DOPPIOZERO

Mengele’s Skull

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18 Dicembre 2012

Cosa legge una fotografa di professione, una che insegue in giro per il mondo architetture, oggetti, spazi, persone, quando legge un libro illustrato? Cosa vede con il suo obiettivo davanti agli occhi, quando guarda un libro del genere? La nuova rubrica di Giovanna Silva inaugura un nuovo modo di recensire i libri, leggendo e guardando, non solo parole ma anche immagini, immagini che sono parole: leggere, guardare, scattare.

Il libro recensito è *Mengele’s Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetics*, della casa editrice Sternberg Press.

Se continuiamo a tenere vivo questo spazio è grazie a te. Anche un solo euro per noi significa molto.
Torna presto a leggerci e SOSTIENI DOPPIOZERO

video image of the photograph was precisely imposed over the video image of the skull. It was a face wrapped over a skull, subject over object, an image of life over an image of death.



These were the missing images. While the results of Helmer's technique pushed the probability calculation further in the direction of a definitive identification, it also did more.[57] It was the appearance of a previously unseen image that produced the potential for conviction. At the press conference the following day, the forensic team presented their conclusions—"It is [...] our opinion that this skeleton is that of Josef Mengele"—and showed photographs of their methods, including Helmer's decisive superimpositions.[58] Ralph Blumenthal of the *New York Times* reported from what he called the "raucous news conference in federal police headquarters" that,

> the international experts cited various bits of evidence in support of their conclusion. Most decisive, many agreed, was an innovative West German photographic comparison

Richard Helmer (right) with Ali Hameli (left) and the skull of Josef Mengele, as prepared for face-skull superimposition demonstration, Medico-Legal Institute labs, São Paulo, Brazil, June 1985. Courtesy of Maja Helmer.

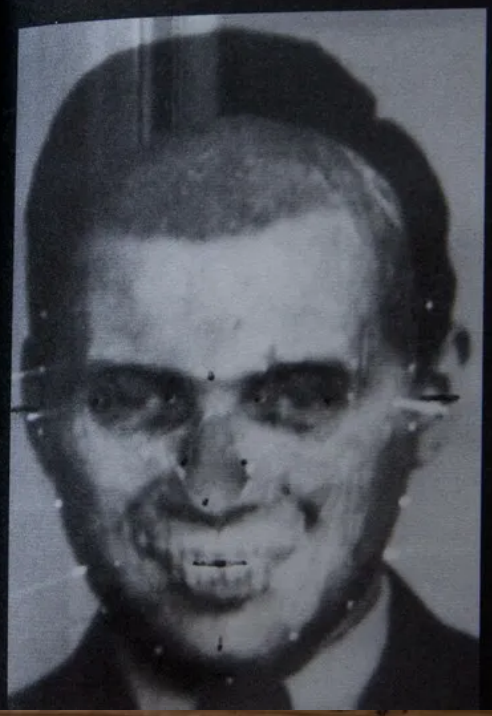


Following pages: Images produced using photographs of Mengele and images of his skull in Richard Helmer's face-skull superimposition demonstration, Medico-Legal Institute labs, São Paulo, Brazil, June 1985. Courtesy of Maja Helmer.

