**Transcribed Presentations from ‘The Sights of Criminal Justice’ (University of Sheffield, 8 September 2021)**

**From Optograms to X-Rays: How to Conjure a Spectral Criminological Image (Dr Michael Fiddler)**

What I’m going to be talking about today is mainly based on a chapter in a forthcoming collection entitled Ghost Criminology. This is a collection that I’ve co-edited with Theo Kindynis of Goldsmiths and Travis Linneman of Kansas State University. The collection is an attempt to bring that kind of hauntological focus that kind of Gilly was mentioning there to the criminological and to explore the temporal dis-ease within the discipline, as well as a way of exploring crime and punishment related individuals and groups and cultural artefacts that have been rendered ghostly. So, I will unpack that term hauntology and say what I mean by temporal dis-ease in due course.

In terms of…the structure of the paper today, I will start by briefly examining the spectral turn that has occurred within the discipline already, set out what we hope to achieve with a ghost criminology, then look at the ways in which the spectral has always and already haunted the criminological imagination and I will do that by exploring some 19th century criminological visual systems - namely Sir Francis Galton’s composite portrait, as well as optograms. In the second half, I will draw upon Walter Benjamin’s idea of a dialectical image in order to conjure a spirit to explore harms that are either no longer or not yet, but whose effects are still felt. So, I will be doing that as a way of capturing the impact of slow violence and perhaps a little bit of solastalgia as well. Don’t worry that’s another term that I am going to come back to.

So, my main focus today is to explore ideas relating to spectrality, invisibility, time and harm. I will tie threads between techniques of capturing imagery, the social imagination and social harms, but before we get to that and before we proceed to those 19th century visual systems I mentioned, it is important to examine that spectral turn that’s occurred within the discipline.

So, in recent years, there have been an increasing number of pieces used or using the language of spectrality to explore the ways in which violence lingers or sits in places and how state power through mastery of the invisible both emboldens and disowns its own violence. In this regard, criminology is catching up with the spectral turns that have already occurred within other disciplines. I should probably be clear at the front. When I, and these authors, that I am talking about, when we refer to ghosts and spectrality, we are not professing a belief in the ‘supernatural’, or those elements of the spectral perhaps familiar from supernatural fiction although time allowing we might unpack that a little bit more in the q and a later; rather when I’m using the language of spectrality, what I’m using it to do is to unpack a sense of time that is experienced as being out of joint. So, to give some kind of examples of that kind of work Catherine Biber has written about the afterlives of criminal evidence. These evidentiary archives are haunted by what they contain as well as what they exclude. As Derrida put it, ‘history never effaces what it buries. It always keeps within it the secret of kept secrets’. My co-editor on the collection, Thea Kindynis has written about graffiti ghosts. These throw-ups are years or decades old. Written and over-written, palimpsest-like. These are cultural architects that hover between presence and absence and my other co-editor Travis Linneman has unpacked how Truman Capote depicted here in his book, In Cold Blood, perpetually conjures the spectres of true crime - the murderous drifter, the helpless victim - and ties them into the effective and material landscape. He tracks how violence haunts these everyday geographies. Then in my own work, I’ve looked or drawn upon Abraham and Torok’s psychoanalytical reading of the phantom as an incorporation of trauma and Esther Rashkin’s idea of ‘texts in distress’ to explore the haunting of space - of a space in distress. So, I explored the ways in which the site specific art work - Die Familie Schneider back in 2004 in London’s East End - which occurred in the two terrace houses that you can see on the left-hand side of the screen there, how they can be read as a crypt containing a phantom that repeated the traumas that had occurred in the area. So be it the archive, the throw-up, the spectral trace or a space-in-distress, what brings these together are their temporarily resonating revenants and their play with presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, and in discussing this with my co-editors Travis and Theo, we found ourselves coalescing around the language of the spectral and this has led us perhaps inevitably to Derrida’s notion of hauntology. So, when Derrida talks about hauntology, it is a pun. It is a pun on ontology. If ontology is concerned with being and presence, hauntology disrupts those categories, denoting how presence, absence, life, death, past, present and future exists simultaneously. As such, the ghost operates within the gap between states - disrupts the familiar. It destabilises any, as Buse and Stott put it ‘neat compartmentalisation of the past as a secure and fixed entity or the future as an unchartered territory’, so a neat way of perhaps of kind of encapsulating that comes from the work of Mark Fisher. He saw hauntology or he distilled it down to an exploration of phenomena that are either ‘no longer’ or ‘not yet’, but which remain or are already effective. The former might be the traumatic compulsion to repeat something of the past. The latter an anticipation of some future act that shapes current behaviour. That first element – capturing the compulsion to repeat - that’s a phenomenon that I explored by tracing the phantom of trauma in the art piece in London’s East End. The second, within the broader framework of Fisher’s work is that which is the ghost as Blanco and Peeran put it – as a figure of ‘clarification with specifically ethical and political potential’. The ghost in this framework provides a productive opening of meaning. So, when I mentioned time as being experienced as out of joint, it’s this notion of the no longer or the not yet but which is either still or which is already effective to which I am referring. It gives the sense of the living present as scarcely being as solid as it claims to be. Wendy Brown makes the point that ‘we inherit not what really happened to the dead but what lives on from the happening’. This suggests that we are indebted to what has come before or there is something to be inherited. Also, what lives on alludes to an ongoing persistence of ideas or events from the past. To be haunted then suggests a lack of resolution, a promise of future action, an indebtedness or relatedly a ghostly inheritance. This too is the force that casts time out of joint.

