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The Failure of the Surveillance State: Observation, Narrative and Identity in American Literature and Culture Since the Cold War

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**The Failure of the Surveillance State:
Observation, Narrative and Identity
in American Literature and Culture Since the Cold War**

Jeremy C. Justus

**Dissertation Submitted to the College of Arts and Sciences
at West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment for the degree of**

**Doctor in Philosophy
in
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Judith Halberstam
Donald Hall
Judith Roof
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ABSTRACT

The Failure of the Surveillance State: Observation, Narrative and Identity in American Literature and Culture Since the Cold War

Jeremy C. Justus

This dissertation examines an aporia in Michel Foucault's analysis of ideological panopticism. Foucault would likely suggest that the contemporary widespread use and acceptance of second-generation surveillance technologies exemplifies the discursive circulation of panoptic ideology. To the contrary, there is a great deal of evidence that suggests that such technology can be used for, to borrow Steve Mann's phrase, *sousveillance* (or, literally, "to watch from below"). By drawing from Niklas Luhmann's and Gregory Bateson's examinations of the inherent "blind spots" of observation systems (both literal and metaphorical), this dissertation suggests that *sousveillance* posits a challenge to the theoretically "neat" (according to Foucault) ideological function of surveillance. Moreover, this dissertation draws from Chilean biologists and systems theorists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's concept of *autopoiesis*, or self-creation, in order to examine how the second-generation surveillance camera facilitates opportunities to discursively express and forge identities that are not so neatly explained by the limited possibilities of ideological interpellation.

This project approaches these issues by examining a triangulated, discursive relationship between surveillance, narrative, and subjectivity as it manifests in contemporary American culture, and it locates examples of this triangulated relationship in both the form and content of various postmodern, cultural products such as Don DeLillo's novel *Cosmopolis*, Anna Deavere Smith's stage play *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, Hasan Elahi's digital art installation *Tracking Transience*, and David Simon's HBO series *The Wire*. *The Failure of the Surveillance State* ultimately posits that panoptic power does not function as neatly as Foucault proposed and that the failures and blind spots of contemporary surveillance systems provide significant possibilities for reconsidering and reconstructing theoretical models of subjectivity, agency, and narrative. It concludes by asserting that these failures have become embedded in emerging narrative frameworks that have moved away from the authority of a singular narrator to a practice that mirrors an infinite regress of secondary observers in multiple points-of-view narrative frameworks (as in the case of Jennifer Egan's novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad*).

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Chapter One: The Failure of the Surveillance State

In most metropolitan areas, one can pass through precious few public places without also passing through the field of vision of several public cameras. With greater and greater frequency, surveillance cameras are appearing atop traffic stoplights, in and outside of consumer spaces like gas stations and grocery stores, inside of ATM machines, and so on; and in each of these locations, the cameras ostensibly function to monitor and regulate the public from a position vested with institutionalized authority. In short, to use Jeremy Bentham's eighteenth century model popularized by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, these cameras ostensibly are, or are meant to appear to be, Panoptic. All-seeing technological eyes perched in physically elevated positions and charged with hierarchical, or "top-down," ideologies, modern surveillance cameras are theoretically manifestations of overwhelmingly pervasive, regulatory ideologies that seek to regulate and control all who pass through their field of vision.

But this perspective is charged with an equally pervasive brand of cultural paranoia that has been with us at least since McCarthy's Communist witch-hunts (and this cultural paranoia has been a prevalent social force in America for much longer than that). This paranoia informs both our urge to survey and our interpretations of what we "see," so that narrative accompaniment to visual information discursively conditions and recreates how we understand the mediation of a camera and what passes through the camera's visual field. In other words, and as I discuss in greater detail later in this chapter, our "reading" of what occurs within the visual field is ultimately a narrative practice that has much in common with the narrative framework of conspiracy theory.

Critics such as Pat O'Donnell, Alan Nadel, Mark Fenster, and John Johnston have provided useful models for understanding the ways in which paranoia can impact the ways in which we interpret historical events and theoretically objective information. The narrative framework of conspiracy theory can, as Fenster asserts, be productive; particularly insofar that such models retroactively assemble a storyline that leads to an inevitable conclusion: the assassination of JFK, for example, or the apocalyptic end of the earth. In these cases, conspiracy theory generates new narratives and new modes of understanding and interpreting information. Similarly, targeted surveillance practices carry certain aims and specific assumptions that influence how we "read" the visual information they generate. If, for example, the presence of a surveillance camera regulates and protects what falls within the visual field, then all who pass through a targeted surveillance area are potential suspects of yet-to-be-committed crimes. Narrative interpretations of surveillance footage carry these implicit assumptions so that we read visual information in much the same way that a JFK conspiracy theorist would read Lee Harvey Oswald's diary: All information can be plugged into a narrative framework that points towards a seemingly inevitable conclusion. Thus, in a conspiracy theory narrative framework, information becomes the occasion for narrative. Ostensibly objective information provided by visual surveillance becomes the information for a narrative structure similar to that of most conspiracy theories. Moreover, by placing viewers in the position to interpret and narrate what happens in the visual field, the surveillance camera also puts us into the position to reinscribe ourselves into a cultural script that adds the authority of objective information to the ongoing and always incomplete process of assembling a subjective identity. And so narrating what we see

within the camera's field becomes a discursive act of describing and inscribing subjectivity. In other words, visual surveillance provides seemingly objective information that can be "plugged into" postmodern identity formations.

The problems with this approach to understanding subjectivity are many. And many of these problems manifest in the American social psyche. For instance, brothers Joel and Ian Gold recently identified and described a contemporary realization of an old psychosis that they call "The Truman Delusion." In reference to Peter Weir's 1998 film *The Truman Show*, "The Truman Delusion" (also called "The Truman Show Delusion"), describes a distinct brand of psychosis which is underpinned by persecution fantasy and paranoia: one's life is being watched and filmed (or broadcast) by unseen forces for the entertainment of unseen masses. The "sufferer" of this delusion believes that she is the center of an essentially completely orchestrated, ongoing narrative, and that the ongoing story of her life is merely a reality-television ruse. A typically metropolitan malady (by virtue of technological necessity), the Truman Delusion allows its sufferers to make sense out of the massive proliferation of cameras – both public and private, institutional and personal – in that these cameras are the tools and technologies that are used to keep the show going, so to speak. Perhaps more importantly, it also helps sufferers understand their feelings of living in a seemingly fabricated world where the possibilities for agency are circumscribed by the parameters of social scripts that have a deterministic effect on behavior. The Truman Delusion thus helps some make sense of the problematic relationship between surveillance, visibility, and subjectivity in the context of the various constraints surrounding the expression and construction of identity.

The Truman Delusion also describes how the current cultural and social milieu creates the occasion and opportunity for pre-existing psychoses to express themselves, but even so, it is easy to understand how and why someone might be inclined to be heavily suspicious of the seemingly exponential spread and circulation of mechanisms of surveillance. *The Truman Show* depicts at least two common cultural fantasies: it is at once the narcissist's fantasy of being the subject of attention and the fantasy of innocent or naive self-articulation, or, as it is in Truman's case, of spending life blissfully unaware that so much of one's public life has been scripted. Accordingly, sufferers of the Truman Delusion may not only desire to be the center of a scripted farce, but to be so without knowing it. Moreover, such sufferers may also be keenly aware of the ways in which various parameters – which range from ideology to spatialized demands for performative acts to the limits and social scripts associated with race, class, gender, and sexual orientation – influence or determine *who one is* in the world while freeing the sufferer to also behave as if this is not the case

Thus, the paranoia of the Truman Delusion is that one may be acting in accord to a scripted context that severely circumscribes the parameters of possibility for agency and self-actualization. Similarly, the paranoia that permeates the field of surveillance studies is typically connected to issues of agency and subjectivity. If, as many theorists suggest, surveillance is an extension of a regulatory apparatus such as the state or of a more encompassing ideological apparatus, then it serves to undermine agency and circumscribe the subject within tight parameters of possibility for action, thought, and self-actualization. Surveillance *does* sometimes function this way, and so the associated paranoia feels intuitive.

For example, in two studies conducted in California, researchers found that surveillance systems in high-crime neighborhoods typically do deter crime. In fact, research suggests that signs containing the word “surveillance” placed in public areas may be as effective as the presence of actual surveillance cameras in deterring violent crime and theft.¹ Regarding issues of agency, we might say that even the suggestion of surveillance in public areas *does* limit one’s ability to decidedly enact his will upon others. Thus, the subject’s agency is severely undermined by modern surveillance practices. Moreover, once the ideological function of the cameras is perceived, understood, and internalized by those who regularly pass through or inhabit surveillance spaces, subjects are right to be suspicious of the camera’s authority and purpose.

This “automatic function” of ideological surveillance – that it works once subjects understand and internalize its aims – is essentially the crux of Foucault’s aforementioned application of Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon to a topological, ideological structure that can be mapped onto Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). In Bentham’s architectural structure, the Panopticon is a circular prison with a central tower in the middle. All cells within the circular structure have walls that open to both the outside, letting in light, and the inside, enabling guards to observe prisoners in their cells. The observation chambers of the central tower are dimly lit, preventing inmates from knowing whether or not the central tower is inhabited and thus preventing them also from knowing whether or not they are being observed; thus the purpose of the Panopticon functions automatically when inmates assume that they are being watched. In so assuming, they internalize the function of the Panopticon and theoretically realize that their “visibility is a trap,” to use

Foucault's words, that limits their ability to enact their will. Along these lines, the Panopticon can be topologically mapped onto public, surveilled institutions and spaces.

Ideologically, the ongoing spread of surveillance technologies should guarantee the automatic functioning of this so-called visibility trap: public surveillance cameras may and often do provide information for the prosecution of crime, and they thus inform the narrative framework of courtroom testimony. But, as we'll see later, this information must ultimately be inscribed into a narrative framework wherein the problem of prosecution informs the ways we "read" this information. Furthermore, the spread of second-generation surveillance technology – particularly handheld cameras and cell phone cameras – destabilizes the theoretical hierarchy upon which Foucault's formulation depends. As I argue later, second-generation surveillance technology does not so much represent the internalization of panoptic ideology so much as it lends the theoretical objectivity of visual information to lateral perspectives. The result is that hierarchical surveillance practices are undermined by second-order observation.

Foucault does acknowledge that surveillance practices need not just be top-down in order to function as both a practical and ideological method of regulation: "for although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top [a practice dubbed *sousveillance* by Steve Mann] and laterally" (*Discipline and Punish* 176).

Unsurprisingly, Foucault predicts the lateral spread of surveillance: although we can assume he was speaking of the ways in which both the ideology of surveillance and the practices of watching from a designated central position (such as the tower in the Panopticon) function when they are internalized and practiced by its subjects, this

statement works as well in the context of the contemporary proliferation of surveillance technologies. What does not work so well is the second half of the above sentence: “this network ‘holds’ the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors, perpetually supervised” (176-177). In other words, while Foucault was able to imagine the effects of centralized power being spread through its subjects, he was unable to see – largely because he didn’t live long enough to see the practical realizations of his theories on surveillance – that the mechanisms of capturing “bottom to top” and lateral perspectives challenge and undermine the centralized force about which he speaks.

Later, Foucault describes mechanisms of centralized surveillance as “the circuits of communication [which] are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge” (217); however, such mechanisms only work as such if there is a central power to which agents of this process report. Instead, the proliferation of visual information recorded by modern surveillance technology and circulated through various digital conduits – from the DVD to the internet – has the opposite effect. Rather than suggest that we are always on the visual record, it suggests that images of what we do, where we go, how we act and so on are distributed in a disjointed, miasmic conglomeration. Even if we are to imagine that there is a central agency responsible for collecting and collating this information, we must also see that the massive amount of visual information generated by modern mechanisms would probably do more to clutter the hyperbolic eye than inform it.

And so this brings us to an aporia in Foucault’s theory: If the mechanisms and ideological functions of surveillance are carried out by its subjects, then the force of the

centralized power is destabilized, particularly when the ostensible authority of the State is “borrowed” by the use of second-generation surveillance technology. In other words, the ostensible authority attached to the captured image lends itself to lateral, and often marginalized, perspectives. When this authority is borrowed to watch the watchers (in acts of *sousveillance*) or to record the actions of others who fall outside of the hierarchical order (in acts of recording lateral perspectives), this information does more to record the many blind spots of centralized surveillance systems than it does to regulate subjective expression. And so the spread of surveillance techniques, technologies, and supporting ideologies ultimately undoes itself. Thus the surveillance state is the failure of the surveillance state.

But this failure of centralized surveillance is also a success. Since we are now ostensibly equipped to borrow the camera’s authority in representations of subjective perspectives, the subversion of centralized surveillance is our empowerment. This empowerment is not just theoretical: Later in this dissertation, I will discuss examples of State authority being called into question by visual information recorded by marginalized subjects. For instance, as I discuss in Chapter Three, during the case of the killing of Oscar Grant III by an Oakland police officer, police testimony was undermined by a host of videos and still images taken by spectators and circulated via various social media spaces such as YouTube and Facebook. Added to eyewitness testimony, the technology of surveillance brought, and continues to bring, the authority of recorded information into the hands of those who use it.

Surveillance, Spectacle, and Celebrity

I am certainly far from the first to critique Foucault. In *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary notes that “Foucault’s opposition of surveillance and spectacle seems to overlook how the effects of these two regimes of power can coincide” (18). Foucault examines Eighteenth Century instances of public torture and execution of political transgressors as examples of presenting the body of a transgressor as symbolic of all transgressors. The spectacle of public torture and execution, then, serves a regulatory function: when subjects observe what happens to the body of a transgressor, they learn to fear transgression. With the development of methods of surveillance – from keeping record of those infected with disease through the design and application of the Panopticon – the method of juridical control shifted from the spectacle of corporeal punishment to the ideology of surveillance. What Crary rightly observes is that Foucault presents these methods of control as mutually exclusive.

But collisions of these two “regimes of power” are prevalent. When, for example, during one of Lindsay Lohan’s infamous courtroom trials, she wrote the words “Fuck You” on her middle fingernail, and when this was recorded by media cameras that were allowed into the courtroom, it became clear that Lohan has been made into a symbolic, spectacular figure – a “stand-in” for all that she ostensibly represents – who is also clearly aware of the constant surveillance to which she is subjected. In other words, Lohan both symbolically represents the body of the social transgressor, and she represents the subject under surveillance. Appropriately, Crary’s critique also points out that “Foucault relentlessly emphasizes the ways in which human subjects became objects of observation, in the form of institutional control or scientific and behavioral study; but he neglects the new forms by which vision itself became a kind of discipline or mode of

work” (18). So when, for example, the images of Lohan’s fingernail are circulated widely through various means of digital circulation (or, most commonly, through channels of “social media”), it becomes clear that techniques of observation vary widely and that the supposed ideological functioning of Panoptic surveillance is undermined by, among other things, the culture of spectacle, of celebrity.

Other social theorists occasionally highlight other “real world” examples of the failure of panoptic practices. For example, in Fred C. Alford’s empirical account of surveillance in American prisons, Alford notes that “if you control the entrances and the exits [of the prison], you do not have to look” and that “[i]f you [or prison guards] have to look, you have already ceded a measure of power, the power not to look and not to care” (127). Even as panoptic practices in the prison have shifted to what Alford calls “nonoptic,” so to does Foucault’s panoptic formula fail as a measure of ideological, architectural (as it was for Jeremy Bentham), and technological visual surveillance outside of the prison. Foucault would have us accept that State power has become completely dependant upon Panoptic practices – “should any part of this universal gaze chance to slacken, the collapse of the State itself would be imminent” (“Questions on Geography,” 72); however, in practice, this is clearly not the case. As a method of juridical control both in and out of the prison, the Foucauldian formula doesn’t function as “neatly” as Foucault claims.

Part of the problem with Foucault’s formula is, in de Certeau’s words, that “[b]eneath what one might call the ‘monotheistic’ privilege that panoptic apparatuses have won for themselves, a *‘polytheism’ of scattered practices survives*” (author’s italics, 48). And so “[i]t remains to be asked how we should consider other, equally

infinitesimal, procedures, which have not been ‘privileged’ by history but are nevertheless active in innumerable ways in the openings of established technological networks” (49). In other words, and as I have suggested already, there are many methods of surveillance, of watching, that fall outside the hierarchical, panoptic order, and that may be far more productive, at least insofar that they record information that ultimately becomes reinscribed into popular narratives.

