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The Commodification of the Criminal Corpse: 'Selective memory' in Posthumous Representations of Criminal

Denham, J.
Jack.denham@york.ac.uk - +44 (0)1904 433041

Department of Sociology, University of York
University Road, York, North Yorkshire, YO10 5DD
UNITED KINGDOM

Words: 7,941

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ABSTRACT: *For the last twenty years, you have been able to buy body parts of criminals on the internet. Through repeated exposure to the corpse in popular culture, the boundaries between real and facsimile are blurring when it comes to the cadaver, but 'murderabilia', a consumeristic arm of 'dark tourism', is often sold as the most authentic way to consume crime in the culture industry. Foltyn argues that in the process of consuming death, we are 'creating corpse facts and fictions' (Foltyn, 2008, p. 155). With regards to murderabilia, my contribution offers the concept of 'selective memory' as a way to understand how positive histories are enhanced in posthumous representations of criminal. A 'selective memory' augments these corpse fictions, more than the facts, making for lopsided representations of the criminal corpse. This paper of three parts analyses historical commodification of the criminal corpse, arguing that being dead has often been a prerequisite of achieving notoriety for criminals. Second, a case study of Charles Manson is used to showcase the brand-like qualities attached to successful criminal celebrities. Third, this case study is continued through news-media representations, to show that the criminal corpse is recalled with a 'selective memory', missing violent aspects and focussing instead on brand.*

KEYWORDS: criminal; corpse; selective memory; murderabilia; commodification

Introduction

The criminal body is increasingly bought and sold, commodified and consumed, through online outlets as murder memorabilia. There are currently (November 2015) more than ten snippets of Charles Manson's hair and fingernails for sale through just one of these outlets, *Murder Auction*. This is foregrounded by a growing public interest in the dead body in general, which has 'moved the corpse to the forefront of many museum exhibits' (Linke, 2005, p. 13), as well as a pervasive public fascination with crime, criminals and criminal violence. Sociologists have argued that while criminals are commodified in this fashion, this array of morbid souvenirs serving as reminders of their crimes means that they are 'unlikely to be forgotten' (Penfold-Mounce, 2010b, p. 257). Yet, there has been little academic work directly considering the ways in which death and commodification can alter our collective memory of an offender. The complexities of remembrance through the commodified corpse are compounded by a cultural temperature that is fascinated with the serial killer (Schmid, 2005) through the consumption of goods. These include crime films that glorify criminal exploits, books accounting their legacies and exhibitions of the bodies themselves – all contributing to an increasingly fictionalised understanding of the criminal. With unprecedented access to corpses digitally and through television or other forms of popular culture, and several *Crime Scene Investigation* type dramas that focus on fake-dead-bodies (Foltyn, 2008), the boundaries between real and facsimile are blurring when it comes to the cadaver. In particular, after death, these mediated representations along with commodified snippets of criminal become the main lens through which we exercise what O'Neill and Seal

would term our 'transgressive imagination' (2012) – but the extent to which these discourses provide an unbalanced recollection of transgression is yet to be interrogated. Considering news-media representations of dead and commodified criminal, my contribution in this paper offers the concept of 'selective memory' as a way to understand how these blurry mediations enhance positive histories at the expense of a criminal's more gruesome qualities.

It has been argued that the activity of remembering through 'dark tourism', while being a morbid form of entertainment, can be seen as a method of confronting and coping with death in modern societies (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Also, the fictionalised way in which death is represented at these attractions can be used to soften and make accessible otherwise gruesome activities (Penfold-Mounce, 2015). While it is clear that the immortalising of criminals through exhibitions, film or merchandise will lead to altered remembrance, all aspects of a criminal's behaviour, personality and lifespan are not remembered with equal diligence. Representations of the criminal dead are extremely discriminating when it comes to who will be exhibited, and what parts of their lives they will be celebrated for – a central process of selective remembrance. Through this mediated consumption, 'we are creating corpse facts and fictions to revive, re-imagine, and "play" with the dead' (Foltyn, 2008, p. 155). It is these 'corpse fictions', and not the 'corpse facts' that are immortalised in representations of the criminal dead through what I term 'selective memory'.

