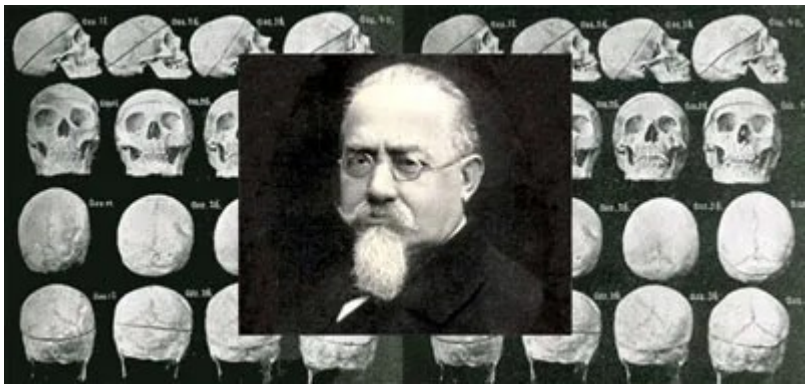
ANTHROPOMETRICS – THE MUSEO CESARE LOMBROSO

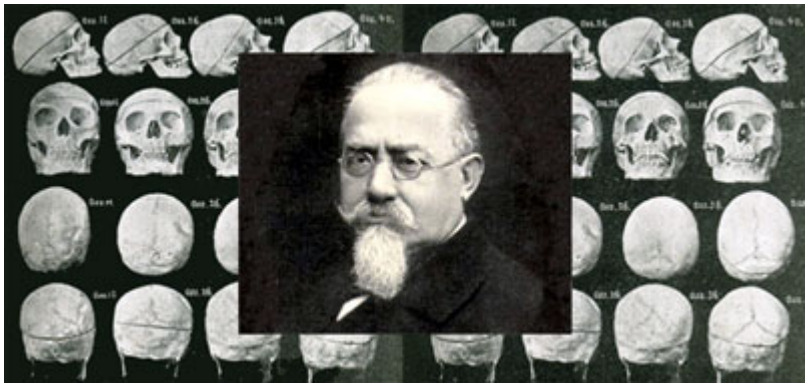


This post is in a series of commentaries on a class running at Stanford, Winter Quarter 2010 – "Transformative Design" ENGR 231 – [Link]

Anthropometrics – part of human factors design. Its roots lie in nineteenth century anthropological science, and forensics. Measuring the distances between eyebrows for evidence of criminality, correlating shapes of skulls with ethnicity, classifying fingerprints to aid forensic detection.

Today Nicole (Coleman) sent me news of the reopening of the Museo Cesare Lombardo in Turin.

Here's how Nautilus describes it:



The Museum of Criminal Anthropology, dedicated to Cesare Lombroso, has reopened after years of

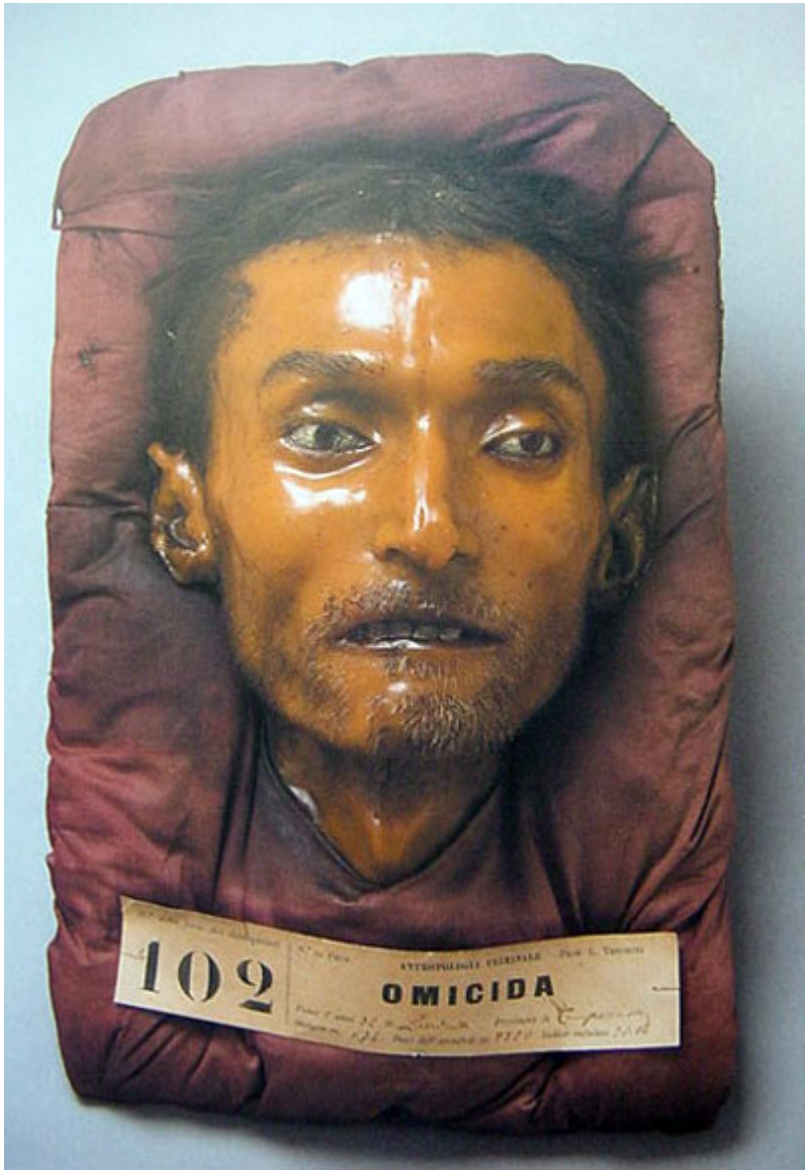
restoration and access to specialist researchers only. The institution was founded by Lombroso in 1898 under the name “the Museum of Psychiatry and Criminology”, documenting his beliefs and research into detecting criminality through physiognomy.

