

Reviews

Enduring Images and the Art of Remembering:^{*}

Book Review of *City of Shadows: Sydney Police Photographs 1912-1948* (Peter Doyle with Caleb Williams) and Exhibition Review of *City of Shadows: Inner city crime & mayhem 1912-1948* (Curator Peter Doyle)

Criminology and law, as with wider culture, have long held attachments to the image. As a discipline, criminology perseveres in the constant aftermath of crime to diagnose crime's place, shape and substance. Inherent always in this response is the composition of our bodies and spaces. And in creating responsive documents, both law and criminology deal deeply in the content of police material — the actions, methods and outcomes and, subsequently, the extensive galleries and archives produced by policing.

The book by Peter Doyle with Caleb Williams: *City of Shadows: Sydney Police Photographs 1912-1948*, accompanies the exhibition *City of Shadows: Inner city crime & mayhem 1912-1948*, held at the Justice & Police Museum in Sydney, Australia, until 11 February 2007. Both the book and the exhibition again spotlight our attachment to the image as a key index of history and thus meaning-making. Doyle and Williams also evoke the use-value of the bureaucratic archive which, in this case, despite being partially destroyed through fire and flood over the years, was rescued in the late 1980's to steadily assume a renewed cultural life.¹ The images chosen to investigate and present an historical life of Sydney are some of the most curious, and also ordinary, pictures produced in culture: police photographs. The publication presents 240 photographs from the Justice & Police Museum Forensic Photography Archive, interspersed with four essays, two each by Doyle and Williams. The exhibition includes many of these photographs and also others, the main feature being three photographic projections of around 10 minutes each, narrated by Doyle, a Sydney academic and writer, who was invited to curate the exhibition.

Reviewing this quite beautiful book and the exhibition is an interesting criminological exercise: to what extent are we drawn by these images, by virtue of their context, into scenes of judgement and injury? To what degree do we require a reprieve from their forensic immediacy or index in order to read them? With such questions emerging, I almost couldn't get into the exhibition because of the crowds. When I visited the Justice & Police Museum there were so many people clambering to see *City of Shadows* that I wondered about attendance at other Historic Houses Trust exhibitions around Sydney, such as *Bondi: A biography*, which has also been heavily publicised. On inquiry, the Bondi exhibition is

^{*} The phrase 'art of remembering' is from Williams' first essay in the *City of Shadows* publication (2005:16).

¹ This renewed life is not limited to exhibitions. Photographs from the Justice & Police Museum collection recently featured in Cate Shortland's *The Silence* (2006) aired on ABC Television earlier this year, and in the film *Hunt Angels* (2006) Dir. Alec Morgan. My thanks to Ruth Williams for confirming this information.

drawing 400-plus people a day, however, *City of Shadows* is breaking records for attendance at the Justice & Police Museum and is, according to Historic Houses Trust publicist Ruth Williams, a 'phenomenal success': a 'sensation'.²

The groundbreaking popularity of the exhibition may, according to some, warrant little or no comment in light of the popularity of television programs dealing with forensics, policing and crime scene investigation — it may merely be an extension of contemporary tastes.³ I think it is misplaced to see an interest in police photographs as part of a wider cultural 'mood'. The prevailing mood certainly cultivates a fashionable interest in all things 'forensic', but, as Williams notes in one of his essays, Luc Sante was one of the earlier pioneers around discovery of the police archive as a place of great cultural worth, and that was almost fifteen years ago, in 1992. It is also useful to remember the mythology around collections such as the London Metropolitan Police Crime Museum and the long relationship between culture and crime embodied in persistent fascination and regulation. Numerous contemporary exhibitions and publications have been charging this material into the cultural domain long before *CSI* was first aired and, indeed, Williams has succinctly surveyed the cultural field of the forensic aesthetic noting, amongst others, Benjamin's discussion of Eugene Atget's photography in Paris and Weegee's work in New York.⁴ He also quotes insights from Ralph Rugoff, who was curator of the *Scene of the Crime* exhibition in the USA in 1997 — all pivotal cultural and theoretical moments in the discussion of forensics and aesthetics.

The book pays homage to this past, acknowledging also the significant work already achieved with the archive by Ross Gibson and Kate Richards in the 1999 exhibition *Crime Scene: Scientific Investigation Bureau Archives 1945–1960*, held at the Justice & Police Museum. Their work with the archive is not confined to *Crime Scene* and includes a CD-Rom of staggering luminescence. Guest curator Peter Doyle undoubtedly adds to this history from his perspective as a crime writer as he looks further back in time at images and events from 1912–1948. Where Gibson and Richards handed the viewer over to music, haiku and fictional names of victims and offenders, Doyle has curated an exhibition of, where possible, identified faces and bodies and, in many cases, has added the police narrative, or as much as can be known, to the presentation of these photographs. Where that

² Email correspondence, 16 January 2006.

³ The exhibition has been extended by three months due to popular demand.

