretation to be fully understood; icons and index are recognized while symbols are interpreted. Those of who have clear and explicit memories of the attacks can look at

these tattoos and create understanding based of our own experience with the trauma. I see a tattoo of the Twin Towers laying within the shape of a heart and I can reminisce of my own experiences of 9/11. However, those without their own memories use more context clues and interpretation to understand the meaning being communicated.

These tattoos are symbolic in their meaning associated with September 11th in that for this generation of people, there is not a direct connection or resemblance. The meaning is purely symbolic and requires some sort of interpretation or interpreter. We understand stoplights because of the social traditions and culture; green is ‘go’, yellow is ‘slow down’ and red is ‘stop.’ People understand these tattoos in similar symbolic manners; the Twin Towers, the slogan ‘Never Forget,’ even just the numbers 9/11 are signified and understood by the symbolic social context in which they have grown and evolved from. Similar to a national flag, the social and historical contexts that encompass 9/11 tattoos create symbolic meanings that extend to those who have no conscious memories of their own and to those who do. While I focus on the symbolic nature of these tattoos to those without their own experiences, there are multiple artifacts, words, numbers, etc. that have become symbolic signifiers of 9/11 for both the US and the world. In understanding these symbols, which people often include in tattoos, the interpretation of these symbols give meaning to them.

While the American flag has its own stand-alone symbolic meaning, when it is included in a tattoo about 9/11, there is a specific social and historical context that creates new meaning for the symbol. The interpretation of the flag, often surrounding the Twin Towers or accompanied by a bald eagle or ‘Never Forget,’ has a different symbolic interpretation due to the social and historical context of the 9/11 attacks. And for many,

9/11 tattoos are subject to constant interpretation in relation to the greater social tradition in which the meaning of these can change in space and time. And when interpreting these tattoos in a more symbolic manner, the 'place' they are connected to is more abstract and existential. This latency period associated with 9/11 is the only experience and memories some have; their sense and association with the trauma is only understood in a delayed fashion in which the memories and unclaimed experiences of others create their understanding of 9/11.

Some tattoos include all three signifiers of icon, index and symbol while still emphasize these concepts of latency and localization. The tattoo below is a prime example of how tattoos can be all three signifiers and also plays into Caruth's concepts. Acting as an icon, the shape of the tattoo resembles and mimics the patches worn on firefighter's gear. As an index, the term 'Never Forget', which has become the unofficial slogan of September 11th, denotes both the real and existential relationship to the 9/11 attacks in asking those of us who witnessed and experienced it to not forget and signifying to those who did not to never forget. The use of the date 9-11-01 memorializes that specific space and time in history in both an iconic and symbolic manner. And finally, the use of '343' with the American flag inside is a symbolic signifier; there were 343 firefighters lost on 9/11. This number is signified as way to commemorate the number of men and women lost, their status as first-responders and as heroes and paying tribute to those who risked their lives in the face of evil. This tattoo communicates both the delayed experiences of trauma associated to those we lost that day as well as the localization of said trauma, which for this person is the New York City Fire Department (FDNY).

Figure 8

9/11 memorial tattoo



Note: Tattoo and photo done by artist William ‘Crowbar’ Tattoo at the Instagram handle @crowbartat2

These tattoos signify a variety of different meanings and interpretation of the trauma of 9/11 as they related to latency and localization. But they also serve as performances of identity; just by looking at this tattoo, what can I learn about this person and their connection to the trauma of September 11th, 2001? The performances of identity embedded in these tattoos are intense yet enlightening. Often times, these tattoos are used in a very intentional manner to both remind themselves to not forget what happened, who was lost and the ways it changed the face of America, as a teaching moment for others, in a ritualistic manner and even art. This concept of performance has specific actions, kinds and functions that ultimately help communicate identity through tattoos.

The first component of performance is action; what is being done within the performance? Under the umbrella of latency and localization, these tattoos have components of artistic practice and social practices. Artistic practice is a major component of performance studies as it studies the relationship between studying performance and doing performance. In this sense, these tattoos provide a performance of both identity in the past and the present; how did the trauma of 9/11 impact the person in the moment and how does that translate to the current historical moment? The first aspect to understand is that often times people with these tattoos have been traumatized to the point to where they justify a permanent and extremely personal memorial in the form of body modification. This artistic practice, in both the literal and metaphorical sense, creates a relationship between the event of 9/11 (or the study of performance) and one's individual performance of the event (doing performance). While these tattoos may have one meaning at their inception, that meaning grows, evolves, and changes throughout time, an aspect I touch on in the next section on the spatial-temporal relationship of 9/11 tattoos.

Performances then have different kinds; ranging from serious to playful to romantic, kinds of performances vary to includes a multitude of intentions, attitudes, emotions, and events. For 9/11 tattoos, we can understand these tattoos as fitting into everyday life, arts, and ritual. Schechner states that performances of 'everyday life' can include a multitude of events and objects; cooking, playing sports, the general concept of 'living.' This is where I place these tattoos – the memories of 9/11 have become everyday life. The experiences had during that day and the days after are ones that have resurfaced years later, been unclaimed in the moment and claimed again in later examination of the

trauma, and have even resulted in things like health issues – all parts of everyday life that showcase small aspects of our identities.

However, this genre of tattoo can also fit into both the arts and ritual; these components often play together to explore personal expression via art of the cultural and/or historical periods at hand. And the ritual objects of one culture or history can become the arts of the others. In this sense, we can understand how the 9/11 tattoos from the early 2000s have transcended time, generations and even cultures to become understood in other historical moments while retaining their significant meaning. These tattoos reflect both the social and historical significance of the 9/11 while simultaneously acting as performances of identity steeped in artistic and ritualistic meaning.

And finally, performances also have a function component that ask, “what are the functions of these tattoos and how do they communicate identity?” There are various functions of 9/11 tattoos in relation to identity construction, including healing, changing identity, dealing with the sacred/demonic, to teach and to foster community. When considering the concepts of latency and localization, it is easy to understand how these tattoos can act as healing performances of identity. The unique aspect of this medium of body modification is the permanence and embodied pain; not only does the tattoo have the ultimate result of communicating several components of one’s identity, such as their relationship to the trauma, the people they personally lost, the national loss, the feeling of unity that arose in the aftermath, but the physical pain of the tattoo is often interpreted as an embodiment of the trauma. Often people seek comfort in the idea that with a tattoo, the trauma of the moment, day, event, etc. is forever memorialized into their skin.

Unsurprisingly, trauma can directly impact one's identity, often causing people to struggle with reclaiming 'who' they are after a traumatic event. With these tattoos, this performance of identity is on display for the world to see in which people are showcasing the ways in which the trauma of 9/11 changed aspects of themselves. And in this changing of identity, they are also dealing with the 'scared or demonic.' In the case of 9/11, the world witnessed both the good and evil the world had to offer. The events of September 11th showcased the ultimate evil, but in the response to it, we saw the best of humanity - millions of people banded together, forgetting their differences, to mourn the thousands of people lost. These tattoos helped people deal with both the sacred and demonic forces of 9/11 all while considering the physical and mental 'place' in which this trauma occurred.

And finally, these tattoos act as nonverbal communicators aimed to teach and foster community. I discussed the different ways in which these tattoos act as signifiers, icons, indices, and symbols. And although I tailored the understanding of these tattoos as symbols mainly to those who do not have their own memories of the event, the historical moment of 9/11 has become its own symbol; the interpretation changes, grows, and evolves yet remains a stable part of our culture, tradition and society. In this understanding of symbol, we see how the delayed experience caused by latency and the 'place' of this trauma is interpreted differently as the demands of the current historical moment changes and, as the victims and witnesses of the trauma continue to uncover unclaimed experiences of 9/11.

Trauma is something we all experience; it does not discriminate. We are all likely to become victims of trauma in our lives in some manner. And for many, like myself, the

traumatic experiences of September 11th, 2001 are ones that have remained seared into memory and impact our identity. Whether a direct victim, survivor, or witness, the trauma of 9/11 is one that we all carry with us as different parts and performances of our identity. And some used tattoos as their medium of expression to help embody their experiences and interpretations of the trauma. Although forever remaining significant, the meaning of these tattoos has changed during the space and time of the last twenty years.

When considering a spatial-temporal relationship to 9/11 tattoos steeped in the concepts of latency and localization, the main theme that emerges is the creation of a new culture tied to the trauma of this historical moment.

In bequeathing a sense of grounding specificity and localization to trauma as a general concept, southern studies scholars have been conceptualizing the differing functions of temporal and spatial memorials (narrative, ritual, history, monuments); uncovering and articulating the political uses of mourning; exploring the relationship between cultural memory and cultural amnesia; examining forms of aesthetic representation and memorialization. Hinrichsen, 2013, p. 609

In this article, Hinrichsen explores one way that the spatial-temporal relationship can be tied to trauma. He states that often times cultural memory of trauma meets cultural amnesia; the moments that all of society knows and recognizes meets the more localized and delayed memories to create a new culture tied to trauma. At an international level, the attacks on 9/11 and the Holocaust are something that will live on in the history books of every country for the rest of time, these are our social moments and collective memories. They create a historical narrative about the trauma of World War II and 9/11

that all inhabitants of the world can relate to, and then there are the individual interpretations of trauma. These meet to create a new culture of the trauma that has been created within space and time.

When considering the concepts of latency and localization as tied to Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos, it is evident how the meaning of these have changed within the spatial-temporal construct. What was once interpreted as an immediate memorial to both the people and spirit that were lost during the Holocaust and on 9/11, has slowly morphed in meaning during the space and time of the last twenty years. In Caruth's understanding of the latency and localization of trauma, she states that trauma is often a "paradoxical experience" in which we have "defining yet unknowable memory lodged in the mind." Ultimately, she states that events can only be understood as traumatic after the fact and is only "fully evident" in connection with another place, and often time, another time. (Caruth, 1995, pp. 405). When tying this to both 9/11 and Holocaust tattoos, full realization of the trauma experienced occurs only after the event has ended; it is these interpretations of the trauma that are on display within these tattoos. The 'place' of the Holocaust and of 9/11 lives on in the flesh of its survivors, victims, and witnesses.

Ultimately, "trauma is a crisis of representation, of history and truth, and of narrative time" (Stark, 2011, p. 443). In this understanding of trauma, there is opposition between the traumatic event and the narrative possibility that comes in the aftermath of the trauma, known as the "anti-narrative" (Stark, 2011, p. 445). Here, trauma is understood as having a multiplicity of narratives; something we see in this exploration of tattoos as tied to latency and localization. The different types of signifiers and performances of identity that are exhibited and communicated through these tattoos have

an abundance of narratives, ranging from global and national depictions of 9/11 and the Holocaust to the more personalized and local interpretations. Within the social and individual constructions, interpretations, and communication of trauma, we see how these tattoos have played a large role in the developed narrative. These tattoos act as signifiers and performances of identity steeped in the collective and personal trauma of both the Holocaust and 9/11/2001.

Next, I turn to explore how Laub's concept of witnessing, testimony and truth play out in this project of Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos. Then, I take a new perspective on the performative aspect of tattoos in considering how these tattoos illicit an ethical performance of the 'other' using the work of Emmanuel Levinas and his 'first philosophy.'

Chapter 5: Truth, Testimony and Witnessing as Tied to Tattoos and the Ethical Performance of the “Other”

In the previous two application chapters I explored the ways in which tattoos are signifiers and performances of identity through various concepts: transgenerational trauma, collective and religious memory, and latency and localization. In this chapter, I now turn to Dori Laub’s work within trauma studies that focuses on truth, testimony, witnessing and responsibility, as well as flipping the script on the idea of ‘performance’ as tied to trauma. Using Emmanuel Levinas’ philosophy on ethics and responsibility, I explore how these tattoos enact and, in some cases, require, a performance of those who are witnesses of the tattoo. Using this Levinasian lens, I apply a +new spin on the idea of performance of the ‘other’ as it relates to tattoos, especially those laced with nostalgic memories and traumas of the past.

First, I lay the foundational work for Laub’s work on witnessing, testimony and the search for truth as tied to trauma from various works, including a chapter for Caruth’s 1995 book *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Then, I apply these concepts to both Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos to explore how they act as signifiers and performances of identity within these concepts of testimony and witnessing and ultimately, how their meaning has changed within a spatial-temporal relationship. Then, I give a brief introduction to Levinas and his work within ethics and philosophy to lay the groundwork for ethical performance of the ‘other’ in which I state that not only do these tattoos act as performances of identity for the wearer, but in fact call out performance in those who view the tattoos as well.

