A Bruise, A Neck and A Little Finger: The Visual Archive of Ruth Ellis

In what ways can sex or sexual desire be said to be *in* the archive? What do we look for and what can be seen when we search for sex in the archive? Do we know in advance what signs and images we seek, or are we suddenly and unexpectedly struck by the visual traces of sex and sexuality? When contemporaries looked at the woman who is the subject of this article they saw sex everywhere about her: they saw it in her lifestyle; in her clothes, voice and manners; they saw it in her hair and in her make-up. How does the historian reconstitute these visual signs of sexuality; what is needed to recognize the visual remnants and prompts? In the photographic archive related to the last years of this woman's life, sex is explicit and implicit; it is both on the surface of the image and concealed in the spaces in between what the photograph seems to show or is about. Sex is not always readily evident and must be conjured *from* the archive through acts of imagination and interpretation. The meaning of an image often exceeds the particularity of its subject; it is more than what is there and what is shown and is part of a wider set of historical discourses concerning, in this case, sexuality and gender, respectability and criminality. It is for the historian of visual culture to bring these components together and, in so doing, to make the images speak.

Ruth Ellis was the last woman to be hanged in Britain. She was twenty-eight years old. On April 10, 1955 and in front of several witnesses, she shot and killed her lover, David Blakely, outside a public house in north London (Figure 1). Ellis was immediately arrested and, following her committal, she was taken to Holloway Prison. Her trial in the Number One Court at the Old Bailey was a highly public affair; it was covered in the national and international press and sealed her reputation as a femme fatale. Her defence was weak and lacklustre and once her plea of manslaughter on the grounds of provocation was rejected by the trial judge, the jury took just over twenty minutes to convict her of murder, for which the sentence was execution by hanging.

Ellis's relationship with Blakely was physically and psychologically abusive and had she not met him, murdered him and been hanged for her crime, her otherwise unremarkable life would be utterly forgotten. In so many ways, her twenty-eight years were like those of innumerable working-class women in post-war Britain; she has, however, achieved notoriety and has been the subject of films and television series, multiple biographies, histories of crime and jurisprudence, as well as feminist re-readings of her life and death.[1] Her life is also dispersed across the largest press photography archives in the world, where the images that were published on an almost daily basis after the murder can now be searched, researched and licensed. There is an order that is imposed on the visual archive, an organization imposed by search terms that define and delimit the historical significance of the images they describe. There is more to these images, however, than search terms can contain and they reveal more about sex and desire in the 1950s than they appear to show. This article is an exploration of meaning in the visual archive; a practice in feminist visual analysis and historical interpretation that dis-orders the archive and breaks out of neat categories and simple narratives to discover new readings of the image of Ruth Ellis and of the lives of women in post-war Britain.

Ruth Ellis was described at the time of her trial as a "model" and as a "nightclub hostess". A couple of years before her death she had dyed her naturally auburn hair and become a peroxide blonde; she was slim and stylish and always impeccably made-up. All the biographical studies include the anecdote that in the days before her trial she was granted a special request to have her hair re-dyed. In the weeks following her arrest, the darker roots of her natural hair color had begun to grow back and she evidently wanted to look what she believed to be "her best" for her appearance at the Old Bailey. Her defence counsel was alarmed at her appearance, fearing that she looked too hard and glamorous and would give the jury the wrong impression and lose public sympathy. A member of the public later

recalled that she seemed like "a typical West End tart"; a lazy insult that typified the dangerous compound of sexual attraction and aggression that characterized men's reactions to Ellis throughout her short adult life.[2]

This is the end of her story; it is better, however, to go back to the beginning, for we need to take the documented details of Ellis's life into the archive, in order to elicit what photography theorist Ariella Azoulay has described as "the possible within the concrete", to find, in other words, those traces of sex and those signs of abuse that can be conjured from the material signs in the photographs.[3]

