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"Speaking Scars" - The Tattoo Transcript

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30 June 2014

“Speaking Scars” - The Tattoo

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SLIDES: TITLE & SUBTITLES

I. Signature and sign

If you think that tattoos are rather a scandalous subject for a lecture sponsored by such a venerable institution as Gresham College, I hope I'll be able to persuade you otherwise by the end of this lecture.

Let me begin with the final slide in my last lecture, which showed a rather enigmatic image that I'll now decode.

SLIDE: MOKO SIGNATURE

This is the signature made by the Maori chief Tuhawaiki on a land grant to the English in 1840. He has signed the document with a precise sketch of the intricate 'moko', or deeply incised tattoo design, with which his face was marked in accordance with Maori culture. Each moko was unique to the man or woman who bore it, and was intimately linked to its bearer's individual identity in a metaphysical sense. This moko design was thus distinctive to Tuhawaiki and served to identify him in many visual and communicative contexts. Here, on this paper document, it functions in the same way as his European signature, which you can just about see below the moko. Both Maori and Europeans well understood that the moko design was analogous to the European signature. In the same way that Europeans absorbed the use of moko as signatures on deeds and contracts and commented on their penmanship, Maoris understood not only the parallelism of moko and writing, but also that moko designs resembled European signet rings bearing a heraldic emblem (Gallagher).

You can see that the moko tattoo condensed the character of the signature as both a written and emblematic representation of identity that I discussed in my lecture last week. Indeed, later in the 19th century a now largely forgotten German cultural historian, Heinrich Wuttke, took this one step further, in a book published in 1872 with the laborious but intriguing title *History of script and literature from the rude origins of writing in tattooing up to the laying of electromagnetic cables*.

SLIDE: WUTTKE TITLE PAGE

In Wuttke's view, Polynesian tattoos constituted an embryonic script: they were abstract signs that, like an alphabet, carried meanings intelligible only to those familiar with their conventions, as with any script and language. So among other things Wuttke argued that the use of moko signatures was not an innovation forced on the Maori by European treaty conventions, but was produced within their own culture. Their tattoos denoted identity, ownership, status, and contract, and 'the expert tattooist [who made] these marks' was, he wrote, 'their notary public - not some kind of fashion designer, but their public clerk' (102). Wuttke also suggested that the pain involved in such tattooing acted as a mnemonic for its significance: this paralleled the slapping or boxing of ears that accompanied the land transfers in Europe that I've referred to several times in these lectures (Landfester).

SLIDE: NUKAHIVA MARRIAGE CONTRACT

The proposition that a tattoo might be a signature and the tattooist a notary public has probably not found much support since Wuttke's day, but at the end of my lecture I will return to another example of this very

point. In his own time, Wuttke was drawing on a century of European interest – in fact, at times fascination – with the tattoos that Europeans had encountered in Polynesia since the mid-18th century. By then, an older history of tattooing within Europe had been largely forgotten. But I am not going to tell that history here today, although I’d argue if I had another lecture to do this in that this older history was incorporated into the broader stream of tattooing in 19th-century Europe. I am also not going to revisit the story of Captain Cook and the other navigators whose voyages brought the European and Polynesian cultures into contact for the first time.

The theme of these lectures is *identification*. Tattoos are, in ID parlance, one of the ‘distinctive marks’ specified in police descriptions, and for many decades they were also recorded on British passports, as these images show. The first is the 1920 passport you saw in my first lecture (which reveals that neither of my Jewish grandparents had tattoos), and the second is a police description from Germany at around the same time, which details the tattoos on the arms of the suspect in question.

SLIDES 1920 PASSPORT; 1911 HAMBURG FICHE

So what I want to do in the rest of this lecture is focus specifically on some of the ways in which the tattoo was intimately linked with the production of identity and identification within Europe. This will involve both voluntary and forcible tattooing, and it will take us through the orphanages of 18th-century Venice and Dublin, the barracks of the 19th-century British army, and the emerging sciences of detection and criminology in France and Germany. By analogy with the relationship between handwriting expertise and graphology that I discussed last week, I’ll argue here that the more that the tattoo was called upon to explain identity, the less it was able to reveal.