Dori Laub on Witnessing, Testimony, and Truth

Dori Laub was an Israeli American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, a professor at Yale University and is considered an expert trauma researcher with a focus on testimony methodology. Born in Czernowitz, Romania (present-day Ukraine) in 1937, Laub was an only child living with his parents in the ‘ghetto’ of Romania before being deported to a concentration camp in Transnistria in 1942. While he lost his father to the Holocaust, he and his mother survived and were liberated by the Red Army in 1944. His mother then moved them to Israel to live with family, and Laub spent the remainder of his youth and young adult life in Israel attending Hebrew University and serving in the Israel Defense Forces (Rudof, 2019). He migrated to the United States in 1966 and studied at both Harvard and Yale, where he eventually became a clinical professor in 2004. This is where his work on trauma and with survivors began – working with patients in hospitals and clinics.

He was also the co-founder of the Holocaust Survivors Film Project (HSFP) with Laurel Vlock, a grassroots research project that videotaped testimony of Holocaust survivors. In this research, and as a child survivor of the Holocaust himself, Laub developed an interview technique that focused on empathic and knowledgeable listening in which interviewers followed the lead of survivors, rather than typical etiquette in which interviewers controlled the narrative (Rudof, 2019). He not only inspired others to adopt this type of interview and documentation style, but trained hundreds of people from around the world. He noted that this type of interview style was imperative to accurately document the Holocaust, as well as all other genocides and human right abuses. He states:

One thing led to another, and then I realized that we didn't have to ask questions. We simply had to allow the survivors to speak We realized that this is something more than we expected. ... But as we proceed through the evening, we were more and more astonished (Rudoren, 2019).

In this technique, Laub states that allowing survivors, or those being interviewed, to lead the narrative of the interview will lead to a more genuine and accurate depiction and documentation. Between 1979 to 1981, Laub and company recorded 138 testimonies from Holocaust survivors, one of the main starting points for his work on truth, testimony and witnessing.

Within Laub's essay in Caruth's *Truth* book (1995) he explores his own trauma as a child survivor of the Holocaust. He states "For a long time now, and from a variety of perspectives, I have been concretely involved in the quest of testifying and of witnessing – and have come to conceive of the process of the testimony as, essentially, a ceaseless struggle" (p. 61). He explains three levels of witnessing as tied to the importance of testimony and truth; being a witness to oneself within the experience, being a witness to the testimonies of others, and being a witness to the process of witnessing itself (Laub & Caruth, 1995). In using himself as an example, Laub explains that the first level, being a witness to oneself within the experience, comes from his childhood experiences as a concentration camp survivor. He notes that he has very distinct memories of his deportation, arrival to camp and the life he and his family led there – these are not facts or stories that he learned from others but explicitly memories and details from his own experiences. "But these are not memories of an adult" Laub writes, as he once again reminisces of this trauma. He states that his experiences and memories of this trauma go

“far beyond the normal capacity for recall in a young child of my age” (Caruth, 1995, pp. 62) and that his mother was always shocked with the precision and accuracy of his memories as he was only five when he entered his first concentration camp. Laub states that within this level of witnessing, it is as though these events occurred in within his subconscious; like a “discrete island of precocious thinking” that happened to another child and yet was inextricably connected to him. He explains that this level of witnessing creates a complex understanding of the trauma, in that he feels both connected and disconnected.

Within the second level, being a witness to the testimonies of others, he uses his interviewing of other Holocaust survivors in which he was a witness to their testimony of the trauma. It is in this participation of others testimony in that he can now become a witness of others trauma, even though he has his own experiences with the event. He claims that within this role of witnessing, he became a companion to others through their “eerie” journey of the testimony (p. 62). In this form of witnessing, as the interviewer of the testimony, Laub becomes a participant in the reliving and reexperiencing of the event and subsequently, becomes a part of the struggle. It is in this sense that he also becomes tasked with upholding the truth of the witnessing and testimony.

And within the third level, being a witness to the process of witnessing itself, Laub found himself becoming extremely aware of the way in which he saw the role of the narrator while interviewing survivors: “I observed how the narrator and myself as listener alternate between moving closer and then retreating from the experience, with the sense that there is truth that we are both trying to reach” (Caruth, 1995, p. 62). In this level of witnessing, the trauma has typically been long buried and often times, distorted. The

horrific experiences and memories of the event exist within the testimony only as an “elusive memory” that no longer matches reality (p. 63). In realizing the disconnect between the testimony and the current reality, both the narrator and the person giving testimony must reflect on the memories and build a new link between the traumatic experiences and memories of the past to present-day life in order to make sense of them.

And out of this witnessing comes the need for testimony, truth, and the responsibility tasked to others to keep the stories of these survivors alive. However, within this chapter and other works on Laub, he discusses the importance of testimony, but the ‘impossibility’ of doing so. It is in this testimony that many survivors begin to realize the process of witnessing and the importance of their testimony to history. Within his interviewing of hundreds of Holocaust survivors, he found a common theme; the notion that people wanted to survive in order to be able to tell their story one day. Laub states that he believes the opposite to be true – survivors did not only need to survive so they could share their stories, experiences, and memories with the world, but they needed to tell their stories to survive. “There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus to come to know one’s story” (Caruth, 1995, p. 63). In his understanding of testimony, Laub states that one needs to know and come to terms with their buried truth in order to be able to comfortably live their life. It is in this understanding of testimony that I explore how tattoos act as nonverbal testimony; these tattoos communicate to others their truth and their stories as survivors.

Laub explains testimony as an ‘impossible and yet necessary act’ (Givoni, 2011, p. 151). Often times, survivors feel overwhelmed by the impossibility of telling; how could they ever tell a story, a memory, an experience, that truly reveals to others the

horror of what they experienced? But this testimony is a necessary evil to attempt to give others the chance to witness the trauma of others and carry the burden of the event with them in some sense. This is commonly done in a historical and cultural sense - we teach our young about the best and worst periods within our history for a reason, so they too, can bear witness to the trauma of others. Often times when survivors remain silent about their trauma, their experiences and memories become distorted and begin to invade the person's daily life. As such, Laub explains that although difficult, painful, uncomfortable, the testimony of others is essential in creating a better world. And it is in this understanding that Laub created his interviewing technique in that the survivor is touted as the narrator and interviewer as an empathic and knowledgeable listener.

Rather than simply limiting testimony to a form of evidence or merely a source of information, Laub considers it a gesture expands the boundaries of knowledge, representation, and justice of traumatic experiences. And he also takes time to set a distinction between testimony and storytelling. He defines storytelling as a "perfect correspondence" between memory, history and narrative that has limited experience and perspectives, while testimony is less focused on a historical reconstruction and pays more attention to the disclosure of "existential, moral and psychic repercussions" (p. 151). For Laub, acts of testimony both "staged and set in motion the crisis of witnessing that formed the distinctive feature of genocide and other atrocities" (p. 152). In this understanding of testimony, it created a space where people could better comprehend the trauma of others and to render more meaningful shared experiences, which ultimately leads to this idea of witnessing and co-owning trauma.

In Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* he explores the tension between witnessing and historical accuracy, the idea of 'truth' and the truth of witnessing to "what cannot be seen" (Oliver, 2004, p. 83). There are certain conditions that must exist for testimony to be able to exist; a protected space, necessary time and a "totally present, committed and attuned listener who is willing to accompany the witness on the journey" (Greenspan et. al., 2014, p. 199). In his understanding between the witness and testimony relationship, the witness has information that has not yet been recorded and requires a certain level of 'readiness' to face the 'real' events of their lives; and the testimony is then a "transmission" of information that require both an internal readiness and pressure to convey, coupled with an external readiness and eagerness to receive (Greenspan et. al., 2014, p. 199). When this cohesion exists, testimony can then take on a life of its own and the boundaries of the witness' memories expands. Many times, after one is done with their testimony, they are amazed with the extent to which they remembered the trauma and how they were able to translate these feelings and thoughts into words. Ultimately, Laub perceives testimony as 'whole' or 'complete' when the person's dialogue is heard by a present, attuned listener who will allow the person to become the narrator; this sets it apart from other instances when survivors speak of their experiences in that they have full control and the full attention of the interviewer. Having a receptive but flexible audience is key within Laub's understanding of true testimony.

The last concept I want to briefly explain as related to Laub's concepts of witnessing and testimony is what he calls an 'inner witness.' In reading Laub's work on testimony as a psychoanalysis, the reader comes to understand the 'inner witness' or the

‘inner thou’ as produced and maintained by dialogic interaction with people. In this chapter, I further this definition of the inner witness to include nonlinguistic forms of communication; the nonverbal acts, events, objects etc. that also interact with people. And in this case, the tattoos worn by Holocaust and 9/11 victims and survivors act as nonverbal communicators of their inner witness. In Laub’s understanding of witnessing and testimony, our sense of “what is meaningful” is only meaningful if we can imagine it to be impactful for others outside ourselves; our sense of self and often times, our understanding of trauma, comes from these relationship with others (Oliver, 2004, p. 83). Ultimately, through our inner witness, we both create and find meaning for ourselves in creating meaning for others.

A key aspect of these concepts of testimony, witnessing and truth is based around the idea that testimony is a “performative speech act” that brings buried and forgotten memories to the surface and often time, represent forgotten or muted victims. It is in this understanding of truth, testimony and witnessing that I tie in Levinas’ first philosophy, and his ideals about ethics that revolves around the idea of “I am my brothers’ keeper.” In his explanation, Levinas’ explains to the reader that ethics and justice are constantly interrupting each other; ethics must play a role in justice, and justice must be involved in ethical decisions. His first philosophy and concept of keeping those who do not have a metaphorical ‘seat at the table’ at the forefront is key. I explore how, through a Levinasian perspective, these tattoos then call out an ethical performance from the ‘other.’

In this chapter, I explore how these genres of tattoos are both an attempt to ‘witness’ trauma and subsequently provide ‘testimony’ to other individuals, societies, and

cultures. These people then become co-owners of the trauma and tasked with the responsibility of providing the truth of these events. In this sense, I task these tattoos with the responsibility of both witnessing trauma and providing testimony, all nonverbally. I explore how these tattoos, acting as witnesses and testimonial, are signifiers and performances of identity that have changed throughout space and time. Then, I turn to explore how Levinas' interruption of ethics and justice provide the perspective space for these tattoos to 'call' out ethical performances of the other.

Holocaust Tattoos and Witnessing, Testimony, and Truth

For this section on Holocaust tattoos and the next section focused on 9/11 tattoos, I explore these three levels of witnessing and Laub's concept of testimony as tied to signifiers and performances of identity. A key aspect of Laub's work with Holocaust survivors is the idea that their narrative has yet to really be 'witnessed' or 'heard.' Meaning, it is within the process of telling their experiences and memories in which witnesses are created, and testimony is heard. For events like the Holocaust and the September 11th attacks, there is an overwhelming amount of formal documentation and evidence to which people can point to when talking about or explaining the event. However, the emergence of the witness narrative, and thus testimony, changes the way the world views at, understands, experiences, and internalizes events like the Holocaust. In this section, I explore how those who survived Auschwitz left with tattoos created a new genre of witnessing and testimony both which can be explored through the lens of signification and performance.

The first level of witnessing is the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience. Laub's applies this first level to himself in saying that as a child survivor of

the Holocaust, he has distinct memories of his experiences with the Nazi's and concentration camps. He remembers not only the event, but the feelings and thoughts of the event. These were not merely facts he learned from another source, but a culmination of his own memories, feelings, and thoughts. Survivors from the Holocaust have been forced to cope with this level of witnessing – asking themselves how to come to terms with the horrors they witnessed with their own eyes. And for many of the survivors that left Auschwitz, they were forced to deal with this level of witnessing with a permanent reminder on their left forearms. These tattoos signified their direct connection to the Holocaust as a firsthand witness. Rather than merely signifying the Holocaust through resemblance, these tattoos act as index signifiers in that they have evidence of something happening and directs attention to a specific event, object, etc. These tattoos continually and nonverbally communicate the real and eternal existence of the Holocaust – not only are the memories and experiences impossible to forget, but these tattoos signify the direct connection this person, or witness, physically encountered during the Holocaust.

A key aspect about this level of witnessing as tied to Holocaust tattoos as signifiers is the concept that as an index or index signifier, these tattoos are directly connected to the event and is concerned with its *actual* existence. Some people, communities, and societies throughout history have continually doubted or denied the existence of the Holocaust – a study from 1995 discovered that nearly a fifth of Americans had doubts about the Holocaust occurring and a third questioned history's accuracy in its documentation of the event (Smith, 1995). Survivors, victims, witnesses, and others alike have collectively turned to Auschwitz tattoos to prove its existence as it signifies to others the physical connection that these survivors and firsthand witnesses

have to the Holocaust. These witnesses' tattoos serve as a constant reminder to themselves of what they experienced, endured, and overcame during one of the darkest periods in the world's history.