Ruth Ellis was born in North Wales in 1926. Her father, Arthur Hornby, was a musician from Manchester; her mother, a Belgian refugee called Elisabertha Goethals, a twenty-year old single mother working in domestic service. As the family grew so its condition deteriorated. Arthur started drinking and became extremely violent and abusive; in her biography of Ellis, Ruth's sister, Muriel Jakubait, claims that she was raped by her father, that she had a child by him and that he also abused Ruth.[4] If these claims are true, then her father's sexual violence was only the beginning of Ellis's experience of male abuse; moreover, she was only one of many women in this period whose relationships and bodies were marked by the signs of male desire and rage. Ellis sought to better herself; she chose from the limited routes available to her and she transformed her appearance to become the glamorous woman who took the dock at the Old Bailey in 1955. Ellis sought to "pass" as a professional, middle-class Englishwoman and to mix in social classes higher than her own; blonde for Ellis was a sign of glamour and sophistication; it is a detail that will help make sense of the photographic archive.[5]

When war broke out in 1939, Ellis was thirteen years old. Like many other girls from working-class families, she left school in 1940, at the age of fourteen, with little or no qualifications and moved to London, where she lived and worked during the war years. In

spite of the dangers of the blitz and subsequent German bombing campaigns, the capital was a logical move for a girl with her sights set beyond an impoverished home in Hampshire, where her family was living. Ellis moved through a number of occupations from factory work and waitressing, to nude photographic model and nightclub hostess. This was not an unusual trajectory for a good-looking, ambitious young woman in the mid-twentieth century; her life maps out a familiar geography of London's commercialised leisure world and an inventory of jobs that enabled Ellis to explore the new forms of personal encounter and social mobility made possible by modern urban conditions.[6]

In her biography of Ellis, her sister writes: "she'd do anything to earn money: modelling, taking photographs; you name it, she did it."[7] Ellis had to earn money to give to her parents and to pay for the son she had with a Canadian soldier during the war, but she also clearly wanted more than the more mundane routes could offer. In the years immediately following the end of the war, a telephonist could earn around £3 a week, a junior clerk around £1 a week and a skilled factory worker £4.[8] The basic weekly salary of a nightclub hostess at this time was £5 and in addition there was commission on the food and drink that she persuaded customers to purchase, along with free evening dresses, accommodation and the patina of glamour.[9]

What did "modelling" mean in the context of post-war employment, gender and sexuality? Like so much language in this period, "modelling" was frequently a euphemism and was loaded with sexual innuendo. Modelling was sexually and morally ambiguous; the running joke about the clubs at the time was that the men did not have film in their cameras but were simply there to ogle the girls. As cultural historian Gillian Swanson has commented, modelling brought together "the domain of sexualized and commodified consumption."[10] Modelling meant sex and readers knew exactly what was implied when the headlines described Ellis as a "model".

From the camera club, Ellis moved on to the ersatz glamour of London's afternoon drinking bars and night clubs and by 1946 she was, her sister writes, "well into club life."[11] Club hostesses were employed to socialize with patrons, to encourage them to spend lavishly on food and drink and also, occasionally, on sex. This was a new commercial environment for attractive, confident young women; whilst they were not prostitutes, in the sense that they were not "public" women on the streets, they might be sexually available and willing to exchange sex for money.[12]

In some ways club life allowed Ellis to achieve some of her ambitions. She was earning good money, was mixing with wealthy men and it was in the Court Club that she met George Ellis. George was seventeen years older than Ruth and he had money; he was also a heavy drinker and violent. They married in November 1950 and moved to Southampton to enable him to take up a job there. Married life was short-lived; George became increasingly violent and, in spite of being pregnant again, Ruth returned to London, where she had her daughter, Georgina, in October 1951. With the breakdown of her marriage, Ellis returned to hostessing and to the Court Club, which had been refurbished and renamed Carroll's, and moved into a flat in Oxford Street, owned by the racketeer, Morris Conley.
Contemporaries saw sex in Ruth Ellis because it was everywhere around her; it defined her environment and saturated her body, her dress and her appearance. It is from this period, around 1952-3, that Ellis dyes her hair platinum blonde and that her image becomes the subject of the photographic archive.[13] Blonde is a rich and polyvalent sign of femininity that expresses diverse forms of racial and sexual identity. In the early-1950s, when Marilyn Monroe was at the peak of her fame, blonde was an international sign of glamor; it was more than this, however, as film historian Richard Dyer states: "Blondeness, especially platinum (peroxide) blondeness, is the ultimate sign of whiteness…And blondeness is racially unambiguous."[14] At a moment, when the pre-War British empire was on the point of collapse

and the impact of migration from the colonies was most intense, blonde femininity was a complex sign of the white nation but also and, at the same time, of sexuality and desirability.