Being commodified in death, according to Penfold-Mounce, is 'capable of inspiring and reinforcing celebrated, or celebrity, status for the deceased' (2010b, p. 251) – insofar as these 'star' like qualities are those biased by selective remembrance. This mediated consumption of the criminal is bound up with their mythological, 'brand like' qualities or 'signs' (Lash & Urry, 1994), prioritising these assets over more gruesome and violent qualities that are usually credited with creating criminal-celebrities. In other words, we 're-imagine' and 'play' (Foltyn, 2008) with the dead, insofar as their mythological and symbolic qualities are those that endure into posthumous representations of the criminal. Nowhere is this commodification more visible than in the explosion of interest in murderabilia – the sale of items associated with famous violent crimes. Many items fall under the umbrella of murderabilia, summarised by Brian Jarvis:

> Murderabilia ranges from serial killer art (paintings, drawings, sculpture, letters, poetry), to body parts (a lock of hair or nail clippings), from crime scene materials to kitsch merchandising […] of 'superstars' like Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer and John Wayne Gacy (Jarvis, 2007, p. 327).

While Jarvis pays equal attention to 'body parts', this is easily the smallest category for reasons of availability. Nevertheless, the market for items of 'bodily murderabilia' is steadily increasing. Fascination with and subsequent collection of body parts is not new, with Larson suggesting that history is 'littered' with severed heads of several kinds, 'embellishing almost every facet of our society' (Larson 2014, 1). The phrase 'headhunting' has its origins in this very practice of collecting, organising and exhibiting parts of corpses. Although its meaning is rooted in historical collections there is a burgeoning market for fragments of corpse (Davis, 2015), seemingly still serving the same purpose as 'grisly souvenirs' (Larson 2014, 7). The

most common item of bodily murderabilia, likely again due to availability, is the hair of a convicted serial killer – and the most popular criminal, for some of the same reasons, is Charles Manson. Manson's popularity has remained high for decades. Of the several violent murderers that are offering, or have previously offered their dispensable body parts for sale, Manson is the most in-demand commodity.

The paper will begin by engaging with the display and appeal of the criminal dead, suggesting that historically, criminal cadavers have been remembered and exhibited in a way that accentuates their more flattering qualities. Following this, a case study of Charles Manson will be used to showcase the brand-like qualities attached to successful criminal celebrities. In the third and final section, this case study will be extended to describe how, after death, it is these assets that are preserved over the more gruesome qualities more commonly associated with violent serial murders. In this final section, the term 'selective memory' will be expanded as a useful way to engage with posthumous representations of the criminal corpse. I use the term selective memory not only to denote a trend toward romanticising and remembering criminals for their more attractive, charismatic or intelligent qualities. Moreover, selective memory is an amendment to the established understanding of 'criminal celebrity' as something that is driven mainly by transgression – by gore, blood and violence – by a desire for pure and authentic experiences. Conversely, through the commodification of the corpse, these visceral qualities will be highlighted as those that are 'selectively forgotten'.

The Criminal Corpse after Death

Being dead is often a prerequisite of enjoying celebrated status or favourable representation for criminals. Most commonly, the criminal corpse is consumed through modern media like film, television and novel rather than raw public display or collection. Gibson argues that 'the criminal, once anatomized in the operating theatre, is now anatomized in the text [after] the display of the criminal body […] was systematically eliminated in Victorian Britain' (Gibson, 1990, p. 75). This is credited with large scale changes to publishing that allowed for a relatively large audience to consume the corpse through proxy and media remains the most popular method, although there are notable exceptions. From mummification, to taxidermy, to plastination (Desmond, 2002) (Walter, 2004), preservation of the human corpse for display has been frequent and diverse. The way by which the corpse is consumed, however, can alter the legacy of the dead by having a pronounced influence on the features that are remembered and those that are forgotten. One foremost method is 'plastination', (the act of replacing bodily liquids with plastics for preservation), with plastinated corpses displayed in museums, for example the *Bodyworlds* exhibitions in Europe and Asia (Leiboff, 2005). Leiboff argues that the bodies are often preserved in a flattering state of youthfulness, transforming through the various practical and theatrical qualities of display. Leiboff likens plastination to vanity, arguing that '[plastination is] the ultimate cosmetic and plastic surgery, in which bodies are protected from decay and are given new lives in death [avoiding the otherwise inevitable] transformation of the human form in death' (p. 224). While the physical body is saved from decomposition in this way, the process of altering the human form is not without consequence when it comes to remembrance – the 'vile' qualities are missing in this form of

posthumous consumption (Leiboff, 2005), with a body's more desirable characteristics being accentuated in the corpse.