The second level of witnessing is the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others, or the involvement in the process of witnessing. For Laub, this is when he acts as the interviewer for other Holocaust survivors; in this situation, he is no longer a witness of his own experiences, but he is a witness to the experiences of others and acts as a participant or a companion through their journey. In this sense, the tattoos of Auschwitz would serve more as an icon signifier in that they are perceived as resembling the signified and acting as a 'representamen' of the Holocaust. In this sense, this enables the witness to see the tattoo and think of other commonalities and bring other similar objects to mind while acting as a form of expression. Icons as signs refer or represent something else with their own unique characteristics; so while every Auschwitz tattoo is not the same number, nor in the same exact placement on the body, they all still act as a representamen of the Holocaust through their own characteristics.

A unique aspect of icons is that they can refer to an object whether the object actually still exists- meaning, they are a correspondence between facts and truths. In this sense, we know that the Holocaust existed at one time, but no longer is in existence in a physical sense – meaning, it is no longer ongoing. This is not to say that anti-Semitism or Nazi's no longer exist in the world, but that this specific event has ended. This is what enables these tattoos to act as unique icons of the Holocaust as they actively represent the event and are perceived as resembling it, even though it ended nearly eight decades ago. Peirce notes that icons can be virtually anything as long as they are 'like' other things and

used as a sign. When someone is witnessing the testimony of others about their experiences within the Holocaust, these tattoos serve as a representation of that time in which others can draw resemblance from.

The third and last level of witnessing is the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself. In Laub's example, he explains this as the process in which he observes himself as both an attentive listener, in that he moves closer to the experience, and as a narrator in which retreats from the experience (Caruth, 1995, p. 62). In this process, both participants are actively attempting to reach a sense of the truth. To do this requires meaningful reflection on the memories as they are spoken and then a reassertion of the past to the current moment. In other words, both the witness giving testimony and the witness attentively listening must reflect on the memories being given and build a new link between these experiences of the past to present-day life (p. 62). When exploring what type of signifier Holocaust tattoos would be in this sense, Peirce's definition and understanding of a symbol is the most fitting. Through the lens of witnessing and testimony in this level of witnessing, these tattoos take on a more symbolic form and meaning in that the person giving testimony and the others witnessing it, are actively searching for their own understanding in truth. Peirce understands symbols to be the most unique signifier within his trichotomy as it requires much more structure and interpretation to understand. And in this level of witnessing, as both sides are actively searching for truth and understanding, these tattoos are more symbolic in meaning than they are representative.

For Peirce, a sign stops being a symbol if it has no interpretant – it requires some level of decoding to be understood. Examples of other symbols are numbers, letters,

traffic lights, flags, even certain gestures, as all of these require interpretation to be understood. In this sense, these Holocaust tattoos which are a collection of letters and numbers, require interpretation from both the witness and testimonial sides in order for someone to understand the process of witnessing taking place. While icons are linked to the objects they represent in a direct manner and indices are physically linked to its object, symbols require an interpreter to create the relationship. In this sense, the person who is a witness to the process of witnessing itself is using the testimony of the person as the interpretation in understanding the symbolic meaning of their tattoo.

Throughout the previous two chapters I have explored the different ways in which Auschwitz survivors have felt, come to terms, and coped with their tattoos. It is in these interpretations that their symbolic meaning is signified and understood by others. For some, their tattoos became a mental prison in which they were forever stuck at Auschwitz. Others viewed their tattoos as medals of honor or bravery, a scar that represents what they have survived and overcome. While some seemed to emotionally detach themselves from their tattoo and use it in more literal or practical manners, such as passcodes and lottery numbers. However, one interpreted their tattoo became the symbolic meaning they conveyed to others. And throughout the process of being a witness to witnessing, one can see how these tattoos take on a symbolic meaning in which the relationship between the person, then tattoo and the event needs some sort of interpretation to fully understand their 'truth.

Laub's emphasis on the 'inner thou' or 'inner witness' can also take on its own signification when it comes to Holocaust tattoos. In his explanation of the 'inner witness' he states that in order to establish one's self as an inner witness one must produce and

maintain a dialogic interaction with people – this is how both their witnessing and testimonials are understood. I expand upon this definition to include the use of nonlinguistic or nonverbal communication in establishing one’s self as an inner witness. And in this context, the tattoos of survivors from Auschwitz are again symbolic signifiers of their identity as a witness and inner witness of the Holocaust. As symbols require interpretation, and inner witnessing requires interaction, these tattoos act as nonverbal symbols of one’s connection to the Holocaust in an extremely personal way. For Laub, witnessing and testimony are only meaningful to someone if it is meaningful and impactful for others; and these tattoos produce a connection between people in that they become aware of and affected by the traumas of others. Through the inner witness, meaning is created and sustained for both the witness and the outside participants (Oliver, 2004).

And finally, these tattoos take on a different signification when just the concept of testimony is considered. Laub defines testimony as a narrative that expands the boundaries of knowledge, representation and justice of trauma – it is an impossible yet necessary act in which people are given the chance to share their experiences, memories, stories, etc. so that others can also bear witness to the trauma and feel a sense of obligation to address it in some manner. It is in this understanding and lens that within a testimonial sense, these tattoos take on the all three of Peirce’s trichotomy of signification. Peirce states that often times, both icons and index/index signifiers can transform into symbols throughout time, but also that something can also be all three at the same time. The nonverbal testimony provided and conveyed by these tattoos take on various forms; they can provide a perceived resemblance of the Holocaust, they act as a

direct and physical link to the historical event and are also symbolic in their meaning as they are interpreted differently by various survivors. In this sense and under the guide of testimony, these tattoos are simultaneously an icon, an index, and a symbolic signifier of the Holocaust. Ultimately, these tattoos take on different signification roles depending on the level of witnessing and the role of testimony. However, one constant that remains throughout this is the concept that these tattoos are constant signifiers of trauma.

Now, I turn to explore how these tattoos, acting as witnesses and testimonials, are also performances of identity. However, I want to first briefly explain Laub's unique perspective and concept that the Holocaust is an event in which there are no witnesses; this drastically impacts how these tattoos can be interpreted as an identity construction and as a performance. In Caruth's 1995 collections of trauma and memory essays, Laub's explores the idea that the Holocaust, and other genocides or related traumas, are events that "produce no witnesses" (p. 65). "Not only did the Nazi's try to exterminate the physical witnesses of their crime; but the inherently incomprehensible and deceptive psychological structure of the event precluded its own witnessing, even by its very victims" (p. 65). Some have found this offensive – how could a survivor of the Holocaust state that there were no witnesses produced? However, Laub explains that a witness is a "witness to the truth of what happens during an event" and that for the Holocaust, and many other genocides and traumatic events, the 'truth' of an event is often skewed in both perception and memory (p. 65). He explains that both outside and inside witnesses failed to "occupy" themselves as witnesses; those inside the camps were living a very different truth than the bystanders, or the outside witnesses who failed to attend to the obvious plea for life.

Laub explains this idea of ‘having no witnesses’ is two-fold – first, it was this reality of the situation and the lack of responsiveness of the bystanders or outsiders. And second, was the circumstances of being inside the event that made “unthinkable the very notion that a witness could exist...that is, someone who could step outside of the coercively totalitarian and dehumanizing frame of reference in which the event was taking place” (Caruth, 1995, p. 66). The people on the ‘inside’ of the Holocaust were unable to have an independent frame of reference to observe the event; they were trapped inside, experiencing horror and trauma over and over from only their perspective. For Laub, this creates the notion that there were no witnesses to the Holocaust, from either the outside or inside. He justifies this by saying that to be a witness, a person needs to be able to experience the event from both an inside and outside perspective; one needs to be able to perceive the world in an unfiltered manner, or be able to imagine the “other” perspectives. Neither those trapped within concentration camps or those running the camps, could imagine being in the shoes of each other.

This is another circumstance where Laub’s concept of the “inner thou” or “inner witness” comes into play. “There was no longer an other to which one could say “Thou” in the hope of being heard, of being recognized as a subject, of being answered” (Caruth, 1995, p. 66; Buber, 1953). The Jewish prisoners of the Nazi’s were both physically and philosophically extinguished; they had no ‘you’ or ‘other’ to turn to for help, not even oneself. And thus, they could not even bear witness to oneself. As such, the Holocaust created a time period in which there were no outside witnesses to uphold the truth, and had also convinced their prisoners that their inhumanity was valid, their experiences were incommunicable, and what they were ‘witnessing’ never took place. Laub asserts that this

inability to bear witness to oneself is the true meaning of annihilation; both history and identities are abolished. (p. 67).

This idea of having no witnesses plays a large role in the performance of identity of the victims and survivors of the Holocaust. The people who made it out of concentration camps were forced to deal with an identity crisis; the parts of themselves that led to their imprisonment suddenly became a point of internal contention. This led people to act out and identify themselves in an abundance of ways, but those with tattoos had a particularly difficult time escaping the horrors of their past which created an identity crisis. Does one hide the tattoo from public and avoid the topic of the Holocaust? Cover the tattoo with a skin graft? Or simply, continue living life knowing that this ink will forever communicate to others the most vulnerable part of ones' identity?

For those who chose to keep their tattoos as is, they acted as performances of identity in varying manners. When considering the four actions in which performance studies can be interpreted within; behavior, artistic, observation and social practice and advocacies, with the guiding lens of witnessing and testimony, Holocaust tattoos can fit into all four actions simultaneously. Behavior is defined as “what people do in the activity of their doing” (Schechner, 2013a, p.2) – for performance tied to identity, this could read as how people construct their identities through activity. In this sense, these tattoos act as an ongoing yet nonverbal activity that communicates a part of their identity to other, as a direct witness to the Holocaust. Second is artistic practice, which studies the relationship between studying performance and doing performance. Here there is an obvious connection between ‘studying performance’ or being the listener to testimony or a witness to the witnessing process and ‘doing performance,’ which would be providing

testimony as a witness. Tattoos help tell a story, or testimony, in a purely and literal artistic manner in which people are able to gather small pieces of identity through observation.

Next is ‘participant observation’ which is where people can learn about people and cultures through this performative action. This action is most prominent under these concepts of witnessing and testimony; these tattoos provide the ultimate opportunity for others to learn about other people, their experiences, their culture, and the histories of the world. Even without a verbal component, tattoos provide a perfect landscape for people to learn about others’ identities in a nonverbal manner. And finally, performance studies include the participation in social practices and advocacies. Tattoos, especially this genre, can play a large role into his idea of social practice as they are silent yet powerful advocates for ensuring history does not repeat itself.

When considering the kind and function of performance as tied to Holocaust tattoos through witnessing and testimony, there is a unique creation of identity construction occurring. These tattoos are an everyday life and ritualistic ‘kind’ of performance and serve the function of marking ones’ identity, to deal with the demonic, to teach and to persuade/convince. Much like other body modifications, tattoos are a part of people’s everyday life; they are a part of ‘living’ that the world has grown to accept and, in some ways, marvel at. However, due to the abnormal and horrific circumstances to which these tattoos came into existence, their ‘kind’ of performance shifts into a ritualistic performance of their everyday life.

Within this ritual performance, people seek to connect with a ‘scared’ realm for the main goal of bringing wellness and peace into their lives. Survivors of Auschwitz are

forced to deal with the public recognition of their identity as victims as communicated through their tattoos. In return, these tattoos act as performances of their identity in which they are actively functioning as a mark of ones' identity – one does not need to speak with the person to know the horrors they have witnessed and grieved. And simultaneously, they act as a teaching and persuasive performance in that their tattoos serves as their 'evidence' of the Holocaust's existence and brutal practices. And in this sense, their tattoos are also functioning as a coping mechanism in that they are tasked everyday with seeing the tattoos, recognizing its origins and the way it is impacted their lives. This meets the ritualistic and persuasive components of identity construction to serve as a full performance of ones' identity as both a witness and a giver of testimony.

Overall, through being both a witness and providing testimonial, these survivors' tattoos are actively signifying and performing aspects of their identity as it is grounded in trauma. Although the trauma might have a common component, in that they all are victims of the Holocaust, their individual testimony provides ample space for an attentive listener to become co-owners of their trauma and struggle and thus, to interpret these tattoos in varying yet important manners. And yet, another key aspect in both understand and interpreting these tattoos in a relevant manner is the consideration of the spatial-temporal relationship between now and the mid-1900s. When considering a spatial-temporal relationship to trauma, often times survivors of trauma link the space and time of the present, to the past, to better discover and interpret the meaning of the trauma in the current moment. In his work on trauma as tied to spatial and temporal components, Dylan Trigg states that often survivors face that “specific details are recollected from the past and applied to the spatiality of the present” and that “the present is undercut by the

radical singularity of the traumatic past, such that the simple fact of being there fails to contribute to the reality of time” (Triggs, 2009, p. 88). In his understand of space and time as related to trauma, there is always some sort of connection of the past trauma with the present-day and this collision of recollection and experience causes an “impossibility of recreation” in experiencing the trauma all over again.

