Re-imagining the Crimino-Legal Complex: Toward a Critical Pedagogy
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Introduction

Crime, writes Alison Young, is a "potent sign which can be exchanged among criminal justice personnel, criminologists, politicians, journalists, filmmakers and (mythical) ordinary individuals."[1] She has elaborated upon the *crimino-legal complex*, which encompasses "the linguistic turns and tricks, the framing and editing devices in and through which crime becomes a topic, obtains and retains its place in discourse."[2] Our project has sought to establish ways to interrogate the effects of criminalization and the affect of the "written and pictorial" devices that convey them to various publics. We ask not only how do we imagine criminal bodies, but how can we re-imagine them in ways that challenge the conventions of the crimino-legal complex?

To do so, we draw upon and extend existing work by critical criminologists who have convincingly argued that the aesthetics of the image—and the imagined—powerfully implicate crime as we (think we) know it.[3] Their work reveals that the image itself is an act of power, one that can expose and mask the complex underpinnings of crime. Criminal figures, for instance, have taken on various embodiments. Depictions of "gangbangers," "crackheads," "bikeys," and "terrorists" have joined the ranks of atavistic man, the pedophile, feeble-minded Jukes and Kallikaks, the mobster, the prostitute, and the native.[4] These bodies share a commonality: they have been studied, represented, and even dramatized in history, popular culture, politics, and science. Mainstream criminology has also affirmed the significance of such images, often minimizing factors contributing to crime.

Not only do the interworkings of nation, race, class, and gender operate interactively in conjunction with—sometimes predictably and at other times unpredictably so—other social inequalities and/or privileges, there is also a problematic relationship undergirding distinctions between victimization and offending. The enactment of crime can invariably embody both, sometimes simultaneously. Because of this sometimes paradoxical positioning, many criminals elude easy quantification or explanation, requiring further contemplation about who they are as subjects and how the broader community relates to them.

Though ostracized and condemned, the criminal body plays a significant role within community dynamics. Allen Sekula argues that the construction of the criminal cannot be separated from the creation of "a law-abiding body—a body that was either bourgeois or subject to [its] dominion… The law-abiding body recognized its threatening other in the criminal body, recognized its own acquisitive and aggressive impulses unchecked, and sought to reassure itself;" one way to accomplish this "was the invention of a criminal who was organically distinct from the bourgeois: a biotype."[5] In other words, power not only embeds in the images of crime, but the representation of crime is itself a discursive biopolitical project linked to subject formation and community maintenance.

Recognizing these dynamics, the aim of this project is to develop a participatory mode that enables public engagement with the terms and conditions applied to the representations and consequences of the crimino-legal complex. Specifically, we hope to expand the dialogue in which the users consider the images of crime and representations of its embodiment.

How it is a digital humanities project

This project utilizes several methods articulated by digital humanities scholars. First is the use of peer collaboration. Knowledge and information, therefore, come from a variety of sources. To organize and solicit interest from many knowledge-makers as possible, we developed a preliminary website (http://reimaginingbodies.wordpress.com/) through which to showcase critical work and solicit comments from those with knowledge or experience, both academic and non-academic, with the crimino-legal complex. Through these channels, alongside conference participation and outreach, we have sought much insight from as many angles as possible.

Second, by focusing on the images of crime and criminalization, the website itself utilizes digital humanities techniques to guide users to resources that query these meanings. It relies on a variety of texts and media, including the written word, video, photo-documentary, and art. With a planned expansion in the next year, the website will do more than merely catalogue these texts; it will serve as the basis for broader dialogue through "Cross-Classroom Collaborations." In Spring 2013, students in different classes at different universities will utilize the platform as a virtual meeting place to discuss and share ideas, while also contributing to the site with the assistance of their instructors and classmates. This initiative has received enthusiastic support from the American Society of Criminology Division of Critical Criminology and its members.

Third, this project continues an important emergent tradition within the digital humanities: developing sustainable and widely accessible archives. As it expands, the hope is that the website will serve as a location where individuals can search for, learn from, and utilize resources for a variety of purposes, including academic, activist, and consciousness-raising sharing.

Contribution to the field of digital humanities

This project brings the digital humanities in dialogue with critical criminology. The use of visual methodologies in critical criminological scholarship has already opened up a space to interrogate tacit understandings of the image and the gaze in relation to representations of crime.[6] While multimedia has the potential to provide avenues through which to present, engage, and contribute to this research and other forms of knowledge production,[7] it entails different challenges systemic of *convergence culture*. As Henry Jenkins has pointed out, convergence culture is characterized by the collision between old and new media and between "grassroots and corporate media," whereby power can become reconfigured, for "the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways."[8] We use new media to facilitate critical engagement with the worlds that we—and our students—occupy. The use of new media supports a deeper interrogation of how the prison industrial complex can embed in media forms.

Our project thus weds critical pedagogy with the digital humanities, an emergent tradition in the field, while also increasing the use (and creation) of open-access materials as part of its learning outcomes. In doing so, it adds to existing digital humanities projects focusing on crime and mass incarceration by providing an additional pedagogical tool for faculty and students alike. Using digital media formats and other accessible educational materials, instructors can also make inroads through dialogue-building techniques that go beyond formal academic settings. Like Sharon Daniel's *Public Secrets* and Richard Ross' *Juvenile-in-Justice*,[9] our project provides a site for students to explore different modalities to understand, discuss, and critically examine the co-constitutions of the crimino-legal complex.

¹ Alison Young, *Imagining Crime: Textual Outlaws and Criminal Conversations*. London: SAGE, 1996: 2.

² Ibid., 16.

³ Keith Hayward "Visual Criminology: Cultural Criminology-Style." *Criminal Justice Matters* 78, no. 1 (2009): 12-4; Keith Hayward and Mike Presdee, eds. *Framing Crime: Cultural Criminology and the Image.* New York: Routledge, 2010.

⁴ Richard Dugdale. *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease, and Heredity.* Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2010 (1877); Cesare Lombroso, *The Criminal Man.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006 (1876).

⁵ Allen Sekula, "Body and the Archive." *October* 39 (1986): 15-6.

⁶ Cecil E. Greek. *Visual Criminology: Using Photography as an Ethnographic Research Method in Criminal Justice Settings* (2005) http://www.criminology.fsu.edu/faculty/greek/VisualCriminology.pdf; Mona Lynch. "Selling 'Securityware': Transformations in Prison Commodities Advertising, 1949-99." *Punishment and Society* 4, no. 3 (2002): 305-19. More recent projects include *Visualizing Governing Through Crime in California* of which a summary is available at: http://vgtc.soceco.uci.edu/

⁷ Stephanie Barish and Elizabeth Daley. "Multimedia Scholarship for the 21st Century University." *Forum for the Future of Higher Education* (2005). http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/FFP0509S.pdf

⁸ Henry Jenkins. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press, 2006: 2.

⁹ Sharon Daniel, *Public Secrets* http://vectors.usc.edu/issues/4/publicsecrets/; Richard Ross, *Juvenile-In-Justice* http://www.juvenile-in-justice.com/