This air toward *positive* preservation of the corpse is not a recent phenomenon with roots in 14th century Europe. Tampering with the body after death, in renaissance Italy, was reserved for two statuses of people. First, the most respected members of religious society, which 'normally involved evisceration and was used to preserve the bodies of saints' (Park, 1994, p. 6). Second, the criminal, for the purposes of prolonging punishment after death, or for educating society on human anatomy. Exhibitions lasting days of the forensic post-mortem of the criminal would take place to reveal the inner workings of the human body to the public (Park, 1994). These early cases of the exhibition of the criminal corpse represented the ultimate punishment in that bodies could not be commuted to the afterlife after mutilation. Lieboff cites being hung drawn and quartered, having a steak pushed through the heart, and dissection as the main forms of sabotage of resurrection. The implication being that mutilation, or a lack of proper corpse preservation, is a negative fate, with the opposite, effective preservation of corpse as positive, saintly, and having religious currency (Leiboff, 2005). The trend of preserving the body in death, though, can be also observed with deviant corpses, for example, Vladimir Lenin's tomb. According to Schoeberlein:

> Dead Lenin was ripe for […] mythologizing. He would be rendered into a symbol of Bolshevik enthusiasm, sagacity and purity. His corpse, on display in his tomb, was an object of purity, seemingly unaffected by the corruption of death. […] Lenin, on death, was quickly turned into a distant yet warm figure (2004, p. 213).

Lenin's legacy encased within a mausoleum in Moscow has managed to circumnavigate the political controversy that he courted in life. Instead, he is remembered as 'warm', referred to using the prefix 'grandfather' by many Russians (2004). The 'corruption' of death, referring to the processes of decay mentioned by Leiboff (2005), along with the more visceral qualities of the corpse, have been avoided in favour of the preservation of Lenin's myth. This is part of a broader pattern toward mythologizing controversial or deviant figures that has contributed to the phenomena of criminal celebrity (Penfold-Mounce, 2010a) and a general appeal for the criminal dead. An example more indicative of murderabilia is William Corder, guilty of the 1827 murder of Maria Martin and cited by McCorristine as one of the most consumed atrocities of the time. Markedly, the modes by which Corder was consumed ranged form plays, to ballads, to exhibitions and the private sale of his body parts – all of which are credited with manipulating his remembrance. The criminal acts themselves and the posthumous representations of criminal became intertwined, discursively informing one another to the extent that the margins between representation and reality became permeable (McCorristine, 2014). Corder's celebration in popular culture has become inseparable from the crimes themselves, leading to a remembrance infiltrated by fiction.

Corder represents criminal celebrities, who when commodified as corpse, frequently enjoy more positive representations than they did when alive. Brand qualities remain intact, while deplorable behaviours are side-lined. Despite transgression being central to our attraction to criminality (Penfold-Mounce, 2010a), it is the torn or deceased *corpse* (Seltzer, 1998) that enjoys the greatest appeal. Penfold-Mounce argues that once a criminal has

become a corpse, we become 'enthralled'. Enthralment with the criminal dead manifests as the consumption of souvenirs as well as actual body parts which in some instances, for varying ailments, were believed to have mystical healing powers and varying superstitious benefits until as late as the 1940s (2010b). The same allure, we can assume, is corpse-specific in that living criminals were not held in any value. Through death, the seductive qualities of the criminal-celebrity are immortalised in the corpse while the negative features of their myth are selectively forgotten.

The oft cited *Robin Hood Principle* (Seal, 2009) – a theory of the formation of notoriety – is also one of posthumous myth. Continuing from previous work on legendary outlaws (1996), Seal argues that it is the noble, good and courageous criminals that we become infatuated with – with their mythic qualities being central to their preservation in folklore. Hero status is often sparked by an incident involving religious or class tensions within a society, occurring at the boiling point of social frictions (Seal, 2009). Instead of focussing attention on the perceived good deeds carried out by criminals, or their perception as embodying the ideology of the oppressed (Hobsbawm, 2001), Seal's explanation of historical criminal-celebrity leans toward fable and myth as the posthumous consequences of celebrated criminality. That is to argue that a conditioning quality of the status of 'outlaw' (Seal, 1996) or 'bandit' (Hobsbawm, 2001) is post-mortem - being represented favourably as a criminal often requires that you be a corpse. As a result, these characters are seen as epitomising a kind of 'moral code' and honour that is at the centre of their remembrance. They are 'celebrated in folklore, romanticised in the mass media and commodified in the tourism and heritage industries' (Seal, 2009, p. 69) and through posthumous commodification their myths are preserved over the gruesome details.

