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Research in Context (ADAD5003)

Lecturer: Paul Duerinckx

Word Count: 2342

Using at least 3 examples, consider how image makers have utilised digital technology to explore at least one of the following: Conflict, Identity, the Surveillance State, the Technological World?

The starting point for this essay was for me to explore the history of photography and how it has been utilised in identifying criminals both before and after they had committed a crime. I plan to explore how the founders of using photographs as a means of identification such as Cesare Lombroso, Francis Galton and Alphonse Bertillon have allowed their own ethnocentric views to create a stereotype of who we see as a criminal and that carries on even today in our own unconscious bias.

Lombroso believed that criminals could be identified by certain attributes such as a murderer would have cold glassy stares or a rapists would have jug ears, Lombroso was one of the first people in history to use scientific methods to study crime. (Criminal Man. 1876). It started in 1871 when Lombroso an army doctor at the time was interested in finding what the differences were

between lunatics, criminals and normal people. It was during this time he met Giuseppe Villella, a convicted thief and arsonist, after Villella's death Lombroso performed a post-mortem and could see Villella had an indentation at the back of his skull, much like an ape would have. The conclusion he drew from this and others he had studied was that some people were born a criminal and there features were similar to early man this led to the Lombroso's work as a criminal anthropologist. He collected many things linked to his work during his career such as death masks, skulls and skeletons of criminals who had been executed. After his own death he donated his head which formed part of an exhibition of his collection at The University of Turin.



Fig 1.Cesare Lombroso preserved in a jar of formalin at an exhibition in Bologna, 1978. (Photo by Romano Cagnoni)

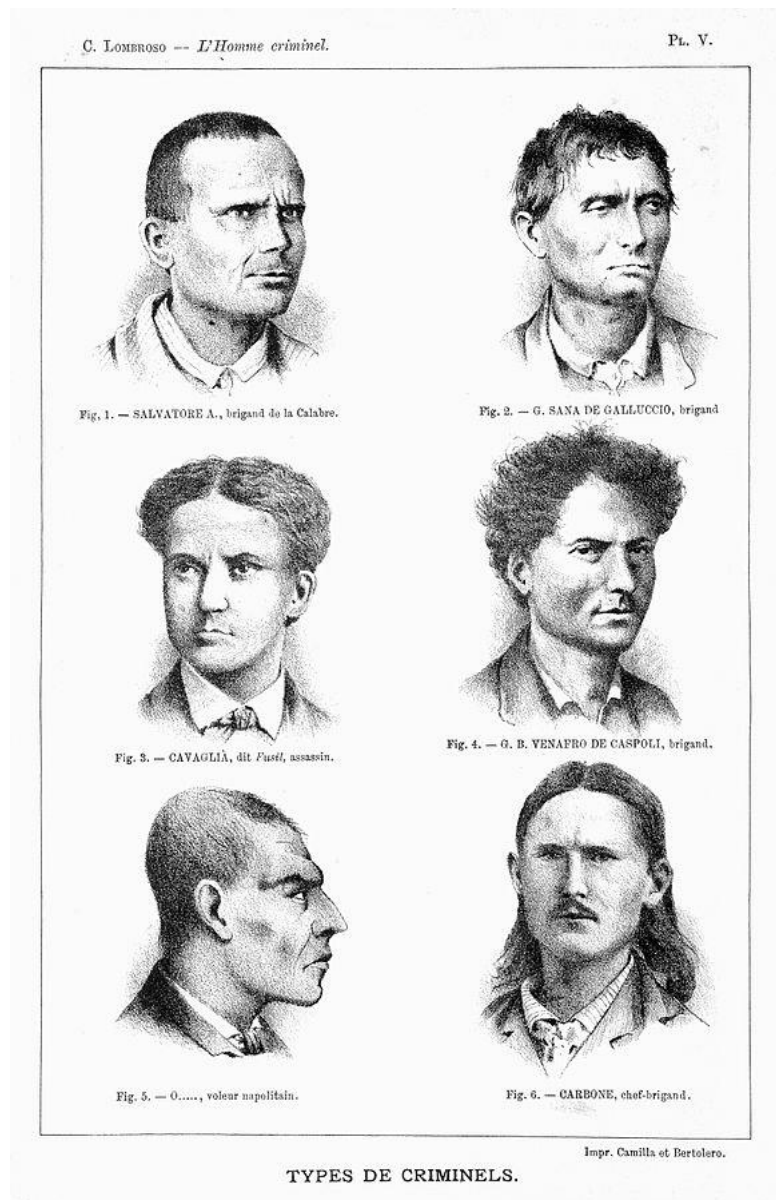


Fig 2. Six figures illustrating types of criminals Printed text *L'Homme Criminel* Lombroso, Cesar Published: 1888

Sir Francis Galton was another who followed a similar path to Lombroso, Galton believed he could create a generic portrait of different types of criminals, he developed a technique where he would overlay several images of convicted criminals and from that produce an image that he purported to

show the common likeness shared by criminals who committed different types of crimes.