II. The Foundling

I want to start with a more or less forgotten story of tattooing adopted as an official means of identification. As I mentioned in my first lecture, marking signs of identity directly on the body had become associated with marginality and dishonorable status in medieval and early modern Europe. Let me just recap this briefly, because unease about body marking has remained a prominent feature of our culture till very recently. Distrust of the permanently marked body had its origins in classical culture, with its disdain for barbarian customs. The legacy of this disdain was fortified by Jewish and Christian injunctions against practices associated with pagan religions (one might hazard that these injunctions were all the more insistent in order to exempt and police these faiths’ own sacred forms of body-modification – circumcision and (eventually) the stigmata). In Greece and Rome, branding and tattooing had both been used to mark slaves, criminals, indentured workers and soldiers.

I also suggested that it was the relative absence of institutions of confinement in early modern Europe that made branding and tattooing valuable public markers of criminal identity, and this continued up to the early 19th century. In France, for example, offenders were branded or tattooed on the arm with letters denoting their criminal status – G for those sent to the galleys, for instance, TP for those condemned to forced labour (*travaux publics*). Medieval and early modern England similarly had all kinds of alphabetic marks, from the V for vagrant, to thumb-brands of ‘M’ for murderer, or ‘T’ for thief. (If you want to see an example, go and look at Hogarth’s ‘Marriage à la mode’ series in the National Gallery, where in plate three you will see the letters ‘FC’ marked on one of the female characters, said to stand for ‘female convict’.) Although these impositions on the European body were largely abandoned in the 18th and early 19th centuries in tandem with changes in penal and prison regimes, African slaves continued to be branded as property until emancipation.

SLIDE: BRANDING SLAVES US 1853

Far less well-known than these rather gruesome examples is another use of tattoos to mark identity and status in Europe. This is the practice of tattooing orphans in the 18th-century orphanage or foundling hospital. Actually, if you have ever seen Mozart’s opera ‘The Marriage of Figaro’, or better still the original play by Beaumarchais, you will know about this already, even if you don’t know that you know it. In the recognition scene in Act 3, Figaro responds to Dr Bartolo’s question whether he is ‘some foundling infant’ by revealing what he calls ‘a distinctive mark’ on his arm: a mark that, he says, someone had taken trouble to put on him as evidence that he was ‘a precious son’. And like Odysseus’s scar, which proved him to be the son of his father Laertes, it is Figaro’s ‘hieroglyph’ that reveals to a shocked Marcellina that he is actually her son (and of course Don Bartolo is his father).

Even though we are told in Beaumarchais' play that Figaro had been stolen by gypsies, his fate is clearly modeled on that of the 'foundling infant' that Bartolo assumed he was, and this would have been very well understood by 18th-century audiences. The 18th century saw an explosion in the number of abandoned infants across Europe. The causes and cure of this scandal attracted a huge amount of contemporary attention, and the foundling became a stock character in plays and novels. Most of these infants were abandoned in the first days or weeks of life, sometimes left overnight in public places where they were likely to be found in the morning. An alternative in continental Europe was to deposit the baby in a kind of two-way drawer set in the wall of a foundling hospital, the so-called 'wheel' (*ruota*), which allowed the parents to leave their child anonymously.

SLIDE: NAPLES RUOTA

However, the children were not always abandoned to anonymity. Many of them were deliberately furnished with signs or tokens of their identity – a coloured ribbon, a piece of fabric or a special button, half a playing card or coin, a medallion, an amulet, or a scrap of paper bearing the child's name and date of baptism. These were carefully collected, recorded and stored by the hospital authorities, along with precise descriptions of the baby's clothing: both parents and hospital were anxious to record evidence of the child's identity in case of a later reclamation. You can see some poignant examples of these tokens in the Foundling Hospital Museum in Mecklenburg Square.