The impact of "going blonde" should not be underestimated. Ellis had assumed the look of contemporary post-war glamour, defined by Hollywood stars and disseminated in films, magazines and advertisements. Her sister describes the effort that Ellis invested in this physical transformation, "It didn't happen overnight. She learned about make-up, hairstyle, clothes and how to talk to well-off people. For somebody in the 1950s, without education, that change was enormous."[15]

According to Jakubait, going blonde worked its magic and transformed her sister, "From the time she started bleaching her hair her character changed. It was like two different people. Being blonde does that. It made her confident and more carefree. She looked beautiful…[like] Marilyn Monroe."[16] Ellis's peroxide curls frame her pale, perfectly made up face (figure 1). With dark arched eyebrows and red parted lips, she is strikingly attractive and draws attention. Ellis needed to look vulnerable in court; she needed to look like a victim and not like a vindictive killer, but everything about the face reproduced in the newspapers in the weeks leading up to her case spelled sex, transgression and premeditation. The photographs we now examine in the archive have been the subject of moral and legal judgement; they are the vestiges of a woman's struggle and failure to achieve both glamor and respectability.

With her new look complete, Ellis was promoted by Conley who made her the manageress of the Little Club, a drinking club in Knightsbridge, where she met David Blakely. Blakely came from a wealthy upper-middle class family. With an undistinguished school and military career behind him, he struggled to find a direction in his life until he discovered motor cars, took up racing and began mixing with the motor racing circle on the tracks and in the London clubs. Blakely was a member of the Little Club and within two weeks of their meeting, he had moved into Ellis's flat above the club. Analysis of Blakely's

character and the details of his turbulent relationship with Ellis are described in all the publications about the murder and it is unnecessary to rehearse them here; it is perhaps sufficient to say that he was charming, a heavy drinker, unstable and violent.

What seems to have fascinated the press most about their relationship was their class difference. From the moment it was made public, when Ellis was arrested after the shooting, her humble background and unwarranted ambition were seen both as the problem within the relationship and the motivation for the murder. Ellis resented and coveted Blakely's class position, which, alongside his mercurial unreliability, might well have produced a tense, hyper performance of upper-class manners and a display of petit bourgeois aspiration, rather than the easy internalization of class style that those who are confident of their social identity assume. There are signs of this tension in the photographic archive (figure 2). An image, probably taken in 1955, apparently in a drinking club. The image freezes at the moment that she lifts her drink to her mouth; she smiles at the camera, perhaps toasting the person taking the picture. She is well dressed in a lace-trimmed *décolleté* gown that shows off her slim, pale shoulders and neck; it was a style that was fashionable and that she would wear again. My eyes are drawn to the dainty watch on her wrist and to the wedding ring (still and always Mrs Ellis); but the detail that strikes me most acutely, is the little finger of the hand holding the glass. It is extended, pointed in a gesture of decorous respectability, that is awkward and self-conscious and painfully *déclassé*.[17] Acknowledging this gesture, the viewer feels the effort that she must constantly make to look acceptable in this context; for Ellis to be other than herself, or, rather, to be always her new self.

Working in this way, across discourses of post-war gender, class and sexuality and the visual discourse of the photographic archive, enables a different way of seeing and feeling the image. Perhaps I have read the image wrongly; perhaps Ellis was relaxed and comfortable at the moment this photograph was taken, but by imbedding the image in the social and sexual

discourses of the moment in which it was made, tension and self-conscious aspiration are the preferred and imaginable conditions and meaning of this photograph and, once seen, they permeate every detail of her body and face.