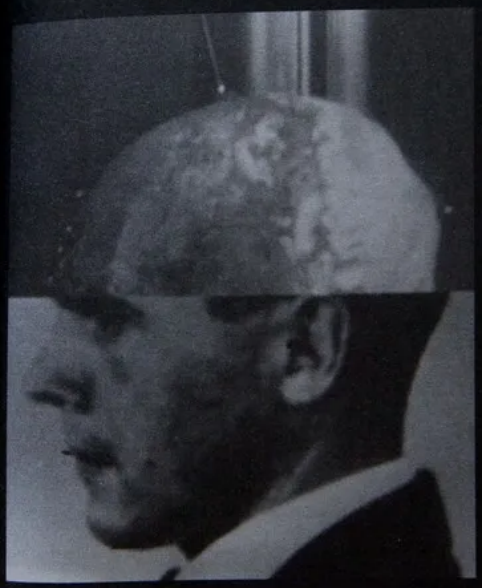


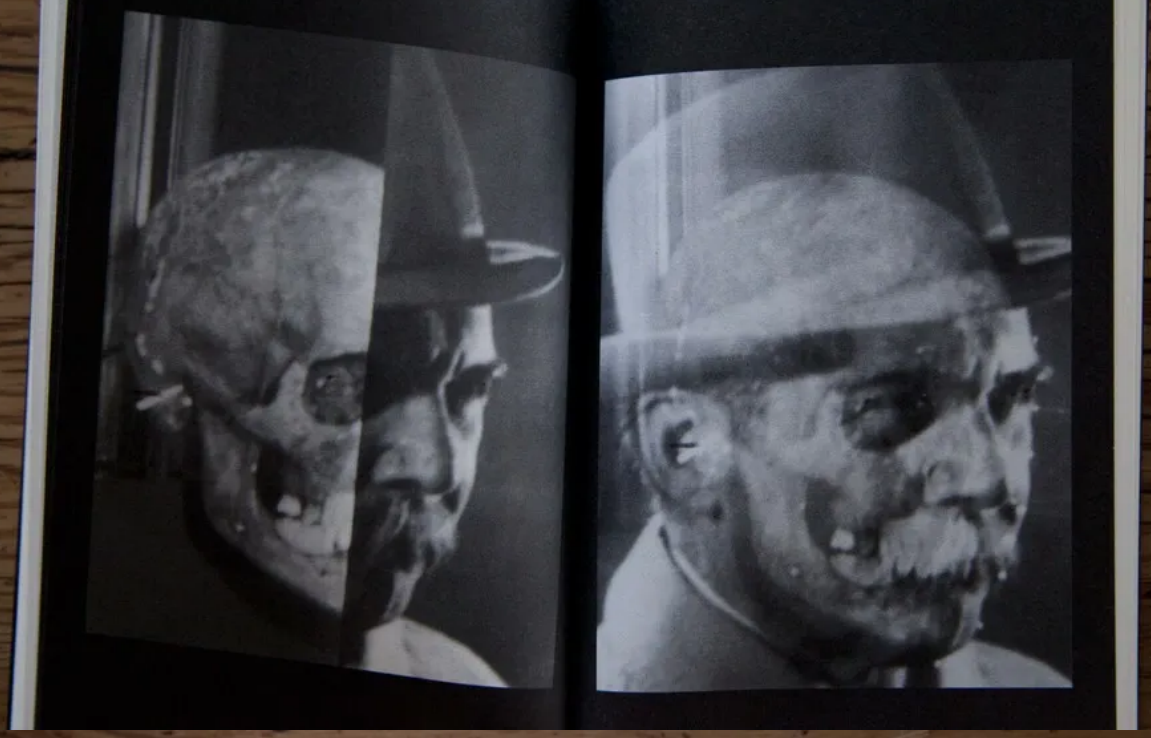


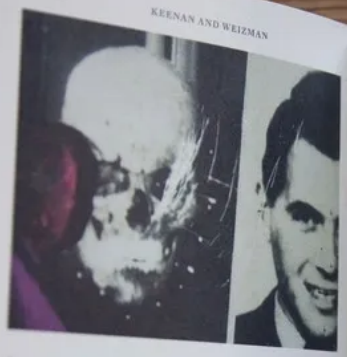
















It was during the Mengele investigation that a variety of procedures and techniques in the forensic identification of human remains were professionally tested and publicly displayed, later to become available as methodologies in investigating war crimes and human rights violations. Snow credits the Mengele case with nothing less than the definitive crystallization of identificatory forensics: in it, he says, "a certain analytical method [was] effectively developed. [...] This process also set the procedural standards for much of the work that we've done since in large-scale investigations of war crimes and crimes against humanity."[83]

Eric Stover thinks that the significance of the investigation was in the public exposure it gave forensic specialists. He reminded us in a recent conversation about the stakes of this investigation, and the sheer volume of exposure it received. It propelled forensic anthropologists, he says, otherwise rather obscure figures, into the global media spotlight: "This investigation was their ticket to stardom, there were cameras everywhere, even cameras trying to shoot into the lab."[84] The Mengele case marked their entry into an expanded public

Above (from left to right): Daniel Romero Muñoz, Richard Helmer, and Romeu Tuma, holding prints of the face-skull superimposition for reporters to see, São Paulo, Brazil, June 21, 1985. Video still courtesy of ABC News VideoSource.


FOLHA DA TARDE

Aqui estão as provas: o homem é mesmo Mengele


O ESTADO DE S. PAULO

Os EUA advertem terroristas

Fim da novela. Josef Mengele está identificado

Presidente pode vetar mudanças na informática

Gusmão anuncia um controle de preços 'flexível'

Mais 30 dias para a

The front pages of Brazilian daily newspapers announced the results of the Mengele forensic investigation with photographs from Helmer's face-skull superimposition test, June 22, 1985. Courtesy of Maja Helmer.

and criminals alike have become a common epistemological matrix on which the discourses of the human sciences, law, and even popular entertainment increasingly draw."[9]

In the 1980s, the nature of the type of the violation—forced disappearances—called for the kind of identification that science could provide within national trials and the work of fact-finding missions. In the 1990s, the emergence of a series of ad hoc international tribunals—the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia (1993) and Rwanda (1994)—followed by the permanent International Criminal Court (1998) required physical evidence, the corpora delicti, in order to supplement the work of testimony about genocide.

Contemporary war crimes forensics began in Brazil with the perpetrator-fugitive and in Argentina with the victim-disappeared. In a strange but clear sense, the Mengele investigation was structured just like the search for the missing. As we have suggested, Mengele was himself a missing person, if for very different reasons. It was methodological proximity that allowed the techniques developed for the former to suit the latter so well. For the forensic scientists seeking identification, the difference between a perpetrator and a victim is non-material, in the full meaning of the term. The skull of a perpetrator, like that of any of the victims exhumed from unmarked graves across Argentina, is simply made of bone tissue. The investigator always seeks the same answer, that of identity. The exhumation of Mengele thus placed the category of the missing beyond the ethical categories of victim and perpetrator.

When the victims are missing and no witnesses come forward, testimony in the ordinary sense cannot occur. Hence the force of some of Snow's figurative language, as when he told the reporter from *People* about his work in Argentina: "These people were murdered. Their bones are