The 400 skulls in his collection, including one belonging to the brigand Giuseppe Villella, were used by Lombroso to develop his theory of the “median occipital fossa”, a cranial anomaly that he believed contributed to deviant behaviour.



On show are drawings, photos, criminal evidence, anatomical sections of “madmen and criminals” and work produced by criminals in the last century. The exhibits also include the Gallows of Turin, which were in use until the city’s final hanging in 1865 and the

possessions of a man known as White Stag, a renowned impostor who convinced Europe he was a great Native American chief. “But it is not a museum of horrors,” insisted Giacomo Giacobini, coordinator of the “Museum of Man” project that the Lombroso collection will be part of. Rather, the museum is intended to recall positivistic era in science, in which Turin played a key role, starting with Cesare Lombroso’s work.



Deathmask

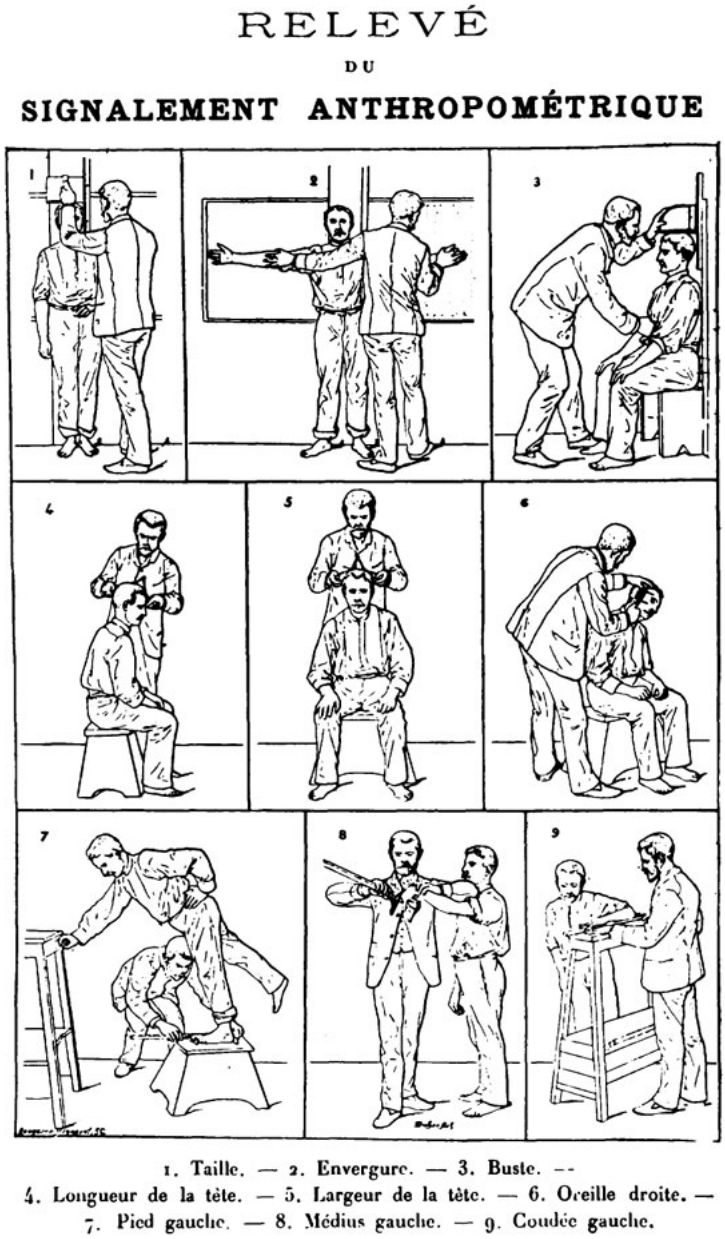
The creation of the museum collections involved extensive interdisciplinary research by Lombroso in the fields of criminology, anatomy, psychiatry,psychology, sociology, ethnology, anthropology,linguistics, law, fine arts and medicine.

Lombroso’s own head is also on display, a century down the line, perfectly preserved in a glass chamber.



[Link: the official museum website]

[Link: Wikipedia on Anthropometrics]



From Alphonse Bertillon's *Identification Anthropométrique* (1893)

Nicole picked this up from a fascinating site – Morbid Anatomy – its topics include medical museums, anatomical art, collectors and collecting, cabinets of curiosity, the history of medicine, death and mortality, memorial practice, art and natural history, arcane media … . Wonderful!