⁴ Exhibitions include: *Evidence* (1977) San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, USA; *After the Fact: Photographs from the Police Forensic Archive* (1992) Victorian Centre for Photography, Melbourne, Australia; *Police Pictures. The Photograph as Evidence* (1997–1998) San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, USA; *Crime Scene: Scientific Investigation Bureau Archives 1945–1960* (1999–2000) Justice & Police Museum, Sydney, Australia; *Scene of the Crime* (2000) Photographs Do Not Bend, Dallas, USA. Other exhibitions have included police photographs and/or photographs of crime scenes taken by press photographers, such as: *Taken: Photography and Death* (1989) The Tartt Gallery, Washington DC, USA; *The Dead* (1995–1996) National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, Bradford, UK; *Scene of the Crime* (1997) Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, Los Angeles, USA. Publications include: Sante (1992) *Evidence*, Hoefnagels, Pubben and Speksnijder (1995) *Murder in Rotterdam, diverse pictures, 1905–1967*, Tejaratchi (1996) *Death Scenes: A Homicide Detective's Scrapbook*, Svenson (1997) *Prisoners*, Hannigan (1999) *New York Noir: Crime Photos from the Daily News Archive*, Heimann (1999) *Sins of the City: The Real Los Angeles Noir*, Buckland (2001) *Shots in the Dark: True Crime Pictures*. This contemporary interest is not restricted to the 1990's and is also evident in earlier decades, for example, Sultan and Mandel's *Evidence* (1977) gathered photographs from (amongst others) the San Jose police department archives. Publications not restricted to a 'forensic' theme but that include photographs of crime scenes or police photography include: Weegee (1945) *Naked City*, Norfleet (1993) *Looking at Death*, Witkin (1994) *Harm's Way: Lust & Madness, Murder & Mayhem*, Barth (1997) *Weegee's World*, Townsend (1998) *Vile Bodies*.

narrative is lacking, Doyle's historical newspaper searches, other research and deep local knowledge enter the frame, as snippets about certain people, inner city suburbs, identifiable staircases or streets are recounted. As Gibson and Richards offered a poetic and radioactive form of narrative to the archive, Doyle brings us his own compelling approach throughout the two exhibition rooms at the museum and echoed on computer consoles in a through-area. As you enter the first room, with its low lighting, there is an illuminated map of Sydney on the left, its borders dotted with streetscapes from each of the suburbs comprising the 'Horseshoe' zone surrounding the city. With the locale set, a projection screen to the right of the map quietly reels off a mute slide show of images. This is a soft start to what follows. I will bypass the rest of the first room for a moment to comment on the second room.

A comic book strip is painted on the wall in the second, smaller room, written by Doyle and illustrated by Eddie Campbell, which concerns the murder of Ernst Hofmann in May 1942. The narrative trail leads clockwise around the room and positioned below the strip are selected police forensic artefacts related to the case, such as crime scene photographs, fingerprint sheets and a copy of the *Australian Police Journal* containing an article, 'The Hofmann Murder Case', written by Brian K. Doyle (the curator's uncle).⁵ The comic strip collects these forensic pieces to form a whole, a strip, like a sentence, around the room, detailing the police investigation and the subsequent murder trial. Symbolically, this room attests to the collection and creation of law's stories, where pieces that remain are ordered into a creative enterprise: demonstrating the legal journey of cohesion and fracture around witnesses, testimony, photographs and bodies to arrive at a resolution. This approach to the historicity of crime and an illustrative imagination is also echoed in the placement of computer consoles in a through-area, each offering an interaction with Doyle's past work with the Justice & Police Museum on the 2002 exhibition *Crimes of Passion*. It constitutes a resting spot of sorts before travelling on to the rest of the museum rooms which, on the times I visited, acted as a valve when the crowds were too large.

What this current exhibition additionally offers us is Doyle's voice; he has what could be imagined as the voice of a detective — a voice that slips around these images with the rough and tumble of historical accounts, bringing insights nonetheless built on moments of interpretation and speculation. This is the particular force of the exhibition and the central feature in the first room that draws people: Doyle's voice narrating fragments of information as images are projected onto three screens either as singular pieces, as a diptych or triptych. Three slide show projections of around 10 minutes each: 'Dark Places', 'The Beat', 'Rogues Gallery' each feature a different focus or collection of images, concerning inner rooms and murder sites, the streets of Sydney: the police beat, and those individuals who came before the police photographer, deemed 'Special Photographs' in police records. 'Rogues Gallery' discloses the unique life of the Sydney Central cells and other police stations via these distinctive mugshots. The pictures almost eschew the bureaucratic work of the police photograph, rendering instead the lively, inimitable scenes that emerge when training the lens on people.