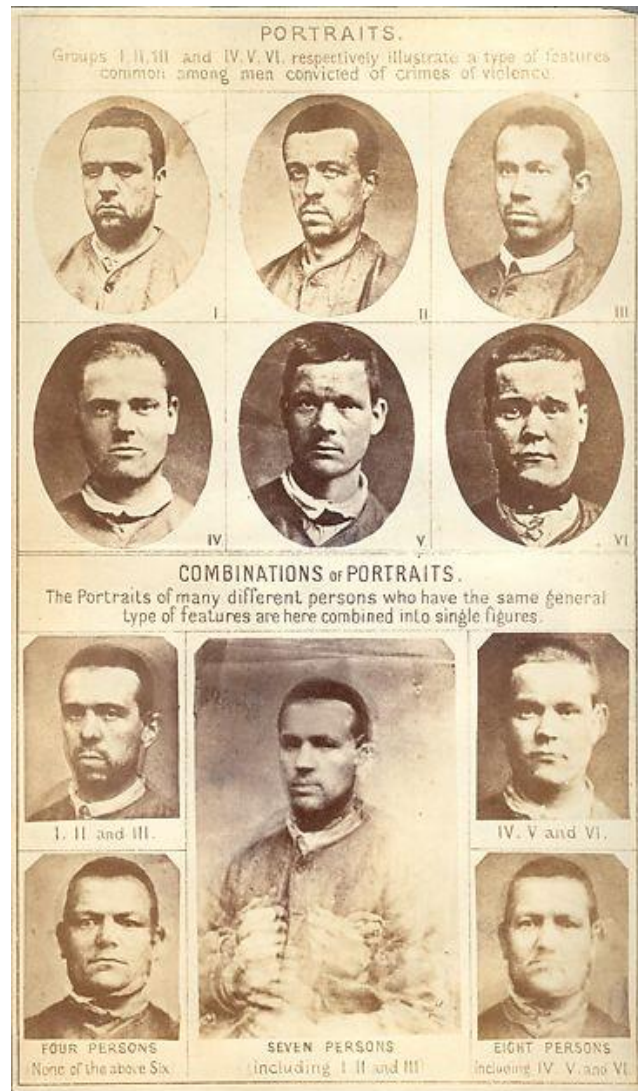


Fig 3. Composite Portraits of Criminal Types 1877 Frances Galton

In Fig 3, above, the top six images created by Galton purport to show the common features of criminals convicted of violent crimes, I would suggest that the very framing and the pose created in the images steer you towards the

idea of a criminal. If you consider Roland Barthes Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography (1980) and the idea that to understand photography you need to understand it from the point of view of the photographer (operator), the viewer (spectator), and the subject of the photograph (spectrum), Barthes states that *'unless the image is a candid one then the subject of the photograph is always being posed 'The Operator is the Photographer. The Spectator is ourselves, all of us who glance through collections of photographs-in magazines and newspapers, in books, albums, archives and the person or thing photographed is the target, the referent, a kind of little simulacrum, any eidolon emitted by the object, which I should like to call the Spectrum of the Photograph'* (Barthes Camera Lucida p.9) then I would say Galton aims to manipulate the images in order to portray a certain vision, his vision as the photographer. Galton wants us to believe that the images he has compiled are that of men who have a propensity to commit crime and by showing these images, unsmiling, static looking directly into the camera and in some ways looking menacing and almost harping back to the theory from Lombroso that criminals were a throwback to early man, you can't help but feel a little intimidated and imagine that should you bump into one such character on a dark night in a lonely lane you may not make it home alive.