The example of media cameras in the courtroom in one of Lindsay Lohan’s many hearings for illegal social behavior illustrates a collapse of the two “regimes” of power: that spectacular figures are often surveyed for the purpose of regulatory control through ostensibly making an example of symbolic transgressors and that one can garner attention and fame for this very purpose (see, for example, Paris Hilton, Britney Spears, Miley Cyrus, and *Jersey Shore*’s Nicole “Snooki” Polizzi). While it would appear from such examples that surveillance of such spectacular figures has the secondary function of regulating femininity, it is more often the case, as Laura Mulvey suggested in the mid-1970s, that the subject of the camera is feminized by an ostensibly male gaze (see “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”). In other words, sometimes surveillance emasculates its subjects and replaces the illusion of their agency with the spectacle of their public performances.

When lateral surveillance is used to turn a transgressor into a symbolic figure, we see that one of the problems with the ways in which popular, heteronormative narratives are mapped onto the visual field. Such was the case for eighteen-year-old Tyler Clementi, a student at Rutgers University who jumped from George Washington Bridge into the Hudson River on September 22, 2010 after his roommate Dharun Ravi advertised

(on Twitter) and broadcast (through live, streaming video) Clementi's private encounter with a fellow male student. On Ravi's Twitter page, Ravi posted that his "[r]oommate asked for the room till midnight. I went into molly's room and turned on my webcam. I saw him making out with a dude. Yay." Both this "tweet" and Ravi's actions are now being debated in terms of a hate crime, which could carry a 10-year prison sentence if Ravi was charged accordingly. In any case, Ravi's actions cannot, of course, be undone.

And so we can easily see that the collapsed systems of surveillance and spectacle can, at times, have disastrous effects. In Clementi's case, a method of lateral surveillance – Ravi's webcam – served an ideological function: to regulate heteronormative expressions of sexual desire. And so Ravi could be said to have carried out the ideological function of Panoptic practice. Ravi, as a conduit of institutionalized heteronormativity, internalized the Panoptic purpose of subjects watching each other to regulate behavior. Moreover, Ravi used his webcam to create a "visibility trap" to ensnare his roommate and to theoretically turn Clementi in a symbolic figure – the bodily representation of a social transgressor. It could be said that Clementi's suicide is a direct result of the collision of the two regimes of power: The internalization of ideological surveillance "naturalized" the transmogrification of Clementi's body so that Clementi had to finish the disciplinary work that Ravi started.

And Clementi's is far from the only case wherein lateral surveillance is conducted and broadcast in matters of policing behavior that falls outside of the dominant social order. Cyberbullying continues to be a high-profile issue for teens and their parents. At the age of self-discovery and self-creation, one should have the freedom to experiment with one's own identity without fear of condemnation or attack. But as we've seen many

times, a triangulated system of social networks (like Facebook and MySpace), social media (like YouTube), privatized surveillance technologies (like cell phone cameras), and heteronormative scripts becomes a recipe for disaster for all those who transgress the norm and do so within the visual field. One of the aims of this dissertation is not to ignore such instances – I will later look at other examples of public surveillance being used to regulate private behavior and subjectivity – but I will also examine ways in which the tables can be turned.

For example, in response to the rise of GLBT teen suicides that stem from bullying, Dan Savage founded the “It Gets Better Project” – a YouTube channel that hosts videos of GLBT adults providing messages of hope and support for the victims of bullying. In this example, a growing collection of videos representing perspectives that fall outside of the hierarchical, social order undermine the authority and legitimacy of the ways in which private surveillance can be used to circulate heteronormative messages. Perhaps most notoriously, Texas Councilman Joel Burns has lent his voice to the “It Gets Better” movement by publicly sharing stories from his own struggles growing up as a questioning youth in a homophobic Texas community. He used time allotted for announcements and discussion during a filmed council meeting to offer this message. And in so doing, he effectively borrowed the system of legitimacy created by the camera and by television broadcast. Burns has since created “The Tyler Project” – a 24/7 hotline and chatroom for GLBT or questioning youth – in memory of Tyler Cleminti; and the “It Gets Better” project, which went “viral” in the first few weeks of its existence, has become one of its top referring sites.

It is a central aim and my sincere hope that this dissertation will illustrate that turning the camera around, so to speak, can be liberating for those who fall outside of the dominant social order. In other words, rather than embrace the paranoia commonly associated with surveillance and surveillance studies, I want to look at potential empowerment demonstrated by subversive acts of counter-surveillance – call it *sousveillance*, or lateral surveillance, or the act of recording the blind spots of the primary observing system. And I want to examine the ways in which the narrative structure of conspiracy theory, another product of cultural paranoia, is similar to the narrative structure that often accompanies surveillance footage in order to further examine the ways in which this narrative structure manifests in cultural products like television, film, drama, and literature. My ultimate aim is to illustrate that in both the practice of visual surveillance and in narrating what happens in the visual field, significant blind spots are opened for lateral perspectives.² As a result, so too are opportunities created to legitimize marginalized perspectives. In other words, the surveillance state creates the blind spots that undo its own central authority. And thus, again, the surveillance state is the failure of the surveillance state.

The Problem with Paranoia: Conspiracy and Narrative

I wrote it once before, but it bears repeating: surveillance studies, like common reactions to public surveillance systems, are typically characterized by a pervasive cultural paranoia. This paranoia appears to be charged with both narcissism (“everyone is watching *me*; I’m *that* interesting”), as in the case of the Truman Delusion, and suspicion of State Power and other controlling forces. And thus this paranoia reveals a deep, cultural anxiety regarding agency. The so-called “Eye of Power” is but the means

of observation of forces that would circumscribe both the spaces through which we move and the possibilities of enacting our will in such spaces. This, in part, is Foucault's problem: if we operate so neatly according to an internalized Panoptic ideology, then we are essentially automatons. If, however, the very means and methods of surveillance can, in the hands of marginalized subjects, subvert both the practical and ideological aims of hierarchical surveillance, then we see that there is yet room for agency. Along these lines, it is also a central project of this dissertation to examine ways in which surveillance fails as an ideological apparatus, particularly when it undoes itself.

In *Empire of Conspiracy*, Timothy Melley discusses paranoia and conspiracy theories as symptomatic cultural manifestations of underlying, but pervasive, anxieties about social control. His phrase "agency panic" describes "intense anxiety about an apparent loss of autonomy [and] the conviction that one's actions are being controlled by someone else or that one has been 'constructed' by powerful, external agents" (vii). "Agency panic," Melley explains, "therefore, may be understood as a nervous acknowledgment, and rejection, of postmodern subjectivity" (15). In other words, agency panic is the postmodern subject's reaction to pervasive cultural and ideological forces that circumscribe the parameters of possibility for the construction and expression of subjectivity or identity. As Patrick O'Donnell puts it "[w]e are paranoid because [paranoia] is the last refuge of identity so aware of itself as a construct and as constructed by desires assembled for it that it becomes a parody of itself" (9). It would seem, then, that if postmodern formulations of identity are correct, then agency panic and paranoia are ingrained into our subjective formations.

Later, I will discuss other methods of understanding subjectivity wherein the awareness and acknowledgement of socially constructed parameters and scripts for subjectivity aren't necessarily linked to paranoia and panic. For now, I want to examine the ways in which paranoia provides a productive model for understanding our reactions to the practices and mechanisms of public surveillance. Specifically, conspiracy theory, as one cultural manifestation and subjective outlet for paranoia, offers us a useful narrative structure for understanding our urge to provide narrative accompaniment to visual information. Melley writes that conspiracy theories "have flourished in an age supposedly marked by the disappearance of grand explanatory schemes and master narratives" (8). The aforementioned destabilization of centrally regulated surveillance likewise illustrates a move away from "grand explanatory schemes." Nonetheless, our urge to narrate what we see is still invested with a compulsion to give an account of ourselves.

Before examining how we read or narrate subjectivity within the visual field, I would like to examine the larger issue of narrating subjectivity itself. I want to posit that "giving an account" of one's self (a phrase I take from Judith Butler's short text of the same name) is essentially what one does when one "reads" or interprets visual information of one's body within the visual field. Regarding subjectivity or identity formation, the urge to give an account is at once invested in the scene of address, or the context for the account, and the audience for whom such an account is made. Butler explains that "[g]iving an account thus takes a narrative form, which not only depends upon the ability to relay a set of sequential events with plausible transitions but also draws upon narrative voice and authority, being directed toward an audience with the aim

of persuasion” (12). In other words, giving an account of oneself presupposes that articulating one’s subjectivity is done so within a certain set of parameters, for a real or imagined audience, and in a distinctly traditional narrative form. Moreover, such accounts are articulations that are seemingly predetermined by the constraints of overlapping parameters of subjective possibility. In other words, in giving an account of one’s self, one essentially tells a story that pieces together the narrative underpinnings for the social scripts associated with identity categories like gender, sexual orientation, race, and class. These stories are further filtered through various ideological lenses. It is these parameters – the scripts charged by the imperatives of categorical identity formulations, the ideological frameworks that contextualize these scripts, and their bodily enactments or manifestations – that, together, create the illusion that the postmodern subject is highly and complexly constructed and that he therefore lacks agency.

It thus feels intuitive that these parameters for the construction of identity are most often examined in these contexts: as products of ideological apparatuses (as in the work of Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Giorgio Agamben); as socially scripted, performative demands charged with the imperatives of gender (Judith Halberstam, Judith Butler, etc.), race (Charles Mills, David Theo Goldberg, Kwame Appiah, etc.), class (Marx, Hegel, etc.), and sexual orientation (Lee Edelman, Leo Bersani, etc.); as being subject to the demands or expectations of a real or imagined “other” (Lacan, Žižek, Fuss); and, more recently, as techno-modern / “post-human” assemblages (Hayles, Haraway, etc.). We can see very quickly that the possibilities for self-actualization and self-articulation are severely circumscribed by these overlapping parameters of constructed subjectivity, and so it looks like the act of narrating one’s self is merely a regurgitation of

the various social scripts embedded in each of the above contexts and identity categories. Moreover, as Diana Fuss suggests, even one's choices in identification (or "finding oneself" outside of one's self), are severely limited by the various social contexts associated with the above categories (see *Identification Papers*). In short, giving an account of oneself looks less like agency and more like an involuntarily followed imperative.

Giving an account thus may be a compulsion to use narrative to traverse time in the suturing of self to various identity categories: a retroactive act that places the development of one's identity on a timeline of chronological causality wherein each component of subjectivity intuitively feels inevitably drawn from seemingly essentialized articulations of gender, race, and sexuality; wherein class and styles of consumption are spatialized (as in the case of Goldberg's *periphractic* spaces which I discuss in Chapter Three); wherein one's worldview seems similarly spatialized and essentialized (as in the case where one thinks of oneself as having been born into a religious belief system, a political and ideological leaning); and so on.

It is this urge to suture self to categorical identity via narrative that informs our urge to provide narrative accompaniment to the images and video generated through surveillance technologies and practices. But, of course, narrative has its own problems. In much the same way that the narrative accompaniment to visual information is often charged by the ideological lens through which it is perceived, so too are the stories we generate about our own identities. Moreover, in both cases, narrative is subject to embellishment, exaggeration, faulty memory, and so on.³ Add to this the inherent blind spots of surveillance – both literal blind spots (or places that fall outside of the visual

field) and metaphorical ones (subjects or situations that surveillance fails to comprehend because they fall outside of the hierarchical order) – and we can see that identity in the visual field is terribly unstable and subject to many conundrums. Thus the relationship between surveillance and subjectivity synecdochically represents the broader conundrums of identity formation itself.

Our tacit acknowledgement that subjectivity is ultimately a complex construction that manifests itself in spatialized contexts charged with various performative demands (such as those associated with race, gender, class, and so on) ostensibly triggers the aforementioned agency panic (see also Melley); and, given the constraints of this particular perspective, rightly so. As I've already suggested, one reaction to this panic regarding the assemblage of one's self is often externalized culturally through the constructions of conspiracy theories, whose shifting but always accommodating narrative framework often mirrors the narrative structure we employ to explain our *selves* to ourselves. If a conspiracy theory is essentially a story whose end is known and towards which any information can be made to point, then identity as such is one in which the result (the "who I am now") is known, and all information that we choose to fit into this narrative framework can be viewed as pointing towards an inevitable conclusion.

While this model of understanding identity is certainly interesting, and perhaps occasionally practical, I would like to take a different approach: one that suggests that recording the blind spots of centralized power from marginalized positions is an act of agency unfettered from the restraints of paranoia or agency panic. For this model, I will draw from systems theory – particularly the writings of Niklas Luhman (*Social Systems*), Gregory Bateson (*Steps to an Ecology of Mind*), Cary Wolfe (*Critical Environments*), and

Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela (*The Tree of Knowledge*) – to examine identity as an *autopoietic* (literally, self-creating) product that results from overlapping social systems that work within the context of a specific environment (be it literal, as in the cases of spatialized performative imperatives, or metaphorical, as in the case of creating oneself inside the parameters of identity categories like race, gender, sexual orientation, and class).

“Everything begins from now—I am reborn”: Susan Sontag and Autopoiesis

Systems theory tells us that the perspective of any system contains blind spots visible only to another observing system. In other words, you see things that I don’t; or, to paraphrase Niklas Luhmann’s anecdote (and anecdotes in Luhmann’s massive and dense *Social Systems* are rare, so perhaps it’s worth mentioning), this is why the marriage made in heaven goes to hell in the automobile (I’m guessing that Luhmann was married to a back-seat driver). Moreover, second-order observation does not just see what first-order observation misses, it also observes the fundamental difference between a system and its environment. In Kate Hayles’s words, it is through second-order observation that we “make the cut,” or that we differentiate between a primary system and its environment. Without this distinction, system and environment are entangled in a “mass of undifferentiated tissue” (“Making the Cut,” 71).

A system, having been distinguished from its environment, becomes *autopoietic*: a phrase coined by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela in their study on self-reproducing, biological cells and appropriated most famously by Luhmann and Gregory Bateson in their applications of the concept to social and communicative systems, the phrase *autopoiesis* essentially means “self-referential, or discursive, self-creation.”⁴ The

most common example of the autopoietic machine is the thermostat:⁵ a machine designed to promote a homeostatic state (in this case, a constant temperature) by circulating information (fluctuations in temperature) and taking its own output (heat) as input (temperature). It is autopoietic insofar that it functions to perpetuate the conditions of its own existence by circulating the “difference that makes a difference” (Bateson’s phrase) or the information upon which its operation is contingent. The continued and evolving existence of living systems can be discussed in this way as well: If survival is a homeostatic state, then biological changes that occur within a species through adaptation would constitute the information circulated by the system to promote autopoiesis.

In the words of Maturana and Verela, change within the autopoietic unity “occurs in the unity from moment to moment, either as a change triggered by interactions coming from the environment in which it exists or as a result of its internal dynamics” (74). In other words, change within the system’s environment may effect a change within the system, but this change only represents a modification of the system’s internal dynamics that facilitate its own autopoietic perpetuation. While, then, the thermostat exemplifies the mechanism that functions autopoietically, particularly insofar that it continually interacts with its environment to regulate and perpetuate the conditions of its own existence, the thermostat does not replicate itself. Thus it is autopoietic only insofar that it creates the output that it takes as its own input: temperature, or heat. And in this way, the thermostat represents a closed system. As an example of an autopoietic system that is both self-perpetuating and self-regulating, we might consider the virus (both the human virus and the computer virus work for this example, but I will focus on the human virus). The virus is a closed system that exists within a specific environment (the human body)

whose environmental changes (such as white blood cells) become the occasion for the virus to make necessary internal, structural changes which, while they do not affect the organization of the unity, perpetuate a homeostatic state - survival (see Maturana and Varela 74). Unlike the thermostat, however, the virus is also autopoietic insofar that it is self-replicating.

I will later examine some of Susan Sontag's work as an example of subjective autopoiesis – or an identity formation that takes its own output as input in the process of creating (and replicating) itself, but in order to further contextualize Sontag's relevance to a project on surveillance, I will first examine her approach to photography and the circulation of photographic images. I should note that Sontag is significant for this aim in two ways: First, Sontag's brilliant polemic approach to the relationship between photography and culture allows us to see how the two – photography and culture – have shaped each other. And, second, Sontag also offers a model for understanding the narrative accompaniment to visual information as a method of both interpretation and second-order observation. Later, I will illustrate the ways in which Sontag functioned as her own second-order observer in her personal journals.

Sontag's brilliant book *On Photography* (1973) is characteristically prescient. In it, she observes that “the camera record incriminates” and that “[i]n another version of its utility, the camera record justifies,” or that it “passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened,” despite what distortions may be embedded in the still image itself (5). She examines the “aggression implicit in every use of the camera” and the ways in which taking “a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability” (7, 15). And she notes that a caption that accompanies a

photograph “is the missing voice, and it is expected to speak for truth. But even an entirely accurate caption is only one interpretation, necessarily a limiting one, of the photograph to which it is attached” (108-9). In other words, as I’ve already suggested, verbal accompaniment to captured images is always interpretive and subject to the problems and shortcomings of narrative.

