Image of State

The Bureaucratic Image as an Instrument of Control

We live in an age of **hyper-information**. We are catalogued at every turn and we collude in this when we engage in social media, use a supermarket loyalty card, in our places of work, or just walk down the street and accept that the government, the police, the local council, shops, bars and private citizens may be recording us as we just pass by or through.

We do not feel coerced in doing so.

"Hence the major effect of the panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power." (Foucault 1977: pp. 195-228)

Michel Foucault *Panopticism*

Foucault, Michel (1977) *Discipline and Punish* London: Penguin

These ideas echo those of theorist and politician, Antonio Gramsci – that the populace is unwittingly co-opted into accepting the values of the dominant group that exercises hegemony. We become complicit in promoting an imposed order.

Foucault was also influenced by the French philosopher, Louis Althusser, and his concept of **Interpellation**. Identity and ideology (the dominant ideology) become interlinked and we 'self-discipline' ourselves into conformity. Foucault argues the point that this process not only makes us passive but also that we frown upon those that don't conform.

This was an idea first explored in Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation* (1961) when he commented upon the idea that people considered 'mad' were accepted and lived among other people in pre-industrial societies, but the mechanization of social control that paralleled the industrial revolution, brought with it a bureaucratized system of difference and the resulting incarceration of people with mental illnesses into prison-like hospitals.

The **panopticon**, envisaged by Jeremy Bentham, was a prison in which a central guard tower overlooks every, brightly lit, cell. The guards can see the prisoners, the prisoners cannot see the guards. This is important as the idea of modifying behavior is based as much on the idea of being observed as actually being observed. The prisoner is controlled by 'self-discipline'. Schools and workplaces do the same thing. Docility results.

Many prisons were built using this model as the image of the Illinois State Penitentiary attests.

Putting eyes on things makes people behave as if being watched.

To many, and this may be up for further discussion if you write about surveillance in your essay, the Panopticon acts as a metaphor for our social media presence, in which we voluntarily allow the guards in the tower to 'observe' us, whether they are looking or not.

Facebook Profiles – Student Pictures

Photography from its inception, from Fox Talbot's assertion that photography represented the 'Pencil of Nature', was associated with a generally perceived truthfulness that, outside classroom discussions of photographic discourse, still holds sway. The photograph, with its indexical attachment to the referent (that depicted), presented the viewer with a 'fact', and in so doing, obtained the status of evidential utility.

Lewis Powell (or Payne) attempted to assassinate US Secretary of State, William H. Seeward in 1865. A co-conspirator with Henry Wilkes Booth (Lincoln's assassin), Payne was photographed on a prison ship shortly before his execution, by Alexander Gardner. Thanks mainly to Roland Barthes, we all know this picture.

How did we go from this to this: Myra Hindley.

Perhaps one of the most iconic pictures of a criminal in the history of British Justice, this police photograph made shortly after the arrest of 'Moors Murderers', Hindley and Brady, was released to the press. Variously considered altered before publication if not by the police themselves, to darken her features, to make her look less human; the alien 'other'. A representation as disassociated from humanity as the crimes for which she and Brady were convicted.

However, this image still conforms to an idea of the criminal image that first established itself in the latter half of the 19th century and differed greatly from the varied poses of Lewis Payne. It presented a photography that fitted into a new regime of classification and taxonomy; of Darwinian determinism and eugenics; of procedural utility and, ultimately criminally enacted state atrocity.

Francis Galton is perhaps the most famous figures in the development of these ideas. Obtaining pre-existing images of criminals, he re-photographed them onto glass plates and then, super-imposing them, printed images as types. He believed that certain types of criminal would exhibit common features and, as his technique removed individuality, the resulting composite, would show this and allow a scientific classification that could be used by police to spot these types.

Writers such as David Green and Allan Sekula have both pointed to Galton's association with often erroneous applications of Darwinian theory – the possibility that natural selection involved evolutionary winners (upstanding intelligent and successful, white middle-class people) and losers (a lower order of criminal types). The message, as the emerging pseudo-science of eugenics took hold, inspired by Darwinian theory (Galton was, famously, Darwin's cousin), but based on the darker notion that inferior – 'degenerate' - characteristics could be rooted out in a process that could lead to physical and mental purity amongst the dominant group but, of course, led instead to the gas chambers of Auschwitz decades later.

Galton did not operate in isolation. The belief in classification, control, measurement of all things - a scientifically arrived-at taxonomy of everything, from animal and plant species, the fossil record, natural phenomena through to types of people of different class, race, physical and mental state, had taken hold. These works where indeed created in what Foucault described as the 'classical épistémè': an ideological period dominated by a belief in classification.

Hugh Diamond – See John Tagg, Burden of Representation

De Boulogne

Photographs turned into illustrations

Alphonse Bertillon

Bertillon created a criminal classification system that is often compared to Galton's. Whereas Galton created generic composites from real criminals and shared with Bertillon an interest in what are now seen as pseudo-sciences, but where then seriously considered – physiognomy – the science of features, and phrenology – head-shape, Bertillon used precise measuring techniques and a style of photography that was soon adopted around the world and is still in use today.

Despite the success of his technique, reliant though, like any system, on a precise and systematic method, it had its deficiencies.

FBI card. The 'West Brothers'

'In 1903, Will West was committed to the US Penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas, a few days after being brought to the office of the record clerk to be measured and photographed. He denied having been in the penitentiary before, but the clerk doubting the statement, ran his measuring instruments over him, and from the Bertillon measurements obtained went to the files, returning with the card, the measurements called for properly filled out, accompanied by the photograph and bearing the name WILLIAM WEST. Will West, the new prisoner, continued to deny that the card was his, whereupon the record clerk turned it over and read that William West was already a prisoner in that institution, having been committed to a life sentence on September 9, 1901, for murder.'