Corpse is at the forefront of a western fascination with violence to the extent that it has been argued, in this journal, that individuals have developed a kind of morbid 'gaze', softening exposure to death in popular culture and normalising the corpse (Penfold-Mounce, 2015). The same lens could perhaps explain the ability of criminal corpses to be represented positively after death. When Mark Seltzer discusses western culture's fascination with violence, he does so in terms of the *wound* – his well used phrase 'torn and opened body' (Seltzer, 1998, p. 253) refers, in its most literal interpretation, to bloodied or dead body. At the forefront of this 'wound culture', entangled within America's fascination with death, are serial killers and mass murderers – the focus and case study of this paper. From the serial killer, we are unable to avert our eyes as 'death is theatre for the living' (Seltzer, 1998, p. 22). It is this commodification of the dead that has a modifying influence on a criminal's remembrance.

Branding the Serial Killer

In order for a criminal to have positive aspects that can be selectively remembered after death they must first have enjoyed recognition in life. The extent to which criminals have successfully branded themselves can be credited with an influence. Corpse collecting and accumulation is not just a central facet of murder-related popular culture, but also a recurring part of contemporary and classic fiction (Kim, 2011). For Foucault, to be a criminal glorified and immortalised after death (in literature) is 'the exclusive privilege of those who are really

great' (1977/1975, p. 69). In the new era of the exhibition of criminality through media forms, 'the criminal was wicked, of course, but he was also intelligent' (p. 69) – criminals that are consumed are those who have greatness, strength and power, and who court these characteristics as part of a transgressive brand. This mediated exposure is afforded only to the great due to the shift in consumption of criminal from violent public execution or torture, to glorification in popular culture. This corresponds with a movement from the consumption of gore and violence, to analytical intelligence when it comes to criminality, for example, the detective novel (Foucault, 1977/1975). Through murderabilia, we witness a reinvigoration of the physical consumption of the criminal body. Although, the mediated form identified by Foucault is still dominant, and the shifts that he identified remain. That is, that qualities of intelligence, greatness and power remain dominant in filtering who is celebrated and consumed and how they are preserved, whereas outright bloodthirstiness is regularly side-lined.

It has been argued that central to the success of a criminal as a celebrated figure is a value tied up in transgressive (Penfold-Mounce, 2010a), or violent (Duclos, 1998) behaviour. Although, the seductiveness of repetitive, sexualised murderer is as much tied up in marketization as criminality. The visceral aspects are not endowed upon the corpse to the same extent as the more virtuous assets of rebelliousness or intelligence. The trend toward remembering using the rhetoric of tenacity rather than criminality is an inherent quality of the modern consumption of criminals and their corpses tied up in branding. Particularly skilled at branding himself is Charles Manson, providing a good example through which this argument can be reinforced. Leader of the Manson Family cult in the late 1960s, Manson was held responsible for seven murders. Despite not carrying out the crimes himself, he has enjoyed attention and commodification beyond any other criminal making him a useful example of the importance of mythical qualities over the gruesome. 'Helter Skelter', a phrase used by Manson to refer to his belief in an impending race war, has since become a catchphrase within murderabilia culture. Also central to his brand is the cross and later, swastika, that he carved into his forehead. His willingness to evoke countercultural imagery (Monteith, 2008) has played a large part in his success as a rebellious brand.

Manson's prudent marketization of himself makes his case particularly pertinent. As other killers have done with success (Schmid, 2004), Manson makes a business from selling almost anything that he can produce while incarcerated. A cursory search using three main murderabilia websites, *Serial Killers Ink, Murder Auction* and *Supernaught* for the keyword 'Manson' reveals 510 items for sale [17 September 2015] ranging from signed photographs to documents and prison records, to dispensable parts of his body such as cuttings of hair and fingernails. He also paints, with most of his artwork bearing the swastika symbol that he wears on his forehead selling anywhere from five hundred to five thousand dollars. He has made a significant profit with his son reporting that he can make six figures from murderabilia. Manson is a countercultural icon and is consumed as such through this array of merchandise. A 1960s replica of his face adorns the t-shirts and posters of many provocatively inclined individuals in pop-art *Che-Guevara-style*. As a countercultural icon he is being consumed in a similar way to that outlined by Heath and Potter in their seminal text *The Rebel Sell* (2005) in that his lack of conformity has become part of his brand image. While this is not the mainstream, it is important to note that Manson has an appeal beyond his

violent history that is rooted in a broader message of counterculture. One that individuals are willing to consume outwardly as part of a display of transgression, despite, and not necessarily due to, his links to deplorable acts of subjective violence.