There is a prurience in the press reporting of Ellis's case; a fascination with her performance of femininity, the sexual nature of her crime and the particular spectacle and pleasure of a woman hanged. The photographs in the press archives are searchable under her name and also through terms such as British Crime and Murder; they have short, generic captions, "Ruth Ellis, who was hanged at Holloway Prison on 13th July 1955…"[18] This is what collects the images together as "an archive" and gives it meaning and Ellis her legacy, her fame. Getty Images is a British-American photo library that supplies stock images and press photographs to commercial clients.[19] Over the years, it has acquired other photo agencies and archives and, amongst hundreds of millions of images, it has a small and extraordinary collection of photographs of Ruth Ellis. Within this collection, there is a group of ten photographs, the archive's last and most recent acquisition; the photographs were taken in 1954, apparently during a single session in Ellis's flat above the Little Club (figures 3-5). The archive caption identifies the photographer as "one Captain Ritchie", although no further information about him can be found.[20] Let us suppose that "Captain Ritchie" was one of the number of ex-servicemen who were members of the Little Club and a keen amateur photographer and that he suggested a private afternoon photo session with Ellis in her flat above the club. Ellis knew about posing; she had modelled at London camera clubs, it would have been a relatively undemanding way of earning some extra money.

These are lazy, generic images; stock poses from a long history of soft porn. A raised leg as a suspender is undone, a smile and a glance at the camera (figure 3); or recumbent, on a sofa, with arms behind the head - a gesture frequently adopted to reveal the breasts, although here the blouse is retained (figure 4). "Captain Ritchie's" photographs are artless in

all senses of the term; they are unsophisticated and candid and they are devoid of aesthetic qualities, there is no discernible interest in composition or framing and the lighting is simply that offered by the closed blinds. A talentless photographer and a model who assumes generic "pin-up" poses.

There is one more photograph in the series, which is slightly different from the previous group. In this image (figure 5), Ellis has removed her top and now holds the leopard skin fabric to cover her breasts. She is closer to the picture surface, looking directly at the camera lens; the image is poorly framed, her head and arm are cut by the edge of the photograph. In his classic study of photography, *Camera Lucida*, the French philosopher and critic, Roland Barthes, differentiates two different modes of photographic meaning, the *studium*, which defines the more conventional, socially and culturally recognizable forms of signification, and the *punctum*, which escapes this symbolic system and which addresses the viewer directly and almost painfully. Barthes describes the *punctum* as "that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)"; it is a kind of physical and emotional violation.[21]

As Ellis removes her top, she reveals a fading bruise on her right upper arm. Violence weaves in and out of Ruth Ellis's life; from her early experiences in her family home, to her marriage to George Ellis and her relationship with David Blakely, men are violent towards her. All the press reports covered Blakely's physical violence and it was acknowledged and described in her trial. Indeed, there is a superabundance of evidence in the print archives of a casual acknowledgement of beatings that resulted in bruises, injuries and even in a miscarriage. It is the most shocking aspect of what is throughout a harrowing and disturbing life. In some respects, I am reluctant to cite too many of these sources, but I also feel compelled to demonstrate just how habitual this physical violence was and how casually it was accepted by Ellis, post-war British society and the judiciary.

Fights between Ellis and Blakely became a feature of life in the club during their relationship and eventually led to Ellis having to leave the flat. In her memoirs, published in the *Woman's Sunday Mirror* shortly before her execution, Ellis is reported as saying, "David often attacked me when he was drunk…Even when other women were there he would smack my face and punch me. When we were alone it was worse."[22] Bruises – fresh and fading – were the constant visual signs of Blakely's abuse; her sister recalls, "My god, the bruises were black and green…She'd casually say: 'Look at these marks on my body. I can't go out until they're gone.'"[23] A bruise is a visible trace of violence on the surface of the body, where the tissue is injured and blood is forced from the site of the blow but the skin is not broken.[24] Bruising tells a history, the color of the mark changes from the time elapsed since it was inflicted, it can be read as a narrative of abuse.

Perhaps most shocking of all is Ellis's own testimony during the trial. Giving evidence on her own behalf on the first day of the trial, Ellis was asked how Blakely's violence manifested itself, she replied, "He only used to hit me with his fist and his hands, but I bruise very easily, and I was full of bruises on many occasions."[25] That phrase, "I bruise very easily", has haunted me during my research on the visual archive of Ruth Ellis. I am aggravated by her acceptance of his violence, by her under-statement and rationalization of the marks of abuse; her fault, not his. It returns to me as I look at the photograph of her posing with the leopard skin cover and all I can now see is the fading bruise on her arm. Ellis was systematically abused and humiliated by Blakely and the bruise is evidence of this. The photograph is testimony to social and sexual identity in post-war Britain; a memento both of male violence and the apathy of state institutions.