Thirty years later, Sontag responds to *On Photography* with a follow-up: 2003’s *Regarding the Pain of Others*. In it, she addresses the ways in which we have become numb to the images of pain and suffering: that, where once the iconic images of, for example, the Vietnam war triggered reactions of outrage, horror, and empathy, similar pictures of America’s Twenty-First Century wars in the Middle-East have, contextually, become more commonplace and tend to be comparably innocuous and ineffectual in triggering public response. In her own words: “Flooded with images of the sort that once used to shock and arouse indignation, we are losing our capacity to react. Compassion, stretched to its limits, is going numb” (108). Additionally, Sontag observes the ways in which television and social media has facilitated a “society of spectacle”: “Each situation has to be turned into a spectacle to be real—that is, interesting—to us. People themselves aspire to become images: celebrities. Reality has abdicated. There are only representations: media” (109). In other words, Sontag suggests (as have others, see for example, Zizek’s “Welcome to the Desert of the Real” and Anna McCarthy’s *Ambient Television*) that the television mediates and often dictates our perceptions and interpretations of the real. She also suggests (again, as others have) that television culture has collapsed the regimes of surveillance and spectacle in a way that suggests we can all be celebrities (one need only watch a single episode of the seemingly exponentially

growing number of “reality-television” programs, including the early example and appropriately named *Big Brother*, to see this at work).

I would add to this that these twinned phenomena – the dulling of our compassion through desensitization and the rise of the cultural urge to act like idiots for the television camera – are also products of self-circulating, autopoietic systems, or social systems of perception and behavior that create and recreate themselves. In other words, “reality” entertainment exists to perpetuate itself, and, much like a virus, its side-effects help to secure the environmental conditions for its continued existence through self-perpetuation. For example, the function of the nightly news is to circulate images of pain, suffering, and loss not to shock, horrify, or arouse compassion, but instead to allow us to remain numb to the pain of others. And the function of reality television is not as much to promote the culture of celebrity as it is to replace our lost compassion for others with a reptilian association or identification with the worst humanity has to offer. The pain we feel for others is thus not in reaction to scenes of pain, but it is the delightful, voyeuristic pain we experience in the face of “common celebrity.” These systems will continue to perpetuate themselves in some form or another, and they will change or evolve when it is necessary for their survival. In any case, they will remain self-creating systems that use society as the environment for self-perpetuation.⁶

But other mechanisms of identification and subjectivity circulate themselves through individuals or groups as well. One might say that one’s understanding of one’s self, even as part of a narrative process, is simultaneously descriptive and creative. Just as each act of narrating what falls within the visual field both articulates a subjective perspective and creates new interpretive possibilities, so too does the act of perceiving

and articulating one's self also aid in the process of literally composing one's self. In other words, and for example, autobiography is part of a perceptual mode of subjective autopoiesis. And once one realizes this, one can make deliberate choices regarding self-creation.

As I discuss in much greater detail in Chapter Two, this is exactly the case for Hasan Elahi, whose *Tracking Transience* project depicts a series of first-order observations that, strung together, tell a visual story about where Elahi goes, what he consumes, what he wastes, and so on. But, as I discuss in greater detail later, Elahi highlights the blind spots of this system (Elahi's own body disappears in these spots) and toys with our urge to narrate what we see. In so doing, Elahi's project offers us the option of constructing a narrative in much the same way that conspiracy theories do: There is a wealth of information that needs only be assembled together in a narrative framework which can be made to point to a retrospectively inevitable conclusion.

And in other cases of autobiographical record, we can see subjective autopoiesis at work. Sontag offers an excellent example of just this. Beginning in 1947, when Sontag was just 14 years old, and going through 1963, her recently published personal journals (published as *Reborn* in 2008) represent more than the evidence of the development of an exceedingly brilliant mind; more than the chronicles of the discovery of sexual desire and the forging of identity; and far more than a catalog of the events that shaped Sontag's personal development. Among other things, the journals represent a history of a conscious self-creation that repeatedly illustrate that Sontag was writing for a reader, and that this reader – imagined or projected – was meant to play a role in the forging of Sontag's identity.

In the language of systems theory, Sontag's journals primarily represent her first-order observations. They begin with a catalog of beliefs which clearly come from a mind far sharper than the typical 14-year old's, and throughout, the journals contain lists of books to read; reactions to lectures, literature, film, and music; musings on sexual experimentation and desire; chronicles of a day's events; definitions of popular slang terms; and admonishments to herself which range from reminding herself to never publicly criticize anyone at Harvard to shower at least every other day. Moreover, Sontag's retrospective marginalia makes it clear that she was also interested in recording the second-order observations of her previously recorded primary perspective. For example, on Christmas Day of 1948, Sontag writes "What, I ask, drives me to disorder? How can I diagnose myself? All I feel, most immediately, is the most anguished need for *physical love* and mental companionship—I am very young, and perhaps the disturbing aspect of my sexual ambitions will be outgrown—*frankly, I don't care.*" Her response, written on May 31 of the following year is "Nor should you."

While an analysis of Sontag's journals represents a conceptual shift from analyzing visual surveillance to examining textual self-surveillance, the recording of first- and second-order observations is nonetheless significant. Sontag's journals illustrate the textual process of subjective autopoiesis. Representing an examination of the self that is at once creative and interrogative; autopoietic and critically observational, the journals are the record of the autopoietic process of forging an identity through literally composing one's self. Moreover, they are the evidence of a retrospective perspective of this process that temporally dislocates Sontag from herself so that she becomes the second-order observer of her first-order perspective. On October 24, 1956,

Sontag writes that “[i]n philosophy the snake swallows its tail; thinking, about thinking—two senses of ‘thinking.’ Thinking is philosophy; thinking¹=the sciences.” Sontag’s metaphorical application of the ouroboros to scientific thought coupled with her metafictional marginalia suggests that she makes of herself the object of her own scientific inquiry. She was often her own reader.

On December 31, 1957, in an entry entitled “On Keeping a Journal,” Sontag writes “[s]uperficial to understand the journal as just a receptacle for one’s private, secret thoughts—like a confidante who is deaf, dumb, and illiterate. In the journal I do not just express myself more openly than I could do to any person; I create myself.” And I think she does. Through an accumulative process of self-creation through second order observation and meta-commentary, Sontag records blind spots through their omission. And here, I mean that she records her blind spots first by leaving them out, and second by retrospectively commenting on them. In this way, Sontag’s metacommentary on her own process of self-creation creates a feedback loop in which Sontag herself functions as the separation and suture of its two ends. The ouroroburus is thus the perfect metaphor for this process of autopoietic composition.

Again, a system must close in on itself in order to be separate from its environment. And it is this closure that creates blind spots. On one hand, it is as simple as the fact that you literally do not see yourself from your own perspective; on the other hand, it is as complicated as knowing that it takes an outside observer to see a system apart from its environment, and so you never fully see this distinction that defines you. For the project of Sontag’s self-creation to be complete, an outside observer is necessary.

Through looking back, Sontag places herself in the role of a second-order observer, and through her metacommentary, provides the externalized perspective upon which the definition of the boundaries of her identity is contingent. And so we might say that Sontag creates herself through the composure of her disclosure.

“How to ‘Facebook’ in Three Easy Steps: Self-Disclosure, Erasure, and You”

Opportunities for self-disclosure on Facebook quickly go viral once they’re created – from memes like “16, 25, 50 or [whatever number you want] Random Things About Me” to “My Top Five Favorite [fill in the blank],” the massive proliferation of opportunities to share seemingly autobiographical information provides the willing participant ample opportunity to narcissistically indulge in spinning the wheel of too-much-information. This system places an imperative on the “tagged” readers to not only comment on one’s “Random Things” but also to perpetuate the meme by writing 25 Random Things About Themselves. These memes have already been discussed as mutating viruses, and, as such, are fairly autopoietic in their own right. The “Random Things” meme, for example, started with the instruction to write 16 Random Things and tag 16 friends who are then required to follow suit. Once its popularity began to decline, and thus its life was threatened, it evolved into its 10, 15, 25, and even 100 random things incarnations. And once “Random Things” were no longer enough to perpetuate the meme’s continued existence, it evolved into “More Specific Things,” asking the Facebook user to “randomly” list 15 favorite artists, musicians, authors, films, etc.

The meme as an autopoietic system itself is certainly interesting, but to push forward into the consideration of the virtual expressions of identity, I want to consider the ways in which these memes facilitate the illusion that Facebook is an appropriate and

acceptable public venue for self-disclosure. See for example, Reiko Ohnuma's 2008 Facebook SNAFU. A professor of religion at Dartmouth University, Ohnuma failed to set her security settings to private and thus exposed some embarrassing confessions about preparing for class by getting information on Wikipedia along with a few jabs at her "blowhard" colleagues. I don't want to make too much of Ohnuma's indiscretion – we're all human, and may he who is without internet blunder cast the first anonymously posted inflammatory comment – but I do want to note how freely and carelessly Ohnuma put this information online. In fact, from the look of it, for some users anyway, Facebook intuitively *feels* like an appropriate venue for full self-disclosure. And, I think we can find evidence of excessive disclosure in Facebook in not just "notes" such as "15 Random things about me;" and not just in "Wall" comments and status updates; but also in the host of other media incorporated into the Facebook framework.

In comparison to Sontag's journals – in which she reminds herself to never publicly criticize other academics – Ohnuma's openness is striking. Where, in the case of the former, Sontag uses a recognizably private venue to compose herself for the possibility of public reading; in the case of the latter, Ohnuma uses a public venue with a clear readership to make comments that should have been private. In both cases, I think, we get a sense of a brand of autopoeisis through self-composure and disclosure; however, underpinning the allure of opportunity for virtual disclosure is the common and communal knowledge of the inherent fictions and falsities represented on Facebook. On one hand, we see several diegetic instances of folks saying, "This is me. This. Represents Me" along with many mimetic instances of folks essentially saying, "Look. This is what I do. This is me, too." On the other hand, we intuitively know that "This is

also not me,” and so we understand that, on the level of metacommentary, Facebook represents a metafictional take on the autopoietic process of self-creation. Where Sontag had the privacy to imagine a readership that would take her self-creation through stylized disclosure seriously, the virtual subject is forced to publicly acknowledge the inherent disappearance of the self through public disclosure.

And so Facebook creates a hall of mirrors that erases identity through the repetition of the representation of the postmodern subject. In other words, Facebook not only provides a venue for autopoietic expression, but it also opens this expression to the interpretive perspective of a network of second-order observation. Facebook does make room for the idea that “if you put it out there, it becomes true,” or that, to some degree, one does compose one’s self online; however, it also enables the Facebooker to circulate such a massive amount of information – through diegetic mini-narratives about, for example, the heteronormative narrative arc beginning with who you dated in high school and ending with whether or not you married the person you dated in high school – that it begins to look more like a chaotic white noise of falsified, exaggerated, and heavily groomed information. Moreover, the massive amount of video and images posted on and circulated by Facebook does as much to scatter the subject’s body into a million tiny pixels as it does to invite an infinite regress of second-order observation. And so the allure of disclosure is also the invitation to disappear in a massive proliferation of information (as Hasan Elahi does in his *Tracking Transience* project).

On *The Office*: The Blind Spot in the Corporate Body

To finish this introduction and to tie these various threads together, I want to look briefly at NBC’s now long-running sit-com *The Office*. Adapted for American audiences

in 2005 from the British version created by Ricky Gervais, *The Office* draws from filming techniques and narrative structures popularized most notably by reality television. The entirety of the show is filmed with what are meant to be handheld cameras by an unseen crew, and much of what is filmed (and ostensibly edited) is narrated or explained during “talking head” or “confession booth” moments wherein a central character talks directly to the camera to interpret, explain, or comment upon the events that have just been aired. Occasionally, the footage captured by the crew is supplemented by video footage from surveillance cameras in the Scranton, PA business park, in which the Dunder-Mifflin paper company (*The Office*’s office) is located, and other private sources, such as boss Michael Scott’s handheld video camera which he repeatedly uses to record apology videos and workplace instructional videos.

The conceit of the show has grown with every season: that there is a central purpose for the presence of the camera crew in the office of a paper company. Early in the series, viewers are meant to assume that the crew is there to record a documentary on American office life. As the series continued, it became clear that *The Office* was meant to parody the reality show genre and that the show *The Office* was itself the justification for the presence of the cameras located in the fictional office. And so we viewers are both the fictional audience for whom this fictional, documentary / reality show is intended and the external audience aware of the central conceit. *The Office* puts the viewer in the position to observe what happens in the office both from the viewpoint inside the fictional world of the show and outside of that world. We are enabled to observe our observations. And we can see that the camera crew need be neither fictional nor “real.” It is both.

We viewers are thus put in an interesting position. We are asked to be complicit with our role as insiders, or as the fictional audience for whom the show is ostensibly intended, while remaining outside of *The Office*'s fictional world. We are thus also second-order observers of two types: We can see inside the fictional world *where* others can't, and we can step away from that world to see *what* the others can't: That the largest blind spot created by the camera crew is itself the conceit that falls behind the cameras' lenses. We are thus located at the point where the camera crew sutures reality and fiction.

Our position in this narrative structure is that of the second-order observers of both *The Office*'s fictional world and of the television show of the same name. As such, we are invited to construct a reality based on our perspective of the inherent blind spots circulated by the show's camera crew. In *Critical Environments*, Carey Wolfe notes that

All systems [...] are constituted by a necessary "blind spot" that only *other* observing systems can see, and the process of social reproduction depends on the "unfolding," the distribution and circulation, of these constitutive paradoxes (which would otherwise block systemic self-reproduction) by a plurality of observing systems – not by observation but by "the observation of observation" (66).

Katherine Hayles has similarly noted the necessity of "an infinite regress" of second-order observation to approximate a perspective of the world that is consistent with a lived reality. In other words, as second-order observers, we are in the position to do what one does inside of the narrative framework of conspiracy theory: draw from the information at our disposal to construct a story about what happens in the visual field. Our stories are

then corroborated inside of the show during the confessional moments wherein the characters speak directly into the camera. These confessions are meant to further augment the material that ostensibly falls outside of the perceptual framework *inside* of the show: In this regard, we are second-order observers alongside each individual character in the show who can see the blind spots recorded both inside of the show and out.

When hierarchical surveillance is conducted in the fictional world of *The Office*, such as when the corporate offices demand that all email accounts be monitored (“dataveillance”), or as when private images are accidentally spread through the corporation’s listservs, another diegetic layer is added to the show’s format. When this happens, we see characters “letting down their guard” for the fictional camera crew while the “real” camera crew captures something that “feels” closer to their true character. And so the presence of surveillance within this particular narrative causes the system to come full circle: It is the occasion for the characters to cease being characters. In so doing, the narrative’s verisimilitude is further bolstered.

The Office is one manifestation of a different but equally culturally pervasive notion: that cameras are everywhere, and that this fact need not be the occasion for paranoia. Instead, rather than be on a continual regulatory record, we are instead given the hope of spreading our lateral perspectives through networks of visual capture and circulation. What happens in the camera’s field of vision must be narrated or explained, but not by authoritative voices. Instead, those inside of this visual narrative framework are free to provide narrative accompaniment to captured footage. And, even so, we see that there are still blind spots that only we viewers, as second- or third- order observers

can see. *The Office* is thus a contemporary realization of much of what I'll present in this dissertation.

In Chapter Two ("The Body in the Blind Spot") I examine the ways in which privatized surveillance systems open blind spots that evacuate bodily representations of subjectivity. In that chapter, I draw from the aforementioned *Tracking Transience* project alongside Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* as contemporary examples of such disappearances and erasures. In Chapter Three ("Institutionalized Surveillance and the Regulation of Race"), I discuss the conflation of race and socio-economic status to examine the ways in which race is surveilled in periphractic – or socio-economically marginalized – spaces (as depicted, for example, in HBO's crime-drama series *The Wire*). Perhaps more importantly, in Chapter Three I examine specific instances in which borrowing the camera's authority brings credibility to the articulations of racially and socio-economically marginalized perspectives (as it does in the case of the killing of Oscar Grant III) and the ways in which this phenomenon manifests in postmodern narrative structures (as it does in Anna Deavere-Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1991*). In Chapter Four ("Private Parts in Public Places"), I examine the surveillance of gender in public places (such as the public men's room and the airport) and focus on the ways in which such surveillance regulates heteronormative scripts for public behavior. In this chapter, I focus on the central character of Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex*, Cal, as well as issues regarding the transgender individual's experience in the public airport to imagine a beacon of hope for future developments in the political sphere that would ensure greater equality for people who don't neatly identify with gender binary categories. I finish this dissertation in Chapter Five ("Dataveillance: DataNarratives in the Age of Information

Proliferation”) by turning towards other methods of surveillance (such as dataveillance and data-mining) to further discuss the subversive power of triangulating methods of capturing information and subsequently disseminating it. I argue that this triangulation has impacted both the form and content of emerging narratives, such as Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) and that has likewise had (and will continue to have) a profound impact on the socio-political sphere (as it has in the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movements).