This appeal is perhaps what Hale terms the 'romance of the outsider' (2011). The belief, central to the post World War Two west, that 'people somehow marginal to society possess cultural resources and values missing among other Americans' (p. 1). Manson has been successful in utilising this embedded sympathy for cultural outsiders during his lifetime of notoriety, but these qualities are not necessarily violent. Characters on the fringes of music, film and fiction could also be characterised as 'economically enfranchised people [that are] marginal and alienated' (Hale, 2011, p. 3). Manson, conversely but to the same effect, represents a marginal and alienated character that has become economically enfranchised through publicity and self promotion. That is to argue that those who are culturally marginal (but not necessarily criminal) can be seen to market themselves as transgressive to gain popularity, whereas the transgressive attempt to cultivate cultural relevance in order to achieve similar ends. At the heart of this jumble is a question that is central to the success (marketability) of the physical by-products of criminals (murderabilia): what qualities of a criminal are successfully commuted into commodified objects, and to what extent do these representations accurately remember the criminal, or favour more positive histories instead. As Linke (2005) suggests, when exhibited in a museum context a corpse's remembered history does not remain unaltered during preservation.

Museum exhibits are memory making in that they are responsible for interpreting and making available objects through which memories are constructed. 'The production of historical consciousness has become increasingly entangled with the commodity form' (Linke, 2005, p. 13) in this way, and murderabilia, or the consumption of corpse parts more generally, can be understood as a modern extension of this. The commodification of memory is often centred around violence and the body due to their perception as temporally *real* and *authentic* – qualities that are understood to also be central to the attraction of murderabilia. However, objects on display in museums and for sale as murderabilia are not temporally realistic and their remembrance is modified in tandem with their preservation. Corpses on display in the *Bodyworlds* exhibitions are 'rescued from decay' (Linke, 2005, p. 13), but this saving cannot be applied to all aspects outside of the physical body. Identified in these exhibitions is a trend toward presenting corpses 'without reference to the deceased subjects' personal biography, [where] corpses are aestheticized in such a way as to suppress any evocations of violence, victimhood or history' (Linke, 2005, p. 18). In *Bodyworlds*, this is achieved through sanitization of the subject and an absence of reference to the personal histories of the corpses, negating the commonplace reaction of disgust and replacing it with a positive outlook on corpse. Famous criminals, through collection and display, achieve a similar result through branding in that they manage to 'successfully evade the memory work of history' (Linke, 2005, p. 18) by being selectively remembered in their commodification as murderabilia. In the example of *Bodyworlds*, death is pre-empted by preservation – whereas in the example to follow, this process of commodification takes place through branding in pre-empt of death.

Charles Manson Selectively Remembered

The effect of this branding and resultant selective memory is nowhere more visible than in modern murderabilia, and in the example of recent media attention paid to Manson's corpse. Elaine Burton, from Illinois U.S.A, has featured in online and tabloid news media frequently in the past year due to her proposed and subsequently cancelled marriage to Charles Manson (Feeney, 2014). First reported in November 2013, the pair planned to marry after Burton had moved near to the California State Prison – Corcoran, to be closer to Manson. Just over a year elapsed after the engagement announcement when the wedding was cancelled. The tabloid press, giving varying accounts of the circumstances, attributed the marriage's non-start to the apparent revelation that Burton, as a morbid kind of 'gold-digger' at less than half his age, was only interested in Manson for his corpse. Burton wanted to put Manson's corpse on display and charge for entry to her commodified husband as a crossover between murderabilia item and museum exhibit. This created several obstacles for the couple to overcome, not least Manson's personal belief that he himself is immortal. Reportedly, author of the upcoming book *The Retrial of Charles Manson* (McCormack, 2015), Daniel Simone, had leaked the corpse revelation to the press citing sources from inside the prison. Through a chain link of rumour and publicity, several news outlets have covered the revelation with varying diligence, but all selectively remembering the positive aspects of Manson's character while neglecting their negative counterparts.

In the mediated narrative of Manson's pre-corpse, his pursuer, Elaine Burton, suffers a character assassination while the deceased (almost) criminal does not. These media representations of the incident will be used to expand the concept of selective memory in the commodification of the criminal corpse and murderabilia. The online versions of tabloid news articles regarding Burton's failed relationship with Manson were archived in April 2015 and analysed thematically. A total of thirty articles were used to inform this paper in conjunction with a 'digital ethnography' approach (Murthy, 2008). An online search engine (Google due to its popularity), was used to identify the articles which held the key-terms 'Manson' and 'corpse'. Sampling stopped after forty as the focus of the articles digressed.