So, by referring to our project as ghost criminology, it reflects our interests in those cultural forces that reveal our wavering present, as well as those that hover between presence and absence and to which we owe a debt or are owed an inheritance. Ghost criminology has then the ghost and the ghosted as its conceptual target. There are two aspects to this. We look at how certain groups, individuals, cultural artifacts, spaces have been rendered ghostly. We explore how they have been subjected to structural violences and how the harms that they have suffered have been obscured or redacted, as well as how those harms are experienced as out of joint - how they return or presage future harm. We are drawn then towards Avery Gordon’s framing of haunting as revealing that which has been repressed, as well as unresolved social violences. For my contribution to the ghost criminology collection. I wanted to examine these ideas of presence, absence, debt, inheritance, visibility and invisibility and how they might coalesce to capture the unseen, the out of joint effects of particular crime and social harm. So, I wanted to look back initially to visual systems that touched upon the invisible and the criminological imagination and for this I am going to talk about the optogram, spirit photography and, as I will talk about in a minute, nuclear visuality.

So first off let’s look at the portraiture produced by Sir Francis Galton. Galton who’s Charles Darwin’s cousin was something of a polymath. He is now perhaps mostly associated with the eugenics movement. He utilised the techniques of composite portraiture. Hopefully I can illustrate that here - there we go – in order to photographically capture the criminal type. He was using the same sort of multiple exposure techniques as Victorian era spirt photographers – seen here capturing Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and someone, something else. Galton managed to call forth…a purely optical accretion or an empirically non-existent criminal face. These were portraits of an imagined other and when it was replicated in France by Arthur Batut, he referred to his images as ‘images of the invisible’. So, in attempting to generate this image of the criminal type, Galton literally effaced those whose images constituted the collected portrait - pushing them into eligibility, hiding and occluding the individual. Slightly earlier, the optogram captured a different aspect of crime. With a nod to Ed Poe’s, The Tell-Tale Heart, Campion Vincent refers to the optogram as the ‘tale-tale eye’. Simply put the optogram was an idea espoused first in 19th century newspaper reports and fiction and only latterly brought under forensic analysis, that the retina like a photographic plate could capture an image. Specifically, it was claimed that the interior of the eye could contain an image of the last thing an individual had seen. For example, the physiologists’ Boll and Kuhne explored these ‘natural photographs’ and claimed to have captured the dying vision of rabbits and these are – what you can see on the screen at the moment – are the dying visions of those very rabbits. Potentially you could see in the top right-hand corner, the lattice work of a…window frame rather. The lead to the ghoulish idea that an examination of the retina of the murder victim could reveal the identity of that individual’s killer. So akin to a beating heart beneath the floor boards, evidence could reside hidden away within the optical equipment that had captured it. Decades after the dismissal of Kuhne’s findings, the optogram was sufficiently burnt into the social imagery that the general public and mass media continued to press for the examination of the retinas murder victims. There was a residual appeal to this Gothicised ideal and the potential for a hidden mystery to be revealed. So, Galton’s composites saw the camera and photographic plate act as a medium to call up the criminal other from the social imagery. The optigram in its seemingly diabolical act of image creation saw the eye itself become a medium, transmitting information from beyond the grave to help the living and bring closure to the dead. We see the interplay of presence and absence, imagination and temporal disruption likewise coming together in Walter Benjamin’s notion of the dialectical image. The early 20th century cultural critique, philosopher saw photography, in Smith and Sliwinski’s expression, as a ‘key medium for the circulation of a culture’s unconscious desires, fears and structures of defence’. Benjamin suggested that a means to reveal these structures could be found in the stereoscope. So, this is where I pop my video back on because I’ve got a bit of show and tell. I’ve got an old view master here, so the way in which this works is you get shown two very slightly different images and they are subtly offset from one another and when they are combined in individual’s visual system, it produces the illusion of three dimensions – or at least the illusion of kind of like plains of depth… the image that is perceived both with the stereoscope and the view master is a virtual one. It exists solely within the viewers’ perceptual system. The resulting image with the suggestion of depth has no materiality of its own.

Benjamin expanded on this to develop the notion of the dialectical image. Just has the stereoscope produces the virtual from the doubled, so the dialectical image is derived from a juxtaposition of texts. To be more precise, a fragment or image of the past could be brought together with an artifact or image of the viewer’s present to produce the dialectical image. As the stereoscope produced the perception of depth, the dialectical image would reveal the depths of historical shadows. This pulls the what has been and the now together in a flash and this flash produces the dialectical image or in Benjamin’s term the constellation. This in Conty’s phrasing this would see ‘fragments of the past surge into the present as the new’.

The shock of the constellation forming is intended to wake the viewer from the dream state into which they had sunk. In so doing, they could develop a new form of critical memory. A new conception of the images of historical time. All at the same time disrupting their sense of time being continuous and chronological. The vision would then push to one side the gossamer thin screen of the social phantasmagoric that swirled around the viewer to reveal that which lay beneath. The mechanisms of capitalism obscured would be rendered bare, but there must first be the imaginative interaction between the reader and text to achieve this. So, what I want to do is I want to reframe the dialectical image. There are certain resonances between Benjamin’s virtual dialectical image and Derrida’s idea of the specter and I want to harness its capacity to examine time out of joint. Simply put I want to use it as a medium to conjure the specter. In short, I see hauntological qualities to this dialectical image. I want to capture the no longer and the not yet.