¹ See University of California, Berkeley’s Jennifer King, Deirdre K. Mulligan, and Steven Raphael study of “the effectiveness of the City of San Francisco’s Community Safety Camera (CSC) program” (6).

² I have chosen to focus primarily on visual surveillance largely because I see the relationship between visual surveillance and subjectivity to be most obviously synecdochic of the larger issue of subjectivity construction and performance in the public sphere. For my argument, the process of narrating the visual field is the connecting tissue between surveillance and subjectivity, so that the narrative framework of conspiracy theory provides a model for the narrative framework of a process of identity formation wherein visual information becomes the data for both expressing and understanding public subjectivities.

³ For more, see Linda Hutcheon’s *A Poetics of Postmodernism*.

⁴ When Maturana and Varela coined the phrase *autopoiesis* in *The Tree of Knowledge* they were originally speaking of self-reproducing, single-celled organisms. So, in the case of each human’s monozygotic beginnings, a single cell splits into two equally parts, and each part splits again, and so on until the cells begin to differentiate into the different parts of what ultimately becomes recognized as a human being. Niklas Luhmann most famously applies this concept to Social Systems. Gregory Bateson, in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, uses the concept to discuss several social and psychological systems (most interestingly, if not most entertainingly, Bateson interprets Alcoholics Anonymous as an autopoietic system). More recently, Cary Wolfe continues the discussion of autopoiesis in the context of postmodern theory.

⁵ Niklas Luhmann, in *Social Systems*, uses the example of the thermostat to describe the ways in which social systems circulate and perpetuate the conditions of their own existence. This example is borrowed by several theorists in the double issue of *Cultural Critique* (issues 30 and 31, Spring and Fall 1995) edited by Cary Wolfe and William Rasch.

⁶ See Niklas Luhmann’s *Social Systems* and *Art as a Social System* for more on the use of society as an environment for the actualization and autopoiesis of a social system.

Chapter Two:
The Body and Its Image: The Failure of Surveillance as a Narrative Apparatus

Translated from the French word *surveiller*, which literally means “to over see,” “supervise,” or “watch from above,” the word *surveillance* both metaphorically refers to the act of watching from a socially, economically, or politically hierarchical vantage point and literally watching from an elevated physical space. Both metaphorically and literally, what it seeks to capture is always perceived and articulated from a vantage point that must necessarily ignore or dismiss lateral viewpoints. Physically, surveillance cameras are typically placed in elevated vantage points that facilitate greater ranges of visibility. Metaphorically, such cameras are also ideologically charged by the hierarchical purposes they serve: to regulate visually circumscribed spaces. In this sense, a surveillance camera’s physical placement replicates its ideological aims: to protect visually circumscribed space, public and private, from theft and damage; to monitor and regulate subjects within its visual field; and to “watch from above.” Moreover, surveillance cameras “capture” the motion of bodies in and through circumscribed space, and this capture may carry its hierarchical authority into what ultimately becomes an authoritative narrative account (as it often is, for example, in the courtroom) of the body in visually circumscribed space.

Thankfully, authoritative narrative accounts informed by the surveillance camera can be undermined by contemporary shifts in surveillance practices as well as the proliferation of privatized surveillance technologies: shifts from what Michel Foucault describes as “Panoptic” practice to something seemingly more rhizomatic, or dispersed and nebulously interconnected, as is often the case in the use of second-generation

surveillance technologies. In the case of panoptic practice, a centralized and hierarchical power structure that functions as a topological method of control is mapped onto ideological state apparatuses (such as the factory, the hospital, the school, or the prison)ⁱ that carry the weight of an unseen “eye of power” whose gaze ideologically regulates all who come within its visual field. In the case of a rhizomatic approach, the widespread distribution of second-generation surveillance technologies and systems facilitates the illusion that they could be interconnected, even if, and at best, only retroactively so; and thus a rhizomatic dispersion is less a strategic, topological structure informed by hierarchical order and more of a shifting, tactical structure that can be implemented regardless of space or ideology. While the dispersion of surveillance technologies challenges the hierarchical, or “top-down,” model of surveillance, most theoretical analyses of surveillance that consider this dispersion suggest that the ultimate aim of surveillance is still invested in regulatory power.ⁱⁱ Although I concede that continued consideration of surveillance in the context of regulatory control is important to the ongoing discourse on surveillance and culture, I assert that the proliferation of visual surveillance technologies – such as cell phone cameras and web cams – provides a multiplicity of perspectives that undermine centralized and hierarchical approaches to authoritative interpretations of visual information; and thus this dispersion also disperses the regulatory power typically connected to hierarchical surveillance practices. Moreover, I posit that the proliferation of lateral viewpoints, or non-hierarchical perspectives, increases the amount of visual information from which we might construct narratives that describe and interpret the visual field. The proliferation of surveillance technologies and practices can thus be liberating and empowering.

Despite claims that the proliferation of surveillance technologies broadens the gaze of hierarchical power structures, the proliferation scatters and fragments the totality of the gaze. It is only when disparate and scattered systems are retrospectively linked for the purpose of reconstructing a narrative account does the observer see through the mediated gaze of retroactively triangulated surveillance systems. Take, for example, the story of Hani Hanjour, the terrorist pilot of Flight 77 who, on September 11, crashed the hijacked commercial airliner into the Pentagon after taking off from Dulles International Airport in Washington DC. Hanjour's story goes something like this: After failing twice to obtain a pilot's license in 1996 and 1997, Hanjour was awarded the license – despite, as reports tell us, his weak flying skills and poor English – by a branch of the Pan Am International Flight Company in Scottsdale, AZ (Yardley A10).ⁱⁱⁱ In the early days of September 2001, Hanjour, along with five others who were themselves later identified as terrorists aboard Flight 77, signed up for a week-long membership at a Gold's Gym in Greenbelt, MD, and, as the *New York Times* reports, paid \$30 in cash from “a wad of money” (“5 Terror Suspects” B4). Then, after being photographed by an ATM camera along with the aforementioned five other terrorists – Hanjour's penultimate known appearance on camera which was later presented as positive proof that he was associated with the other known hijackers – Hanjour traveled to the Dulles Airport on the morning of September 11 following his fellow hijackers. Like his accomplices, he set off metal detectors, but unlike most of the other hijackers, he was not subject to additional screening (“Surveillance Video Shows” A19).

Taken from written reports and interviews of flight school instructors and students, the guest registry of a public gym, an ATM camera snapshot, and images from

the surveillance system at the Dulles airport security checkpoint, this is, from one perspective, a story about a man who was a poor pilot, interested in working out, friends with men who had ATM cards, and who passed through additional airport screening after a magnetometer detected what was presumably the box cutter he carried (which, at the time, was legal). Viewed retroactively as a timeline of chronological causality tainted by the perspective of the “end of the story,” so to speak, the story is about a man who trained to fly a commercial airliner into the Pentagon in an act of suicidal terrorism. Each detail, from speaking poor English at flight school to paying for a gym membership in cash rather than credit to being associated with the other hijackers, is plugged into this master narrative that, in its internal structure, mirrors the framework of conspiracy theory. I don’t mean to acquit Hanjour of his guilt nor lessen the severity of his actions: he was most certainly responsible for a horrendous act of suicidal terrorism on September 11, 2001, and it would be both difficult and unnecessary to provide a reading of the visual information that would suggest otherwise. What I do want to point out is that, ultimately, the story of Hani Hanjour is a cautionary tale: even if only in retrospect, the postmodern subject is always on the record, informed by visual information and interpreted into a retrospective narrative framework, and this record ultimately becomes the authoritative narrative account. Moreover, prevailing narrative trends tend to get retroactively “plugged into” such narrative accounts. In this case, the pervasive American narrative that casts Middle Eastern Muslims as terrorists becomes mapped onto the larger explanatory narrative.

Such retroactive constructions of explanatory narrative usually link together historical facts (or, as is the case for Hani Hanjour, ostensibly objective visual

information) with predominant ideologies by imbuing them with current, pervasive, ideological perspectives. This process, though, is arguably as much an act of interpretation as it is explanation. In the words of Alan Nadel, “[i]n personal experience, as it is in culture, the fissure between event and history is broached by narrative” (3). But the linkage between event and history by narrative is problematic at best: narrative is articulated from a limited perspective; it is subject to falsifications, exaggerations, faulty memory, and conventions that sacrifice objectivity for the appearance of chronological causality, and it ultimately fails to represent that which it intends to articulate, describe, or otherwise give voice to. Simply put, narrative is an act of interpretation. As such, it is also an act of translation, of passing information through the filter of subjective mediation. As the story of Hani Hanjour illustrates, once the “end of the story” is known, then interpretations of information become retrospectively charged with the imperative to move towards this seemingly inevitable end. Visual surveillance technologies are thus affected by the problems of interpretive narrative: their metaphorical and literal hierarchical perspectives create blind spots that ignore lateral viewpoints from outside perspectives, and the hierarchical perspectives are ultimately embedded in the narratives they are used to generate. I would suggest, then, that the authority of the visual record can thus be challenged, augmented, or undermined by a proliferation of privatized or second-generation surveillance technologies that provide lateral perspectives. In other words, the greater number of perspectives that fall outside of institutionalized and hierarchical surveillance practices, the greater the possibility for challenging the authority of the visual image and the greater the possibility for granting authority to perspectives that would otherwise be marginalized by the dominant order.^{iv}

As the instance of the retrospectively triangulated surveillance system involved in weaving together a narrative thread about Hani Hanjour further illustrates, the authority of the camera and its relationship to the subject under surveillance often goes unquestioned; however, particularly in recent years, the incredulousness of “reality” television, the proliferation of “Photoshopped images,” and the massive amount of self-circulated visual information via social media have called into question the stability of the relationship between the mediation of the camera and its relationship to interpretations of visual information. The instability of this relationship has become an increasingly common concern expressed in American culture and its cultural products. For example, in literature, Paul Auster’s *New York Trilogy* (1987) and his *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2007) each depict characters for whom watching from a limited vantage point determines the ways in which we “read” what they see;^v and Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* (2003) offers a protagonist, Eric Packer, whose very being is so intertwined with his privatized and massively dispersed surveillance systems that the visual story they present about Packer ultimately accelerates and scripts Packer’s demise while calling into question the privileging of visual information. In film, a tradition of the problem of “reading” a closed perspective, ranging from Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954) through more recent films such as *Vantage Point* (2008) and *Eagle Eye* (2008), highlights the cultural paranoia underpinning the breakdown of privileged perspective and authoritative accounts. In cultural, virtual instantiations of autobiographical accounts that draw from the camera’s authority as a storytelling device – and here I refer to social media spaces such as MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube – we see that the privatization and proliferation of visual surveillance technology turns everyone into a potential, visual

storyteller. Cultural figures, such as the performance artists New York City Players, who stage scenes in public surveillance spaces meant to be watched by those behind the surveillance cameras' lens, as well as digital artist Hasan Elahi, who uses the surveillance camera to weave a vast narrative of the proliferation of visual information, highlight the problem of the camera as an authoritative and seemingly objective narrative device.

Drawing from DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* and Elahi's ongoing self-surveillance project *Tracking Transience* for examples of the postmodern character caught in a triangulated system of visual surveillance, interpretive narrative, and performative imperatives, I analyze the problematic relationship between seemingly objective visual information and the stories we tell about the postmodern subject. Ultimately, I assert that, caught in a vast network of visual surveillance, the postmodern subject is entrenched in a complex narrative system broken into disparate and disconnected parts. Moreover, I posit that, in surveillance footage, images of the body metonymically replace the presence of the body to suggest that the body functions best as its image. First-generation surveillance technologies carry the hierarchical authority that originally initiated the replacement of the postmodern body by its image, while second-generation technology enables the postmodern subject to further participate in this visual decorporealization.^{vi} For example, in the case of the protagonist Eric Packer of DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, we see that the dispersion of a massive, first-generation surveillance system also disperses images of the body, and that, depending on the perspective of the camera, the ways in which the body is narrated depend upon the camera's vantage point. In the case of Elahi's *Tracking Transience* project, we can see that the privatization of surveillance technology allows the subject greater control of the role of his "avatar," or digitalized visual representation.

Specifically, in *Tracking Transience*, the body of the subject is only present in the visual field through metonymies of bodily activity, such as travel and consumption, and we see that the narratives we create from the visual information of bodily activity replace the implied bodily referent. Where Packer's body is evacuated through a virtual hall of mirrors created by a massive dispersion of surveillance cameras, each watching both Packer and each other, Elahi's body disappears in the camera's blind spots.^{vii}

Paranoia and Conspiracy Theory as Interpretive Acts

Before examining Hasan Elahi's *Tracking Transience* and Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, I feel it is necessary to contend with the relationship between surveillance, conspiracy, and paranoia. In part, a study on the relationship between surveillance and identity itself risks sounding both paranoid and bit like conspiracy theory. And, perhaps, since we suspect suspicion and avoid paranoia, we would be inclined to devalue a project that resonates with these characteristics. Nevertheless, I assert that both paranoia and conspiracy theory are interpretive acts that provide useful models for understanding the narration of postmodern subjectivity from the perspective of the surveillance camera. For example, studies on paranoia and the postmodern condition – studies I present in greater detail below – have been useful for understanding the ways in which poststructuralism is as much a cultural movement as it is a theoretical discourse, and they provide a method of understanding some of the underpinning reactions to surveillance systems. Moreover, paranoia, as Pat O'Donnell suggests, stems from postmodern subjectivity recognizing itself as a social construction, and what else is a Foucauldian model of subjectivity under surveillance if not a social construct? Similarly, conspiracy theory is also ultimately an

interpretive act that turns relatively objective information into narrative in much the same way that surveillance footage is often used as information for an accompanying narrative.

Critics such as Pat O'Donnell, Mark Fenster, Timothy Melley, and Alan Nadel have posited that the paranoia embedded in the postmodern condition has been facilitated by the breakdown of "Master Narratives" (in Lyotard's famous formulation), perpetuated by McCarthyism and the Cold War Communist witch hunts, and solidified by widespread cultural knowledge of government conspiracies such as Watergate. Melley, for instance, discusses paranoia and conspiracy theories as symptomatic cultural manifestations of underlying, but pervasive, anxieties about social control. His phrase "agency panic" describes "intense anxiety about an apparent loss of autonomy, the conviction that one's actions are being controlled by someone else or that one has been 'constructed' by powerful, external agents" (vii). In the face of Foucault's formulations of surveillance as a mechanism of social control, it is unsurprising that the postmodern subject would, for example, interpret the surveillance camera's presence as a regulatory device and fear that it replaces the autonomous perspective of the individual with an objective perspective that undermines autonomy and agency.

Similarly, Fenster notes, as others have, that "within a presumably 'postmodern' era that marks the end of master narratives, conspiracy theorists posit highly and imaginatively integrative analyses of individual pieces of evidence that do not provide direct proof of conspiracy into an all-encompassing framework" (79). Along these lines, conspiracy theory can be seen as not only a narrative strategy but also as an interpretive practice wherein the ultimate aim is to get at the "truth" which is always "out there" waiting to be discovered. Towards this end, conspiracy theorists "place links along an

interpretive chain” (87) in an ongoing construction of the “truth” from what otherwise may be disparate and only loosely connected materials.^{viii} For the conspiracy theorist, there is an ultimate solution to a conspiracy that objectively exists but remains hidden, and the contextualized meaning and significance of each individual piece of evidence becomes retroactively clear once the truth has been discovered. Ultimately, however, an authoritative, reconstructed narrative that successfully solves the mystery of the conspiracy would fail to qualify as a conspiracy theory, and thus would undo itself as such. A conclusively “solvable” mystery cannot be a conspiracy. The “truth” of the conspiracy is both what the conspiracy theorist desires but can never attain. As a circular mode of interpretation, it is also, according to Fenster, productive – that is, it is “self-generating and forever flying through space and time” (95). As a productive mode of interpretation, it may “tear the sign from its chain, to move, to produce new chains” (97). In other words, the narrative practice of conspiracy theory generates a closed, internal logic that, in turn, creates new and evolving situational meanings of signifiers and even may generate new “objective” information.