In the final days, over a long Easter weekend, as Blakely rejected Ellis and stayed with his racing friends, she stalked him, phoned him and harassed him and finally, with the help of her friend and former lover, Desmond Cussen, she shot and killed him.[26] In her

statement at Hampstead Police Station, after her arrest, she said simply, "I am guilty. I am rather confused."[27]

There are no images, of course, of Ruth Ellis's execution. It is a visual absence, a tremendous gap, in the otherwise endlessly interrogated details of her life and her appearance. Until the middle of the nineteenth century hanging had been a public event, but in 1868 the Capital Punishment Amendment Act removed hanging from public view and thereafter executions took place behind prison walls. As hanging was removed from sight, so it became the subject of the imagination, fed by reports in the popular press. Hanging is a primitive and brutal form of execution; with its rudimentary technology, it represents capital punishment at its most archaic and, as such, began to seem increasingly anachronistic and incompatible with the modernizing aspirations of post-war welfare Britain.[28] Whilst British audiences were held captive by Ellis's story, therefore, there was also a powerful outcry against the barbarity of the sentence and the insensitivity of the British legal system.

There are no images of Ellis's execution and yet the spectre of her hanging has an inescapable presence that seems to haunt every image. The object of voyeuristic attention, her beauty seemed to make the public fantasy of her hanging more compelling; as Jacqueline Rose has observed, Ellis seemed "to release something of that peculiar pleasure which the idea of execution always seems to provoke."[29] Hanging is everywhere in the visual archive and nowhere to be seen; it is the term through which her image can be sought, but it yields everything but the act itself. There is a photograph which was reproduced in all the newspaper coverage (figure 1); often cropped in different ways, it has become one of the most iconic images of Ellis.

It is a photograph of a young, happy couple; they are smartly dressed and probably in a club. Ellis has a small, oval face with a long, slim neck that is emphasized by her pose and her off the shoulder top. Her peroxide blonde hair has been curled in the style made popular

by Marilyn Monroe around 1953, her black arched eyebrows contrasting strikingly with her nearly white hair. She is undeniably good-looking, not as beautiful as Monroe, but she is groomed and stylish. Blakely stands close to her, his cheek flattens the right-hand side of her hair and it is difficult to avoid the impression that his face is a bit oafish and silly, his toothy grin contrasting with her practised smile. It is a picture of two offenders and two victims, one shot, the other hanged.

When viewers saw this picture of Ellis in the papers they knew that she had committed murder and that she would hang. When the judge pronounced sentence at the end of the two-day trial, he delivered the words that were spoken in all capital punishment cases: "The sentence of the Court upon you is that you be taken hence to a lawful prison, and thence to a place of execution, and that you be hanged by the neck until you be dead."[30] Ruth Ellis's neck signifies this sentence; it represents the absolute authority of the state and its right to violence. Everything in the image seems to call attention to this meaning and to make Ellis's neck the focal point; hanging is the unbearable and inescapable connotation. There is an apocryphal story, recounted in Muriel Jakubait's biography, that their father, noting Ruth's "exceptionally long neck", used to say, "All the better for hanging with."[31] Perhaps in a society where execution by hanging is a part of crime and punishment, this is not an unusual everyday quip; it is, nevertheless, chilling, both because of the identity of the speaker and its articulation of a terrible truth in the image.