SLIDE: FOUNDLING TOKENS

In Italy, Spain and perhaps France, but not in England, we can also find occasional cases where a foundling arrived branded with a distinguishing mark, perhaps made by a hot thimble, or with its ears pierced and a thread drawn through one hole. (The branding or tattooing of infants was not confined to foundlings alone. There is evidence from Spain and Italy of the marking of infants against the evil eye; and in one region of France, a child might be branded before a father left for a long absence, so that he could recognize his offspring on his return.) On top of this, there is ample evidence that in Italy, Spain and Ireland, and perhaps elsewhere, the foundling hospitals themselves took to branding or tattooing their infant charges, usually on the ankle or the arm. The foundling hospital in Siena was tattooing its charges with a lancet and black ink from the end of the seventeenth century. (This was almost a century before any Europeans had set foot in Polynesia, and is part of the ample evidence that tattooing was already known and practised in Europe well before the 18th century.) In Sicily, all foundlings were branded with a hot iron until 1771. We find the same practice employed in the Hospital Real in Santiago de Compostela in Spain, which in 1768 gave this job to an official titled the 'surgeon-marker' (*cirujano-marcador*). And in the hospital of Santa Maria della Pietà in Venice, foundlings were at first branded and later tattooed with the letter 'P' combined with the sign of a cross, until marking was finally abolished in 1807.

SLIDE: VENETIAN PRIVILEGE DECREE

This Venetian marking system may have been intended as a form of registration, but as this decree shows it also guaranteed that magistrates would recognize an ex-foundling and honour his right to enjoy certain privileges accorded by the state. But marking could also be an identifying precaution taken before sending infants out to paid wet-nurses, for fear that a nurse might extend her term of employment by fraudulently substituting another baby in the (all too common) event of the foundling's early death. In early 18th-century Dublin, beset by the deep poverty and immense problem of pauper children that led Jonathan Swift to write his *Modest Proposal* in 1729, an official report by the Irish House of Lords in 1737 recorded that

'to prevent Frauds and Impositions, [the Governors of the workhouse] contrived Badges, to be put around the Children's Necks, marked them in the Flesh of the Arm, numbered them, and ordered the Clerk of the Foundlings to enter their Names in a Book together with those of the Nurses'.

Marking was still in use in Dublin in 1836, when children were being tattooed with the initial letter of their parish of origin, apparently by means of a stamping machine specially devised for the purpose.

To my mind, the foundling tattoo stands midway between stigmatization

and identification, and reminds us of the ambiguity of all markers. I think that's why Beaumarchais, da Ponte and Mozart were able to integrate it so successfully into their sublime comedy of manners. Figaro was shy about disclosing his tattoo, but when he did so, he solved the mystery of his identity and brought about a happy ending. And the founding tattoo anticipates the status accorded to the tattoo by European police and criminologists as these sciences developed in the 19th century, which takes me on to the next topic in this lecture. Why did tattoos, which had been invisible for most of their history within Europe, begin to attract the attention of these experts? What did they think tattoos could tell them about the identity of the persons who bore them?

III. Speaking Scars

Police interest in the tattoo as a distinctive mark has a long history, almost as long as the history of the professional police and detective forces themselves. By the mid-19th century, tattoos were being routinely included in physical descriptions of suspects, convicts and prisoners, and they continued to figure in the more elaborate anthropometric descriptions that were developed in the later 19th century, which by then also incorporated the more modern technologies of photography and fingerprinting.

SLIDE: ANTHROPOMETRIC CARD(Roscher p236)

Public as well as police interest in the forensic value of the tattoo was also stimulated by a number of sensational murder cases in France and Germany in the 1840s and 1850s, in which murder victims were identified by their tattoos. Tattoos were especially useful in identifying repeat offenders as well as unknown corpses, and even after the forensic victory of the fingerprint by the turn of the century, the tattoo was still in 1932 being described by the pre-eminent French expert in police science, Edmond Locard, as 'so to speak privileged by virtue of its identificatory power...[and as] the model and archetype of the distinguishing mark' (Locard). But what exactly was the identificatory power of the tattoo? Between the 1850s and the 1930s, this question was fought out among European police, forensic experts and criminologists. As a result of this, some of the early promise of the tattoo as a genuinely 'privileged sign' of identity came to be recognized as ill-founded.