It is tempting, then, to accept that paranoia is part of the postmodern condition and assume that the familiarity of our “condition” would render continual subjection to visual surveillance systems familiar – as an extension of the pre-existing condition, even. Moreover, if we view conspiracy theories as narrative practices – recognizing that, as a postmodern narrative framework, the logic of conspiracy theory suggests that “the truth is out there” – then, coupled with the familiarity of continual surveillance, we might view surveillance as an apparatus that assists in the collection of “objective” information that

can be assembled into the construction of whatever truth we might seek, and thus it would be yet another apparatus that facilitates what Melley calls “agency panic.”

However, as I previously posited, the distribution of surveillance technologies can be both liberating and empowering for the postmodern subject: insofar as the proliferation of second-generation surveillance technologies also increases the number of perspectives, it also undermines the assumed hierarchical authority of first-generation surveillance practices and replaces it with a multiplicity of authoritative viewpoints. The postmodern proliferation of surveillance technologies provides the means of destabilizing what has been perceived as the malevolent force of surveillance practices. Additional streams of visual information provided by the privatization and distribution of surveillance technologies opens multiple spaces and opportunities for non-hierarchical perspectives to be presented with their own authority. In other words, the proliferation of privatized surveillance systems adds authority to perspectives that have traditionally been marginalized by hierarchical social and power structures. Moreover, the proliferation of visual streams of information (and narrative interpretations and perspectives) also creates a chaotic “white noise” of visual information in which, as Hasan Elahi illustrates, the postmodern body has the opportunity to disappear. In sum, the proliferation of visual information returns agency to those who are robbed of it by regulatory power and it provides an excess of material for the construction of interpretive narratives. The excess of interpretations and perspectives opens a space for the postmodern subject to either borrow the camera’s authority or to disappear in a primordial ooze of visual information.

The (Mal)Function of Surveillance in *Cosmopolis*

Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* presents a protagonist, Eric Packer, surrounded by a vast, internally-connected network of surveillance technology. Truly rhizomatically connected, Packer's massive surveillance system facilitates the aforementioned "white noise" of information, by providing a proliferation of multiple perspectives of a singular subject (namely, Packer himself). The novel focuses on Packer's limousine journey through Manhattan on "A Day in April" in 2000, during the historical period of American cultural and socio-economic affluence that Francis Fukayama famously calls "The End of History," or the period of the late Twentieth Century and the beginning of the Twenty-First when the U. S. stock market was at its peak, the Cold War had ended, the war on terror had not yet begun, and the U.S. experienced financial prosperity that seemed virtually endless. In *Cosmopolis* the stock market and currency exchange have peaked and are on the brink of decline,^{ix} and so not only does Packer similarly straddle this financial brink, but he also embodies the exaggerated, late Twentieth Century, American sense of entitlement, prosperity and futurism. Beyond presenting a protagonist gifted in American capitalistic pursuits and exploits, *Cosmopolis* depicts a character whose surveillance systems provides him with technologically augmented and uncannily prescient foresight; but Packer's financial prowess and precocity crumble when his advanced technologies fail, and these failures arguably initiate a chain of events that ultimately lead to Packer's death. On the surface, *Cosmopolis* questions the technologically-mediated, commodified ontology of the postmodern subject; underneath, however, it suggests that an unquestioning faith in the objectivity of visual information can be deadly.

DeLillo invites us to read Packer's surveillance systems as prosthetic extensions of his psyche, and so we are meant, I believe, to see Packer as what Kate Hayles and others have called the "post-human," or, in Donna Haraway's phrase "the trans-human."^x To point out the ways in which this is the case is a blatant act in articulating the obvious: Packer's surveillance and informatics systems are so ingrained into his functioning in the world that the boundaries between Packer and his technology are blurred to a degree that effectively renders "the machine" a part of Packer and Packer a part of his machine. Moreover, the story is so imbued with the presence of these technological innovations and Packer's existence so defined by them, we are meant to "read" Packer's surveillance systems as decision-making prosthetics and sensory apparatuses that are both outside of the body and representative of a disembodied self. Jerry A. Varsava notes that "Packer's interactions with various telecommunications and computer systems [...] confer upon him a sense of personal prestige, even moral redemption" (86). Packer's advanced technological apparatuses and systems do confer prestige and redemption, but beyond redemption, Packer's technologies present the possibility of a technologically-mediated afterlife in the novel's recurring promise that people will ultimately be absorbed into "streams of information," to use DeLillo's phrase.

The transliteration of the visual image into pure information is merely illusion, since all visual information is accompanied by interpretation that usually takes the form of narrative. At best, visual surveillance facilitates the aforementioned problematic chain of secondary observations necessary for the appearance of objectivity; at its worst, its failure to provide narrative objectivity undermines the socially constructed authority of the visual image. So while *Cosmopolis* foregrounds a postmodern American identity

formation decentralized and mediated by rhizomatically dispersed, privatized systems of visual surveillance, it also suggests that these same systems ultimately represent failed approaches to greater narrative objectivity. This failure is represented in a few ways in the novel: 1) the attempt to blur boundaries between physical interiority and exteriority in collapsing the distance between the two through visual representation does more to undo the authority of the image than bolster it; 2) the suggestion that the camera presents an endless “stream of information” that facilitates a technological afterlife for the postmodern subject is really just another way of suggesting that “the body functions best as its image”; and 3) when there are discrepancies between the perspective of the camera and the perspective of the subject, the camera’s authority undoes itself by arguably prescribing impossible performative demands.

“A Surface Separates Inside from Out and Belongs No Less to One than the Other”:

Permeable Boundaries

The relationship between interior and exterior, or, in the terms of systems theory, between a system and its environment, and the potential permeability of membranes separating the two are recurrent themes in the novel. As Packer notes while staring at the enormous building in which he lives: a “surface separates inside from out and belongs no less to one than the other” (9). Like the reflective wall of his building, Packer’s body is depicted as a penetrable membrane. For example, Packer gets a medical exam during which he is connected to an echocardiogram, and as Packer sees the image of his beating heart, he ponders both the closeness and distance of what the image represents: the exteriorized image of his most vital of vital organs (44). “The image,” he observes, “was only a foot away but the heart assumed another context, one of distance and immensity”

(44). Here the core of the body's interior vitality is not only projected externally, but is also separated from the body and sutured to the digital screen. Not only, then, is Packer's body fragmented and reconstructed as a network of interdependent systems, but also the objective information about Packer's body is separated from its bodily referent so that, like the images of bodily activity in Hasan Elahi's work, images of Packer's physical interior metonymically represent the body to which they refer.

During this same medical exam, the doctor, Ingram, investigates Packer's prostate, and Packer "fe[els] the pain. It traveled the pathways. It informed the ganglion and spinal cord. He was here in his body, the structure he wanted to dismiss in theory [...] It [the body] was convertible to wave arrays of information. It was the thing he watched on the oval screen" (48). Virilio notes that the camera helps organize distance into illusions of traversable possibility, or the idea that "*Everything I see is in principle within my reach, at least within reach of my sight, marked on the map of the 'I can'*" (author's italics, 7). And, as Anna McCarthy notes, the camera and the screen facilitate "two modes of spatiality—distance and proximity—so that mediated images can seem more 'live' than the person with whom we are sitting" (124). While, on one hand, the mediated image facilitates a problematic possibility – in Packer's case, the possibility of examining and objectifying his physically interior space; on the other hand, it also collapses distance and proximity and determines the parameters of a lived reality.

The problem, of course, is that the objectification of Packer's pain, of Packer's body, is a fiction. The visual information that presents the "wave arrays of information" of Packer's body is not only mediated by the camera and screen, but through diegetic layers of interpretation: That is, not only do we read Packer's perspective, itself mediated

by the narrator's omniscient perspective, but we also understand that the image is being presented in a very specific context – the physical exam – and in the presence of a contextually authoritative perspective: the doctor's. In this context, the visual information is, of course, meant to simply provide factual information for a medical evaluation, and so we see that Packer's desire to render his body into "wave arrays of information" is really just an internalization of the contextually authoritative perspective. DeLillo thus offers a *metafiction*: a fictionalization of the fiction embedded in interpretations of visual information. In the case of Packer's medical exam, for example, the fiction that although Packer is "here in his body" while he attempts to theoretically objectify the associated pain that "travels the pathways" of the ganglion and spinal cord, the visually mediated distance and proximity of the images of his body's interior facilitate a theoretical dismissal of the body itself.

This separation is necessarily also a suture: Packer physically embodies the pain he externalizes, and thus the image of his body simultaneously distances, or separates, himself from his bodily referent while suturing him to it. In her essay "The Will to Evolve," Jane Goodall quotes the performance artist Stelarc as suggesting that "[e]lectronic images displace and even erase the body" (15).^{xi} As I have already asserted, the displacement of the body by its image suggests that the symbol metonymically erases or displaces its referent. Moreover, for both Stelarc and Packer, the technologically mediated displacement of the body by its image suggests that the digital image of the body is a cybernetic one. As Timothy Melley puts it, "by rejecting the idea that the boundaries of the material body are the boundaries of the person, cybernetic thinking offers, simultaneously, the exhilarating prosthetic extension of the

person into other systems and the frightening effacement of the liberal subject” (88).

This “prosthetic extension” of Packer into his technological systems points towards just such an effacement. It suggests that the difference between Packer and his image is not that great: that, in fact, the very idea of difference suggests a separation that simply does not exist. It suggests that Packer and images of Packer are essentially one and the same. In this way, it also suggests that images of Packer’s body displace, erase, and evacuate their bodily referent.

“The Creed of the New Culture”: Streams of Information

Early in *Cosmopolis*, the triangulated relationship between capital, technology, and the body is introduced as another of the novel’s themes. In conversation with his currency analyst, Packer asserts that the only thing left worth studying is the inseparability of technology and capital (23). And later, during the same conversation, Packer studies computer monitors depicting scrolling, “real-time,” financial information, “streams of numbers running in opposite directions,” and he interprets the numerical display in terms of organic aesthetics: “Here was the heave of the biosphere,” he thinks. “Our bodies and oceans were here, knowable and whole” (24). That “our bodies and oceans,” our “biosphere,” are reduced to “streams of numbers” suggests that nothing is free from either the grip of technological mediation or the reducibility of all phenomena to pure information. Similarly, the novel also suggests that the digital image – be it still (photographic) or moving (video) – is also reducible to pure information. As such, it is suggested that images of the body reduce subjectivity into “knowable and whole” information without considering that visual information is always captured from a limited perspective and interpreted within fairly narrow frameworks of subjective possibility.

The translation of subjectivity into streams of information reveals a distinctly postmodern concern with the fragmented and decentralized self. That is, if identity can be potentially encoded into streams of information, there is thus no essential core from which identity manifests.^{xii} As artists like Hasan Elahi have illustrated and theorists such as Donna Haraway have argued, the body, by virtue of operating in an already technologically enhanced cultural and socioeconomic framework, is already technologically augmented. While technological innovations in science and medicine function, of course, to regulate and preserve the health of the body, public and private technologies ranging from Automated Teller Machines to personal computers could be said to occasionally function as technological enhancements for the postmodern subject's body. In this way, subjectivity becomes technologically augmented and agency operates in the gap between interior subjectivity and exterior manifestations of identity.

O'Donnell reiterates that "both the postmodern condition and the condition of language [...] remains suspended in the increasing gap between all the 'betweens' of signifier and signified, semiotic and symbolic, maternal materiality and paternal ideality" (89). Moreover, and more importantly, he asserts that "residing (waiting) within this state of suspended animation complies with the conflation of identificatory and capital fluidity that constitutes a major aspect of the ideology of postmodernity" (89-90). The link between "identificatory and capital fluidity" is intrinsic to the identity formation of the postmodern subject.^{xiii} In Packer, we see not only the link of the fluid identity formation with capital fluidity, but we also see a shifting but ever-present technological mediation between the two. For Packer, technology functions to symbolically suture the

two together, effectively creating the illusion that identity and capital are intrinsically linked.

O'Donnell also asserts that, in part, “we are paranoid because we are approaching with increasing rapidity the commodification and virtualization of temporality itself” (9). ““Clock time accelerated the rise of capitalism,”” remarks Packer’s chief of theory Vija Kinski. “[T]ime is a corporate asset now” (79). But it is truly the advancing and unending flow of information that facilitates the corporatization of the future as well as the flux of cyber-capitalism. DeLillo himself notes in his essay “In the Ruins of the Future,” published in December of 2001, that the “dramatic climb of the Dow and the speed of the internet summoned us all to live permanently in the future” (33).

Accordingly, Packer views the streams of information to which he has unending access as the acceleration of the future. Moreover, the constant real-time flow of information functions as a sort of antithesis to the fragmentation of the self. From this viewpoint, the only authentic narrative account looks something like an unceasing flow of pure information: any thing else is necessarily a subjective interpretation or embellishment.

Cosmopolis also foregrounds a postmodern concern with the separation of event and history and focuses on the failure of narrative to suture the two. Packer recalls the time “when he was forecasting stocks, when forecasting was pure power, when he’d tout a technology stock or bless an entire sector and automatically cause doublings in share price and the shifting of worldviews, when he was effectively making history, before history became monotonous and slobbering” (75). Here, then, we are able to view the relationship between event and history – or, more specifically, between Packer’s predictions and the “shifting of worldviews” – as one connected by a “monotonous and

slobbering” narrative linkage. In what ways, then, are technology, capital, and the body intertwined? Through narrative.

““Why am I seeing things that haven’t happened yet?””: The “(Mal)function” of Surveillance Technology

Packer’s is a first-generation surveillance system: a Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) system which consists of a rhizomatically dispersed network of cameras and monitors placed in his home, his limousine, his workspaces, and even on his wrist (his wristwatch contains both a miniature camera and a tiny viewing screen). This system has these integrated central aims: to watch “from above” and to visually preserve, narrate, and regulate Packer’s movements through, and interactions in, the world. Prior to Packer’s switch to CCTV, the images captured by Packer’s surveillance system are broadcast in real-time, twenty-four hours a day. These images become the narrative visual biography of Packer, viewed, if by no one else, his obsessive assassin and former employee Richard Sheets, a.k.a. Benno Levin. Levin views these images from a distinct and emotionally charged vantage point, having been fired by Packer despite entering the company with hopes of making his fortune. Here we see the inherent problem with the construction of history as narrative: the observers play a role in its construction.

In *Cosmopolis*, only singular events, repeatedly displayed, carry the mythic currency of objective history. As elsewhere in DeLillo’s work, scenes of tragedy – particularly murder or execution – are obsessively, repeatedly aired in media representations.^{xiv} In the case of *Cosmopolis* we first see Arthur Rapp, “managing director of the International Monetary Fund” assassinated in Nike, North Korea, “killed live on the Money Channel” (32-3). The networks broadcast the assassination repeatedly

“until the sensation drained out of it or everyone in the world had seen it” (34). As he later reacts to the deaths of other professionals in his field, Packer reacts to Rupp’s death by feeling refreshed and invigorated but obsessed with the murder’s continual televised “reruns” to which he has boundless access. In effect, these continual repetitions both externally displace Packer’s memory and continually bring the visually recorded past into the present, folding the two – memory and recorded image as well as past and present – into one another.

Continually broadcasted media images have an anachronistic quality. For example, Packer watches the American President processional motorcade inch its way through town, and sees an image of half of the president’s body, standing through a roof window of a limousine. Packer looks “vengefully at the screen, thinking the image did the president every justice. He was the undead. He lived in a state of occult repose, waiting to be reanimated” (77). In this sense, the broadcasted image of the president’s body functions symbolically, but it also separates the image from the person. The image presents an unanimated and anachronistic version of the president. Nevertheless, Packer resents the president for the virtual omnipresence that provides the president with virtual immortality: absorption into a technologically mediated spatio-temporal omnipresence.

And when Packer watches Brutha Fez’s funeral procession in the “real” world and in “real” time – unmediated by the camera and screen – he immediately notes, after Fez’s casket passes by, that “[i]t did not seem right that the hearse had come and gone. He wanted it to reappear at intervals, proud body open to the night, to replenish the sorrow and wonder of the crowd” (139). Freed from quick and easy access to his technological innovations, specifically, the video screens that mediate his interactions with the world,

Packer longs for the control over the visual representation that his own surveillance technologies afford him. More importantly, this exposure to the real world highlights Packer's reliance upon his surveillance technologies and reveals his vulnerability without them. It is this same vulnerability that underpins Packer's unquestioning reliance upon the image as a source of pure information.