When considering these explanations of space and time within trauma and exploring the role of tattoos within Laub’s understanding of witnessing and testimony, it is easy to see how the meaning of these tattoos have changed throughout space and time, not only for the survivors, but for the people of the world. During World War II and the time and space immediately after, these tattoos signified to others one’s status as both a victim and survivor. The tattoos had a specific meaning, for both the wearer and observers, in communicating that their lives were taken from them – even though they survived, many had their innocence stripped from them as they were subjected to extreme labor, torture, and tasked with watching the extermination of thousands of their peers. The tattoos communicated to others in that immediate space and time their status as a recovering survivor who was constantly reliving the horrors of those moments every time, they caught a glimpse of their tattoo. Their tattoos communicated their obvious status as a witness and simultaneously provided testimony of their experiences as a European Jew in the 1900s.

And in present-day, the meaning of these tattoos has transformed in the space and time since the Holocaust and World War II. What was once seen as a scar and Jewish marker has since become a symbol of the evil the world can produce and the strength of individuals to overcome that evil. They have witnessed pure evil and persevered through;

their tattoos are symbolic of that perseverance. As the world changed and evolved, and new generations were introduced to the history of the Holocaust, these tattoos communicated the strength of those who had witnessed the horrors and somehow, found a way to continue on. Since the end of the Holocaust and World war II, the space and time surrounding the way we document history has vastly changed: from newspaper to radio to television to the internet. Information becomes more and more accessible. And as such, the testimony of the people behind the tattoos became more well-known and shared. And within the space and time of history, these tattoos transformed in symbolic meaning from evil to one of strength and courage.

Laub's understanding of witnessing, testimony and truth are easy to understand and apply to concepts the Holocaust, as that was the main inspiration behind the development of his witnessing levels and creation of 'true' testimony. Although he developed these with his and others experiences of the Holocaust in mind, it can also be applied to collective trauma of other events outside of genocide, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. In the next section, I explore the ways in which 9/11 memorial tattoos can also be understood and interpreted as witnessing and providing testimony of one of the darkest days in American's short history.

9/11 Tattoos and Witnessing, Testimony, and Truth

Although Laub's primary focus within these terms is to genocides and similar traumas, there is also room to explore how these work within other traumatic events. September 11th, 2001 is a day that changed America. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, the United States rushed to put new safety measures in place to ease the minds of citizens and to work towards eliminating the possibility of similar events occurring in the

future. This included the creation of Homeland Security, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and the creation of new branches of the FBI, such as the National Security Division (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.). That day, every person in the United States and world became a witness to 9/11 in some sense; near or far, citizen or not, the world mourned for those lost in the attacks. And during the aftermath, people began to mourn, cope and grieve in different ways; re-watching the attacks on television as they flooded the airways for months, discussing with others their experiences with 9/11, internalizing the fear and anger, and some turned to more artistic interpretations of the trauma.

The obvious difference between this genre of tattoos and Holocaust tattoos are the circumstances in which they came into existence; prisoners were forcibly tattooed as to be easily identified as someone who was capable of manual labor. This unwilling component of Holocaust tattoos places these people in a different type of witnessing; they see their tattoos as scars or battle wounds in which they overcame and have been forced to live with. September 11th tattoos were not only done by choice, but they are masterfully crafted to represent specific moments, feelings, memories, etc. This willingness creates an entirely new understanding of ‘witnessing,’ even for those who were direct victims and survivors of 9/11. In this section, I explore how Laub’s three levels of witnessing and understanding of testimony are enacted in 9/11 tattoos through signification and performances of identity and the change in meaning through space and time in the 20 years since the attacks took place.

The first level is being a witness to oneself within the experience. The attacks of 9/11 were unique in that they created a wide array of first-hand witnesses. People were

direct witnesses in a multitude of places and channels. Although the most memorable moments of 9/11 were the crumbling of the Twin Towers, it is important to remember that there were two other attacks in different places that created firsthand witnesses. Some watched as the towers fell in New York, while others watched as the Pentagon was crashed into in D.C. or found the wreckage of Flight 93 in the rural areas of Pennsylvania – this created a unique gathering of geographical firsthand witnesses. However, there was another subset of direct witnesses of those who watched live on television as the second plane crashed into the south tower – creating witnesses in both a geographical sense and through different channels.

After researching the wide variety of 9/11 tattoos that exist, I found a common theme; the majority of people who have tangible and distinct memories of September 11th consider themselves, in some way, a witness within the experience. And as such, these tattoos act as index signifiers in that they are directly connected, either physically or causally, to the signified. In this case, these tattoos represent ones' immediacy to the event, showcasing the attacks themselves, those who were lost, or the unity felt in the aftermath. The creativity that something like tattoos enables allowed people to uniquely and individually memorialize their status as a witness to their own experience in differing yet powerful manners. These tattoos signify to others their direct connection to the attacks in an indexical way.

The second level is focused on being a witness to the testimonies of others. Unlike the Holocaust, current technology allowed for the attacks of 9/11 to create a wide-open door for people to be able to provide their own testimonies of the event. Whether in more formal ways, such as broadcasted or radios interviews, or in more casual ways such

as blogs and social media posts, technology created an entire new platform for people to provide testimony of the event and the impacts of the trauma. In this sense and with the broadened scope of those designated as witnesses providing testimony, these tattoos can be interpreted as an icon signifier, in that they perceived to resemble the signified. This analysis of 9/11 tattoos are particularly unique in that some people revamped or added to already existing tattoos aspects of the terrorist attacks to turn it from icon to another. Many people have patriotic tattoos; one of the most common themes in this area are flags – often times people use country or state flags as a way communicate aspects of their identity. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the United States flag took on new meaning, now more so than ever in recent times, people turned to the flag and other iconic objects to represent what it ‘means’ to be an American. What once could have been designated simply as a tattoo showcasing one’s nationality, now became an icon in that the U.S. flag signified to other ones’ representation of 9/11/2001 and the feeling of unity that emerged out of the darkness.

And the third and final of Laub’s levels is being a witness to the process of witnessing. Similar to this process as discussed above within Holocaust tattoos, it is easiest to understand how 9/11 tattoos are interpreted in a symbolic form in that they require more structure and direct interpretation to understand. Considering the wide scope of witnesses that emerged after 9/11, many times witnesses of the event were also acting as witnesses to the process of witnessing; meaning that although one had their own memories and experiences to share, they were also constantly being subjected to the witnesses process of other witnesses. This is one of the main differences between this kind of trauma and genocides, that initially lead Laub to studying and ultimately

developing alternative methods to interviewing. However, the principles remain the same in that we must respect and attentively listen to the witnesses of the event; even if that means putting aside ones' own witness status and being attentive to the process of others experiences as witnesses.

This idea of an excess of witnesses and an overlap between witnessing ones' own experiences and witnessing the process of others creates this idea that these tattoos would have a more symbolic meaning and projection. Peirce states that often times both icons and index signifiers can transform into symbols, and that symbols can also have attributes of all three symbols. Tattoos are often deeply personal and require some sort of interpretation to be fully understood. In my research of 9/11 inspired tattoos, there was a plethora of subject matter; some that I could easily interpret and understand with just a quick glimpse, but others required more time and an interpreter. These tattoos took on a more symbolic signification in that ones' interpretation of the event as a witness changes from person to person, and in attempting to witness this process, requires more structure and decoding to be understand. And it is also important to realize that symbols, like icons and index signifiers, can grow, change and develop out of other signs; in other words, change through space and time.

The last aspect of signification I explore is how 9/11 tattoos act as a nonverbal testimony. Laub states that after this process of witnessing, comes the need for testimony, which ultimately calls for others to understand the 'truth' of these witnesses. This testimony is critical in creating a better world and a more accurate understanding of the historical events that take place. Like Laub states in this essay, testimony expands the boundaries of the knowledge and representation of the trauma – through these individual

or sometimes collective testimonials, there is a better, more whole, understanding of the trauma. In this sense, 9/11 tattoos are an example of how one thing or object can be representative of all three signifiers of Peirce's trichotomy at once. These tattoos act as icons, in that they are representing a signified event, and index as they are directly linked to the signified and as a symbol, in that to truly understand ones' relationship to and understanding of the trauma, requires some sort of interpretation. In this sense, these tattoos can be seen as a culmination of all three signifiers, icon, index, and symbol.

The last analysis within this section explores how 9/11 tattoos act as performances of identity within the concepts of witnessing and providing testimony. In both acts of witnessing and giving testimonial, people are portraying their experiences to others and in turn, providing a small glimpse into their identity construction. Laub states that both processes provide a space for people to tell others how they see themselves in relation to the trauma they have endured and survived. And in his studies on witness and testimony, he states that within these processes is where true meaning is created and shared. In this creation of meaning, people are able to better comprehend their own trauma and the trauma of others through sharing. While witnessing has multiple levels, often that coincide with each other, testimony provides the space for people to disclose the more abstract, existential, and psychic repercussions of the trauma. It is in these understandings of witnessing and testimony in which tattoos can act as nonverbal performances of identity through an action, kind, and function.

As an action of identity performance, these tattoos are both artistic practice and participant observation. As an artistic practice, these tattoos allow for others to study the relationship between the facts of 9/11 and their interpretation of the trauma. Artistic

practice looks at the ‘study’ of performance against the ‘doing’ of performance; in this sense, the ‘study’ is the historical documentation of 9/11, while the ‘doing’ is the persons individual interpretation of the events, which are evidenced in their tattoo. And second, is the participant observation which is where people can learn about others and their culture; how does a United States citizen internalize and understand the attacks of 9/11 differently than other foreign cultures? Or even in a more domestic sense, the varying cultures within the U.S. By seeing and interpreting these tattoos, one can grasp a sense of the person and their understanding of the trauma as it relates to their identity as both a witness and provider of testimony.

The difference between performance ‘is’ and performance ‘as’ has drastically been impacted by the technology of the 21st century. Technology has globalized events in that they are now a series of connected performances. In understanding the impact of technology, there is the creation of more witnesses and more opportunity to share testimony on both a national and global scale. Performances studies focuses in on idea that outside of action, these performances also have different kinds and functions. This is where the true understanding of one’s identity can be differentiated and understood; what kind of performance is happening and what are its main functions? What is it trying to communicate to other people? These tattoos have overlapping understandings of kinds and functions as related to witnessing and providing testimony; while they are a part of everyday life, they are also considered a kind of art and ritual. And within these artistic and ritualistic performances, their main functions are to communicate to others their healing process and identity change, as well as providing a unique space to teach others, foster community and to see the beauty that can come from tragedy.

For many people, tattoos and other body modifications are the ultimate personification of their unique attributes. In both an artistic and ritualistic sense, these tattoos communicate to others not only their status as witness of 9/11 in some sense, but also one way in which they are ascribing to the notion that this trauma is something they will have to deal with for the rest of their lives. Some days, months, years are harder than others, but this coping of the events becomes a ritualistic practice in that their tattoo helps communicate their deep sense of attachment to sad trauma. And ultimately, these kinds of performance then translate to a construction of identity in that people have subscribed to a lifetime commitment to sharing, teaching, and communicating the importance of September 11th, 2001.

The functions of performance serve to answer the question ‘what are these functions accomplishing?’ In this sense, these tattoos act as a constant reminder of the trauma that occurred that day, but also the feeling of hope that emerged in the aftermath. People turned to a variety of methods of memorializing the moment that changed America in order to begin the healing process and for some, tattoos were a perfect and immortal way to signal to others the important ways 9/11 changed the face of America, its citizens and taught the world a lesson on the fragility of life. The people who wear these tattoos are actively ‘doing’ a performance of their identity, one steeped in the trauma of 9/11. While these tattoos act as a healing process and an identity marker, they also seek to teach others, build community, and ultimately enlighten others in the light that can emerge from darkness.

Memorial tattoos often focus in on this aspect of ‘not forgetting’ the person, the event, the moment in time, etc. And in this notion of not forgetting comes the possibility

of teaching others and building community. We saw both of these in the days, months, and years after 9/11; those who were not born or were too young to remember the attacks, ask questions about people's experiences. And the testimony provided by these tattoos allow for a more encompassing narrative about the event. Although the collective memory of the event is easily accessible, the individual testimonies provided by witnesses are equally important to understanding the impacts of the trauma. And in this sense, these tattoos function in a unique way in that they teach others about the event, from their own perspective and to highlight the notion that although 9/11 was one of the most tragic moments in the United States history, something beautiful did ultimately emerge; the fostering of community not only within the U.S., but around the world. As America wept, the world wept with us. And these tattoos stand as an immortal performance of ones' identity as grounded in the trauma of 9/11.