Ellis's slender neck conveys the fragility of her body. Her daughter tells us that when Ruth was hanged she weighed 7 stone 5 lbs; she was a small woman by any standards and there is, perhaps, something particularly shocking in the mental image of this woman "being hanged by the neck."[32] Although her celebrity hangman, Albert Pierrepoint, wrote that "She died as brave as any man" and that death was instantaneous, this barely conceals the brutality and petty bureaucracy of the process: the standardization of the technology; the mathematical

calculation of the drop; and the official record keeping.[33] Pierrepoint's account is countered by that of Evelyn Galilee, who was a prison warden at Holloway Prison and supervised Ellis during her last weeks in prison:

> It was a vicious drop. Whatever the autopsy report said about it all being all right, clean break and everything – it wasn't all right. It was horrific. She was such a doll-like creature. I could see her as she was. Then I could see her broken body in my mind.[34]

Ellis's brother, Granville Neilson, was asked formally to identify her body and confirmed the damage that had been wrought by the execution and that had been partially disguised by prison officials who draped a scarf around her neck to hide the marks of the hangman's rope.[35]

Galilee's words, "I could see her as she was. Then I could see her broken body in my mind", evoke the structure of representation in the image of Ellis's neck; we see her as she is in the photograph and, at the same time, we imagine her mutilated by the hanging. It is enormously difficult to avoid recreating a voyeuristic or salacious viewing position in writing about this photographic archive and, particularly its resolution. Perhaps this is an inevitable consequence of seeking and finding sexuality and violence, which are present in every image.

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I come away from the archive with a profound sense of sadness; not only for Ruth Ellis, but also for all the other women in post-war Britain who longed for more and whose wishes were thwarted; or who loved and were humiliated and abused. For all those pregnancies, abortions, miscarriages and births that defined the lives of women who were active sexual subjects at this time and who tried to make choices within a limited range of

possibilities. A feminist encounter with the Ellis visual archive is a meeting not only with an individual woman but also and as importantly, a meeting with 1950s sex, sexuality, class and violence. The photographs show a woman's body as commodity and spectacle, a fetish object created through the perfection of surface appearance that could, at any moment, crack open to reveal the destructive powers of femininity and the retribution of patriarchal society. As Jacqueline Rose writes about Marilyn Monroe in her book *Women in Dark Times*, Monroe had to pay the price for her sexuality, "This is of course the classic role of the femme fatale who is always made to answer for the desire that she provokes."[36]

Sex is not deposited in the visual archive waiting for the diligent researcher to discover, but its traces can be apprehended from signs, absences and feelings in images and texts. Working in the spaces in between what the images seem to show, reveals the vestiges of abuse and violence, marks of corporeal transformation, details of hair, make-up, skin that speak of a life lived against the grain of a nation emerging from six years of war and rebuilding its society and economy. Ruth Ellis refused to remain within mainstream social structures; she was an indifferent mother, she was overtly sexual and transgressed respectable values in her work and in her life. This is a weight to bear, the cost of sexualized performance that inevitably forces itself onto the face and body, the strain and tension distilled into surface composure. As Ariella Azoulay writes, "Every additional documented detail allowed me to imagine more." We need to approach the archive through the imagination, intervening in the moment that the photograph was taken and imagining its conditions of production, "reading the possible within the concrete", drawing out the violence and sexuality, piecing together the moral and sexual judgements, the desire and the rejection.[37]

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[1] For film and television see, for example, *Dance with a Stranger* (UK, 1985; dir. Mike Newell); 'The Ruth Ellis Story', ITV, 1977; 'Ruth Ellis: A Life for A Life', BBC1, 1999; 'The Ruth Ellis Files: A Very British Crime Story', BBC4, 2018. Biographies and other publications will be cited throughout.

[2] See Marks and Van Den Bergh, *Ruth Ellis*, 134, 148; Ballinger, "Dead Woman Walking", 2; Ellis (with Rod Taylor), *Ruth Ellis, My* Mother, 178; Lee, *A Fine Day for a Hanging*, 257.

[3] Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, chap. 4.

[4] Jakubait, *Ruth Ellis*, 23. See also Lee, *A Fine Day*, 38.

[5] There is an extensive literature on "blonde" femininities, much of which focusses on American women. My interest in my forthcoming book, *British Blonde: Women, Desire and the Image in Post-War Britain*, is in the dissemination of American glamor in Britain and the meanings of blonde as they are absorbed into British post-war society and culture and express British notions of desire, sexuality and the image. For a recent international study see Ginette Vincendeau, ed. *Celebrity Studies*.

[6] On Ellis's wartime and post-war occupations see Jakubait, *Ruth Ellis*, 51 and Lee, *A Fine Day*, 43-4; on cultures of consumption and sexual behaviour in twentieth-century urban life see Swanson, *Drunk with the Glitter*.