At issue here was the point I made at the beginning of this lecture series when I was discussing the relationship between identification and categorization: i.e. that the question 'who are you?' leaks imperceptibly, if it is allowed to, into the question 'what kind of a person are you?' The tattoo seemed to promise the police and medico-legal experts an answer to both questions. Perhaps it could not only could identify an individual, as in the cases of the unknown murder victims, but could also yield information on what kind of person the bearer was? In fact, in the course of the 19th century, if I can slightly over-simplify matters, the police became convinced that the tattoo was only good at answering the first of these questions, the identification of an individual. But against this, Europe's criminologists were for several decades gripped by the possibility that tattoos were also clues to a person's occupation, character and disposition.

This began with relatively cautious claims about the forensic promise of the tattoo. One of the first medico-legal experts to investigate this, the French expert Ambroise Tardieu, argued in the 1850s that 'Tattoos can offer the most valuable evidence [of social status], and appear ... as a distinctive mark of the class or occupation to which a particular individual belongs'. Tardieu's data included a shoemaker with a tattoo of a boot on his forearm, three joiners with hammers, planes and other tools of their trade, and a cooper, a publican and a baker with similarly appropriate emblems. These slides taken from later 19th-century publications in France and Germany show what Tardieu meant. They include numerous craftsmen's images as well as regimental and army emblems.

SLIDES: TRADE & MILITARY TATTOOS

But, as other experts pointed out, even conclusions drawn from this evidence could be unreliable. The proportion of occupational emblems among tattoos studied was not very high; the same person might carry a jumbled assortment of images that defied a single interpretation; and anyone could get any tattoo he cared to, if he wanted to conceal a criminal background, for example, or to gain entry into certain trades or pretend association with a crack regiment. A Danish prison physician claimed that he had found the motto 'Work ennobles man' on one of Copenhagen's most notorious idlers. One of his German colleagues asserted that some of the most elegant occupational emblems could be seen on men who had no connection with the trade in question. Others pointed out that offenders whose tattoos had been registered in police or prison

records could cannily confound this system of registration by acquiring new tattoos, or by tattooing a new image over an old one.

If even this evidence about occupation was contested, how much more contentious was the claim that tattoos provided indelible clues to a person's character, in fact to his criminal identity. This argument had its heyday in the 30 or so years before 1914. It was linked to profound changes in the field of what we now call criminology, which included most importantly a new focus on the person of the offender, rather than the nature of the offence and its punishment. If I can again somewhat compress a more elaborate argument, the new criminal anthropology, to use the contemporary term, derived its concept of criminality from an anthropology of human types and a pathology of physical and psychological differentiation between the 'normal' and the 'abnormal' or anomalous. Criminal anthropology focussed intensive attention on the body, and helped to sponsor a shift in the interpretation of the tattoo. Instead of its being discussed largely as a possible clue to *individual* identity, the tattoo was reinterpreted as the involuntary stigma of a collectively pathological criminal class.

The extreme version of this attachment of the tattoo to criminal identity was espoused by the Italian criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso, whose ideas became widely known in Europe through his study of criminal man, *L'uomo delinquente*, first published in 1876 and repeatedly reissued in ever-expanded editions.

SLIDE: L'UOMO DELINQUENTE COVER

Lombroso gave a central place to the tattoo, or rather the propensity to get tattooed, in his theory of criminality as an atavism, i.e. the argument that criminals manifested a reversion to earlier, less civilized stages of human evolution in the physical formation of their bodies and the character of their emotions and mental dispositions. Among the range of evidence disclosed by the body, Lombroso included tattoos, and argued that 'tattooing is one of the special characteristics of primitive man and those in a state of savagery'. In Italy it was therefore characteristic of the more 'primitive' strata of society, 'those classes who, like the ocean floor, maintain the same temperature, repeat the customs, the superstitions and even the songs of primitive peoples, and who share with them the same violent passions, the same dullness of sense, the same childish vanity, the long periods of idleness ... that among savages are the principal incentives to this strange usage.' Lombroso went on to describe the 'atavistic compulsion that drove criminals to undergo this strange operation', and argued that 'tattooing assumes a specific character, a strange tenacity and diffusion among the sad class of criminals ... locked in combat with society'. Among this class of men, 'the tattoo can be considered, to use the medico-legal term, as a professional characteristic'.