One journalist's facetious observation sums up the biased opinion that is commonplace in these articles. When referring to Manson and Burton, they write: 'one is an unreliable, allegedly manipulative crazy person, and the other is Charles Manson' (Hathaway, 2015). The bodily-murderabilia curator and collector, Burton, is represented as cold, manipulative, foolish, deceitful. Comparisons to Manson's own crimes are commonplace, and outrage at her intentions is disproportionately large – reflected unflatteringly against a staunch defence of the innocent, elderly, yet highly intelligent and un-defeatable power-figure of Manson. The message is resoundingly clear, the murderabilia collector, the profiteer, is in many ways more repulsive than the violent criminal himself. In an article titled *Charles Manson Calls off Wedding after Learning his Fiancée is too Evil even for Him*, Reed mirrors several other journalists with the sentiment that 'Burton's idea is stupid to begin with because [Manson] doesn't believe he'll ever die' (Reed, 2015). The comic subtext of many of these quotes is not lost on this author, but of the thirty-one instances where Manson's perceived immortality is mentioned, only eleven use this as a device to disrepute the murderer. Instead, the revelation that Burton is (foolishly) using the criminal for his corpse is

used to discredit Burton's romantic intentions toward him and bring into question her commitment and knowledge of her fiancé's life. The fact that she is seeking to monetize the corpse of an immortal person is a good example – is she not aware that profiting from his corpse is fundamentally flawed in the context of Manson's own chronology? Above all, Burton is represented as a bemused super-fan that is, like many women before, under the pervasive control of Manson's powerful ideology.

For Valentine (2015), murderabilia departs from museum exhibitions at the point of commodification in that exhibitions tend to display the corpse as subject with its life history still attached, whereas fragments of corpse sold into private collection are cast as de-personalised objects. She writes: 'We make the assumption that a trade in these products, if not illegal, then certainly must be something clandestine; something akin to a shifty salesman opening his mackintosh in a dark alley and showing his wares to immoral collectors' (Valentine, 2015). While it is clear that the 'salesman' (Burton) has been represented as 'shifty', it is not the case that Manson, as a full-corpse museum exhibition, is discussed with his life story still-attached and in-tact. Instead, the deprecating narrative that Burton's romantic interests were masking the fact that she 'only wanted the wedding so she could cash in on his corpse' (Bucktin, 2015) are paralleled by contrary, much more positively selective representations of the objectified criminal. Manson's corpse is posthumously embodied with a level of intelligence and tenacity - he is repeatedly lauded for his astuteness and cunning.

In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault (1977/1975) invites the reader to consider the semantics of criminal-celebrity by examining the use of categories such as 'misfortune' or 'abomination', or phrases such as 'illustrious', 'lamentable' or 'famous' in works that account the deeds of various socio-cultural 'bandits'. The semantics of Manson's remembrance in these media representations exacerbate his selective remembrance. Words such as 'mastermind', 'architect', 'kingpin' and 'leader' all occur more than once. A common thread running through the articles professes that Manson realised Burton's manipulation quickly, implying that it is not possible to outwit a mastermind of the stature of Charles Manson. His depravity, his convictions and the specifics of his crimes are not discussed in any more detail than a passing reference. He is discussed as a cult leader, an icon of the nineteen-sixties, someone who has succeeded in influencing minds. He is described as having 'encouraged' the Manson Family, and as staunchly defending a strong philosophy. Words such as 'figurehead' and 'upscale' leave the reader perplexed as to the subject of the accolades. The reader could be forgiven, in some extreme instances, for confusing his jailable offences for positive acts of defiance and his corpse for a national treasure. Manson's past is discussed, for want of a more suitable descriptive, through the language of fame. Burton is described as being infatuated with the killer through a consistent phraseology of eminence and celebrity. 'Influence', 'fascination' and 'besotted' all occur repeatedly, but 'cult' is the most noteworthy terminology.

Inevitably, this leads to comparisons with Manson's history of manipulating women – with suggestions that he 'strung [Burton] along' (Sanderson, 2015). Supportive implications range from vague suggestions that the killer is the wilier character – 'Manson had the last laugh' (Hooton, 2015) – to declarations that Manson, as part of his broader successes in profit-making, had been stringing Burton along for financial gain. Other journalists suggest that Manson's 'complicity' in the plot was in itself double edged, that he would exploit

Burton's apparent exploitation for amenities that were not readily available in prison. Perhaps the most notable examples of these biased representations are those that go one step further, implicating Manson as the mastermind behind the plot in the first instance. One journalist suggests that Manson 'doesn't come off like the one being "played for a fool"' (Hathaway, 2015) in the relationship. It is interesting to see that even in a scenario where Manson appears to be the manipulated party, he defaults into a position of control in journalistic accounts of his pre-corpse. I suggest that this selective memory is due to his successful commodification of himself as a countercultural brand, and the subsequent immortalisation of notions of power and control that are, when weighing up the qualities that a criminal requires to become celebrated, more noteworthy than gruesomeness and violence.