In some sense, every single Americans identity was changed or altered in some way after September 11th, 2001. Although the number of people with 9/11 inspired tattoos is relatively small, the important narrative of these tattoos cannot be understated. In fact, various organizations have explored the signification and performance of these tattoos, often worn by first-responders of 9/11, throughout the years. Fox News, USA Today, Inked Magazine, Fire Rescue websites, Business Insider, ABC News, and various museums have all written about individuals experiences as witnesses of 9/11 and provided space for their testimony in both verbal and nonverbal manners. Although not a traditional definition of testimony, I contest that tattoos are the *ultimate* testimony, in that not only share with others the traumas they have witnessed, but provide a permanent and artistic interpretation of their testimony that is on display for the world to see.

The final section in this chapter switches gears to explore how, through Laub's understanding of witnessing and testimony, Peirce's trichotomy of signification and Levinas' scholarship on ethics, justice and philosophy, both Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos demand an ethical performance from the 'other' when interacting with these tattoos. Including an introduction and overview of Levinas' first philosophy and his work on the interruption between ethics and justice, I explicate that while these tattoos are a performance of identity and of trauma, they are also an object in which performance is called out from others.

Emmanuel Levinas's First Philosophy

Here I explore the role of communication ethics as tied to performance of the 'Other' through a Levinasian perspective as related to both Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos. I first carefully explain Levinas' first philosophy, his understanding on the interruption between ethics and justice, and his focus on the importance of always including the 'other.' In his book *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas situates ethics as his first philosophy in opposition to Heidegger's *Ontology* as first philosophy. Whereas Heidegger focuses his philosophy on power, Levinas focuses his on ethics and justice (Levinas, 1979, p. 47).

Levinas' work within ethics, philosophy and communication ethics provides a new and unique entrance for this idea of performance as tied to the Other in relation to tattoos. In understanding his perspectives on these concepts, I then apply them to this idea of performance in that these tattoos are laced with historical, cultural, and social significance that call out performance from the 'other'; those who see the tattoos are pulled to feel, react or think in a certain way.

“Levinasian ethics are most often articulated as a non-equitable I-for-the-Other that calls for no return or reciprocity” and thus, justice lies in opposition to this understanding of obligation (Gehrke, 2010, p. 13). For Levinas, justice should not be avoided as it is necessary for various components of society; “comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling, order, thematization, visibility of face and thus, intentionality and the intellect” (p. 14). These are necessary beyond their ornamental values, as this call to action or obligation would not be possible without these tools (p. 14). Thus, although necessary for society, justice is constantly interrupted and complicated by ethics, and vice versa (p. 14-15).

Levinas’s understanding of ethics works in strained conjunction with his premise of justice (Arnett, 2017). This understanding is essential to the scope of this project in pitting justice against ethics regarding the topic of past traumatic events; “...human responsibility attends to ethics within the realm of proximity, and justice is responsive to the forgotten and marginalized” (Arnett, 2017, p. 135). While both ethics and justice work towards this idea of human responsibility to the Other, there are obvious limitations to its reach. The most obvious limitation in relation to trauma and traumatic events is the scope to which it is understood by others, especially those in other parts of the world. Jewish communities around the world mourned the loss of their people during World War II, but no one felt the immediacy of the loss and pain as much as those directly involved. And similarly, while the world watched in horror the events of September 11th and ultimately shared in the sadness and anger, they could not understand the deeply personal impact 9/11 had on the American people.

“Communication ethics are central to the dialogic process of negotiating contending social goods in a postmodern society, engaging an era of narrative and virtue contention” (Arnett, Arneson & Bell, 2006). While there is no solidified, universal definition for communication ethics, there are standard components. The relationship between communication ethics and decision-making developed from Aristotle’s ideology on *phronesis*, the practical tradition of discourse (Arnett, 1987). Scholars agree upon the importance of choice-making within communication ethics - should something be done or said? (Johannesen, 1978; Nilsen, 1974; Thayer, 1980 and Arnett, 1987). Further, people must accumulate “enough information so ones privately and publicly stated belief structures are grounded in knowing choices, not blind allegiance to particular social structures” (Arnett, 1987). Essentially, ethics must play a part in one’s decision-making *and* dictate choice.

Beyond these components, scholar Michael J. Hyde states that “communication ethics entails an appreciation of ‘rhetorical competence’” (Qted in Arneson, 2007). He explains this concept as the ways that people make “cogent and persuasive” arguments, the different manners in which stories are told, and ultimately the way these arguments or stories can move or convince others to think and act in a moral fashion (Arneson, 2007). Although the term ‘communication ethics encompasses a variety of aspects, the concepts of ethical decision-making, epistemological accumulation and ability to influence others in a moral way are essential for the analysis portion of this essay.

There are various communication scholars that actively use Emmanuel Levinas within their scholarship. Ronald C. Arnett is a leading authority within communication ethics. In his book *Levinas’s Rhetorical Demand: The Unending Obligation of*

Communication, he situates Levinas into the realm of communication ethics in various ways. First, Arnett states that Levinas is a crucial factor of communication ethics for those “absent a code or metaphysical assertion,” stating that ethical responsibility is beyond being systematic (Arnett, 2017, p. 3). Within a Levinasian perspective, communication ethics is “an existential burden enacted each day, by each person, and responsive to each moment through one’s own uniqueness of responsibility to and for the Other” (Arnett, 2017, p. 3). Arnett explains Levinas’s relation to ethics in a manner consistent with his concept on human responsibility; it is not a ‘once in a while’ act, rather it is a repetitive, continual responsibility to others.

He continues, stating that Levinas’s ethics align with the term *communicative praxis*; the concept of communicative action and decision-making in daily life (Arnett, 2017). Levinas’s ethics revolve around this concept; that ethical decision-making is present in everyday life, and answers are found in “meeting the particularity of a given moment and person” (Arnett, 2017, p. 40). That is, one must be present in the current moment and maintain ethical decision-making, regardless of outside factors. Arnett continues, stating:

“Responding to the face of the Other, listening to an immemorial ethical echo, and attending to the unique demands of a given historical moment are key communication ethics coordinates that announce the rhetorical demands of Levinas’s corpus of concern about an awakened sense of responsibility for the Other” (p. 5).

He continually reiterates the aspects of Levinas’s first philosophy that work cohesively within communication ethics, focusing on a defining characteristic of his work on

responsibility. Levinas's work on responsibility lives in the theory of meeting and responding to the ethical needs and responsibilities of the current historical moment (Arnett, 2017).

For Levinas, the first 'state of being' is acknowledgment of obligation (Gehrke, 2010, p. 9-10). This sense of obligation precedes both ontology and epistemology, in that attention and responsibility to the Other is superior (p. 9). Thus, obligation and responsibility for Levinas "can never yield a stable system or code of communication ethics" and rather is a forced call to action (p. 9-10). Nevertheless, Gehrke clarifies that this forced call to the Other is not absent in thought or concern, but that these aspects cannot dissipate one's call to action or be the ground for responsibility (p. 9). Ultimately, Levinas points to a communication ethic driven by response, obligation, and attentiveness to the Other with no call for reciprocity or recognition (p. 13).

There are various other important scholars using Levinas within communication ethics, such as Oona Eisenstadt, a Jewish studies scholar and Bettina Bergo, a philosophy scholar. Eisenstadt again places important on Levinas's concept of justice to create a just and ethical society, we must; "...treat people as parts of ordered wholes (as citizens, members of family groups, income groups and so forth) and on the other hand, allow those designations to be called into question by the rupturing ipseity of individuals" (Eisenstadt, 2005, p. 146). Bettina Bergo also situates Levinas within the realm of communication ethics with his "undercutting of subjective freedom and the reason why one may freely choose, in a later moment, to act in the interested of a being other than oneself" (Bergo, 2005, p. 138). In this interpretation of Levinas's human responsibility,

she states that ethical communication for or about the Other can begin prior to anything being said or done (Bergo, 2005).

Levinas's contribution to the development of communication ethics is crucial to the greater communication discipline, but also to the discussion of ethics. In the next section, I apply these aforementioned Levinasian perspectives on justice and ethics to the idea of performance. In this, I understand both Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos to act as nonverbal communicators of both justice and ethics that commands a performance from the 'other' – those who view the tattoos are called into action by the ethic and justice components by which these tattoos stem from.

Levinas and Ethical Performance of the 'Other'

In understanding Laub's definition of witnessing and testimony, there is a unique entrance for these to be tied to Levinas' first philosophy. Laub states that as a witness provides testimony, the listener to the trauma is no longer a mere bystander; they have become a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event (Laub, 1992, p. 57). In this creation of the co-ownership of trauma, Levinas would state that those are called into action. And, in understanding Peirce's trichotomy of signification, feeling (icon), reaction (index), thought (symbol), one can further understand how these tattoos demand performance from the 'other' or in this case, the observer. In combining the foundations of performance studies with the work of Peirce on semiotics, Laub on witnessing and testimony, and introducing Levinas' ethics as first philosophy, creates a new narrative ground for the ethical performance of the 'Other' when observing, or witnessing, both Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos.

When I began this project, I thought about performance in a one-dimensional manner; people who have tattoos are performing aspects of their identity through this form of body modification. However, it was brought to my attention, that these specific genres of tattoos are unique in that they also call out an ethical performance from the Other. Through the scholarship of both Laub and Peirce and guided by a Levinasian perspective, I explicate how these tattoos call out this performance from others, still grounded in the narrative of trauma.

Through his first philosophy as a communication ethics lens, Levinas speaks of this immemorial echo which calls us into responsibility and action for the 'Other' (Arnett, 2017). In this understanding of ethical responsibility, Levinas states that consideration for those who are not present, or those who do not have a metaphorical 'seat at the table' is not only needed, but essential. This part of ethics is indispensable; we cannot forget those who are not present or a part of the past. In understand the ethical call out to Others as related to both Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos, Levinas would lean on this idea of responsibility to the other, even those that are no longer in this world. Both the Holocaust and 9/11 are events in which the world learned grave lessons from and the tattoos that represent these moments in history demand an ethical performance from the Other upon viewing them. Holocaust tattoos evoke a sense of ownership in remembering the people who were both lost physically and mentally during World War II; while many prisoners of concentration camps were physically liberated, these tattoos created a mental prison in which they remained captured. These tattoos ask the 'Other' or outside witnesses to take on responsibility in ensuring there is never another Holocaust or reminding the world of

what can occur when evil is enabled and empowered. This performance of the Other is an unending obligation and responsibility.

Holocaust tattoos are a more unique genre of tattoo in that they were a power move initiated with force. September 11th tattoos were autonomous choices in which these people are already taking on this sense of responsibility for the other in memorializing the events, the people, the feelings, etc. of 9/11 in a permanent manner. However, these tattoos still call out for a performance of the other in that remembering those who were lost due to tragedy and manmade evil is still an ethical responsibility. In a unique sense, many 9/11 tattoos are already acting as both a witness and as providing testimony, and in doing so are perpetuating Levinas' claim that everyone is tasked with the responsibility of caring for and acting for the 'other.' This is based in Levinas' notion that we are each our 'brother's keeper.'

Another key aspect within Levinas' scholarship is the idea that within this ethical responsibility to the Other, comes the interruption of justice. For Levinas, ethics and justice are constantly interrupting each other. His ethics, as state previously, calls upon others to take on responsibility for the other, while justice requires attentiveness to those without power or not present in the decision-making. In this consideration of justice, Levinas states that people must be concerned with both the proximate 'other' and the 'unknown and unnoticed' other. This understanding is unique to Levinas in that he calls for people to recognize the influence of decision-making and/or actions to those not empowered yet visible, and those *not* empowered and *not* visible. In this sense, when one is faced with these tattoos, they are called to perform in an ethical manner while still remembering that justice is at the center. In this case, both Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos call

out for others to remember not only the people that were lost in the events, but the humanity that the world lost and the justice that must be served.

In both of these events, justice is continuously being sought – and these tattoos act as historical reminders of this search for and assurance of justice in demanding performance from others. Examples of this are the extradition of former Nazi's or the killing of Osama Bin Laden, years after the traumatic events had ended. Even now, nearly 80 years after the Holocaust, the world is still actively searching for and prosecuting former Nazi's. In February, Friedrich Karl Berger, 95, was extradited back to Germany to face his punishment for participating in Nazi-sponsored acts while serving as an armed guard at a Nazi concentration camp in 1945 (WWII Nazi Concentration Camp Guard Removed to Germany, 2021). At the frail age of 95, the world exploded with opinions on the appropriate measures that should be taken; many that focused around ethical components and questions of serving justice.