SLIDES: LOMBROSO IMAGES

Lombroso did not go quite as far as to argue that every tattoo is a mark of criminality, and his theories are in most respects conceptually deficient and empirically anecdotal. Yet even so you can see that he is vastly expanding the association of tattoo and identity that we met a moment ago. In the 1850s, Tardieu had suggested if you saw the trademark tattoo of a butcher or baker on your cadaver, you could reasonably infer that its bearer was a butcher or baker and use this information to identify the deceased. Thirty years later, Lombroso is telling us that the tattoo is the professional identification of a criminal: the occupation is 'criminal' and the tattoo is, so to speak, his ID card.

Lombroso's ideas chimed with a wider fin-de-siècle pessimism about the threat of social and physical degeneration in the European races which manifested itself across a huge range of social and cultural theory. The classic reception of Lombroso's ideas on tattooing can be found in a famously excessive claim by the Austrian cultural commentator Adolf Loos, in his essay *Ornament and Crime*, published in 1908, that 'People with tattoos who are not in prison are either latent criminals or degenerate aristocrats. If a tattooed man dies at liberty, he has simply died some years before he has been able to commit a murder'.

SLIDE: LOOS TITLE PAGE

Lombroso's theories were more influential on penal policy in his native Italy than anywhere else. But they also exerted a more limited though more geographically widespread influence, in that they drew the attention of army and prison officials and physicians across Europe to the intriguingly tattooed bodies of the men in their charge, and prompted an explosion of publications on what they discovered.

SLIDE: GERMAN TATTOO IMAGES

I have to say that if it were not for this burst of misplaced intellectual energy we would not have such a rich record of this evanescent art in its heyday at the end of the 19th century; but alas I cannot linger on this today. To cut a fascinating story short, the upshot was a widespread refutation of Lombroso's argument that the tattoo was the very emblem of criminal identity. Investigators found that in fact tattooing was more common among vagrants and petty offenders than among the criminal monsters of Lombroso's imagination, and that it was more evidence that someone had already spent time in prison than that he was destined for a life of crime. The hope that tattoos could somehow be mined for the autobiographical meaning of their content also proved illusory, despite the best efforts of these indefatigable collectors. And even the hope that tattoos could be categorized and catalogued to provide a database of images was given up: tattoo images were far too unruly to produce meaningful and – this is crucial – searchable databases. That function had to await the refinement of fingerprint technology in the years before the First World War.

The best that could be hoped for – and it was this that prompted Locard's comment about the value of tattoos to the police – was that recorded information about an individual's tattoos could be used to reidentify him. Some observers thought that criminals were well aware of this. Havelock Ellis, the English social theorist, commented in 1890 that 'criminals frequently refrain from tattooing themselves because they know these marks form an easy method of recognition in the hands of the police'. [Against this, though, we have the evidence of the London Criminal Record Office's Habitual Criminals Register in late 19th-century, which was replete with descriptions of the tattoos on the miscreants it listed; as well as the ironic observation made by an important British parliamentary report in 1894 on 'the best means available for identifying habitual criminals' that 'it is extraordinary how large a number of habitual criminals provide the police with an easy means of identifying themselves by names or initials tattooed on their bodies'(Troup Report).]

IV. Britain: Another story

Let me stay with Britain for the final part of this lecture. In the debate I have just summarized you can see the unease that I've said Europeans felt in the face of marked bodies. Whatever the views of these 19th-century commentators about the minutiae of the arguments, almost all shared the opinion that tattoos were in principle uncivilized and dishonorable: that, in the words of one Frenchman, tattoos were 'unworthy of a free man'. Most did not exactly agree with Lombroso that tattooing was an involuntary expression of inherent defects; and yet they echoed this view in their own messages that people did not really *want* their tattoos: that they had got tattooed under the influence of others and deeply regretted their decision.