So, my target for this conjuring are environmental crimes and harms. Those phenomena eliciting a sense of solastalgia. That’s Albrecht’s term that takes the words solace and algos, to grieve pain, to evoke the sense of existential distress we experience when trying to take comfort in a place that has been despoiled. In short, and this is from the Handbook of Climate Society, ‘it’s the sense of desolation people feel, consciously or unconsciously, when their home or land has been lost’. We might certainly experience this solastalgia when we saw the fires that caused across California turning the skies above San Francisco an other-worldly orange or where Australia’s black summer scorched the earth or where recent floods across Western Germany and New York have caused untold damaged. In these instances, we have been visited by the ghosts of the anthropocene. The anthropocene referring to that period of geological time that captures when humans have impacted upon the planet’s climate and ecosystems. These are visions of the or perhaps generously a possible future. In Gan et al’s phrasing, ‘anthropogenic landscapes are haunted by imagined futures’. When ecological traumas are inflicted, their effects are experienced out of joint. They transcend time. These ghosts of the anthropocene also demand a sort of ethical and liberatory response that Blanco and Peeran were referring to and which I mentioned earlier. We have certainly spoken thus far about repaying debts to the past, well we are already incurring debts to the future. So, we are at a point charged with both past and future and possibility. We can certainly feel the weight of the not yet.

A valuable framework to further develop this can be derived from Nixon’s notion of slow violence. This speaks to an obscured violence of the longue durée. Nixon refers to slow violence as an alternative to phenomena that are sudden, spectacular and spatially limited. Rather a slow violence can capture the impact of the events that slowly accrete - their boarders spreading and indeterminate, their effects prolonged. The spacial dispersal of both actors and catalysts for slow violence, the destructive and harmful effects may not be felt for generations and as Davis puts it, it can be ‘difficult to epidemiologically and geographically locate blame’. It follows then that a major challenge is representational. How do we devise resting stories, images, symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects. In order to make visual the effects of slow violence, we must radically shift our systems of representation to account for these prolonged temporal periods and as Steve Pile puts it ‘the spectral requires a particular type of seeing’.

Likewise, the body itself, is a marker of forces that transcend and expands beyond human time scales. With reference to the radiological damage following the Chernobyl accident in 1986, Nixon describes the different timelines of mutation – ‘international, intranational, intragenerational’ as the radiation plume corrupted bodily integrity and traversed national borders. It is within the interiority in Derrida’s notion of the invisible that the accretion of these harms accrued. How then to capture that what has been let die across the longue durée? Davis calls for ‘slow observations’ to capture the experiences of those living within ecological death worlds. It requires a double gaze to determine the harms experienced and being done and in this final section, I will make use of Benjamin’s dialectical image as a basis to capture or try to make this kind of slow observation and in terms of ecological harms, I am going to focus on the radiological and for this, I am going to play a very short video which unfortunately I don’t think the signs have seen beforehand, I didn’t send it within time, but just to describe it - it is footage taken of Chernobyl. If you keep looking at the left-hand side of the screen, you will see some kind of white flashes on the footage. That’s the key thing that I want you to focus on here, so the white flashes on this camera film. So, the reason why I’ve chosen to look at the radiological is that there is this curious interplay between photography and radiation. I mean of course, light radiation is the means by which we see and how photographs can be taken depending upon wavelength, radiation both occludes and exposes, as I will discuss shortly X-rays penetrate tissue revealing Derrida’s invisible interior. Still photography and film footage taken at the sites of nuclear accidents depict bright comet-like trails or milky clouding of the sort which we just saw on the screen. If Galton’s composites were effacing, film damaged by radiation reveals cesium, plutonium and uranium self-portraits. Those trails hint at penetrations of the body of the camera operator as well. Again, to quote Nixon, ‘radiological violence is driven inward, somatised into cellular dramas of mutation that, particularly in the bodies of the poor, remain largely unobserved, undiagnosed, untreated’. Likewise, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki unleased a monstrous atomic visibility. Victims of the blasts became photographic effects. The body itself became a photographic plate as patterns of clothing seared onto flesh. They were photograms. Images formed by the direct exposure of objects on photographic surfaces. The body was subjected to a catastrophic light and in some instances, interiority and exteriority fused into pure surface. Shadows scorched upon walls and stairs, so the two images that I am going to conjure my Derridean spectre, by way of Benjamin’s dialectical image relate to these varied aspects of the radiological. Let’s first look at Hand mit Ringen.