In a similar event, the United States and parts of the world rejoiced in May of 2011 when it was announced that the Central Intelligence Agency had successfully terminated Osama Bin Laden, head of al-Qaeda who took responsibility for the 9/11 attacks. Even 10 years after the attacks, the United States was still searching for justice for the pillars of America that were compromised and those who were lost on 9/11/2001 in NY, DC, and PA. This interruption of justice and ethics is often played out in various manners, but in this sense, these tattoos remind us of the immemorial echo that calls for responsibility to the Other.

A major component within this idea that these tattoos call out an ethical performance of the Other is Laub's understanding and definition of testimony. As noted

previously, his concept of testimony is unique in that it requires a different dichotomy between witness and listener. In a traditional interview, the listener is the narrator; they ask questions and guide the narrative of the interview. In Laub's developed interview style, he states that for a witness to truly be heard and be able to share their truth with the world, they must be the narrator and the listener must be attentive, knowledgeable, and empathic. In this sharing of testimony, the listener then becomes a co-owner of the trauma and tasked with the responsibility of remembering, teaching, and sharing the struggle of these witnesses.

In this sense, when others come face to face with these tattoos, they become co-owners of the trauma and are tasked with performing in some manner in recognizing the social, political, and historical importance of both the Holocaust and the 9/11 attacks. As such, these tattoos enact an ethical response from the Other that is steeped in responsibility, truth, and justice. Although this may not be traditional manner in which Levinas' crafted his concepts about responsibility, justice and ethics, these tattoos act as symbolic signifiers and performances in which others are directed to act upon.

Peirce's trichotomy of signifiers can also lead to an understanding of how these tattoos call out an ethical performance of other. In a more abstract definition of the trichotomy, icon, index, and symbol also represent firstness, secondness, and thirdness; also understood as feeling, reaction, and thought. In his understanding of icons (firstness and feeling), index (secondness and reaction) and symbol (thirdness and thought) these work together to manifest meaning in a more abstract and subconscious level. Throughout this processing of signs, each signifier asks for the Other to respond in some way. Icons invoke feeling by resembling the signified, indices invoke reactions by being

directly connected to the signified and symbols invoke thinking or thought processing by requiring a more complex interpretation of the signified. Ultimately, these work together to create a sense of obligation to the Other in feeling, reacting, and thinking when coming into contact with these tattoos. Seeing a tattoo on a person who has survived the horrors of the Holocaust or has grieved the attacks of 9/11 calls for that person to feel, react and think in a way in which they become obligated to perform in some ethical manner, even if that is in a nonverbal or implicit manner.

Tattoos, like other artwork, often are created with the sole purpose of creating some sort of response. Although Auschwitz tattoos were mandated for ease of categorizing people as capable or incapable of manual labor, the purpose of the tattoo was clear and created a response. Throughout the years, the meaning and expected response to these tattoos changed; what was once used solely for identification purposes, transformed into a religious, historical and social symbol that asks for people to not only remember those who were lost during World war II, but the ideological forces at work that caused the Holocaust. Even the meaning of 9/11 tattoos have changed in the 20 years since the attacks. While many of these tattoos initially acted as commemorative pieces for 9/11, their meaning evolved to encompass a wide variety of emotions, memories, experiences, and testimonies.

Hyde further explicates this notion of performance to the Other as it is tied to a spatial-temporal relationship in Arneson's 2007 book, stating:

Levinas reveals how human existence is structured spatially and temporally at any given moment and how this structure calls on us to assume the ethical

responsibility of affirming our freedom through resolute choice as we attempt to give meaning to the world. (p. 107)

Hyde reiterates this importance of ethical responsibility to create an admirable society steeped in the necessity of helping others. He explicates this in Levinas's concept of Being, in contention with Martin Heidegger, stating that this call to conscience is not in the "temporality of Being" but rather in the "temporality of the interhuman" (Quoted in Arneson, 2007, p. 111). Levinas's concept of experience is steeped in face-to-face encounters between one-self and the Other. For Hyde, Levinas's call to conscience is based around an "interruptive nature"; the ways the world calls us into question (Hyde & Rufo, 2000). This call to conscience has a specific rhetorical function, in that it acts as a rhetorical interruption (Hyde & Rufo, 2000). And in this, there is an entrance for the importance of these tattoos in and their changing meaning throughout space and time.

Ultimately, both the Holocaust and the September 11th attacks created varying types and levels of witnessing and ample space for those to provide testimony that would impact the world in the immediate moment and in the years and decades to follow. These tattoos are both signifiers and active performances of identity that are grounded in the trauma of witnesses and testimony providers. In fully understanding these tattoos and their cultural, social, political, and historical importance, it is then easy to understand why these demand an ethical performance from others. One cannot simply view tattoos laden with such meaning and significance and not feel called into action. Similar to visiting a museum or a cultural site, these tattoos illicit a reaction, and thus a performance, from others. These tattoos call us into ethical responsibility to remember

the historical moments that created this trauma and all the people impacted, both in the past and currently.

In the final chapter of this study I discuss the implications and potential future research ideas. Ultimately, I conclude with two main sentiments. First, that trauma *is* performance and that these tattoos act as repetitive rehearsals of that performance that allow for evolving and changing meanings and interpretations. And second, that tattoos can be understood as signifiers and performances that construct identity. In the future research section, I briefly explain how breast cancer/disease awareness and COVID-19 tattoos could be studied in future projects as interesting communicators of identity as tied to diseases/cancers and collective traumas such as pandemics. I then end the project with concluding sentiments.

Chapter 6

Implications, Future Research, and Concluding Sentiments

Throughout the previous five chapters, I have explored a new realm of communication that combines semiotics with performances studies to explicate how certain genres of tattoos can be both signifiers and performances of identity grounded in trauma. Using various theories and scholars, I have sought to better understand the unique communicative nature that body modification, specifically tattoos, play in the active construction of one's identity. The choice to use Auschwitz and 9/11 tattoos were intentional in that these are both crucial moments in history that have been memorialized, either by force or choice, in the skins of their victims, survivors, and witnesses. And throughout the space and time of these historical moments, these tattoos have taken on various and ever-evolving meanings to individuals, communities, societies, and cultures alike.

In this last chapter, I provide the implications of this study that rests on the concepts that trauma is performance, tattoos are embodiment and finally, tattoos grounded in trauma are active and communicative aspects of one's identity construction. Then, I provide multiple new genres of tattoos that could be studied in similar aspects for future research including breast cancer/disease awareness tattoos and COVID-19 tattoos that have emerged out of the current historical moment. Then, I briefly explain the limitations of the study and then conclude with closing sentiments.

Commemoration, Embodiment and Performance of Trauma

Throughout this study I have explored the varying ways in which these two genres of tattoos can be interpreted as signifiers and performances of identity grounded in

trauma. Ultimately, this points to the idea that as individuals, communities, societies and even nations, we commemorate trauma in a multitude of ways as a way to remember, memorialize and ensure those who come after us know the horrors and triumphs the world has endured. These commemorations of trauma come in political, social, and historical manners all with the same goal; to remember the events of the world.

Both of these genres of tattoos are a commemoration of trauma; one by force, the other by choice. Either way, these tattoos signify and perform aspects of people's identities that are grounded in the trauma of the Holocaust and the 9/11 attacks. This idea of 'trauma' encompasses a wide array of social and cultural phenomenon. It shows itself in physical, emotional and mental capacities; "Trauma has traveled far to become a key not only to explain, as originally conceived wounds to the body, but also injuries to spirit, culture, society and politics" (Levy & Sznajder in Delanty, 2006, p. 289.) Both of these tattoo genres represent and communicate these physical, spiritual, cultural, social, and political wounds.

The tattoos that Auschwitz survivors were left with were more than just a physical trauma they experienced during World War II and the Holocaust; these tattoos left wounds that were invisible to the naked eye and yet immensely felt by both the individual and collective victims. Trauma is easiest to see and interpret on a surface-level when there is a physical scar or wound; one can see the trauma and imagine the circumstances to which those evolved. Holocaust/Auschwitz tattoos are particularly traumatizing in knowing that now only were these not intentional or a choice, but forced onto to men, women, and children in the darkest of ways. These numbers enabled Nazi members to easily and visually be able to tell what type of labor prisoners were capable of – these

tattoos originated as signifiers and performances of identity in the most inhumane of ways. And throughout the years, survivors of the Holocaust have actively worked to reclaim their identity, their sense of purpose and the meaning behind these tattoos. These tattoos have always been a remembrance of trauma, but in the nearly 80 years since the Holocaust, survivors, witnesses, historians, and others have actively worked to 'take back' the communicated meaning of these tattoos. And in this evolving meaning is the commemoration of trauma; in a political, cultural, social, and historical sense.

In a political sense, these tattoos represent the danger of a single man in power; Hitler and the Nazi organization started relatively small and slowly but surely garnered power throughout Europe. These tattoos are physical representations of the dangers of dictatorships and the political landscapes that are created by power-hungry individuals. If people were to ask about the potential political and social consequences of having a minority have the majority in power; one could turn to these tattoos as representations of what happens when the majority is silenced. Although many survivors have flipped the script on their tattoos, interpreting them as battle wounds or badges of honor, the truth still exists that these tattoos represent the worst of humanity.

Tattoos that memorialize the September 11th, 2001 attacks are different in their commemoration of trauma. These tattoos, unlike Holocaust survivors, are consciously and artistically developed and drawn, carefully stenciled and placed (and often re-placed many times until perfect) and intentionally memorialized into the skin. And yet, these still commemorate trauma in political, social, cultural and historical manners. In the aftermath of 9/11, people were reeling with the feeling of inadequacy of our government; how did this happen to America? Citizens felt letdown, afraid and angry. Nearly 3,000

people were lost that day in the blink of an eye and many felt let down by our political leaders. With our political landscape changing, so did our cultural and social norms. Going to the airport looked very different in August of 2002 than it did in August of 2001 all thanks to September 11th. The creation of new government branches aimed solely at tackling the issues of terrorism, both afar and at home, came rushing to the surface and changed the way the average American lived their life.

Reflecting on the wide array of tattoos that represent in one way or another 9/11/2001, there is a sense that as a community and a nation, our social and cultural norms changed and these tattoos sought to ensure that the history of the attacks, the people and the sentiment were ‘never forgotten.’ One of the more powerful aspects behind the attacks was the emergence of the feeling of unity; for a brief (very brief) moment, all of America was united. Political affiliation, socioeconomic status, skin color...did not matter. These tattoos memorialized these moments and feelings; they show the best America has, such as the Twin Towers and the Statue of Liberty, the sense of ‘freedom’ that is absorbed in seeing the American flag wrapped around our figurehead Bald Eagle protecting the New York skyline. These tattoos represent the physical, emotional, and even spiritual trauma that millions of Americans carry with them.

If one were to ask the average person what their tattoo ‘meant,’ they would most likely get some deep, sentimental response. Often-times, tattoos communicate the most vulnerable aspects of their wearer; and in this vulnerability lies the embodiment of trauma. In chapter three, I briefly touched on this idea of embodiment as related to tattoos, trauma, and identity. I want to circle back to that concept now that I have explored a multitude of realms in which tattoos are signifiers and performances of

identity grounded in trauma using Gabriele Schwab's work on embodiment within trauma. She states that often times the result of trauma are 'legacies'; these are memories, experiences, and testimonials (as Laub would say) that are left behind from trauma. These legacies are equally felt by 'others' as they are the direct survivor, victim or witness (Schwab, 2010, p. 1-2). And within these legacies, people outside the trauma often attempt to embody the pain, anger, memories, etc. experienced by those they know or love.

In this sense, these tattoos are both literal and metaphorical embodiments of trauma. I explored both Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos within the concepts of transgenerational trauma, social and religious collective memory, latency, and localization and witnessing and testimony. In all of these circumstances, this idea of embodiment is at the forefront. For Holocaust survivors, it was using their tattoo as an embodiment of what they had endured, survived, and overcome. They took what was once a symbol of pure hatred and evil and turned it into something else – not always a 'beautiful' something else, but something that embodied more than just the pain and anguish of the Holocaust. And in the cause of transgenerational trauma, the younger generations of the survivors took on the task of a more literal embodiment. By getting the same tattoo, in the same place as their elder relative, they were embodying the trauma of the Holocaust in both a physical and metaphorical manner.

In a physical manner, these tattoos embody the physical and laborious pains their relatives endured during the Holocaust or the pain suffered by those during the 9/11 attacks. Although nowhere near the *actual* amount of pain these survivors suffered, these tattoos are a small act in which they can offer up an act of solidarity. The ink of the

average tattoo sits only about 1.5 millimeters below the skin; the depth of a U.S. dime. This is just deep enough to keep the ink permanently in place – however, ask the average person if it ‘hurt’ and the answer will be ‘yes.’ Modern tattoo machines are an assembly of ten to fifteen needles, all moving in sync to create under the skin artwork. And the physical pain that comes with getting tattooed, another act that could be touted as a performance, could be seen as an attempt to embody the pain caused by the trauma of the Holocaust or the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

In this sense, tattoos are actively embodying peoples’ own and others’ identities. Throughout various studies, tattoos and other forms of body modification have been viewed as ways to challenge what is considered the ‘norm,’ whether that be hegemonic boundaries, beauty standards, or even gender and sexuality (Young, 2001). Often-times, people use body modification, especially tattoos, to construct their identity through embodiment; and for my specific study, at the core of this embodiment is trauma. These tattoos act as embodiment of the most crucial and vulnerable moment in these people’s lives that ultimately communicate aspects of their identity to others.