But when we turn our attention to Britain, we find a rather different and oddly contradictory tattoo landscape, if I can put it that way. You might recall my reference to Jeremy Bentham in the lecture on Names a few weeks ago, when I cited his proposal for a rationalized system of legal nomenclature. What I didn't add then was his further suggestion that England should officially adopt 'a common custom among English sailors, of printing their family and christian names upon their wrists, in well-formed and indelible characters.' In other words, everyone in England should have their name tattooed on their wrist. This policy, Bentham says, in a startling reversal of the account I have just given, 'would be a new spring for morality, a new source of power for the laws, an almost infallible precaution against a multitude of offences.'

Whether or not Bentham meant this seriously, in Britain a rather durable practice of forcible tattooing for purposes of official identification coexisted in the 19th century with a flourishing culture of voluntarily acquired tattoos. Let's just briefly look at the best example of this, the contradictory place of tattooing in the British army. Tattooing was used for disciplinary purposes in the army, to identify deserters and so-called 'bad characters'. From the late 17th century, deserters from open quarters were not executed, but instead mercilessly flogged and branded with the letter 'D'. In the early 18th century, branding was replaced by tattooing, at least for soldiers stationed in Britain, and for some years this was done by a kind of printing machine rather than hand-held needles, as the authorities tried to ensure that the tattoos were indelibly applied. (They were not: it was evidently rather too easy to scratch them out or convert them into some other, innocuous image.) Meanwhile, 'bad characters' were tattooed with the letters 'BC'; these were soldiers who were so disruptive that they had to be discharged, and the army wanted to be able to identify and exclude them if they tried to re-enlist.

These practices aroused intermittent protests whenever they came to the attention of MPs, who tended to denounce them as deeply barbaric and incompatible with modern civilized standards. They were finally abolished following the 1869 commission on courts-martial, yet the commissioners actually found very little principled opposition to them among the officers who gave evidence. On the contrary, witnesses

emphasized that tattooing as such was not seen as dishonorable in the army; they compared tattooing to vaccination and pointed out that soldiers and sailors voluntarily got tattoos for sentimental reasons. One Lieutenant-Colonel even recommended that it would be a good idea 'to have every one, officers and men, marked with a crown or something of that kind, on entering His Majesty's Service; there could be no objection to this...' (PP Reports 1868-9, vol 12).

In fact, officers as well as enlisted men in the British army and the navy were proud to carry regimental tattoos or naval images, and the list of royal and aristocratic young men who gained tattoos during military service or overseas visits was lengthy, including Queen Victoria's sons and grandsons. Tattooing was as normalized among the British upper classes as it was among their social inferiors. This did not make Britain entirely unique in Europe, but the social reach of this culture was unusual compared with other countries. To discuss the reasons for this would take me well beyond the remit of these lectures, so having simply made the point I'd like to end with a story about tattooing that opportunely brings together several of the themes of this lecture. This is my last lecture, so in a way it is the End of Term, and I think we deserve a little fun.

As you might expect from this account, tattooing was treated quite lightheartedly as part of British popular culture. A terrific example of this is a one of H. Rider Haggard's lesser known novels, *Mr Meeson's Will*.

SLIDE: MEESON BOOK COVER

The basic story tells of a young writer, Augusta Smithers, whose stingy publisher, Mr Meeson, has not only screwed down the royalties paid to his best-selling authors but has disinherited his young nephew Eustace. By a quirk of fate, Augusta and Mr Meeson find themselves passengers on the same ship to New Zealand, which is then shipwrecked on an Antarctic island. There Meeson, in a fit of contrition as he faces death, decides he wants to write his nephew back into his will. But how to do this with no paper or writing implements?