[7] Jakubait, *Ruth Ellis*, 51.

[8] Salaries given in Jephcott, *Rising Twenty*, 119, 137.

[9] These are the terms and salary that Ellis received when she began working at the Court Club, see "My Love and Hate by Ruth Ellis", 7. See also Hancock, *Ruth Ellis*, 22.

[10] Swanson, *Drunk with the Glitter*, 162.

[11] Jakubait, *Ruth Ellis*, 55.

[12] For an excellent discussion of the commercial pleasure economy of post-war London and the figure of the "good time girl" see Mort, *Capital Affairs*. A number of the biographies state that Ellis had sex with men for money whilst she was a hostess, see, for example, Ellis, *Ruth Ellis*, 11, 31-2 and Hancock, *Ruth Ellis*, 1-2.

[13] Sources are inconsistent about the precise date that Ellis first dyed her hair, but it seems most likely that it was around 1953.

[14] Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, p. 40; also Dyer, *White*.

[15] Jakubait, *Ruth Ellis*, 82.

[16] Jakubait, *Ruth Ellis*, 114.

[17] As a child, Ellis had rheumatic fever, which affected the joints of the little finger of her left hand. Jakubait stresses the resulting damage and gnarling of that hand as a crucial part of

her argument that Ellis could not hold the revolver and did not shoot Blakely, see *Ruth Ellis*, 43-4, 179-80; this argument is rejected by Lee, *A Fine Day*, 396, see also 42.

[18] See, for example, PA Images search terms.

[19] Much of my research on post-war visual culture has taken place at Getty Images and I am immensely grateful to Matthew Butson, Vice President at the Getty Images Hulton Archive, and Melanie Llewellyn, Curator of the archive, for their support and interest in my work.

[20] Inquiries have been made to the previous owner of the photographs, there is no further information, however, regarding either the provenance of the photos or the identity of "Captain Ritchie".

[21] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.

[22] *Woman's Sunday Mirror*, 7. See also Ellis, "My Love and Hate", June 26 1955, 1 in which a card that Blakely sent Ellis is reproduced with the caption "a peace offering after he had given her a black eye, a sprained ankle and extensive bruises." Also, "The Last Words of Ruth Ellis", 17 July 1955, 6 in which she mentions "the bruises on my arms" and the beating which results in the miscarriage, 7.

[23] Jakubait, *Ruth Ellis*, 111-2. See also 285.

[24] On bruising specifically in relation to forensic medicine see Burney and Pemberton, "Bruised Witness", 41-60.

[25] From a partial transcription of the trial as reproduced in Goodman and Pringle, eds. *The Trial of Ruth Ellis*, 109. All national newspaper reporting on the trial recorded this statement.

[26] Sources vary on the degree of Cussen's involvement with the murder of Blakely, but most agree that he gave her the gun and drove her to the pub where she shot him.

[27] As cited in Lee, *A Fine Day for a Hanging*, 201.

[28] Seal, *Capital Punishment*, 8.

[29] Jacqueline Rose, *Why War?*, 47.

[30] From a partial transcription of the trial as reproduced in Goodman and Pringle, eds. *The Trial of Ruth Ellis*, 124-5.

[31] Jakubait, *Ruth Ellis*, 89.

[32] Ellis, *Ruth Ellis*, 44.

[33] Pierrepoint came from a family of hangmen; as executioner in all the major murder cases of the mid-twentieth century, he assumed a kind of celebrity and later published his autobiography, *Executioner Pierrepoint.* On his claim that Ellis died instantly and the post-mortem report see Lee, *A Fine Day for a Hanging*, 343, 345. On the standardization of hanging see Seal, *Capital Punishment*, 17.

[34] As cited in Jakubait, *Ruth Ellis*, 237.

[35] On the formal identification of the body see Jakubait, *Ruth Ellis*, 237; Lee, *A Fine Day for a Hanging*, 346; Marks and Van Den Bergh, *Ruth Ellis*, 190.

[36] On woman as fetish object see Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity*; Rose, *Women in Dark Times*, 124.

[37] Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, chap. 4.