Historically, tattoos have been documented as the “embodiment of a person’s inability to conform with existing social norms, values, and beliefs” (Atkinson, 2003, p. 23). In this sense, tattoos were easy ways to tell who were ‘social deviants’ (p. 23). However, the landscape around body modification and tattooing has slowly changed throughout the decades; although still consider ‘taboo’ on some cultures and societies, tattoos have become common practice, especially when it comes to the commemoration of trauma. Portraits of lost loved ones and pets, handwriting of family members, dates not to be forgotten – these are all commemorations of trauma that communicate to others’

aspects of identity. And through these permanent decorations of art, is embodiment. Physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional embodiment of others, events, situations, brief moments in history...the list goes on. In some way or another, tattoos are an embodiment of something else.

Implications

In understanding this concept of embodiment, it may be easier to understand why I chose to do a semiotic analysis of tattoos; it is easy to comprehend how tattoos could be signifiers to others. However, it may be more difficult to understand why performance studies was chosen in conjunction with semiotics. I wanted to create a new entrance for the role of performance within communication as tied to tattoos, trauma and identity. I wanted to explicate how tattoos are an active performance of one's identity; a performance that may change in space and time. Ultimately, I conclude that trauma *is* performance and tattoos are constructions of that identity grounded in trauma.

In Schechner's understanding of performance studies, there are three main aspects of a performance to take into consideration: action, kind and function. Within these differentiating aspects, performance is understood in three ways that work together that ultimately create a performance with intentionality. In understanding this, I then conclude that all trauma is performance, especially within the current historical moment in that the public sphere is not only incredibly involved, but obsessed, with trauma. In pulling from Judith Butler's work on performance and her understanding specific to gender in that we are always "doing" gender, or performing it, I use this section to conclude that trauma is a performance we are always 'doing.' And in this sense, these tattoos are active performances of the associated trauma.

In his 2013 book *What Is Performance?* Schechner differentiates between something ‘as’ performance and something ‘is’ a performance. Almost anything can be studied ‘as’ performance, behaviors, actions, events, things, etc. While studying something a performance ‘is’ was traditionally more limited to things that can be linked to historical and social contexts and traditions. However, the current historical moment and the widespread use of technology has all but diminished this delineation; we now not only live our lives as an interconnected series of performances, but we can also experience, on an in-depth and intense level, the performances of other people’s lives. Television, social media, video chatting, texting...we are never not connected to others which enables us to more wholly view and understand the lives and performances of others. And more often than not these performances actively communicate to us, both verbally and nonverbally, constructs of identity.

In this sense, I contend that tattoos and specifically the two genres explored within this project can be studied as artifacts, objects, events, constructs that ‘is’ a performance. Both genres of tattoos have immense social and historical links; in a way, both represent the worst humanity had to offer in those historical moments. However, both Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos have also evolved in their communicated meaning, and thus performance. As history continues and our social traditions evolve, so does the associated and interpreted meaning of these tattoos; the context of the current historical moment plays a large role as to the way that these tattoos are interpreted and understood, particularly when it comes to the identity of the owner.

Ultimately, trauma is performance. It is something every person in the world experiences on some level or another and something that changes the way one sees

themselves and how they project themselves to others; in other words, trauma is an ongoing performance that constructs our identity. Cathy Caruth provides one of the most widely accepted definitions of trauma within the discipline; "...an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth, 1996a, p. 11). In understanding this definition of trauma, traumatic experiences are then categorized in two ways; trauma-event and trauma-symptom (Duggan & Wallis, 2011). Both as individuals and collectively as communities, societies, countries, cultures, "survivor-sufferers" become trapped in a cyclical pattern of reiteration until they unlock a better or healthier understanding of the trauma (p. 5). In this sense, trauma can be seen as repeated performances and rehearsals; "acting out" or performing then hopefully leads to "working through" (p. 5).

First, the trauma-event performs itself as a "restored phenomenon" in which survivor-sufferers reclaim experiences and memories they remember from the trauma and ones they had suppressed. Then, in the trauma-event, survivors then "perform symptoms of their suffering, repeatedly and compulsively 'acting out' words, situations and actions" (p. 6). Through both the trauma-symptoms and trauma-events, there is a repetitive performance that is central to understanding the trauma that was experienced, witnessed or communicated. In this sense, trauma is a repetitive and cyclical performance in which one is always acting out, in some way, their trauma in order to better understand, interpret or communicate its meaning – which also changes in space and time.

Survivors become stuck in this repetitive cycle of trauma-symptoms and trauma-events which creates a performative structure in which the symptom is a representation or

‘rehearsal’ of the original event but is simultaneously a trauma event in itself. This creates a constant and active performance of the trauma and the duality of its interpretation as the performance is repeated over and over (Duggan & Wallis, 2011). The understanding of this concept of trauma as performance provides ample space for the entrance of tattoos as performances of trauma. Although these tattoos become permanent, unchanging signifiers of trauma, their performance can change in the understanding and interpretation of them through space and time.

The tattoos are a constant rehearsal or representation of the original event while also signifying the traumatic event. These specific tattoos allow for the repetitive nature of trauma performances to evolve and change while remaining a consistent source of the origination of the trauma. The tattoo can be seen over and over through space and time by different peoples, cultures, communities etc. and thus, are always performing. However, the understanding and interpretation of the source of the trauma can also change, allowing for these repetitive performances to alter in meaning and ultimately, construct identity in varying manners.

In this same article, Duggan and Wallis also explore the role of witnessing and testimony as tied to performance using Laub’s development of these concepts. In Laub’s understanding of witnessing and testimony, he states that as both direct witnesses and witnesses of testimony we are “ethically required to participate in the cultural circulation of ‘the truth of what happens during an event’” (p. 7). In this understanding, Laub posits that as witnesses and witnesses of the process of witnessing, we become equally obligated to share the ‘truth’ and thus, become co-owners of the trauma. Duggan and Wallis then argue that witnessing then becomes a performance as the testimony is “re-

framed and the testifier, re-personated” (p. 7). This chain of witnessing creates cultural meaning in that from person to person, culture to culture, community to community, etc. this trauma lives on in the performances of witnesses and the understanding of those performances.

This idea of the performance of witnessing and testimonials fits nicely into various concepts of this study, but specifically with chapter three’s section on transgenerational trauma. Gabriele Schwab explicates the idea that trauma is not a single-serving or constricted event; it is not only the direct victim/survivor that is impacted, but that this trauma is passed on from generation to generation. In understanding Laub’s concept of witnessing as a performance of trauma that carries from one person to other(s), both Auschwitz and 9/11 tattoos could be considered constant performances of trauma that are carried to and by other generations. In this sense, these tattoos are active performances of trauma that ask other generations to not only learn of the associated trauma but become co-owners; this transition from generation to generation creates the opportunity for the performances of the trauma to change in meaning and interpretation based on the demands of the current historical moment.

This idea of performance can be a critical frame for how individuals, societies, communities and countries address trauma, especially collective trauma. Modern trauma theory considers ‘wounds’ to be both physical and psychic (Duggan & Wallis, 2011b). Trauma as a performance examines cultural, social, and historical issues of experience, memory, and representation. In fact, performance can be a critical frame for considering and understanding how trauma builds and creates culture; the culture of the world drastically changed in the aftermaths of both the Holocaust and the 9/11 attacks. There

were drastic social and political changes that occurred as a direct response to the forceful cultural changes these events demanded of the world. And these tattoos, both old and new, act as reinforcements of those cultural performances of the trauma.

A key aspect around this concept of trauma as performance for this study is the impact on and the active construction of one's identity. In other words, how does the performance of trauma impact one's selfhood? The "uninvited nature" of trauma-symptoms often causes survivors of extreme trauma to not only be left with the inability to understand their identity themselves, but also unable to communicate their identity to others. In his 2011 article "If There's No Justice...': Trauma and Identity in Post-Dictatorship Argentina" Diego Benegas "maps the identitarian politics both of state moves to foreclose trauma and of performative forms to disrupt this" (p. 20). In this article, he highlights the way that trauma interrupts the ever-evolving construction of identity at both an individual and collective levels and how the idea of performance "can both intervene in and act as frame of analysis for both identity-formation and its traumatic undoing" (p. 20). He explores how these performances of trauma, especially political trauma, are constant re-enactments of the traumatic event(s) that play out through our lives and are consistently constructing and re-constructing our identity.

Benegas concept on the importance of trauma-performance as an identity construction is something I have attempted to explicate and emphasize throughout the entirety of this project. Through viewing trauma through the perspective of signification and performance as constructions of identity, these tattoos play a vital communicative role to their owners. Through the application chapters of this project I have explored on how these tattoos can be interpreted differently using Peirce's signification trichotomy

and how even as an inanimate and permanent artifact, these tattoos are ongoing performances of trauma in which their constructed meaning as it related to the identity of the wearer, changes in space and time.

In chapter three, I analyzed how both Auschwitz and 9/11 memorial tattoos can be considered signifiers and performances of transgenerational trauma and social collective trauma, as well as how Holocaust tattoos became a symbol of religious collective trauma. Using Gabriele Schwab's work on transgenerational trauma and Maurice Halbwachs work on collective trauma, this chapter focused on the varying ways that these tattoos can communicate different parts of identity. Transgenerational trauma highlights the impact that trauma permeates throughout generations beyond the direct victim or survivor, while Halbwachs work on collective memory explores how social, cultural and historical documentation of the events are remembered by those who experienced them and by those who come after.

In chapter four, I explored the role of latency and localization as tied to Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos. Focusing on trauma scholarship from Cathy Caruth, I set out to analyze two main aspects of how these tattoos tie into her definition of trauma. First is that survivors often have 'unclaimed experiences' of the trauma that do not surface until later-on when they can seek out better understanding of the event. And second, is the tie to 'place' or the localization of where the trauma took place. Through both of these concepts, Caruth states that people are often re-traumatized as these new memories are experienced and often times trauma is tied to some sort of, place whether it be physical, metaphysical or both. Through analysis of the signification and performance of these

tattoos, I state that they represent both unclaimed experiences and have a strong tie to both a physical and metaphysical ‘place.’

And finally in chapter five, I examined how these genres of tattoos tied into the concepts of witnessing, testimony and truth, as well as explicating how these tattoos act as a performance of the ‘other’ with their steep social, cultural, and historical significance. In the first section, I use Laub’s theories on witnessing, testimony and the idea of truth to better understand how survivors of trauma work through and understand both their own trauma and the trauma of others. Laub sets clear guidelines for how to best be both a witness and a witness to witnessing; he says this type of information gathering requires an empathic, attentive and knowledgeable listener prepared to let the survivor become the narrator. And second, he provides three distinct levels of witnessing that allowed for an in-depth exploration into how tattoos can act as varying kinds of signifiers and performances. These levels include being a witness to oneself within the experience, being a witness to the testimonies of others and finally, being a witness to the process of witnessing itself. Through witnessing and testimony then comes the need for ‘truth’ in which Laub states both the narrator and the survivor (or interviewee) are both actively attempting to reach through their own processing and performances of trauma.

Throughout these three application chapters, I explored how tattoos can be interpreted as both signifiers and performances of identity grounded in trauma that change in space and time. These theories and foundations combined to create a unique entrance for me to analyze and explore how tattoos are nonverbal communicators of trauma as tied to identity. And ultimately, the idea that these tattoos are ongoing and

active performances of past trauma - even ‘worked-through’ trauma still impacts the daily lives of sufferers, causing an eternal performance, in some manner (Duggan & Wallis, 2011, p. 5-6). The truly unique aspect of this study is based in the idea that these tattoos will change in meaning and interpretation through space and in time. Even in the relatively short time since the 9/11 attacks, the memorial tattoos of that moment have evolved throughout the years and will continue to do so.

Just as Judith Butler states that as humans are always ‘doing’ gender, I contend that these tattoos are always ‘doing’ identity; they are repeated performances whose meanings and interpretations change through space, time, and the repetition of performance. Similar to that of gender, these tattoos create performances of our identity in different and unique manners. And that the end result, being the finished tattoo, does not solidify or end the performance that constructs our identity but in fact, it is the opening act. Each time someone new notices the tattoo it opens the possibilities for a new performance, with new signification, all that revolve around the construction of identity. There are various other genres of tattoos that could be analyzed and explored in a similar manner, which I briefly touch on in the next and final section of this chapter.