William Roentgen discovered X-rays whilst working in the laboratory at his university in Bavaria in November 1895 and this on the screen at the moment is the first medical X-ray. Roentgen captured the image of his wife’s Bertha’s hand. So, the image itself provides a close up of Bertha’s left hand or rather it depicts the bones of her left hand. In sepia tones, the spindly metacarpals and proximal phalanges of her four fingers seem to coalesce from a milky fog. The fingers of the hand have been degloved, the flesh of the palm melted away under the insistent penetration of the X-ray. Upon seeing the image, Bertha is reported to have said, that it brought ‘a vague premonition of death’. Well yeah, I can completely understand. It allows us a glimpse of the invisible. What Derrida called, that which is ‘kept secret while remaining within what one can call exteriority’. If we think about the body contains organs that may become visible through accident or surgery, or which are ordinarily hidden behind an invisible exterior. If we gain access to that invisible then something has gone awry. Also, has Lippit puts it by capturing single moments in time, all photographs suggest future anniversaries and future absences. We are already haunted by this future which brings our death. Our disappearance is already here. So that’s Hand mit Ringen.

Ok second image and Gilly kind of mentioned this earlier and I said it was going to be my point of departure, it is going to be my point of conclusion, sorry. This is art work entitled Trinity Cube and as Gilly mentioned it can be found in the Fukushima exclusion zone. You will recall back in March 2011 that an earth quake forced the automatic shutdown of the active reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power point. The earthquake itself caused a 15-metre tsunami that then disabled the plants emergency power supply this led to the cause of three of the reactors subsequently melting down. Radioactive material was vented into the atmosphere and surrounding sea water in order to reduce gas pressure. As with Chernobyl, it was classified as a level 7 major accident on the international nuclear and radiological events scale. An evacuation took place and as of a few years ago, some 50,000 people had not been allowed to return to their homes. Paglen’s work seen here was part of a site-specific exhibition entitled ‘Don’t follow the wind’. The title was taken from the advice given to those fleeing the area in the immediate aftermath the disaster. The show something of a misnomer will not be seen until the exclusion zone has lifted. The work itself consists of a small glass cube measuring 20cm across each of its sides. It contains swirls of aquamarine within greys and blacks. We see trapped air bubbles and floating impurities. It is seemingly lambent within an unseen interior light. Taking a step back we see a room within which the cube sits. There is a window high in the wall. The floor is covered in a rust-coloured dust. Water appears to have seeped in between the large rectangles on the walls. The room looks diseased. We pre-emptively wheeze when we see it. It feels as though we breath in the dust and the mould and the what else? We take them all into the body - into the invisible. What it this exposure doing to the viewer?

The cube itself was made from irradiated glass collected from the site with a core of trinitite. Trinitite is the oceanic green man-made mineral that was formed by the melting of the sand at the detonation of trinity. The first nuclear bomb tested in New Mexico. Both of these images – Trinity Cube and Hand mit Ringen can be already be considered hauntological. They invoke the invisible and the absence presence, as well as sense of repetitious cycles of trauma, as time is experienced out of joint, but let’s take this step further and conjure that…spectral image that I’ve been referring to. By focusing upon the imaginary, I see this dialectical image as generating the spectralised constellation of what lives on from the happening and provides glimpses of visions from the future. So, given the spectral traces within the two separate images, what is the virtual image that is produced when we combine them? By doing this, I am also in debt to Donna Haraway’s call for ‘speculative fabulation in the scholarly mode’. In short, in trying to capture something of the social imagery it perhaps pays to think imaginatively. Remember too that Benjamin emphasised the imaginative interaction necessary between the reader and text when producing the dialectical image. So, let’s first flatten the X-ray of Bertha Rontgen’s hand onto Trevor’s cube. Let the invisible bones coalesce with the unseen art display. The two images merge and the flash occurs and perhaps we might see the constellation beginning to materialise. We can focus first on that element which is no longer but which lives on in the compulsion to repeat. Hand mit Ringen pre-echo’s the ulcerations, the excarnations, and eventual amputation of the digits and hands of those early X-ray operators. Hands withered over the decades following prolonged exposure to materials that were known to cause biological decay. This was an optogram made real. The killer was contained in the body all along and if Galton’s composites erased difference, this constellation draws out the haunted and haunting connections across time, so we begin to see the repetitions, the silences, the cloaks, the corruptions of the bodies of those operators folding itself first around Chernobyl and later Fukushima. This was the secrets of kept secrets, fashioned by certain bureaucratic creativity. It was the social production of ignorance around these accidents, Paglen’s ruined objects carries within it the acts of silencing that surrounded the disaster of Fukushima, as well as Chernobyl and other such accidents that proceeded it. To paraphrase Brown ‘what lives on from the happening of these events can reveal to us the effects beneath the black marks of redaction’. What then of the visions of the future, Hand mit Ringen provides us with a shiver of the sense of our own mortality. Juxtaposing it with the trinity cube projects that premonition of death and populations let die into the longue durée, and what I mean by this is the contamination within and surrounding the Trinity Cube - the dangerous of the hostile substance, to paraphrase Beck, will continue. It extends into the future. It suggests future anniversaries where the hazard will endure. The sense of an obscured threat can mingle with time out of joint is well summarised by Bloom’s description of a ‘present that is troubled by a traumatic past in a dreaded future’. Hand mit Ringen and Trinity Cube invoke failed utopian futures. They are visions from the future and in Gan et al’s phrasing ‘anthropogenic landscapes are haunted by imagined futures’. These traumas are out of joint. They transcend time. Flesh is ruined, land is poisoned; all for dreamworlds of progress that are built upon ashes of colonised peoples, decimated species and a corrupted atmosphere. The ghosts of the anthropocene haunt a future that is yet to come. Theirs is the double death - both of fatalities in the present proceeding ongoing, as well as future death. They birth ghosts of an extinguished future. So, owing a debt to both Benjamin and Derrida, I see this technique as a means to look through images and in so doing conjure a specter that regards us from the past and haunts our future. To echo Haraway once again, ‘it matters what descriptions describe the descriptions’. This is a counter visual that uses images imaging images and if you would like to learn perhaps a little bit more about this, here’s the book and to use the terminology that I’ve used so far - it is not yet, although it has acted as an anticipator of future actions. That’s a long-winded way of saying it comes out in January. Thank you very much for your time. Thank you all for listening. And yeah, I’ll hand back over to Gilly.