Bill the sailor proposes tattooing the will, but the cowardly Meeson himself recoils from this: 'Me tattooed like a savage - tattooed with my own will!' The role of parchment is instead taken by the plucky Augusta, who owes Eustace a favor and volunteers her own fair skin. The sailor delicately incises the shortest possible sentence on Augusta's back - 'I leave my property to Eustace Meeson'. Meeson and one of two required witnesses sign it by holding the hand of Bill as he pricks their signature, which we as well as Meeson know will constitute a valid signature; Bill signs his own name.

SLIDE: TATTOOING THE WILL

Meeson, deservedly, doesn't survive to be rescued, but Augusta does. On her return to England she sets off to find Eustace and to legally file and prove the tattooed will. She volunteers literally to sit on the shelf at Somerset House, after which a court case ensues in which the judge rules that tattooing constitutes writing according to the law, and that Augusta is therefore acceptable as a legal will.

SLIDE: PROVING THE WILL

Eustace duly inherits, Augusta duly marries him, and as new head of Meeson Publishers he duly institutes a new system of generous payments to authors. So there you have it: tattoos and the signature under the same cover, and perhaps a hardly more unlikely form of signature than some of those we met last week.

V. Conclusion

Somewhat to my surprise, I realized as I finished this lecture that I have been telling a not entirely premeditated story of English exceptionalism in this series. I do think that the story of identification and ID documents is best told as an international, comparative history, but I'm not sure I meant this differentiation to be quite such a prominent message of my lectures. But the conclusion we should draw from this may be a bit different from what you might think. The point is that in discussing identification I have told only one part of the story. The other side is the process of information gathering and data storage which I've mentioned from time to time. The English state has long practice in this and is currently engaged in enlarging its scope in the name of policies of securitization that have been gathering speed and legitimacy since the 1970s. We may be able to change our names and not have to carry ID cards, but we cannot control the myriad ways in which the British state compels us to leave electronic and visual traces of our presence and activities all over the place. If I travel by car from Oxford to London my numberplate will be automatically photographed and recorded at several points on the M40; if I park my car and travel on by tube, my Oyster card will track my starting and ending stations. This kind of tracking attached to a searchable database of identity is surely identification by extension.

So we might need to ask ourselves again the question I briefly addressed in my first lecture, about the character of the state in this country. I said then that we should consider what the state does as well as what it is. From this point of view, the state disaggregates itself into a series of not entirely congruent or integrated institutions and practices. These include the democratic institutions of parliament and the legal system or rule of law, but also administrative entities such as police forces, the immigration administration, and the security services which are liable not to honor rules of privacy and rights of anonymity as meticulously as we might wish. Here the looseness of English practice may not always be on the side of the citizen. The Metropolitan police commissioner, Bernard Hogan-Howe, has defended the police use of false identities to infiltrate campaigning groups and even to give evidence in court, even though these identities were usurped from the birth certificates of dead children and fortified by fake passports, fake driving licences and even fake tax codes. But Hogan-Howe claimed that 'There's no law that says it can't happen ... in absolute terms, the criminal law does not make a crime of it.' (*Guardian* 27.10.11; 3.2.13).

The moral is perhaps that we should not regard the mere absence of ID cards as a sufficient guarantee of our self-established identity, our privacy and our freedom of movement, since there are other mechanisms that can infiltrate all these areas and that may require even more vigilance. Still, my task in this series has been not so much to generate conclusions for the present, but to lift the lid on how some of the mechanics of identification have developed in the past. These lectures have, I hope, borne out my opening claims about the instability of identity for the purposes of identification, and its heartening potential to resist those who would like to fix it once and for all.

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Further Reading

P. Becker R. Wetzell, eds., *Criminals and their Scientists. The History of Criminology in International Perspective* (Washington DC 2006)

J. Caplan, ed., *Written on the Body. The Tattoo in European and American History* (London 2000)

M. Gibson & N. Rafter, trans. & eds, *Criminal Man. Cesare Lombroso* (Durham NC & London 2006)

K. Wedd & R. Harris, *The Foundling Museum* (London 2009)