I believe that at the heart of Galton's research his ideology was that of a racist which can be seen in an excerpt of his book *Heredity Genius* (1869) where he states: *'The best form of civilization in respect to the improvement of the race, would be one in which society was not costly; where incomes were chiefly derived from professional sources, and not much through inheritance; where every lad had a chance of showing his abilities, and, if highly gifted, was enabled to achieve a first-class education and entrance into professional life, by the liberal help of the exhibitions and scholarships which he had gained in his early youth; where marriage was held in as high honour as in ancient Jewish times; where the pride of race was encouraged (of course I do not refer to the nonsensical sentiment of the present day, that goes under that name); where the weak could find a welcome and a refuge in celibate monasteries or sisterhoods, and lastly, where the better sort of emigrants and refugees from other lands were invited and welcomed, and their descendants naturalised'* (Galton *Heredity Genius* (1869), p.362)

Galton's views could easily be seen as ethnocentric, a term applied to the cultural or ethnic bias whether conscious or unconscious, *'Ethnocentrism is the technical name for this view of things in which one's own group is at the centre of everything and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it'* (Sumner W,G *Folkways, A Study of Mores, Manners, Customs and Morals* (1906) p.13)

Galton certainly judges others by his own peer group and this can be seen in his works where he considers others who lack education, skills or wealth to be inferior and something that can be eradicated, in the same way as those who are unfortunate enough to look like his idea of a criminal can also be eradicated.

Around the same time that Galton was creating his composite images, Alphonse Bertillon who was a French criminologist, was himself designing a new way of identifying criminals. In Paris at that time, the authorities were finding it difficult to identify repeat offenders of crime as there only way of knowing who a person was, was by their name and address, which could so easily be changed and as appearances could also change it made accurate identification almost impossible. Bertillon devised a system of recording measurements of convicted criminals this system of identification relies on 11 bodily measurements in addition to this, the colour of eyes, hair, and skin. He believed that the more measurements you took the less likely it would be that two people would match, however the problem with this system was that people of the same height are more likely to have the same arm, or leg length etc... the other side of this which correlates to Galton's work was the idea that from these measurements people could be identified as 'Born Criminals' because of their 'appearance' and fitting the stereotype of a criminal.

He first described this system in *Photography: With an Appendix on Anthropometrical Classification and Identification* (1890).

Bertillon went on to include a photograph 'Mug Shot' of the person, the style of which is still used today. It included a front facing and side facing image in much the same manner as Galton's, again this style just reinforces the stereotype of a who a criminal is, even in the below image of Bertillon's 2 year old son Francios Bertillon taken in 1893 as a 'mug shot' makes the child looks as though he's just committed a crime, the image is devoid of any niceties that you might expect a young child to be pictured with, such as toys or siblings and as such the overall result is a criminal look.



Fig 4. Francios Bertillon, 'Mug Shot'

An earlier example of similarly styled images is that of Lewis Payne Fig 5. who was one of the conspirators in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln he was executed a few weeks after this image was taken. Again these images have a similar feel to those by Galton in the framing and pose of the subject but what really strikes me with the central image is the youth and good looks of the subject that probably wouldn't be out of place in a modern magazine shoot, but its what else is included in the frame that tells the story, including his hands chained together tells the viewer that beyond the seemingly good looks is a criminal, the unkempt clothing and dark plain back ground also feed into the narrative that this person is a criminal.



Fig 5. Three photographs of Lewis Paine 26th April, 1865 – Alexander Gardner

As John Tagg says in his book *The Burden of Truth* (1988) where he asks, '*when did the use of photographs being used as evidence by the authorities become acceptable he states "Like the state, the camera is never neutral. The representations it produces are highly coded, and the power it wields is never its own. As a means of record, it arrives on the scene vested with a particular authority to arrest, picture and transform daily life; a power to see and record; a power of surveillance*' (Tagg *Burden of representation* 1993: 63-4)

I would say that it is certainly true of the images above, they could not be considered neutral and the photographer only wants you to see the darker side of the person captured.

Throughout the late 19th and 20th century and on to modern day the 'Mug Shot' of people arrested for crimes, whether convicted or not has largely stayed the same, a front facing image of a usually unsmiling person, a plain background and little else, Mostly the images are of people when at their worst looking untidy and tired, is it any wonder they tend to look like a criminal at that time.

In 2015 Canon Australia conducted a very simple experiment asking 6 photographers to capture a portrait of the same man, the only difference being they were each given a different description of who the man was, from a millionaire, a life saver to a convict. Whilst the subject was an actor who took on the role of each character, the photographer was free to capture them in anyway they wanted. The resulting images were vastly different. In Fig 5. 'The Lifesaver' he is portrayed in flattering light with an open and happy expression, he looks like a man you could be friends with, who is kind and caring, compare that to Fig 6. 'The Convict' photographed in dark lighting aimed at deliberately creating shadows and dark contrast, the face turned and twisted with a menacing look thus giving the viewer an overall feeling of unease, someone to avoid in a dark lane. Whilst the subject is only acting I feel the photographer plays into the stereotypical view of who or what a criminal is and how they look to the rest of the world.