**News, Crime and Culture 1991-2021: ‘news is our guidance, our conscience and our redemption; sometimes familiarity should breed contempt or at least criticism’ (Dr Maggie Wykes)**

A few years ago, I was asked to write a new edition of News, Crime and Culture which I published in 2001. That book was written about crime news during the Thatcher years. It wasn’t systematic and it was only when I was developing teaching, media and journalism that I began to look at material I had collected since I did a first degree in the 1980s. I was a very late starter. I didn’t get a degree until I was 37 and I collected material really from the beginning of 1980.

The next slide please. You can go to the next one actually because Gilly has kindly done that. That’s lovely, thank you.

This is an image…a photograph taken in Brixton in 1981 after a police operation dubbed…’hundreds of police sent into Brixton to stop and search in an effort to end street crime’. It followed similar raids in Bristol and it pre-empted other raids in Birmingham and later. The Financial Times reported the events as an ‘epidemic of some alien disease’.

Next slide please.

When Handsworth erupted four years later, the term copy cat crept into reporting, relating the new events in Birmingham to the previous events in Brixton and Bristol. But also, to increasing racial, inter-racial friction in South Africa. It was as if that violence was somehow being reported as self-perpetuating. The Sun headline takes account of Handsworth with the headline ‘barbarians’ and that was quite typical of the coverage. The subheadings included ‘the carnival of death’ and the ‘blitz of Handsworth’ and as you can see on the screen there, the war analogy was every evident.

The Sun also suggested that in no time sociologists would be picking among the debris of Handsworth for evidence of social protest. ‘They will be eager to find the signs of resentment over deprivation and unemployment’. ‘The looting of shops’, wrote The Sun, ‘is born of greed, not social despair’, so effectively the news coverage turned effectively political protests into crime. The images are anchored by very overtly ideological texts.

If we go to the next slide. At the same period during the miners’ strike that ideology was very clear in the representations of events across the country. The news was so shaped by news values it barely addressed the underlying grievances of the miners, civil liberties issues associated with heavy handed law and order, or the implications or validity of long-term pit closure. Industrial action was effectively repackaged as crime or insurrection. Jones wrote in 1991 ‘that the media constructed the event as a morality play between the forces of good and evil and cast the strikers and their leaders as beyond the pale of legitimate politics and civilised society’. Reports consistently, persistently placed pickets and Arthur Scargill in the agent role, directing readers to interpret them as responsible for the ensuing action. That was nearly always reported as violence against the police. Very little showed what happened on the streets, and this was why I chose this particular picture because it is a very rare one showing the police calvary effectively charging a smallish group of pickets. The police were extraordinary heavy handed. During the miners’ strike, the collusion of interests between the law, the government and news practices distorted the long existing cultural ideology of the miners, their class and their communities - allowing for a very handed use of the law to control the strike and significant mobilisation of police around the country. The Conservative years moved the class goal posts. They directed the middle classes towards popular culture with the potential, of course, for marketing and money making there and they reconstructed the meanings of realities of working-class lives to parallel and to promote the pursuance of middle-class values and interests. In Thatcher’s terms, ‘she had created harmony where there had been discord’.

My second research post was in the closing communities near Sheffield in 1988 looking at how they were coping post-strike. They weren’t, they aren’t and there are no more deep mines left in this country and curiously my first research post has been to evaluate an IBN computer laboratory at Sheffield Hallam University to see if it might be useful for higher education to bring computing into the university. I concluded in my report that it would be useful.

The images of inner-city disorder and industrial action prompted much work within criminology and in other disciplines. Visually what was shown was race war and class war and it was shown in such a way that it enabled a law-and-order response but something else was also shown in many of these images. There were no disorderly women represented in these images nor women amongst the ranks of the police. There was no account of the one characteristic either that linked those protesting and policing the inner cities and coal communities. These were all men.

Next slide please.

