

Wisconsin Death Trip, Criminal Profiling, and the Artist/Offender

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Wisconsin Death Trip (1973) is the first work of narrative non-fiction by the American writer Michael Lesy, juxtaposing photographs of townspeople in Black River Falls, Wisconsin taken between 1885 and 1940 with grisly excerpts from the local newspaper. By encouraging its reader to connect photographs made by Charles van Schaick with stories of maiming and death in the *Badger State Banner*, Lesy's book augured a forensic approach to image and text at a moment of growing American anxiety over serially-committed violent crime. This talk positions *Wisconsin Death Trip* as a prefiguration of Carlo Ginzburg's "evidential paradigm." Specifically, I connect part of the publication's cultural context—the development of criminal profiling at the Federal Bureau of Investigations—to the paradigm that Ginzburg draws out from Giovanni Morelli's approach to details in paintings. Beginning in 1970 with co-taught courses at the FBI Academy, agents Howard Teten and Patrick Mullany codified criminal profiling as an investigative practice that uses crime scene evidence to hypothesize the behavioral patterns and motivations of an unknown offender. Matched to typologies of criminalized behavior, these subjective inferences are then used to generate profiles of suspects. The shared grounds of connoisseurship and criminal profiling are encapsulated in their mutual theorization of the *signature*, some irreducibly unique aspect of the individual that takes visual form in the details of the artwork/crime scene.

Ye Chen Zhao studies the historical, philosophical, and poetic impacts of photography on art history. He is currently writing a dissertation on posthumously discovered photography in 1970's America. Other research projects include the MoMA installation photographer Soichi Sunami, and the sixteenth-century *Saint Veronica Altarpiece* formerly displayed in Old Saint Peter's Basilica. His work has been generously supported by the Terra Foundation for American Art and the Center for Creative Photography.