Early in the novel, in response to his inquiry regarding the malfunctions of his surveillance equipment, Packer is told that his “system's secure. We're impenetrable. There's no rogue program” (12).^{xv} In the early malfunctions, the surveillance system monitors display images of Packer's immediate future, thus repeating the novel's concern with the anachronism of mediated images as well as furthering the suggestion that Packer and his machines are intricately connected insofar that both are amazingly prescient. David Cowart suggests that the “lags” in the “representation on the screens” that foreshadow Packer's actions are jokes played by DeLillo, calling these instances “seemingly inconsequential” (“Anxieties,” 181). “[T]hese glimpses of what has not yet happened culminate, ironically,” Cowart observes, “in the ultimate example of being ahead of the curve: before the events actually transpire, the man who so prides himself on commanding futurity witnesses on a tiny screen his own death and subsequent tagging in the morgue” (181). These instances, however, are far from inconsequential. They suggest much more than a glitch in Packer's “commanding futurity”: these malfunctions, I assert, reveal the intricate interconnectedness of Packer and his machines insofar that the authority Packer invests in them determines the degree to which they set performative parameters for Packer's actions. Moreover, they provide the narrative of deathward chronological causality: a seemingly predetermined, linear progress towards Packer's

assassination. But while we question whether the malfunctions in Packer's surveillance system present an inescapable futurity or information that informs decision, and here it is worth noting that Gregory Bateson calls information "the difference that makes a difference" in the functioning of an autopoietic system, we should first wonder if DeLillo invites us to question the inevitability of Packer's death. Does Packer have any real agency once his surveillance system has predicted his future?

The first malfunction occurs fairly early in the text. As Packer and his currency analyst Michael Chin talk in the back of the limo, Packer "watch[es] himself on the oval screen below the spycam, running his thumb along his chinline. The car stop[s] and move[s] and he realize[s] queerly that he'd just placed his thumb on his chinline, a second or two after he'd seen it on-screen" (22). In this first instance, Packer's actions are prefigured by the technology that monitors them – presenting Packer with a technologically mediated sense of *déjà vu*. He responds by again questioning the penetrability of his security systems. He is reassured that the system is secure, and replies to this by asking "“why am I seeing things that haven't happened yet?”" (22).

The second malfunction prefigures Packer's second sexual climax of the novel. In this scene, Packer verbally copulates with his chief of finance Jane Melman, bringing her to orgasm simply by speaking the words describing what he would like to do her – the act rendered unnecessary by its description. Just before their mutual climax, Packer sees "his face on the screen, eyes closed, mouth framed in a soundless little howl" (52). We're told that Packer knows that "the spycam operated in real time, or was supposed to. How could he see himself if his eyes were closed? There wasn't time to analyze. He felt his body catching up to the independent image" (52). While narrative – in this case, the

verbal copulation between Packer and Melman – renders action unnecessary, the visual image apparently does not.

During a downtown riot in which rioters beat, dent, rock, and graffiti Packer's limo, the internal surveillance system malfunctions for a third time: Packer's "own image caught his eye, live on the oval screen beneath the spycam. Some seconds passed. He saw himself recoil in shock. More time passed. He felt suspended, waiting. Then there was a detonation, loud and deep, near enough to consume all the information around him. He recoiled in shock. Everyone did" (93). In this instance, Packer knows that his surveillance system has again shown images from the immediate future. He knows what is about to happen, and so "he [feels] suspended, waiting." Like the previous instances of inescapable futurity, Packer's reactions are just that: purely automatic reactions. In other words, Packer's suspense has less to do with the question of agency and choice and more to do with question of stimulus. Theoretically, if Packer sees what he is about to do, he should have the choice of doing otherwise; however, in these three instances, the scenes depicted by his surveillance systems do not depict the results of autonomous choice. In this way, they maintain their authority as objective machines.

Also, in these three instances, the stakes are incrementally raised. That is, the vital significance of each successive scene escalates—from Packer stroking his chinline to the image of sexual climax to "recoiling in shock" after a bomb blast. It is as if through these malfunctions the machine and Packer's psyche become increasingly bound. In much the same way that the arch or trajectory of a stream of information necessarily contains within in itself both its own futurity and its logical end, so too does the technology of visual surveillance systems, as a stream of information, contain its own

futurity. In a traditional narrative framework, each story has an inevitable end towards which a narrative moves. In the aforementioned conspiracy theorist narrative framework, the end is already known and the narrative is constructed retroactively. Either way, all narrative moves towards an inevitable point.

As Packer's story and Levin's coalesce towards the novel's end, we see both characters increasingly fall prey to the circumstances that bring them together. After Packer's final sexual encounter, the only one in the novel wherein he has intercourse with his wife, he wanders into the streets, hears gunshots that sound like firecrackers, and hears his full name called out (179-81). It is this scene that prefigures the final malfunction of Packer's surveillance technology. In the final malfunction, also the final scene in the novel, Packer witnesses, in a series of fragmented scenes, the events that lead to his murder:

He looked at his watch. He happed to glance at his watch. [...] But the watch wasn't showing the time. There was an image, a face on the crystal, and it was his. This meant he'd activated the electron camera unintentionally [...] The camera was a device so microscopically refined it was almost pure information. It was almost metaphysics. It operated inside the watch body, collecting images in the immediate vicinity and displaying them on the crystal. (204-5)

Packer looks back and forth between his watch and Levin several times. In the first instance, the face of his watch shows a prone body, facedown on the floor. In his second glance, he sees "the inside of an ambulance, with drip-feed devices and bouncing heads." In the third glance, he sees "a series of small vaults," a mortuary. Then he sees the tag

on one of the open vaults which reads “Male Z”: “He knew what this meant [...] Male Z was the designation for the bodies of unidentified men in hospital morgues” (206).

In the words of Luhmann, “[a]utopoietic systems are the products of their own operations” (“Deconstruction as Second-Order Observing,” 771). Taking their output as input in a circulation of difference to promote homeostasis, autopoietic systems function to perpetuate continued existence – the ultimate homeostatic state. And while, systems theorists typically suggest that individuals don’t function as independent systems so much as components of larger social, communicative, and, in many arguments, evolutionary systems, Packer’s surveillance system functions as a tight system whose condition for continued existence is intricately linked to Packer’s continued existence. Leading up to Packer’s death, we are presented with two views of what might happen to Packer upon his death: either “the world will end” or he will be “absorbed into a stream of information.” While it is not my goal to present a Postmodern view of life after death or to conversely present an essentialist view of Packer’s identity, I do want to suggest that, for Packer, both options occur. Effectively, the world does end, even if only it is the internal world of the closed system of narrative created by continual streams of visual information. And, likewise, Packer *is* absorbed into a stream of information, even if only we assume that the stream of information has been preserved – recorded to be endlessly replayed as Packer’s life and death become anachronisms themselves. Along these lines, we might consider Packer’s death as his entrance into a virtual eternity.^{xvi} Both erased and replicated, Packer enters a virtual “hall of mirrors” that destabilizes and perpetuates his existence through the possibility of endless repetition.

The Body in the Blind Spot in Hasan Elahi's *Tracking Transience*

As I have suggested elsewhere, public reception of and reactions to the proliferation of surveillance technologies are, generally speaking, twofold. First, there are those who see the surveillance camera as a mechanism of control invoking an Orwellian paranoia regarding subjectivity and personal, autonomous agency. For example, an exaggerated form of this brand of paranoia has recently been identified and named “The Truman Delusion” by Bellevue Hospital’s Dr. Joel Gold along with his brother Ian Gold of Canada’s McGill University.^{xvii} Second are those who embrace the technology of visual surveillance as a facilitator of safety and community, such as those in the aforementioned internet-based, virtual communities who use the camera as everything from a grooming tool to a safety device. While the attitude of acceptance of the latter group is disturbingly free from the paranoia that underpins the assumptions of the former, perhaps the enlightened position is to assume that one *is* being watched for the entertainment of unidentified masses, and to willingly, and perhaps enthusiastically, participate. Hasan Elahi is one such enlightened figure.

Hasan Elahi, visual artist and assistant professor at San Diego State University, was detained in 2002 at the Detroit Airport on a return trip from the Netherlands. Informed by the FBI that he was listed as a suspected terrorist, Elahi was subjected to hours of interrogation, and, in the course of a six-month investigation, underwent nine polygraph tests before proving his innocence. Elahi, born in The People’s Republic of Bangladesh and raised in the United States, travels extensively in promotion of his visual art installations, and it was during one such trip that he was detained. Elahi’s case is not so much one of misidentification as it is one of misunderstanding. Specifically, Elahi

was fingered by an overzealous Florida citizen who observed Elahi moving materials out of a storage facility on September 12, 2001. The erroneous report, clearly a reaction to the terrorist acts of the previous day, suggested that Elahi's storage bin was full of explosives (Thompson par. 4). Moreover, Elahi clearly suffered the ill effects of the larger, more pervasive, cultural narrative that cast people, like Hani Hanjour, who appear to be of Middle-Eastern descent as potential terrorists.

Since clearing his name, Elahi continues to contact the FBI before every flight he takes. Moreover, Elahi has, since 2002, voluntarily subjected himself to an ongoing, self-surveillance project. The project, *Tracking Transience*, has taken a few forms: from a massive digital image installation at a recent *Sundance Festival* to a traveling still image installation to the *Tracking Transience* website, an ongoing and continuously updated visual log of Elahi's physical whereabouts and consumptive activities. In its web incarnation, in three separate horizontal frames, *Tracking Transience* shows a scrolling, still image of Elahi's immediate environment; a satellite image map, hosted by Google, of Elahi's location (see figure 2.1) and a series of digital images representing various categories of activity in these places, from eating to urinating to eating *and* urinating on an airplane (see figures 2.2 and 2.3). Elahi personally photographs, typically using a cell phone camera, all of the images that appear, which number beyond 10,000, on *Tracking Transience*. Additionally, Elahi carries a GPS chip that continually monitors and transmits his location to the aforementioned satellite image map. In effect, by rendering himself a part of a mottled mass of visual information, Elahi disappears in the proliferation of information he circulates.

Figure 2.1. The *Tracking Transience* “splash” page.

Figure 2.2. A collage of images of public urinals.

Rather than speak begrudgingly about his continual subjection to visual surveillance or the necessity of using this as a perpetual alibi, Elahi speaks favorably about the practice, asserting that his project affords him a great deal of privacy. As he told *Wired* magazine, he has

“‘discovered that the best way to protect your privacy is to give it away’” (Thompson par. 5). Giving privacy away through the circulation of visual information allows Elahi to flood a seemingly panoptic eye ultimately and create the chaotic, visual, white noise in which his body disappears. We should note that images of Elahi himself are missing from his project. Of course, operating behind the lens of the camera means that Elahi has less responsibility to appear within its visual frame. Nevertheless, Elahi clearly makes himself the ultimate subject of his own visual art, and he does so by scattering his bodily presence through the series of images containing metonymies of bodily activity – metonymies such as images of plates of food, airports, waste receptacles, and urinals. The bodily acts to which these images refer are, themselves, metonymies of the body itself.

Moreover, Elahi aesthetically depicts the evacuation of the body through the blind spot of primary observation. One does not see one’s body other than in a mirrored reflection or through the mediated gaze of the camera, and so one’s own body is always in a blind spot. Of course, the camera or mirror offers the subject the possibility of externalizing perception and thus becoming the secondary observer of one’s self, but as Lacan, Mulvey, and others have noted, such externalization effects both the separation and suture of identity and its bodily referent.^{xviii} In other words, seeing one’s own reflection or visual representation puts one

Figure 2.3. Images of airline food.

Figure 2.4. Elahi's only appearance in *Tracking Transience*.

in the position of being on the outside of the body and looking in while simultaneously identifying with the image as the visual representation of one's self. Elahi avoids the decentralization of the self through an externalized gaze by depicting his own primary perspective rather than using the camera to "see" his own body. In only one instance does any physical trace of Elahi's body appear within the camera's visual field: In figure 2.4, we see what are presumably Elahi's shoes, jacket, and shadow standing before a public urinal. Whether this was an oversight Elahi's part or a deliberate, albeit brief, exception, Elahi's spectral appearance does more to support the illusion of primary observation than to undermine Elahi's bodily disappearance. Simply put: this is what you see when you stand at a urinal. Elahi's limited, bodily appearance bolsters the verisimilitude of his depiction of first-order observation and invites the viewer to share his perspective. In so doing, Elahi also invites the viewer to disappear through the blind spot of primary observation and escape the regulatory power of visual surveillance.

It would be tempting, if not easy, to dismiss the possibility of subversion in Elahi's project as a manifestation of something very Foucauldian (and thus not at all subversive). We could view *Tracking Transience* as a contemporary example of the internalization of Panoptic practice: a juridical subject has internalized Panoptic ideology and has voluntarily subjected himself to a continual, controlling, externalized gaze.^{xix} If this is the case, Foucault's formulation is correct. Foucault asserts that panoptic practice is a "superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be a minimal cost" ("The Eye of Power," 155), particularly when the subjects of panoptic power internalize its underlying ideologies and start watching themselves and each other

in a dynamic system of regulatory control and disciplinary power.^{xx} I submit instead that Elahi effectively illustrates some of the problems with Foucault's formulations.

Elahi's functions as not only the initial subject of surveillance, but also as the initial surveilleur as well as the initial implicit author and narrator of *Tracking Transience*. In so doing, he tells a story about the story: a metanarrative about what it means to tell a digitally mediated visual story about the body and its absence. The visual "story" of *Tracking Transience* can be constructed in a "traditional" narrative framework. In conforming to a traditional model of narrative, the narrator and protagonist are one and the same, and so we see what our protagonist sees, or what he wants us to see. It is a story about travel: we see images of airports and aircraft; neatly packaged airline meals in containers that look like TV dinners; distinctively "ethnic" dishes from around the world (curry in Bangalore; rice in Kuala Lumpur; various cured meats in Rome); and, of course, the satellite imagery of Elahi's current location. It is furthermore a story about consumption: in addition to the images of food, we see lists of credit card transactions and images of urinals, the waste receptacle of post-consumptive materials. And, as a story about travel, consumption, and waste, it is also a story about the body – where it went, what it bought, and what it consumed.

As a *metanarrative*, it offers commentary on what gets lost when visual information is used to construct narratives about the postmodern subject in the visual field: ultimately, the body itself gets dispersed and lost through its distribution as information. The metonymic, visual representations of the body through references to Elahi's bodily activities essentially disperses the bodily referent into bits and traces of information. Along these lines, Elia Zureik refers to the "decorporealization" of the body

in terms of “its reconfiguration into binary digits (bits) of information,” and notes that “the body is not captured in its totality as a unitary entity, but as a collection of discrete pieces of information” (40). In Judith Butler’s words, “[t]here is a bodily referent,” but surveillance systems “do not capture the body to which they refer” (38). In Elahi’s case, not only is his body not visually captured, but also the trace of his body’s presence is only suggested through the mechanisms of travel and consumption, themselves traces of their use. An image of a urinal, for example, suggests, in no uncertain terms, urinary activity, but omits the activity itself. In this way, an image of a urinal in *Tracking Transience* becomes a trace of a trace, a metonymic image that hints at the bodily activity of a body that is only present through suggestion.

Moreover, the visual metanarrative tells us that the subject of surveillance can get lost in the proliferation of visual information: that, at least from Elahi’s perspective, the only way to avoid continual, state surveillance is to subject oneself to continual surveillance and to inundate the panoptic powers-that-be with too much visual information. In this way, we see that Elahi rearticulates a common contemporary position: that one may not only surrender to the demands of surveillance, but one may also hide behind such surrender. On one hand, Elahi suggests that we can have greater anonymity by being part of a larger community. On the other hand, Elahi’s assumptions that we *want* to watch – assumptions not unlike those who suffer “The Truman Delusion” – suggests that scopic pleasure is augmented through interactivity with a community of watchers when the community is invited to interpret and describe what the camera captures.

Figure 2.5. Scenes from the Tampa Airport.

Figure 2.6. Rice in Kuala Lumpur.

Elahi invites a community of “readers” to engage in an interpretive process not unlike those who follow conspiracy theories: we are given information and may piece it together, or “read” it, in a way that resonates with our understanding of the project itself. Moreover, we are invited to supplement the visual information with something it lacks: an accompanying narrative description or interpretation of the interconnectedness of the imagery. The urge to narrate, interpret, and weave connections into the visual information is ultimately an urge to impose upon the information a different, lateral, or outside perspective; and when we interpret visual information through narrative, we add to it our subjective perspectives by describing what we read “into” the information. Subjectively, we bring to the information a lateral viewpoint that sees what the camera might miss.

