

When Cameras Lie

By **Alexander Baron** - Nov 4, 2015



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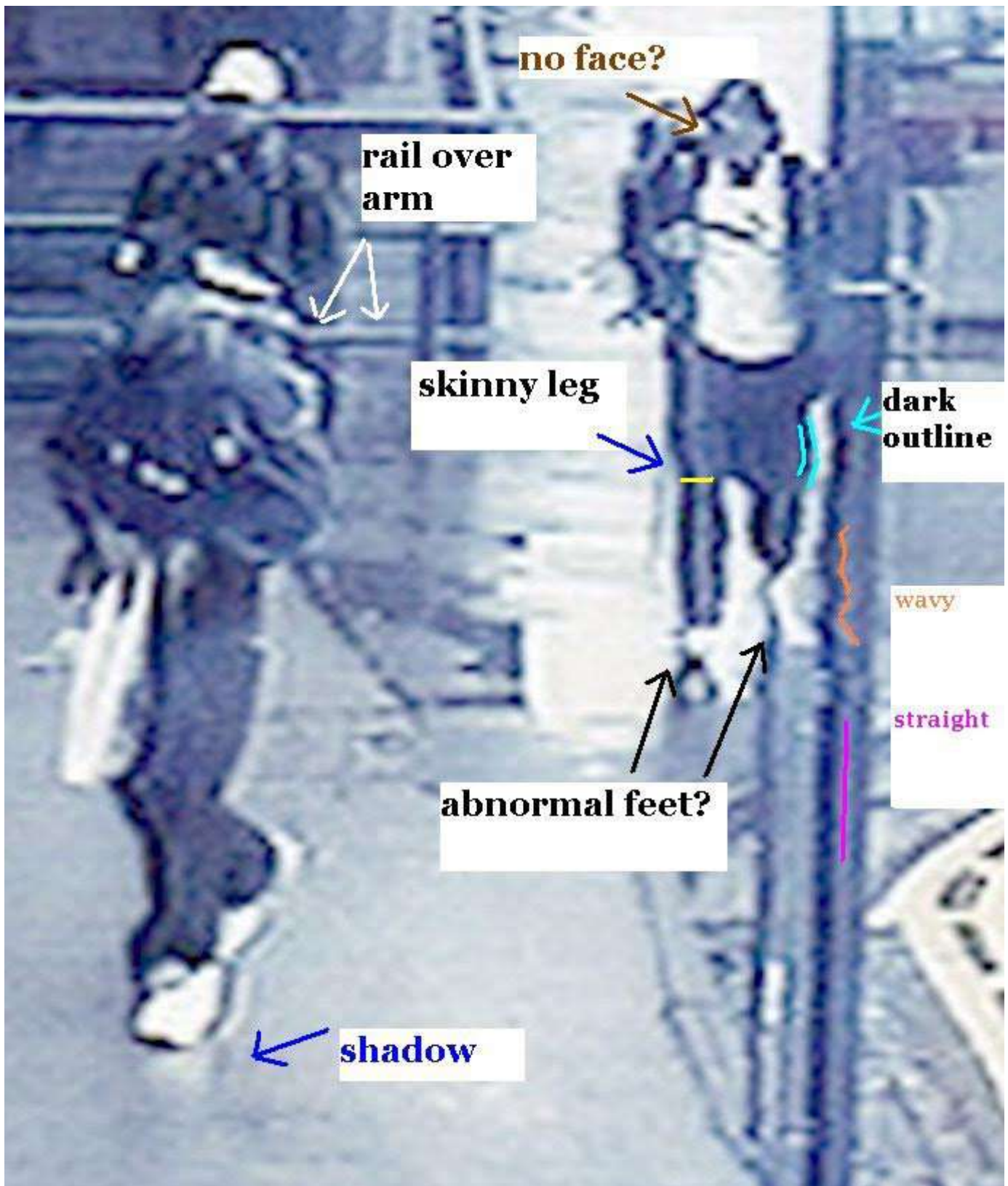
You've probably heard the phrases "A picture is worth a thousand words" and "The camera never lies", but the first is not always true, and the second is definitely not. If you watch documentaries and similar programmes you may see a scene in which a man knocks on a door, it opens at once, he and the person inside greet each other, perhaps emotionally, and then the camera switches to the inside. You know at once that this meeting has been staged. There is by and large nothing sinister about this, but such staging can be used to mislead us.

Photographs are even more suspect because a photo freezes a moment in time, or appears to. Recently, a dishonest photograph of David Cameron no less, **was published** of him

wearing a poppy in advance of the forthcoming Remembrance Day. It didn't take long for detractors to point out that this was an old photograph, and the poppy had been added to it. There is even a name for this process, such images were once called montages or simply fakes, but now we say they are photoshopped, after the name of a well-known computer program. Such chicanery is nearly as old as photography itself; American con man William Mumler was producing spirit photographs back in the 1860s.

The Cameron poppy photoshop set off a storm on Twitter, although this was only a very minor deception, people are entitled to ask if the man running the country will lead us up the garden path over something so trivial, what else is he lying to us about?

If fake photographs can pass for genuine, then genuine ones can sometimes be mistaken for fakes. The late **Michael Meacher** was one of countless people taken in **by claims** that the authorities had faked photographs of the 7/7 cell who bombed London a decade ago. The image below is technically not a photograph but a still from a CCTV camera.



People who don't understand how cameras and other imaging equipment work have been duped into believing it is a fake because it appears to defy the laws of physics. Poor quality images often give that impression, but so can good quality ones. In the old days of Kodak film it was not possible to determine if an image had been doctored unless an expert had

access to the original negative; in the digital age, it is often not possible period, but that does not of course excuse David Cameron wearing a photoshopped poppy on his jacket.

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