Future Research

A common theme throughout this study was this idea of collective trauma, defined as “refers to the psychological reactions to a traumatic event that affect an entire society; it does not merely reflect an historical fact, the recollection of a terrible event that happened to a group of people” (Hirschberger, 2018, para. 2). I chose these specific tattoo genres intentionally with the idea that both represent a different way in which collective trauma is understood, interpreted and ultimately, performed. Auschwitz tattoos

are unique in that they were not an autonomous choice, but something forced onto prisoners as a way to inhumanely categorize those capable of manual labor. Throughout the years, survivors have reclaimed their tattoos and used varying narratives to help perform aspects of their identity tied to their own construction of the trauma. And those who memorialized the terrorist attacks of 9/11 have also used this artistic form of expression as a way to signify and perform their own experiences with the trauma. Both of these tattoo genres allowed for unique analysis on the communicative aspect of tattoos grounded in trauma.

However, there were multiple other genres of tattoos which I considered including within this study, but ultimately ran out of space and time. Two other genres of tattoos that are different traumatic events that have been memorialized into the skin of survivors are COVID-19 and breast cancer/disease awareness tattoos. I will briefly explain both of these genres of tattoos and how and why they would be good fits for future research that explores the communicative and performative nature of tattoos grounded in collective trauma. First, is the emergence of COVID-19 tattoos and second is the use of tattoos as a way to memorialize the cancers and diseases that have overtaken humanity.

In March of 2020, the United States (and many other countries around the world) came to a screeching halt. A new and deadly virus had been detected within the U.S. borders that was spreading like wildfire and causing immense numbers of deaths and, as we later found out, long-term health issues. People began what would-be a 15+ month quarantine period fearing for their lives, angry about the status of the world, and some even doubting the seriousness of what would come to be known as COVID-19 or the Coronavirus. As a country, the United States essentially shutdown; restaurants, schools,

office buildings, shopping centers became barren and masks became mandatory. Life as we knew it had disappeared right in front of us. Many believed that the shutdown would last mere weeks before life returned to normal with busy shopping centers, nights at the movie theater, or dinners spent in restaurants. But people soon began to realize that the ‘normal’ that was once known, would not return for months. Many stuck inside, particularly in those areas with harsh winters, began to suffer mentally with the quarantining and lack of socialization. Nearly 1.5 years into the pandemic that changed the world, we are just beginning to see a glimpse of hope and a light at the end of the tunnel.

Similar to traumatic events such as World Wars and terrorist attacks, COVID-19 has created a new sense of collective trauma that the world has not experienced since the Spanish Flu of 1918. Thanks to technology people are still able to remain connected in a digital sense; something the 1918 world did not have. So even those quarantined alone could have some sort of human or social contact, even if it were in a virtual manner. And now after 15 months of experiencing a world-wide pandemic, people are beginning to deal with the trauma of COVID-19 in different ways. One of those ways, has been to tattoo their memories of this unforgettable experience permanently into their skin. Various tattoo artists have stated that in the recent months (and since being able to open and operate again) their time has been consumed with COVID inspired tattoos. Ranging from mask wearing pin-up girls to reimagined famous works of art that incorporate COVID, people are using body modification as a way to express their identity as tied to the trauma of COVID-19.

Figure 8

6 Feet lady



Note: Tattoo and photo done by artist Jeremy Peig at the Instagram handle

@spawnjeremy

These tattoos incorporate masks, the actual physical representation of the COVID virus (a green ‘spikey’ ball), social distancing guidelines and even mixing traditional tattoo styles with COVID inspired material to create new genres of tattoos. These, like both Auschwitz and 9/11 tattoos, could be analyzed to differing concepts with trauma studies to explore the signification and performance of identity as tied to the collective trauma of COVID. Although it would not be possible to consider the spatial-temporal component of these tattoos since this is still an ongoing event, it would be particularly interesting to see how these tattoos changed in space and time in relation to how the owner of the tattoo identifies with COVID in the latter years. Especially in understanding how these tattoos act as ongoing and active performances of one’s identity as connected

to the COVID-19 trauma that, unlike most other events, impacted the entire world almost simultaneously. Below are a few examples of COVID-19 inspired tattoos.

Figure 9

<between us>



Note: Tattoo and photo done by artist Willaume Audrey Harvey at the Instagram handle @tattoo_by_harvey

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a ‘new’ type of collective trauma that people are actively attempting to interpret, understand and cope with, which includes the use of tattoos. These tattoos, while being a unique and artistic way to internalize trauma, also offer a unique opportunity to understand how individuals identify with the trauma associated with COVID. These tattoos will continue to act as signifiers and performances of identity in which the narrative of these performances will evolve as the world moves on (hopefully) from this worldwide pandemic. While the world has lost a staggering 3.35 million people due to COVID, this still leaves billions of witnesses left to provide their

testimony. However, this is not necessarily new territory for the tattoo world; one of the most popular tattoo genres are those associated with the trauma of diseases and cancers.

Figure 10

Rose of No Man Lands



Note: Tattoo and photo done by artist Eli Bauman at the Instagram handle @elibauman

Disease awareness and memorial tattoos are widespread and encompass a large amount of differing subject matter. One of the most unique interpretations of this is the strategic application of tattoos in breast cancer survivors and patients. In fact, tattoo artists have begun to specialize in this type of realism tattooing to help the women (and men) who have survived breast cancer and have undergone mastectomies, reclaim their bodies. These tattoos also have a wide variety of subject matter and are worn by direct survivors and those impacted by the trauma of their loved ones.

These tattoos have a broad range, from cancer ribbons, utilizing certain colors or signs, specific phrases or words, and even the placement can signify the trauma of

disease. For the wearer, these tattoos act as both a signifier of remembrance and to raise awareness. One of the most common types of tattoos in this genre are breast cancer awareness. The public has come to understand the color pink and the month of October as symbols of breast cancer and breast cancer awareness. People often get the pink ribbon tattooed, either alone or incorporated into other symbols (such as using the ribbon as the body of a butterfly). Without verbally explaining the tattoo, most people can understand the basic meaning behind it, being related to breast cancer and thus, understand in some capacity, their identity as related to the trauma of cancer.

Another interesting way breast cancer is signified as tattoos are as mastectomy cover-ups. After having one or both breasts removed, some women turn to tattoos for healing. Often women will get breast implants after having their breast tissue removed, but this requires removing the nipple in full. As such, some tattoo artists have begun specializing in tattooing realistic nipples. This option is for those who wish to reclaim their bodies in a more traditional manner. Other women turn to a more artistic interpretation to represent their trauma, mourning and perseverance through intricate artwork that covers the scars from their procedure(s). Both of these tattoos allow women to embody their trauma and reinterpret their fight with cancer in beautiful and meaningful ways that both signify and perform aspects of their identity that are deeply intertwined with the trauma of breast cancer.

Figure 11

Black and Grey Floral Tattoo



Note: Tattoo and photo done by artist Shane Wallin at the Instagram handle

@shanewallintattoo

The purpose of these tattoos is two-fold; they help women reclaim their bodies while still healing from the trauma of breast cancer. Some have noted this as an embodied health movement to explore how women are reclaiming their bodies after losing a major part of their ‘womanhood’ (Jong & Bruce, 2020). Like other tattoos of this nature, breast cancer tattoos can be seen to “challenge dominant discourses related to identity” and is “currently evolving into practices of self-expression, healing, and transformation” (Jong & Bruce, 2020, p. 695). As such, one could explore how these tattoos, and others related to disease and awareness, act as signifiers and performances of identity grounded in the

trauma of experiencing and surviving cancer. The pictures below represent the magic that tattoos can provide to women who have lost their breast due to cancer – using a realistic form of tattooing, this woman had nipples tattooed back onto her breasts along with a design to cover the scars. Often times, these tattoos are life-changing for survivors in that they help them reclaim their identities as women – something breast cancer survivors often site as one of the main triggers of trauma associated with breast cancer.

Figure 12

Double Mastectomy Tattoo Cover



Note: Tattoo and photo done by artist Jaclyn Bergantino at the Instagram handle @jaclyn.artist

Breast cancer/disease awareness tattoos are another unique genre that simultaneously represent multiple identities and take on various signifiers. After researching potential genres for this project, this category of tattoo became increasingly more interesting when combined with both the semiotic and performance foundations from which I am working from due to the potential of communication the trauma of not only yourself, but often the wearers of these tattoos get them for the purpose of

representing or remembering others and their struggle. I particularly focus in on two types of breast cancer tattoos; those that represent awareness via the pink ribbon and mastectomy cover-up tattoos in which women who have had their breast(s) removed, use tattoos in unique and artistic ways to cover the scars of their surgeries. These, like Holocaust and 9/11 tattoos, take on interesting and prolific meaning when we recognize both the symbolic nature and performance of identity that this artform carries. And how the meaning of these symbols and performances change in space and time.

There are also other disease related tattoo genres that perform similarly to that of breast cancer tattoos. During my research I came across the common use of roses to represent cystic fibrosis (CF) in children. “The ‘65 Roses’ story dates back to 1965 when an observant 4-year-old, hearing the name of his disease for the first time, pronounced cystic fibrosis as ‘65 Roses.’ Today, ‘65 Roses’ is a term often used by young children with cystic fibrosis to pronounce the name of their disease” (Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, n.d., para. 1). In fact, this term has become so intertwined with the disease that the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation registered ‘65 Roses’ as a trademark of the organization. In researching the use of tattoos as representative of diseases, I found this common theme across parents who have a child with CF. Tattooing a rose on them represents more than just their child’s fight with a deadly disease, but an interpretation and communication of how children see and identify the disease on their own. Below is an example of rose and tiger tattoo that represents both the struggle and strength of ‘65 Roses.’



Figure 13

Tiger with Rose Tattoo – “65 Roses”

Note: Tattoo and photo provided by the owner and wearer Olga Glubiak.

Another interesting future research idea for the role of tattoos within trauma is the performative nature of being tattooed. The process of being tattooed is one that requires various components from the individual. From communicating their ideas and concepts to the artist, planning and saving for the event to the execution of the tattoo, the person being tattooed experiences a plethora of emotions. This physical act of being tattooed

could be considered a performance. Often times, people get tattoos that embody other events, people, emotions, etc. and the physical act of being tattooed is a ritualistic ‘rite of passage’ that one must go through. The physical pain associated with tattooing is often an embodiment of the pain, either physical, emotional, or mental, in which the tattoo is ultimately representing.

These various other ideas revolving around tattooing, trauma and identity that are excellent candidates for future research. The COVID-19 pandemic is a recent and unique form of collective trauma that has never been as heavily or accurately documented since it has been over a century since the world has experienced an event of this kind. And exploring the role of tattoos within disease and cancer survivors adds a new individualistic component of a collective form of trauma. Both of these tattoos could be analyzed to better understand how people interpret, understand, signify, and perform aspects of their identity that are grounded in the traumas of daily life.

In this dissertation I have attempted to convince the reader of not only the unique and beautiful impact that tattoos have in the current historical moment, but the important and evident relationship between tattoos, identity, and trauma. Trauma is all around us – it comes in different shapes, sizes, events, non-events, times, days... but it is something that everyone in the world experiences in some capacity. And for many, the performances of these traumas lead to artistic outlets, such as body modifications like tattoos. Even those tattoos that are not currently grounded in trauma, could be one day. Take the example that I provided in chapter one. In this moment, I have both of my parents handwriting tattooed on me that represent my love for them. However, sometime in the (very far) future, these tattoos will become a memorial of them – a representation,

signifier, and performance of the trauma of losing a parent. The meaning of these tattoos will change in space and time; however, they will always and forever remain a repeating performance of my identity.

The spatial-temporal component of this study is also an aspect that could be further studied in the future; how will 9/11 memorial tattoos be represented and communicated differently in the space and time 50 years after the attacks? How will Auschwitz tattoos continue to grow and evolve as a collective and religious symbol of the Jewish faith? How will those who wear these tattoos understand the performances of them as active constructions of their identity?

Trauma does not discriminate; it is not selfish nor selective. Every person has experienced trauma in some manner and as a result, actively performs that trauma in varying aspects of their lives that construct their identity. This looks different for different people: choosing a specific career, raising children a specific way, sharing the stories, experiences, and memories with others in hopes of enlightening, teaching, or persuading them. And some choose to have these performances inscribed into their skin; and every time they are asked about their tattoo provides them a new opportunity to perform that trauma in a new way with evolving or changing meaning. So, the next time you see a tattoo, I encourage you to think more critically, openly, and interpretively about what that tattoo is communicating to you about that person's interpretation of their own identity.

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