Those visuals and the textual underpinnings really matter. The repetition in the news, the use of agency, the perspectives that were offered to the public repeated over and over again with no mention of gender whatsoever. This matters because the consistent association of a word shape to an item, act or experience welds arbitrarily assigned forms to meanings, apparently immutably. Stewart Hall likens this confusion of form and meaning as the ‘same’ as our ready acceptance of the photograph as a ‘meta-message… this really happened and this photograph is proof’. The photograph belies the selecting, transforming and reproducing and offers only the apparent evidence of an event. The history of the event, the process of production are superseded by actuality and immediacy. The apparent reality of the news photo is the visual equivalent of the apparent meaning of language. Once it is possible to see that only the form of language is fixed, use determines the accent or preferred meaning and it follows that normally the preferred or conventional meaning will concur with the point of view of those who control the most pervasive means of language use. Dominance will by convention dominate, meaning interpretations of the word form, and that was very evident in those reports of public disorder. This isn’t truth. It is interpretation and construction. The 1980s and in fact the late 70s saw a great deal of work on race issues in the news and class as well. Criminology was very much in its Marxist phase. The turn to cultural criminology had begun … but was relatively minimal, but two things coalesced for me. An increasing interest in media presentation, as I came to the end of my first degree, particularly of gender because it seemed to me to be missing and I also came across the work of Carol Smart and became very interested in the lack of attention to women’s place in crime. Both those areas of interest were very much driven by feminist thinking. I began to think about gendered representation. I knew John Burgess brilliant 1972 work, ‘Ways of Seeing’, that the BBC produced programmes for and I think it’s still available on YouTube. He wrote that ‘in pre-modern art the painters, spectators and owners were usually men and the persons treated as objects to paint usually women’. This unequal relationship is so deeply imbedded in our culture, that I would argue that even 50 years from when he wrote this, it still structures the consciousness of many women. They survey like men their own femininity. That matters because language shapes our sense of self, as well as our sense of the world around us.

The next slide please.

I started to collect news coverage in my second undergraduate year. Just as structural linguistics is giving away to a more critical approach to discourse that viewed language as not fixed to forms but linked to forms by convention. Work on representation was often focused on women or the lack of a broad range of images of femininity and that was very much impacted by feminist scholarship. Importantly, John Berger had argued and showed how women are depicted in quite a different way from men. Not because the feminine is different from the masculine – but because the ideal spectator is assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him. Two things struck me in thinking about a PhD as my degree came to an end. Why were there no women in these images of public disorder? And what happens when women are involved with crime to the extent that the news do represent them because crime sells papers. It’s a very important aspect of sales. Carol Smart did the MA in Socio-Legal Studies at the University of Sheffield and published her dissertation as Women, Crime and Criminology in 1976. To criticise a criminology that she argued failed to acknowledge its positivistic and paternalistic past. She wanted to understand women’s place in crime and argued that in criminology - next slide please – ‘the deviant, the criminal or the actor is always male; it is always his rationality, his motivation, his alienation and his victim. Selection of the male pronounce’, she wrote, ‘may be said to be inclusive of the female she wrote but in reality, it is not, it merely excludes women and makes them invisible’.

Her point was that women were symbolically annihilated by such pronouns and however different the crime configuration was for women it deserved an account. The fact that the early criminology Smart was criticising was written largely by men, on the subject of men for an audience of men no more focused on men than it did on women, as is evident from the voluminous history of work on physique, mental health, race, youth, class as criminal variables, with no mention of gender. Criminology was blind to the masculinity at the heart of its discipline, at the source of its subject and as the basis of meaning. That lack of acknowledgment of men at the heart of social and cultural power meant men were, and I would argue still often are, metaphorically inextricable and, therefore, unaccountable. Yet in the following years some began to look at masculinity.

Next slide please.

Tony Jefferson was one of the earliest in 92, he wrote ‘most crimes remain unimaginable without the presence of men’ and Steve Hall in 2002 said that ‘the claim that men commit most acts of physical violence is possibly the nearest that criminology has come to producing an indisputable fact’. Yet so much news still does everything but engage with this despite the obvious presence of men in more recent public disorder and of course in private violence. There is no acknowledgement of their presence in the news, and there has been very little acknowledgement in criminology. Tony was an exception, so was Richard Collier and there has been a few others – Tony Ellis, more recently, but most work on masculinity was and still is in other disciplines.

Men are most likely to be victims of men’s violence except in the home where feminists working with women victims have been exposing levels of male violence since the 70s. Given the levels of violence directed at women in their most personal and intimate relationships what surely is surprising is how few respond with like violence. It’s rare but they do and I knew then that I had my PhD topic….I decided to compare cases of intimate partner killing. I also decided to focus on the news. News is a source of knowledge about crime and also about gender and perhaps the most prolific source, particularly nowadays where we have 24/7 information, but also I had a very practical reason for focusing on the news. The group I was interested in were a truly hard to reach group as 50% of them were dead.

Next slide please.

Roger Fowler writing in 1991 and looking in particularly at the news coverage of a range of different events identified the adoption of a conflict paradigm in the news to ‘segregate and marginalise threatening and undesirable elements’. Concurrent with that conflict paradigm around race and class I’ve already mentioned was identifiably at work elsewhere. That conflict paradigm was evident in a kind of backlash to second wave feminism where conservative, socio political history appears to have included a backlash which Faludi argued ‘was not a response to any genuine realisation of women’s equality but a pre-emptive strike that stops women long before they reach the finishing line’. I think that gender conflict remains alive and well 30 years later.

Next slide please.