The Bertillon measurements of these, given below are nearly identical, whereas the fingerprint classifications given are decidedly different.

The case is particularly interesting as indicating the fallacies in the Bertillon system, which necessitated the adoption of the fingerprint system as a medium of identification. It is not even definitely known that these two 'Wests' were related despite their remarkable resemblance.

Their Bertillon measurements and fingerprint classifications are set out separately below.'

National Crime Agency

The utility of the method and its claims toward objectivity are questionable too. The Myra Hindley image became a totemic monster in its own right as a signifier of the enormity of her (and Brady's) crimes. Whenever her incarceration was reviewed, or if there were discussions about a move to a lower security prison, the image would, once more, play out across the tabloid press. Very few images occupy the public consciousness in the way that this does, which is why Marcus Harvey presented the image in this form in 1995 at the Saatchi-curated *Sensation* exhibition.

The extension from home grown to colonial 'otherness' or 'othering' also began in the Victorian period at the height of Empire. Images that classify indigenous peoples in Africa, Asia, the Americas and Australia have at their core, as perhaps Tagg would see it, after Foucault, a negative agenda: to classify and measure a tacitly perceived inferiority in the indigenous people depicted, photographed in their traditional dress, or often naked, to emphasise, for a Victorian audience, a received view of savagery, baseness and racial inferiority.

And as other commentators including Edward Said and Stuart Hall have pointed out, this hasn't left us, even if the intentions of Irving Penn or jimmy Nelson are more benign than those of their Victorian and early 20th Century forebears.

As mentioned, the intentions of Galton contained a malignancy that reached its peak in the 1930s and 40s. Using the Bertillon method of classification, Jews, gypsies, socialists, homosexuals, the disabled etc.; those that didn't conform to the Nazi ideals of racial purity, were systematically measured, classified and photographed as criminals would be under Bertillon's system. Not only does their process represent the obsession many tyrannies have with a dark bureaucracy, but also connotes a belief system in which people are presented as criminal or sub-human because of who they culturally, politically, sexually or racially, are.

Mentions August Sander

And, despite the enormity of this system of identification in Nazi Germany, the adherence of totalitarian regimes to its methods have manifested themselves many times since. Like the pictures of Nazi concentration camp prisoners – like the picture of Lewis Payne that motivates Barthes to remove the punctum from the image itself and into the hinterland of wider knowledge – that these people are photographed immediately before or on a trajectory toward state sponsored death – the images of victims of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia's 'killing fields' resonate in the same way.

"The atrocities committed over 4 years, were systematic, expansive, and bureaucratic in detail. About 1.7 million people – a quarter of Cambodia's population – died after being herded from cities into torture centers and prisons during the Khmer rouge rule."

Barbie Zelizer

During this reign of terror very little information got out. There were not photographs or film of what happened as correspondents were not allowed access. The 'meticulously ordered' evidence of what happened was discovered after Pol Pot's regime was overthrown in 1979. Victims were numbered, photographed and catalogued in what became known, when widely disseminated across the international news media, as Cambodia's 'Bureaucracy of Death'. They are now part of a museum on the site of the S-21 prison south of Phnom Penh, where the ineluctable power of the images haunts visitors: 15,000 faces, numbered but not named, looking into the lens, certain of their desperate fate.

These photographic methods are, according to Peter Hamilton, 'The dominant metaphor for identity in the 21st Century'. We can indeed see their adoption in the taxonomic or typological methods of art photography associated with identity – Thomas Ruff for instance.

And, just as Foucault used the Panopticon as a metaphor for state control through soft coercion, in the modern realm, in a world dominated by the image, both governments and artists alike have expanded and adopted the apparatus of surveillance in a new discourse of control as a necessary adjunct to an uncertain globalized world: a world of terrorist threat, supranational finance, political instability, and questions about our

identity in the bewildering regime of hyper-technology. To this we can now add the word, ‘pandemic’.

It could be noted that the extent to which we were clandestinely observed by our governments has changed since the end of the Cold War, a time when much of western propaganda was geared up to point toward our ‘freedoms’ in binary opposition to Soviet oppression, applied to citizens within communist countries. Although in Althessurian terms, communist countries operated a Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) whereas in western culture, we are subject to IDAs – Ideological State Apparatuses.

‘A vivid example of this, noted by the legal scholar Jeffery Rosen, is in Milan Kundera’s novel “The Unbearable Lightness of Being”, when describing how the police destroyed an important member of the Prague Spring resistance group by recording his conversations among friends and then broadcasting them over public radio: “Prochazka was discredited because in private, a person says all sorts of things, slurs friends, uses coarse language...makes a companion laugh by shocking him with outrageous talk, [and] floats heretical ideas he’d never admit in public.”’

None of Your Damn Business: Privacy in the United States from the Gilded Age to the Digital Age, by Lawrence Cappello, published by the University of Chicago Press

Doug Rickard’s virtual Americana

Mishka Henner’s use of satellite surveillance to create a new mapping of the human environment – a project that both represents a continuation of the enlightenment ideal to map the world, and the post-modernist calling to utilize existing images rather than make new ones in a world oversaturated with them.

Richard Mosse’s adoption of military technology which is turned back on itself as a contemporary detòurnement

And Michael Wolf's voyeuristic meditations on the lived and observed urban environment.

And other new panopticons – of both the state and personal vision.

The modern contradiction inherent to both our experience of private and public space, and the ways in which that is utilized by governments, corporations and by artists exploring new representations of contemporary life is unknowable. We experience the 21st century digital realm through the prism of 20th century rules governing both the control of our personal data and our understanding of the implications of how that data is used. We have, as Foucault may have put it where he still alive, entered a digital épistéme.