There is a careful choreography to these works: as an image is projected onto one screen, Doyle speaks to the image, sometimes thereafter drawing the viewer's eye to a particular detail. The image might then be accompanied by a blown-up version of the same image projected onto the other two screens in unison with his remarks, zooming our view into the element. Alternatively, the image might be significantly cropped to evidence detail and projected onto one screen: the misdemeanour inscribed on the photographic negative, a close-up of a window reflection, a magazine on a chair; the variations continue. Sometimes

5 BK Doyle, 'The Hofmann Murder case', *Australian Police Journal*, July 1949.

a triptych of photographs will simultaneously light up, or the projections will span a single image across the three screens, all the while in concert with Doyle's steady and absorbing narration. Many of these compositions are eerily beautiful, some are breathtaking as they fade on and off the screens: the expanse of a policeman's coat almost fanning out behind him as he stands, a sentinel, near the body at the crime scene. In this exhibition space, people crowded into the room and often leant perilously close to the walls, with their mounted images and the three illuminated storyboards summarising the slide shows, in order to watch and listen to these mesmerising projections.

The precision of this approach to the slide shows means our eye is always dancing with our imagination about the city outside and Doyle's commentary. The book similarly reflects this, incorporating his research, family insight and Sydney knowledge around the presentation of the images. In so doing, and as with Sante, we are offered moments of local knowledge, substantial research or speculation: '[d]etails unknown but the scene is recognisably the Argyle Steps, in Argyle Street, the Rocks' (2005:228); '[t]he sun shining in through the open door of this empty bar suggests the photo was taken in the morning' (2005:229). In many cases the images are not merely presented, but are discussed. This becomes thick and intense with historical narrative and detail in Doyle's second essay 'Persons of interest'. Here Doyle introduces us to particular crimes matched to offenders in the archive. Enhanced with his research following up the NSW Criminal Register, the NSW Police Gazette and articles from the press, we enter deeper into the world of coronial inquiries and police statements. Doyle stitches fragments about trials, evidence presented, witness statements and coronial outcomes seamlessly into the evolution of these images before us. Despite the rich narrative lilt of Doyle's writing and description, this is not glossy reading.

In his essay 'Gathering evidence' Doyle also provides an account of his comprehensive work with the negatives and the process of selecting the images. Caleb Williams' essays 'The forensic eye: photography's dark mirror' and 'Spirits awake: encountering the archive' both offer added knowledge about the archive, the practice of forensic photography and the specifics of prison portraiture, engaging with Walter Benjamin's reflections on the aura. These essays reflect an accumulation of thought around the archive, art and police practices that clearly emerge from Williams' own history with this archive: he is Curator of the Justice & Police Museum and has cared for the archive for 14 years; his signal contributions and insights are unique, expert and eloquent. Here is a curator who clearly knows much more than could fit in the pages of the book and his consequent choice of what to essay is elegant. The essays are peppered throughout the book amidst an array of photographs, presented as mostly full-bleed, many across two pages. Deep in the centre lie the images of the dead, the book easing into and out of these pictures, inserting an image of an arcade or the interior of a cake shop into the pack. The book is a further revelation of the archive, an artefact that we can sit with and examine much longer than we might stand in the rooms at the Justice & Police Museum.

Such immersion is echoed towards the end of the book where, as with Sante's 1992 book *Evidence*, the *City of Shadows* publication reproduces thumbnails of all images in the book accompanied by captions.⁶ The captions have been intricately researched and written by Doyle and detail what is known about the crime or accident, the date, the offender, the victim, the scene or area. If little or nothing is known about the image this is similarly noted.

6 The format of the book also shares an affinity with the recent publication *Scene of the crime: photographs from the LAPD archive* (2004) in terms of its large-scale format and the presentation of images, including thumbnails.

The point is this: even in the absence of information these images come to us framed by their forensic context. The book makes note of the reference to and reverence of Sante's work. That great text produced insights into forensic photography, not the least of which is the phrase '[t]here is no place for us outside the frame, nothing to breathe, nowhere to stand' (Sante 1992:99). Criminology and law's attachment to the image is as much an attachment to the *frame*, to practices of framing, which call into question modes of address and the reading and writing of evidential narratives; a point of engineering made equally available in Doyle's approach as in law's prior jurisdiction over these particular images.

The police photograph works according to a specific epistemological performance: the forensic capture of the subjects and objects of crime. Doyle notes that, according to the Justice & Police Museum archive, forensic photography in Sydney emerged around 1912 and that photographic activity appeared to increase in 1921 (2005:163). Photography thus also emerged as a means to address problems in the context of policing and criminal justice, enabling enterprises of identification, surveillance and evidence. Peter Hutchings states that the emergence of modernity brought with it not so much an 'outbreak of crime' as an 'outbreak of law' (2001:131). Photography is a part of law's outbreak, a technology now utilised in everyday police practice around crime scene examination and part of a foundation of visibility with a long history in law and criminology. And, importantly, Hutchings emphasises that at the heart of law's empirical dreams lies instability: the uncertain index (2001:157). Loosened from their legal context as forms of evidence or identification, these images dissolve any definitive reading of 'crime' or 'criminality'. In order to smoke a little with those concerns, the images must be coupled with other facts or knowledge and, even then, the dubious history of photographing crime's essence erupts, as some offenders look 'more like detectives than malefactors' (Doyle 2005:163). Left on their own, they offer us enthralling cultural notes: this is Sydney in the early to mid twentieth century; these are the streets, these are the signs, these are the staircases, the cars, the bodies, the crowds, the terrible and the intriguing moments that have gathered in the archive.

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