The branding of Manson does not go unreferenced in these journalistic representations. Manson was the leader of a criminal group, or 'family', which is often described as a cult in its traditional meaning as a proxy for extreme religious devotion, religious sect or the worship of a figure or object. In these articles, however, it is employed with its more modern, popular cultural meaning. As in: offbeat, trendy, out of the ordinary, alternative, unusual or progressive – the antonym of mainstream culture, better described as counterculture. As a living man, Manson is guilty of being heavily implicated in the murder of several people – but as a corpse, Manson only appears guilty of having committed the crime of notoriety. Representations of his cult popularity are communicated with clarity, while his criminality remains imprecise and strewn with factual errors. Here we arrive at the crux of this argument: the gruesomeness of Manson's crimes, a quality that is often cited as a driving factor behind fascination with criminals, is not an equally important quality of his posthumous success. Violence, in the business model of 'Manson's Tomb', is doubly absent. First in that although The Manson Family's crimes were gruesome, Manson himself was not a gruesome actor in that he did not perform them himself, and second in that those limited aspects of gruesomeness are not preserved as part of his brand. Instead, his criminality is selectively remembered with acts of depravity being left out of discussions of his value. Manson's preserved corpse is represented as an immortalised counter-cultural icon, not a dead murderer.

Representations of this countercultural icon that directly reference display and exhibition do so through repeated comparisons to Vladimir Lenin. Burton is said to be 'Flaunting' (Jordynshaffer, 2015) the criminal corpse, by planning 'to lay out Manson's remains in a glass crypt [in a] bizarre California version of Lenin's Tomb [that] would draw huge crowds and make big money' (Sanderson, 2015) – from 'one of the most notorious names in American criminal history' (Piggott, 2015). The word 'tomb' is used far more frequently than alternatives such as 'coffin', semantically elevating the subject to a level not usually befitting of a criminal. 'Much like […] the glass-encased body of Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin in Moscow' (Baker, 2015), Manson's corpse is considered as politically relevant, an icon of the people, albeit as a celebrated facet of popular culture rather than a figure of historical political importance.

This convenient-forgetting of key negative information with positive qualities moving to the forefront could perhaps be explained in Manson's shift from person to object. According to Jarvis (2007), there is an established likening of violent-criminal to violent-*consumer* that is well used as a cinematic device in popular culture. Objects, on the other

hand, are to be *consumed* and as objects of consumption, could lose the violence of consumption inherent in killing. Jarvis employs the examples of Patrick Bateman from the book and film *American Psycho* (Ellis, 1991/2011) (Harron, 2000), and John Doe from the film *Se7en* (Fincher, 1995) to describe devices used to juxtapose serial *killer* against serial *consumer*. Serial killing has a counterpart, serial consumption – in that they share some key characteristics such as repetitive and compulsive behaviour, wastefulness and the need to continually consume the same type of objects. Dyer, mirroring Jarvis' arguments about filmic criminals, also compares the good of Detective Somerset (Se7en) against the bad of John Doe (Se7en), suggesting that their analytical and formulaic behaviours represent the good and the bad as two sides of the same coin – theoretically interchangeable if their occupations were subtracted (Dyer, 1999). Using these provocative comparisons, it is possible to see criminal and consumer as intrinsically related, and that a shift toward consumable from consumer could alter an individual's representation from negative to positive. This brings a literal meaning to Appadurai's popular idiom *The Social Life of Things* (2007/1986) inside which comparable sentiments are voiced:

> We call misers greedy, the same word we use to describe out-and-out consumers […] suggesting that we recognise […] all forms of excessive incorporation of value (Gell, 2007/1986, p. 113).

Gell observes inside the nature of material consumption that similar themes can be found within consumer practices that appear at first to be polar opposites (the spendthrift vs the thrifty). At the same time, it is noted that extreme consumption in any form (be it accumulating money, or objects) can be described using the word *greedy*. We label the extremities of consumption, or the extremely money-minded, with a universally negative stereotype, while being sympathetic toward the consumed. If we were to consider Manson's shift from criminal person to passive object one from consumer to consumed, we can better understand his selective remembrance that is conducted through a largely positive lens. Once dead and commodified, Manson is no longer a violent actor but a passive object. Conversely, Burton is demonised when she acts as the consumer of Manson's corpse. As such, the aforementioned news-media articles undermine simplistic and linear narratives of good and evil which, when it comes to murderabilia, are embodied as *collector* and *collected*. In this case, the established understanding that to collect murderabilia is a leisure practice that preserves evil has been flipped on its head – it is the evil collector who selfishly seeks to appropriate the decomposing legacy of an international icon. In this narrative, the collector is reverted back toward traditional narratives of colleting – from the botanist to the headhunter, of colonial acquisition, forcefulness, cultural appropriation and inhumanity, while simultaneously becoming divorced from the sovereignty that historically allowed headhunters to pillage treasures from foreign cultures.