Fig 5. 'The Lifesaver'



Fig 6. 'The Convict'

Throughout the history of recording images of those arrested or convicted of crimes the same format has been followed and perhaps this has led to an unconscious bias within society. *An unconscious bias is when discrimination and incorrect judgements occur due to stereotyping. These can occur automatically and without the person being aware of it. These types of biases are often so ingrained in culture and society that they go unnoticed by many people. This is most common in gender, age, and race stereotyping.*

(Unconscious Bias. (n.d.). In Alleydog.com's online glossary)

I would suggest that it is this unconscious bias within all of us that has led to mistaken identity and people who have convicted of a crime based solely on one person who points the finger at that individual. Take for example the case of Antony Stock, a man convicted of Robbery at a Tesco store in Leeds, January 1970. The only evidence provided by the prosecution was incriminating

comments he made to the police and one man who saw the culprit for a split second and then provided the police with an identikit of that person Fig 7. And in Fig 8. the mug shot of Antony Stock taken at the time of his arrest.



Fig 7. The identikit from the witness

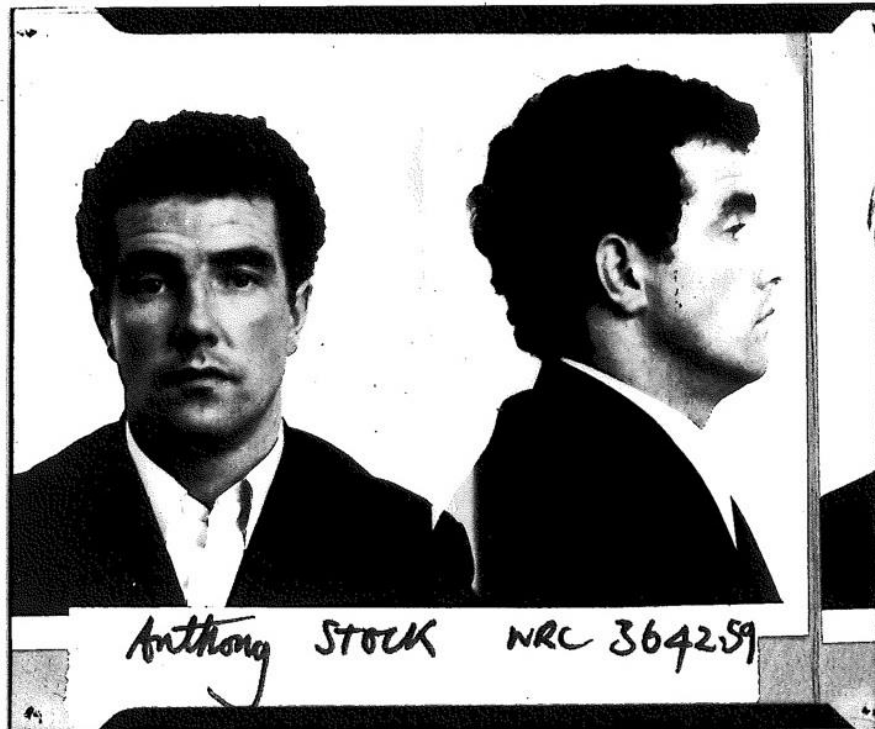


Fig 8. Anthony Stock's Mug Shot

Whilst there is a similarity between the images I've no doubt that same identikit image could have incriminated thousands of other men with similar features. Anthony Stock protested his innocence and refused to take part in an identification parade so the investigating officer decided to take the witness over 70 miles to where Stock lived and waited outside until they caught a glimpse of him, the witness immediately identified him as the same man he had seen on the night of the crime. I would suggest that the witness could so easily have been mistaken, having seen the culprit and locked eyes for a split second at night in the dark is he just following his unconscious bias and his

stereotypical view of a criminal, reinforced by the police officers taking him the Stock's home and who's only agenda is to convict him of this crime.

In John Berger's book *Ways of Seeing*, he states *"What the camera does, and what the eye can never do, is to fix the appearance of that event. The camera saves a set of appearances from the otherwise inevitable supersession of further appearances. It holds them unchanging. And before the invention of the camera nothing could do this, except in the mind's eye, the faculty of memory"* (Berger 1980: 14).

I feel it is important to keep in mind where identification of criminals came from, Lombroso, Galton and Bertillon's stereotyping based on their own ethnocentric ideology has potentially created an unconscious bias in all of us and can we really rely on the accuracy of what we see or are we just reverting to the idea of who we think looks like a criminal.

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