The evidence of it in the 1980s and early 90s were the frequency with which films – very popular films – depicted violent women, usually heterosexual, with their violence directed against male suitors, lovers or spouses, in the films like ‘Fatal Attraction’, ‘Body of Evidence’, ‘Dirty Weekend’ and ‘Black Widow’. The reality as we all know is that women are most often at risk, at home, from men they know and in ‘real’ life women are rarely violent. This sort of goes against the reality of women’s experiences…in intimate relationships. Feminist criminologists commented that representation of women in the media could be contributory to the levels of violence against women that they were beginning to identify. The feminist criminological focus was very much on women particularly as victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence. As accounts of public disorder, the men behind that violence were rarely acknowledged in the news at all, but they were described as ‘beasts’, ‘deranged’ or ‘evil’. Most commonly as Cinthia Carter wrote ‘domestic abuse barely got any coverage in the news at all’. Violence against women can be construed as breaking the law but also breaking the sanctuary of heterosexual relations of the norm of the family. Those relations are essential to patriarchal power. The way such violence is represented to the vast majority of us who never experience it or witness it in reality matters because the stories that are used tell stories about gender in a very covert way, where they tell us stories about violence much more overtly.

The next slide.

The stories matter because ‘how social groups are treated in cultural representation is part and parcel of how they are treated in life. Poverty, harassment, self-hate and discrimination are shored up and instituted by representation. How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we are see them; such seeing comes from representation’ and that was written in 93 by Richard Dyer, the film Academic. So, I decided to look at representations of extreme intimate violence. I identified 6 domestic murder cases, 3 male killers and 3 females and I was interested in how journalists managed that ideological conflict of the destruction of the heteronormative model of the male female relationship. The more I analysed the more concerned I became about the implications of gendered discourse for justice, for violence against women and girls, for equity, but also for self-worth and subjectivity.

I’ll use just one case from my PhD to illustrate the type of stories that were told.

Next slide please.

This was a case from 1991 and the picture of murdered Oxford student Rachel McLean featured in many newspapers during the search for her and during the trial of her killer boyfriend, John Tanner. She was 19. The press reports in April 91 immediately assumed that the killer was a dangerous stranger and we still very often have that assumption in crime stories now involving what is really intimate violence. The police also succumbed to this theory. It took them over a week to find Rachel’s body beneath the floor of her bedroom. In December 1991, her boyfriend John Tanner was sentenced to life for murder. The press made much of Tanner and McLean’s passionate love affair with headlines completely out of order headlines like ‘fatal obsession’ reflecting that film Fatal Attraction, which featured a murderous woman.

There were persistent references to it being a crime passionnel. Rachel’s infidelity was discussed even though that was entirely a lie to support John Tanners plea of provocation. Rachel was depicted as glamourous, sexual and alluring. Interestingly that image is very similar to some of the classic oil paintings that John Burgess discusses in Ways of Seeing. Many articles just posed the image of Rachel with ones of John Tanner and this is just typical. The Sun offered a picture of him clutching a teddy next to the one of Rachel wearing that lovely dress. Less was written on his ability to sleep next to her body, write to the woman he killed, take part in a reconstruction and try and cover his tracks and hide his previous history of stalking. He was described as a classics student, there were details about his idyllic family. The fact he was one of New Zealand’s most gifted boys. He had a brilliant mind. Has been left shattered and lonely. His defence council described…it as no run of the mill humdrum tale. It was a love story a passionate relationship. So special it seems impossible for journalists to question how middle class, educated heterosexual white man with all the associated privileges might not only kill but be arrogant enough to blame his victim. He served 12 years in prison, is now free and living back in New Zealand. Most murdered women are killed by partners or ex-partners. About 2 each week in England and Wales but still the news consistently looks for the dangerous stranger. In all of my 6 cases the focus was on the feminine and on the failings of femininity. Whether preparators or victims it was the women who were held to account. Not because they had broken the law but because they had transgressed feminine norms. I was interested in agency and labelling and much of my analysis was quite structural.

You can go to the next slide.

I looked at the labels used for women and the gendered discourses of sexuality, social life and psychology. 37% of those used for women in press accounts whether they were perpetrators or victims were negative compared to 15.7% of labels used for men. 44.3% of the lexes in the place of casual agents in news about intimate killings were male. 55.7 were female. So even the counting of texts seems to suggest blame being directed towards women more often than men, even though my cases included 3 women victims and 2 of the women who did turn and kill their abusers had been battered for many years.

Lindsay Segal wrote in 1990 that ‘women are write to see are society as riddled as cultural expression of contempt for them’. Cases like these seemed to criminalise the perpetrators both men and women for breaking the law but then both blame women perpetrators and victims for going against the grain of normal femininity.

The next slide please.

The next cases I wrote about was the West case in 1994. Fred committed suicide in prison. He and Rose had killed 12 young women. Rose stood trial alone and she was judged as guilty in the press before the verdicts came in. The Sun headlined that ‘Fred had claimed he was only the undertaker and when Rose was pregnant her lesbian tendencies were at their strongest and he had to go and get her a girl’. Even the Wests’ female victims were described in hugely negative terms as if they sort had deserved what they had got – runaways, illegitimate, lesbians, fostered, hitchhikers. Fred was barely described at all – nor were the male punters who bought sex at Cromwell Street. The Sunday Mirror wrote that ‘Fred was one of the best-looking boys in town and he had a motorbike accident and a fall through from a fire escape. The family thought he was brain damaged’. Just in case we missed the message that women are to blame for men’s sexual violence, The Sun tells us he was introduced to sex by his mother. The story is one of depraved femininity and a damaged man who loved his wife enough to condone her passions. Less is said about the fact that he killed twice before they met, collected pornography, and picked Rose up when she was 15 and he was 28.

Next slide please.

