

“Living with Original Sin”

an MA in Criminal Justice research dissertation by Miljenko Williams
at LJMU’s School of Law, and in collaboration with FACT Liverpool, on the subject of
surveillance



“how much of this is fiction.” was a wonderfully, if unintentionally, timed exhibition. A huge compilation of old and new artistic endeavour – focussed on the activities and historical events, dynamics, and behaviours of a post-truth age – the exhibition truly hit its mark with the advent and arrival of Donald Trump to the US Presidency, and the increasingly erratic relationship of politicians everywhere in relation to concepts of truth.

On the other hand, intentionality isn't everything – and perhaps, really, isn't anything. Certainly not to be pre-defined, and perhaps never to be fully understood.

Could it have been that those involved with the project, two years before, anticipated maybe not Trump et al themselves but at the very least the probability – even certainty – that changes such as the aforementioned individuals have wrought would come along sooner or later, at the hands of someone or other? And in such anticipation, intuitively divined, do we not find the very location and purpose of all art?

As heroesforsale points out:

“I asked the child, 'What do you think an artist does?' And the child said, 'They notice things' - paraphrased from a Grayson Perry Reith lecture.”

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BUzXcpDjjUM/>

So. In my own research, for the one-year *MA in Criminal Justice* at Liverpool John Moores University's School of Law which I started last September 2016, I am studying not what surveillance looks like but how it feels. I am well placed to do this: I straddle many fields of interest. One advantage this offers me is the ability to bring emotion to thought, and thought to emotion. I am fascinated by the possibilities that what has been called variously a documentary criminology, a cultural criminology, or a sensory criminology, offers to such a combining of approaches. It is my firm conviction, after little more than a few months studying Criminal Justice, that nothing will change – at least in English-speaking countries – until we are able to *feel* what it is like to suffer the real cruelty of Justice, and its application in both the England & Wales I know fairly well by now as well as in other analogous legal places and communities.

In order to feel the pain, we have to sense it. And in order to sense it, we must use more than our logical sides.

This, I believe, is the rationale and justification for studying the subject of surveillance in art-gallery spaces – in this case, those of FACT Liverpool. To this end, fascinating observations and interviews carried out in relation to FACT's “how much of this is fiction.” exhibition, which ran this spring in its galleries in the city, have been made over the past few months. To date, this research has generated 10,000 words of observational material and will end up producing around 40,000 words of transcripts.

My position – initially, I have to say, against surveillance of any kind – has changed quite considerably over this period. I can't say exactly how as yet, nor where my final position will lie, but I think we need to quote – at this point – from the French thinker and producer of intellectual toolboxes, Michel Foucault:

“My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism. I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger.”

“On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress.” Afterword, in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Massachusetts Press. (1983)

In the post-truth age which “how much of this is fiction.” has defined so effectively, we must surely listen more closely to Foucault than ever before. Everything *is* dangerous, it is clear. But the scent of danger is what refines our senses: and if a sensory criminology is going to change this world for the better, it is danger we do have to decide to pursue – every single thought-provoking second of our lives.

For by confronting such danger, we acquire the ability to channel – and ultimately reshape – it. And this must always be to the good.