> The sheer brutality of the act of decapitation set apart 'them' from 'us' [...]. Headhunters were characterised in the press as emotional people who were unable or unwilling to recognise the ethical implications of their actions. […] The vision of headhunting informed a much deeper dichotomy that flourished in the late nineteenth century, between 'wild' people and the

> more 'refined' viewing public who gazed upon them (Larson, 2014, pp. 39-40).

The collecting of body parts, it seems, has always been characterised by narrative dichotomies of sorts, two are pointed out here by Larson (them vs us, wild vs refined) – both of which can be observed in this case study. The split identified by Larson between 'us' and 'them' is one between *collector* and *collected*, and as Manson moves from one to the other in his commodification as corpse, so his representations follow. The *collected* are understood as victim, whereas the *collector* of morbid items has historically been demonised. It is in this shift that criminals are able to enjoy a more favourable posthumous representation, and this denial of agency can go some way to explaining how such violent actors can maintain popularity amongst non-violent collectors. Burton becomes unrefined in her depiction as the hopelessly emotional character, portrayed as not comprehending the ethical implications of acting as a corpse-gold-digger. Her monstrousness is multifaceted, she is styled as feral in her upbringing and tempestuous in her willingness to court controversy. Whereas Manson's monstrousness is overlooked in death - he is recollected as cunning and wily. His wildness, although present in his history, is not bestowed upon his remains. When the criminal is a commodity to be purchased, we support the plight of the consumed, not the consumer, leading to selective posthumous representations of criminals.

Conclusion

Principally, this paper has offered the concept of selective memory to understand the commodification of the criminal corpse. Through the case study of Charles Manson's representation in tabloid media, it was suggested that all aspects of the criminal corpse are not recollected with equal diligence. Using Manson, it was argued that being dead, or commodified as murderabilia, acted as a way to distract from gruesome deeds in a way that a living actor does not enjoy. Selective memory allows the *consumed* to be recalled positively while the *consumer* is at the full mercy of the media. It was suggested that this selective memory is in part due to a tendency to victimise the 'headhunter' and the aggressive accumulator of objects while romanticising the objects themselves. The idea that all living humans are a 'being-toward-death' due to a persistent cultural and conscious awareness of our mortality – one of Heidegger's popular neologisms (1962/1927) – is made literal in that Manson is commodified in the context of his temporality. When our case study is considered a monetized commodity, his positive qualities dominate his posthumous representations.

In the first section, theories of criminal celebration (Seal, 2009/Seltzer, 1998) were revealed as being integrally posthumous. In the second section, it was argued that branding and the cultivation of a brand image are also integral to being celebrated as a criminal, and that these mythic qualities are those that endure into corpsehood. As Penfold-Mounce has argued: 'The criminal celebrated in life can become a celebrated corpse' (2010b, p. 254), but with the help of prudent marketization. In the final section it was revealed that, in posthumous representations of the criminal corpse, gruesome histories are often overpowered by the aforementioned brand-like qualities. Hayward and Presdee argue that cultural criminologists should consider the way in which crime is 'imagined, constructed and framed

within modern society' (2010, p. 3), while Phillips and Strobl suggest forms of media to be places where the 'meaning of crime […] is created, consumed and re-created' (2006, p. 307). In this paper I have considered the impact of branding, commodification and temporality on this mediatized construction of criminal.

With a few exceptions (Schmid, 2005) (Jarvis, 2007), little Sociological work has investigated murderabilia markets. This paper has implications for the study of media representations of violent criminal in that it proposes a divide between the living and the dead. As well, it provides insight into the sensationalistic way in which murderabilia collecting is often reported as a wholly negative hobby, while murder and corpse invade all planes of popular culture. This paper has described 'corpse fictions' (Foltyn, 2008) as the more positive, mythic qualities that are integral to the success and marketability of criminal. Selective memory highlights the necessity for criminals to have more than just transgression in order to enjoy success as murderabilia. Moreover, it contributes to the established understanding of criminal celebrity by making the addition of branding as a qualifying factor. Criminal celebrity is not only driven by a will to transgression, gore, blood, violence and a thirst for the *wound*. These primitive qualities are important, but fandom is selective and requires wounds to work alongside branding and commodification.

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