As systems theorists such as Niklas Luhmann and Gregory Bateson suggest, observing systems have “blind spots,”^{xxi} and blind spots are visible only to an outside (or second-order) observer. Thus, through second-order observation, the blind spots of a primary observation system are made clear. The second-order observer, however, also has blind spots visible only to yet another observer. In order to approach anything close to objective perspective, an infinite series of second-order observers is necessary. In this way, we see that objective perspectives are made up of an intricate web of second-order observations: that through a series of second-order observations of the blind spots of first-order observation, some consensus of objectivity might be reached. However, unless the chain of second-order observation closes into a loop – in other words, if the first (or a primary) link in the chain, so to speak, is also the second-order observer of the last metaphorical link – then this becomes a closed system itself, and thus has its own

blind spots. Objective perspective, then, is nearly unachievable, attainable only through a mass consensus of an infinite series of second-order observations.^{xxii}

All observations, then, are subjective; and, thus, even second-order observations that interpret and narrate visual information are also subjective. As Kate Hayles suggests, even as narrative describes a system's blind spots, it circulates blind spots of its own ("Making the Cut," 72). For Elahi, the camera documents first-order observation while opening the opportunity for a "reader" to chronicle a lateral perspective. In this way, the camera becomes a system of communication while circulating both first-order observation and its own blind spots. In other words, the surveillance system in *Tracking Transience*, first of all, facilitates a shared first-order perspective on Elahi's consumptive activities; but, secondly, it also opens the blind spot that invites viewer interpretation and allows Elahi to slip through the metaphorical cracks of observation and narrative.

Elahi uses the camera to create a complex feedback loop in which his body is lost at the separation and suture of its two ends. Elahi's body disappears in the gap where subjective perspective and the object of its gaze meet. This, too, is a failure of narrative, for it is ultimately a failure to reinscribe difference – between perspective and object, between first and second-order observation – into a fundamental historical contingency – or along a timeline of chronological causality that circulates a logic of inevitability – that places Elahi *between*, for example, an airport in Tampa and eating rice in Kuala Lumpur (Figures 2.5 and 2.6). In other words, the failure of Elahi's surveillance system – itself a communicative system – to capture Elahi is also the failure of the implied narrative to provide the logical connections between the fragments it presents. The burden of

supplying this narrative is placed on the viewer, and that burden ultimately requires us to “make something up.”

Elahi’s metacommentary on surveillance, along with his perspective on the mechanisms of consumption, travel, and waste, is thus a self-reflexive and self-perpetuating (or, in the terms of systems theory, *autopoietic*) system. The conditions of its *autopoiesis* are not just that Elahi simply continues to provide the environment for this communicative and story-telling system, but that we continue to watch.^{xxiii} By suggesting through depiction the traces of bodily activity and visual bits of information that can be put together in countless numbers of chains of chronological causality, Elahi’s system asks us to assemble the narrative ourselves, in much the same way that conspiracy theory allows the “theorist” to assemble bits of information into a larger, coherent narrative. In this way, *Tracking Transience* invites “readers” or viewers into a discursive loop of situational signifiers that the reader or viewer may assemble into a larger narrative structure. In so doing, the reader’s activity in the construction of the narrative both supplants and augments Elahi’s role as the storyteller, and further erases Elahi’s bodily presence.

In addressing the ultimate imperative of visual surveillance, or by addressing the questions “Where did you go?” and “What did you do?”, through providing visual information about his whereabouts and activities, Elahi offers an answer that is no answer. We know where he went and what he did by seeing these things from his perspective, but we lack the bodily referent that would suture him to these activities. To tell the story presented in *Tracking Transience* is to assemble a narrative out of disparate bits of information in a narrative framework similar to the narrative framework effected

by paranoia. In constructing this narrative, we are asked to interpret the disappearance of the body through the blind spots of surveillance as either the erasure of individuality at the hand of the Panoptic machine or the enabling of agency through the circulation of information.

Conclusion

Ultimately, as the cases of Hasan Elahi and Eric Packer illustrate, we readers and viewers are also second-order observers, occupying a space outside of the narrative and looking in. Of course, we bring our own subjective interpretations to the narrative, but we also necessarily see what falls outside of the narrative framework. So, too, does a proliferation of surveillance cameras weave together a web of multiple perspectives. The relationship between spectator and spectacle is as symbiotic as the relationship between visual information and their ensuing interpretive acts of narration. Without interpretation, and thus without narrators, visual information exists in a void. The fact that there is now such a great proliferation of surveillance apparatuses, and thus such a great proliferation of seemingly objective perspective, means that the postmodern subject is liberated to join the growing enclave of interpreters and observers. While the postmodern subject's entrance into authority is contingent on the failure of surveillance to provide objective narrative information, it gives greater voice to lateral perspectives while undermining the illusion of authority invested in hierarchical, social orders.

Moreover, just as subjective acts of interpretive narration open blind spots through which objectivity gets lost, so too does surveillance circulate visual information through which the primary object of surveillance – the Postmodern subject's body – disappears. While Elahi illustrates through exaggeration the disappearance of the body in

the blind spot of primary observation – wherein the viewer is invited to share the primary perspective of the camera – DeLillo creates a metaphorical “hall of mirrors” wherein the massive amount of visual information regarding the protagonist’s body – itself an exaggerated allegory of the Postmodern body – is evacuated through endless repetition. In this way, Packer’s death and loss of identity in the morgue metonymically represents the loss of subjective representation through the proliferation of visual information. An excess of visual information does less to provide an increase of objectivity and more to create a virtual, chaotic “white noise” in which bodily representation and narrative authority get lost.

Exploiting the literal and metaphorical blind spots in hierarchically-organized observation systems is a pervasive phenomenon. For instance, in the regulation of crime, state surveillance initiatives often function to push crime to unobserved areas, so that the surveillance of affluent neighborhoods essentially serves to further push crime into socio-economically marginalized areas (where crime rates already tend to be higher). Moreover, the surveillance of socio-economically marginalized neighborhoods tends to conflate class with race so that the targeted surveillance of non-whites is justified as a measure to prevent crime in poor neighborhoods. I examine this phenomenon, along with the more general surveillance of race (and its inherent failures), in Chapter Three.

ⁱ I take these examples from the seminal essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” written by Foucault’s mentor Louis Althusser.

ⁱⁱ For example, in his edited collection *Surveillance as Social Sorting* (and elsewhere) David Lyon introduces the concept of the “synoptic” surveillance, wherein “the many watch the few” as opposed to Foucault’s formulation regarding “panoptic” surveillance, wherein “few watch the many.” In both cases, however, the focus is on the ways in which surveillance is used as a mechanism of social and regulatory control.

ⁱⁱⁱ I mention the report of Hanjour’s “poor English” because it comes up in several news articles on Hanjour. It is an interesting, if not telling, note that, in retrospect, both the news reporters and those they

interviewed found it important to point out Hanjour's poor conversational English skills, as if this factoid fits into the retrospective formulation of terrorist narrative.

^{iv} As I discuss in much greater detail, the subversive use of second-generation surveillance technology has been an extremely important factor in 2011's Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movements.

^v For more on Paul Auster and second-order observation, see Joseph Tabbi's *Cognitive Fictions*.

^{vi} Of course, most of the theoretical "control" offered by second-generation surveillance technology is undermined by its popular use for depictions of the body that conform to the ideology of panoptic authority. This is why, for example, privatized surveillance systems are so often used in the seemingly autobiographical narratives presented in Web 2.0 social spaces like MySpace and Facebook. Nevertheless, I posit the Elahi effectively illustrates an method of undermining the panoptic machine by vigilantly controlling the circulation of his body's image (or lackthereof).

^{vii} First-generation surveillance technologies facilitate second-order observations, while second-generation technologies provide the opportunity to visually capture first-order observation. In other words, first-generation technologies always provide an external gaze looking at the subject; however, although second-generation technologies still may represent an externalized gaze, they can be consciously used to represent subjective perspective.

^{viii} An excellent example of this is Christian eschatology, or the study of the Apocalypse. The "ending" of the story is known – that the Christ will return and that the earth will be engulfed in flames – but the chain of events leading towards that end is continually under construction. This is way in which venues ranging from the *700 Club* to *The National Enquirer* may continue to re-incorporate historical and contemporary news events into what is essentially a closed narrative framework in which all information points towards its "logical" conclusion (even if only according to its own internal, constructed logic).

^{ix} Varsava observes that "April 2000 is of symbolic value given that U. S. stock markets peaked early in 2000" (83).

^x See, for example, Kate Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman* or Haraway's *ModestWitness@SecondMillenium* for a more in-depth treatment of the postmodern transhuman subject.

^{xi} Famous for the ways in which he presents the obsolescence of the body, Stelarc repeatedly introduces transhuman concerns into both the academic and artistic realms. Beyond frequently displaying his body in various forms of technologically implemented and regulated transformation, Stelarc effectively urges his viewers and critics to consider the body as an intricate network of symbiotic systems functioning together. Like Packer, Stelarc repeatedly surrenders his body to the public eye as it is technologically implemented and discursively redefined.

^{xii} Along these lines, the postmodern, subjective identity *is* the symbiotic network of biological, psychological, and social systems working together to produce one organism. In other words subjectivity becomes more about the *process* of integrating fragments into an illusion of identity than the *product* of such integration.

^{xiii} For excellent studies on the unstable and shifting postmodern identity formation, see Zygmunt Bauman's essay "From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity" and James Donald's "The Citizen and the Man About Town."

^{xiv} See, for example, DeLillo's *Libra*, *Mao II*, or *Underworld*.

^{xv} These "malfunctions" seem to be triggered by Packer's own prescience. Packer's machines predict the future of time and space in much the same way that Packer predicts the futures of stocks and currencies. In both cases, it is suggested that forecasting stocks and literally seeing the future are both the results of Packer's ability to organize and streamline information outside of temporal constraints

^{xvi} Others have written on representations of virtual space in DeLillo's fiction. Laura Barrett, for example, discusses such space as represented in DeLillo's *Mao II* in terms of what William Gibson calls "consensual hallucination," or, as Barrett puts it, "a meta-world in which characters myopically, if not blindly, negotiate among unfamiliar virtual landmarks, even the actual world offers myriad opportunities for psychological tripping and stumbling" (789).

^{xvii} About "The Truman Delusion," *New York Times* reporter Sarah Kershaw suggests that "The Truman Delusion" is "fueling a chicken-and-egg debate in psychiatry," noting that the delusion may simply be "classic paranoia fed by the current cultural landscape" or that there may be something about "media like reality television and the Internet that can push people over the sanity line" (par. 9). Similarly, *Wired*'s Kim Zetter reports that "psychiatrists say such patients [as those who suffer 'The Truman Delusion'] are often mirroring -- albeit, to an extreme -- what is occurring in the environment around them" (par. 5).

Brothers Joel and Ian Gold, co-authors of the forthcoming book on this brand of psychosis, suggest that “[m]ost likely these people would be delusional anyway,” but that if a cultural environment “can make people crazy, then we need to look at it” (Kershaw, par. 11).

^{xviii} See Lacan’s essay “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function” in *Ecrits* as well as Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”

^{xix} See Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*.

^{xx} I should note, however, that Foucault implies that the minimal cost applies to the State power more than to its subjects. As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three, instances such as the cases of Rodney King, Larry Craig, and others would suggest that the cost of the so-called “superb formula” is actually rather great.

^{xxi} See Luhmann’s *Social Systems* and Bateson’s *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*.

^{xxii} Kate Hayles beautifully describes the problem of an infinite series of second-order observations and objectivity in her essay “Making the Cut.”

^{xxiii} As Kate Hayle’s explains it, “[t]he organization of a system is constituted through the processes it engages in, and the processes it engages in are determined by its organization. To describe the circularity, he [Maturana] coined the term *autopoiesis*, or self-making” (“Making the Cut,” 74). Autopoiesis, then, is a system’s recursive method of self-construction and perpetuation. As a paradigmatic example of the autopoietic system, Niklas Luhmann treats social systems and communication as autopoietic devices. Through various social mechanisms, societies preserve themselves and ensure their own propagation. So, too, does communication circulate the conditions for further communication. As a narrative device, surveillance systems, I assert, also function autopoietically. If we can accept narrative as a function of preserving cultural undercurrents that ensure the propagation of society and as an example of cultural communication; and if we see surveillance as a method of circulating narratives about social behavior, then one function of surveillance is to perpetuate itself as a narrative device.

Chapter Three: Institutionalized Surveillance and the Regulation of Race: The Failure of Surveillance in Periphractic Space

In the early hours of New Years Day 2009, Oscar Grant III, a twenty-three year old, black resident of Oakland, California, was involved in a fight that took place on the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system. The fight was reported to BART operators by other train passengers who described the scene as a “barroom brawl.” Alerted by these operators, five BART police officers were dispatched to the train’s next stop – the Fruitvale terminal – where they pulled Grant and three others from the train and forcefully restrained and questioned the young men. What followed happened very quickly: all in the few minutes while the train was still stopped at the station and dozens of BART train passengers watched what turned out to be a tragedy unfold.

Grant was shot in the back as he lie face down on the concrete at the station. The bullet passed through his body, ricocheted of off the station platform concrete, and punctured one of his lungs, fatally wounding him. His killer, Oakland police officer Johannes Mehserle, who was only two years into his career, resigned from the police department days after the shooting and has since been charged with murder – a charge that, after Mehserle’s unsuccessful plea to have dropped or reduced, was finally brought to trial in June 2010.ⁱ The charge comes not as a result of police or eyewitness testimony; it comes from a wealth of video and still images taken by cell phone cameras, iPhones, and personal cameras.ⁱⁱ These images illustrate that Mehserle undeniably killed Grant in cold blood, and that Grant did little to provoke physical aggression.ⁱⁱⁱ Moreover, the images contradict the descriptions of the event made by the police officers on the scene, particularly the testimony of Marysol Domenici, who, under oath, described the scene as

chaotic enough to provoke her to think to herself, as she said during the preliminary hearing, “Oh, Jesus Christ, if I have to, I’m going to have to kill somebody” (Bulwa, “Cop,” par. 8), and Anthony Pirone who initially falsely testified that Grant kneed him in the groin, provoking Pirone to force Grant to the ground.^{iv}

The two most notorious videos taken of the incident were both posted to YouTube almost immediately after the shooting and were donated to Grant’s family for the purpose of putting together a case against Mehserle and the BART police department. The first of these videos, taken and posted to YouTube anonymously, begins shortly after Grant and crew were detained and forced against a concrete wall across from the stopped train. It shows the officers acting physically aggressive towards the young men, while the young men are clearly compliant and cooperative. At the beginning of the video, we hear a woman’s voice say, “Honey, it’ll be fine. I’m just recording” and a man’s voice say that “You *gotta* take pictures and shit,” just before the train passengers erupt into a cacophony of yelling “Hey! Hey!” and “That’s fucked up!” and “That’s uncalled for!” in response to the clearly elevated aggression towards the young men. We also see another handheld camera repeatedly drift in and out of the frame, making it clear that the anonymous videographer was not alone in her effort (see Image 1).

In this video, we see Grant verbally respond to the officers who are brutally restraining another young man. Pirone, another white officer, and Mehserle grab Grant and force him to the ground: the former holds Grant’s head to the concrete with his knee while Mehserle frisks the subdued Grant. After frisking Grant, Mehserle abruptly stands up, draws his gun, says something to Pirone (which Pirone has claimed was Mehserle’s command to step away from Grant), backs up a step, and fires a single shot into Grant’s

back (Image 2). After the shot, Mehserle looks up as if in surprise, quickly and briefly touches his forehead with both hands in a moment of apparent astonishment, and then reaches back down to Grant as if to handcuff him (image 3).^v At this point, we see the train doors close while the passengers continue to yell in disbelief.

The second video, taken and posted by Karina Vargas, shows the scene from a completely different perspective. For starters, the first, anonymous videographer viewed the scene from within the train and to the left of the action. Vargas was much further to the right, and throughout filming she gets off the train, approaches the scene, and retreats back to the train just after the shooting. She is followed back to the train by a female officer who clearly intends to confiscate her camera.^{vi} The anonymous videographer remained on the train, out of the range of sight of the police officers. Unlike the anonymous videographer, Vargas has since offered verbal testimony to support the video, and has appeared on San Francisco news stations to offer her testimonial accompaniment to her video footage (“Home Video Surfaces”). Although her video doesn’t actually show the shooting – Vargas was distracted by the detention of one of the other men – her account adds to the interpretation of the event as being an example of police brutality.^{vii}

In an exceedingly delayed response to the incident, three months after the shooting, BART police chief Gary Gee agreed to a televised interview with KTVU, the San Francisco news station that broke the story and first showed the witness videos. His interview begins with his following words: “The truth does come but it can not come at this time and not from me.” Further distancing himself from this “truth,” Gee says that “it would be easy for three persons to watch that video and draw different conclusions and that’s all.” In an instance wherein police testimony has been trumped by the

perspective of citizens, Gee's best strategic maneuver is to highlight the interpretive act of watching the videos of the killing, even though the original police testimony – that deadly force was warranted in the face of Grant's own physical aggression – was highly interpretive, to say the least.^{viii}

As I suggest in Chapter Two, the surveillance camera ultimately functions as a narrative apparatus. It is representative of both the limits of a singular perspective, particularly in illustrating that singular perspectives contain blind spots, and of the ways in which we are naturally compelled to augment objectively-captured visual information with descriptive but necessarily interpretive, subjective narrative. We are story-telling creatures. But a proliferation of video images taken from multiple perspectives by multiple people would together theoretically provide a mosaic, visual amalgamation that might ultimately represent greater fidelity to the truth of lived experience – to the fundamental, human connections between perspectives and the socially constructed and socially shared nature of what counts as the truth (in a courtroom or on a public transit railway platform, for example). This interconnection doesn't just illustrate that the rhizomatic distribution of second-generation surveillance technology functions as a part of a larger communicative system, it also illustrates that, in practice, surveillance techniques in the Twenty-First Century do not neatly function Panoptically or ideologically, as Foucault observed of similar techniques of social control and punishment in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Rather, they often function as another media and medium for the presentation and articulation of subjective perspective and narrative interpretation. Thus, the institutionalized camera undermines its own hierarchical authority in a postmodern culture that has all but done away with grand.