This was the story of two 10-year-old girls who disappeared in 2002. Again, the assumption was that it was a dangerous stranger…This was beginning of the reference of the bogey man of our age – the online paedophile. Ian Huntley was convicted of the murders. The motive was thought to be sexual. He knew them and worked at their school. All of the press focused heavily on his partner Maxine Carr who had given him a fake alibi because she genuinely believed that he hadn’t killed them. She had been 100 miles away in Grimsby. This all came out and the press had a field day demonising her as snivelling and selfish. She had to have a new identify on release because of fears that the public would track her down and assault her. What she was perceived to be doing wrong was that she was not at Huntley’s side taming his sexuality at 6.30 on that Sunday evening and, therefore, she was responsible for the girl’s murder.

With the Philpot case we have another discourse apart from masculinity focus and here it was class. Mick Philpott who had 17 children by 2 women. One of his women partners left with her children and he plotted an arson attack on his own home. The plan was to rescue his remaining children and, therefore, as a hero win back his partner who had left and gain back all the benefits that had gone with her. No account of masculinity, just close linking between the benefits claimants and violence with headlines like ‘evil born out of welfare dependency’ and this is evident here in the Daily Mail account.

Next slide please.

Again, the public focus is very much on his wife, Mairead, who was part of the plot. When it was announced she was appealing her 17-year sentence, you can see the comments posted online in the Daily Mail. All of the focus was on her as a completely failed mother – again the characteristic of femininity failing to support her children. There is little about Philpot’s prison sentence for previous violence against a woman and little discussion of him at all.

In June 2021, the Sun discovered that she had been released from prison and come out with the headline, ‘monster mum to move into taxpayer funded flat’.

Next slide please.

Now preparators are hidden by new media but also by myths about tech-determinism, panics about effects and stereotypical ideas about female sexuality. Increasingly crimes are being filmed and posted on social media. The story I have put up there comes from Florida. Hundreds of women witnessed the attacks on these young women and nobody did anything about it. It was uploaded onto a website and it was seen by nearly 14,000 people before being withdrawn, so you are getting a secondary victimisation in space with no victim anonymity and representations eternally present and this is particularly evident in cases of alleged rape where the filming of those kinds of assaults is regularly being uploaded and it happens globally. Changing the law seems to have made very little difference in this country or indeed in South Africa who looked at our 2003 law and changed it in 2007 but are still struggling with very high levels of violence.

Next slide please.

So, the evidence really is that all the criminology, victimology, feminism, law reform have changed very little. Domestic and intimate partner violence causes more deaths and much higher economic costs than homicide or civil wars and the gross domestic cost globally is about 1.5 trillion pounds.

Next slide.

In the UK, the situation has got worse and this is data from last year – the decline of 64% in convictions for rape and charging decisions fell by 19% in cases of domestic abuse. So why is it so difficult to change this?

Next slide please.

Partly the problem is criminology, western social research tends to investigate in a way that reproduces dominate social relations. The focus is out groups, criminals, women, black people, psychotics because they present problems for dominance and they get funded.

Focus on separate membership groups of the oppressed easy becomes victim’s study and if you are being cynical, it requires all the information required to maintain and legitimate its power. Hillyard wrote in 2004, ‘the noise of criminology – the ceaseless chatter advocating the extension of criminal justice practices and solutions – these are telling sustained silences of the absence of questions about power’. It tends to be the subjects of violation of rights who are the objects of knowledge - not the one unifying factor of the majority of perpetrators. Feminism hasn’t addressed the hiatus in mainstream criminology, which is largely ignored, masculinity, because its preferred women’s place in crime and it’s hard to do as even women are entangled in those taken for granted ideologies.

Next slide please.

Michael Kimmel in 2001 had a suggestion that ‘changes among men should represent the next phase of the movement for women’s equality – changes among men are vital if women are to achieve full equality. Men must come to see that gender equality is in their interests’. Yet 12 years later, Susan Moore was still raising the question about male reluctance to look at gender, power, and institutional failure.

The last slide please.

So, the questioning that Susan Moore advocates is important. Gendered violence doesn’t just cost in harms and economic loss, private and public, but in identity, knowledge, justice and human rights. It’s not just a legal issue. It is deeply symbolic. It violates discursively through textual annihilation and abuse just as it does in reality, and unfortunately merely analysing representation leaves reality as it is. Academia is partly to blame. We have devolved down to biographies, focus groups, celebrations of differences recognised, parodies played out and decoupage represented It seems to be more interested in identify politics, than gender or any other type of power at present. Criminology and allied disciplines focus on the crime problem rather than the gendered roles and relations that underwrite and maintain it. Post-modernism has ironically become an effective tool of hegemonic power by disabling criticism and knowledge to just different points of view. It is not so much men who use violence but power, the seeking of it and the retaining of it but power does remain largely patriarchal.

In 2012, Heidensohn said 50 years of feminism hasn’t got us very far. In 2021, it feels that that little distance is being eroded. When the Plymouth case hit the news in the last few week, it emerged that Jake Davison murderous attacks men, women and children, including his own mother, may relate to his heavy involvement with online celibate groups. It seems that not only does the existence of a woman partner allow her to be blamed for men’s violence – visually, textually and across many discourses – but even the lack of a woman partner can be blamed as well. Thank you very much for listening.

*[With many thanks to Charlotte Walker (Sheffield) for transcription.]*