Image 1: BART police offers detain Oscar Grant III while onlookers capture the scene from multiple perspectives.

Image 2: The killing of Oscar Grant III.

Image 3: The moment upon which Mehserle's defense rests.

Image 4: The beating of Rodney King.

narratives and ultimate authority; but in the hands of people who occupy marginalized spaces and positions – be they socioeconomic, racial, sexual, political, or in other ways marginalized – the second-generation surveillance camera lends its objective authority to otherwise marginalized subjective perspectives.

But surveillance technology performs another key function for postmodern subjects: The camera sees so that we don't have to. It sees what we might rather not look at other than through the mediated gaze of the camera's lens and the television or computer screen. And it all too often replaces our subjective culpability in circulating a racialized perspective that we might rather not openly acknowledge. For example, targeted, visual, police surveillance in London focuses on black women and men one and a half to two and a half times more often than their presence in the population would warrant (Norris 265). And a recent study of San Francisco's Community Safety Camera (CSC) program – which involves 71 surveillance cameras strategically placed throughout San Francisco – justifies focusing primarily on non-white neighborhoods by placing most of its cameras in or near low-income, government housing projects and known “gang activity areas.”^{ix} What looks like the policing of crime often translates into the surveillance of race. Towards this end, the institutional surveillance camera distances us from our responsibility to maintain racial equality by automating the visual circumscription of space allocated to marginalized groups – a space that David Theo Goldberg calls *periphractic* space, or space that is metaphorically, literally, or as is usually the case, both metaphorically and literally pushed to the periphery (see *The Racist Culture*).

This is precisely what makes the tactical use of second-generation surveillance technology in the presence of institutionalized authority so important. The proliferation of surveillance technology does not always necessarily come with an increase in the proliferation of the racial institutionalized gaze: but it does mean that we are occasionally equipped to fight fire with fire. In Steve Mann's terms, we are technologically equipped for *sousveillance*, literally "to watch from below" or, as Mann means it, "to watch the watchers" in acts of using second-generation surveillance technology to monitor known institutionalized surveilleurs, and this is what the multiple instances of privately-captured videos and images of the killing of Oscar Grant III illustrate.^x

As I argue in this chapter, since the late 1990s, subjectively captured video and still images taken at scenes of the enactment of institutionalized power have gained an increasing authority in challenging hierarchal ideological practices that would otherwise marginalize lateral perspectives. As we see in the case of the killing of Oscar Grant III, contemporary, second-generation, surveillance technologies equip the postmodern subject to add her subjective perspective to an enclave of subjective perspectives, and a proliferation of perspectives synergistically perpetuates a method of "seeing" that both falls outside of a traditionally hierarchical political or social order and undermines traditional forms and institutions of authority. Moreover, as we see in the television series *The Wire*, this multiplicity of perspectives has become naturalized and embedded in narrative frameworks. Through regularly switching to camera angles and techniques that replicate the angles and cinematographic *feel* of the first-generation surveillance camera, *The Wire* mimetically replicates the narrative framework of a rhizomatic

surveillance system. However, I argue that rather than align viewers with the surveillance camera itself, this replication invites us to identify with a multiplicity of subjective perspectives in much the same way that the increasing amount of YouTube videos like those described above also invites us to see systems of hierarchical power from lateral perspectives.

Moreover, and more importantly, we see that when social systems and systems of power overlap, a great deal of agency is afforded to subjects inhabiting the spaces where these systems intersect: in the cases of Oscar Grant III and Rodney King, the objective authority of the camera augments the subjective perspective of the citizen in a space where the authority of State power meets lateral perspective. This authority gains critical mass in Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, wherein a multiplicity of perspectives forces us to see, if nothing else, the ways in which the surveillance of non-white neighborhoods translates into the surveillance of race. Finally, *The Wire*, beyond mimetically replicating the narrative framework of a multiplicity of perspectives, shows us that when systems of State Power meet social systems (like the massive social system that regulates and perpetuates the inner-city drug trade), the postmodern subject may find himself in an exceptional space with an exceptional amount of possibility for subjective autopoiesis, or self-creation.

“The Power to Transgress”: Rodney King, Reginald Denny, and the LA Riots

To digress, perhaps what makes the case of the killing of Oscar Grant III so poignant is its stark resemblance to the beating of Rodney King (see figures 1 and 4). The ghostly specter of George Holiday's filming of the Rodney King beating haunts the videos of Oscar Grant's killing, but unlike the video of the beating of King, the multiple

videos of Grant's murder carry the authority of the visual image which has the potential to trump the hierarchical and ideologically charged perspective of police testimony in the courtroom. In other words, where the authority of the visual image was undermined in the courtroom by the hierarchical, State authority granted to police testimony in the case of the beating of Rodney King, the authority of the visual image has been bolstered in the case of Oscar Grant, in part because there are several videos and still images of the Oscar Grant III incident as opposed to the singular video of the Rodney King incident, and this proliferation of objectively captured, subjective perspectives provides a stronger, interwoven net of marginal vantage points. For the purpose of examining the relationship between privately captured video and institutionalized surveillance, what is most striking is that if Holiday's video was an instance wherein privatized, second-generation surveillance was seen as an extension of its user's subjectivity, the aforementioned videos of the killing of Oscar Grant represent a shift towards the power of collective objectivity and authority as well as the theoretical stability of the visual image, regardless of who or what captures or generates it.

The images of the beating of Rodney King have been burned into the American cultural psyche, and thus they are arguably embedded in most "readings" of video footage of police brutality against black men, but the comparison of the beating of Rodney King with the killing of Oscar Grant does warrant some degree of historical context and description. On the night of March 3, 1991, Rodney King allegedly resisted arrest when he sped from two LAPD officers (married officers Tim and Melanie Singer) who spotted King speeding on a San Fernando Valley interstate. King was eventually stopped after exiting the freeway into a residential area when several other patrol officers

joined the pursuit and cornered King's car. King's two passengers exited the car when commanded to do so, but King briefly remained in the car before exiting, waving at the police helicopter that had joined the pursuit, and taunting the police by grabbing his backside (an act that was initially interpreted as reaching for a gun). When King resisted being handcuffed, he was shot with a Taser twice and knocked to the ground. When King stood up and allegedly charged one of the officers, he was met with the first baton blow – the only one necessary to finally subdue King – of several at the hands of three of the officers at the scene. The unseen, nearby resident who filmed the incident, George Holiday, happened to be in the right place at the right time with a personal VHS camera. The tape of this beating instantly became an international phenomenon, and many of those who commented on the incident, including Tom Holert in his essay "The Politics of 'Outside,'" have claimed, as Holert does, that "[t]hat amateur video recorded on 3 March 1991 which showed African American truck driver Rodney King getting a brutal beating by officers of the LAPD did lead to the LA riots" (573).

At the beginning of a decade of American capitalistic decadence in 1991, Los Angeles, one of the largest cities representing the primary locale for the creation and circulation of media images that paradigmatically portray and circulate American cultural and capitalistic excess, was on the verge of erupting into the ensuing acts of outrage represented by the L.A. riots. There were certainly other contributing factors to the LA riots aside from the acquittal of the officers involved in the beating of King, but these riots provided another instance in which the lens of the camera was again used to point out the shortcomings of Los Angeles police. During the four-day riots in LA at the end of April in 1992, media helicopters filmed the brutal beating of truck driver Reginald

Denny as the LAPD looked upon the riots and did nothing to stop the beating. Goldberg describes the juxtaposition of the media images of the riots and the beating of Reginald Denny – “that vicious beating of a defenseless white truck driver by young black men overlooked from afar by inactive officers of the peace” – as the “photographic negative of Rodney King’s brutal beating at the hands of white policemen” (202). The two images go hand-in-hand as symbolic specters of institutionalized racism. But, as Goldberg puts it, “[b]oth images” of Reginald Denny and Rodney King, “boasted the power to transgress, to be outside the law” (202). In other words, these images represented the violent degree to which officers of the Law and its subjects can resist ideological regulation. Unfortunately, these instances also do as much to confirm the importance of the Law as they do to illustrate our ability to resist it.

The images of “the torching of buildings and businesses” during the Los Angeles riots as representative of a collective “rage against a class-defined collaboration in perpetuating the subjugation of the racially marginalized” serve as a fixed point in the history of the relationship between race and class (Goldberg 202). The “trashing” of liquor stores, Goldberg suggests, signified a backlash against “the spirit of surplus value soaked in degradation” and “the pursuit of profit with no regard for the consumptive effects upon people” (202). In retrospect, these images add to the emotional and psychic charge of the events that led up to the destruction. In the American social conscience, the beating of Rodney King has been inextricably bound with the beating of Reginald Denny and the L.A. Riots. This connection informs our readings of similar events, like the killing of Oscar Grant III. In other words, the case of Rodney King and the L.A. Riots have become bound together as a trope in the psyche of American Culture, and whether it

be through subjective interpretation or systematic repetition, this trope is part of the ideological and communicative system that perpetuates itself and circulates institutionalized modes of “seeing,” regulating, and understanding race, gender, class, and other categories of identification.^{xi} Moreover, these instances have become iconic examples for the promise and possibility of adding the objective authority of the visual image to the subject perspective of the subject in periphractic space. They show us that, in the hands of marginalized subjects, the camera adds objective authority to marginalized or lateral perspective while highlighting the blind spots in the primary perspective of State power. In periphractic space, the authority of the visual image may be the only authority granted to marginalized perspectives, and so it is all the more important that we are able to recognize and, to whatever degree possible, identify with the subjective perspectives presented through the technological capture of secondary observation.

“The Ghosts of White Supremacy”: Race, Class, and Perspective in *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*

Cultural products that also present the interconnections of multiple, marginalized perspectives on singular events give us further opportunity to both examine the phenomenon of subverting prevailing hierarchical ideologies via the capture of secondary observation and to ostensibly identify with the marginalized individuals whose perspectives are narrated. For instance, in her stage play *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, Anna Deavere Smith captures the multiple voices and largely marginalized perspectives of the beatings of Rodney King and Reginald Denny, the Los Angeles riots, and the killing of a young black woman Latasha Harlins by the Korean store owner Soon Ja Du. Drawn from interviews with people more obviously connected to the events, such as

Reginald Denny and Ted Briseno – one of the LAPD officers involved in King’s beating – to local residents and business owners such as a Los Angeles real estate agent and juxtaposed with public statements issued by people like Elaine Brown, the former head of the Black Panthers, the famous scholar Cornel West, and former LAPD chief Daryl Gates, *Twilight: Los Angeles* consists of a deeply intertwined network of subjective perspectives that work together to produce an image of a larger whole: an image that, like a work in modern cubism, appears simultaneously distorted and fantastically complete.

Moreover, described in the stage directions accompanying the script as well as portrayed in the made-for-television one-woman performance by Smith herself, a barrage of video images – from videos of the beatings of Rodney King and Reginald Denny to the rioting and looting of downtown L.A. to the smoky and smoldering remains of the aftermath – accompany and contextualize the dialogue. For example, in a scene entitled “No Justice No Peace: The Story of Latasha Harlins,” Charles Lloyd, with the “defiant efficiency of an old-time professional radio boxing sports cast announcer,” narrates the surveillance footage of the killing of Harlins in Du’s downtown L.A. store in an instance wherein diegetic narrative accompaniment to mimetic visualization of the killing are co-enacted:

Boom!
 Looka there in the face
 Boom!
 Latasha knocks Mrs. Du down, the lady throws the chair.
 Mrs. Du reaches under the counter,
 Picking up a gun now!
 Trying to take it out of a holster
 Latasha comes up to the counter with the orange juice!
 Just like Hollywood— (40)

Not only does Lloyd's description of the scene as being "Just like Hollywood" suggest that it resonates with the manufactured drama of the screen, but it also suggests the screen effects how we view and interpret the events in the real world.

But film and other methods of subjective expression manifest underlying social scripts, and both the scripts and their subjective expression are facets of a self-perpetuating, discursive, social communicative system. In the terms of systems theory, even language is itself a system for which humans provide the environment.^{xii} In other words, we collectively provide the environment through which a language circulates and perpetuates itself. Thus the process of providing narrative accompaniment to video images does more than to make the images seem "just like Hollywood," it discursively perpetuates a linguistic system that has a deep impact on the way we "see" and interpret video images. So too does a discourse – particularly one charged with the teeming cross-currents of ideological, political, socioeconomic, and cultural underpinnings – function as a self-perpetuating system. For example, discursive constructions, articulations, and perceptions of race have tenaciously adapted to modern political and social climates to ensure survival. In other words, racialized systems of power function discursively. As Foucault says, "[p]ower is exercised through networks [or systems], and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power" (*Society* 29). Or, more succinctly, "power passes through individuals. It is not applied to them" (*Society* 29). If "power passes through individuals" in a discursive network, then its subjects are the environment for the circulation and autopoiesis of power. In other words, power discursively perpetuates itself through its subjects.

Smith portrays the ways in which subjects are used by power, language, and racialized discourse even as they are blindly caught up in it. Throughout *Twilight: Los Angeles*, we see people with radically different perspectives on and interpretations of the beatings of Rodney King and Reginald Denny during the L.A. Riots using similar descriptive phrases. For example, Smith presents Reginald Denny's perspective, spoken in an interview given in his lawyer's office, on the beating, his rescue by four local residents, and his desire to have a personal shrine to the event:

Someday, when I
 Uh
 get a house
 I'm gonna have one of those *rooms*
 and it's just gonna be
 of all the riot stuff
 and it won't be a
 blood and guts
 memorial
 It's not gonna be a sad
 it's gonna be a happy room
 [...]
 And there won't be
 a color problem
 in this room. (114)

Smith follows these words from Denny with words from Paul Parker, the chairperson for the "Free the 'L.A. Four Plus' Defense Committee" – a committee that petitioned for the release of Denny's attackers and for charges against them to be dropped. Smith masterfully juxtaposes Denny's desire to have a "color-free" memorial room in his home with Parker's similar desire to have a personal shrine to the event:

When I finally get my house, I'm gonna have just one room, set aside.
 It's gonna be my "No Justice No Peace" room.
 [...]
 and have all my articles,
 and clippings and, um,
 everything else.

I guess so my son can see,
my children can know what Daddy did. (118)

Smith's point, clearly, is that we're not so different: That people with racially, ideologically, politically, or socially-informed perspectives that may superficially seem radically different nevertheless contain underlying, interconnected moments of striking similarity. That despite the vast differences on the surface, we're all still human.

Her point is an admirable one, but problematic: for most intents and purposes, racial differences in America are typically portrayed as paradigmatic examples of difference itself. Suggesting that, despite our differences, we're all really the same does as much to confirm our differences as it does to highlight our similarities. Along these lines, Smith ends up illustrating the discursive nature of racialized perspectives and highlighting the individual subject's role in being part of the larger environment of an individualizing, if not racializing, discourse. But here, again, we do not use the discourse to articulate subjective perspective so much as we are used *by* a discourse that evolves only to ensure its own survival. In this way, and as I suggest in the previous chapter, this discourse informs the narratives we construct from visual information, and in the made-for-television, one-woman performance of *Twilight, LA*, visual information of the aforementioned beatings and killing along with images of the L.A. Riots provide a wealth of opportunity to "read into" the tragedies they depict. The readings do more to tell the truth of the underlying, discursive, systematic perspective than they do to objectively describe the visual field.

The narrative we impose on this information resonates with the one embedded in our perspective because it comes from a script deeply ingrained in our social conscience. In *The Racial Contract*, Charles Mills articulates the deeply discursive and socially

embedded framework that perpetuates various forms of naturalized race. “The Contract,” to use Mills’s abbreviated phrase, is a social one that underpins the primarily economic exploitation of marginalized races through the spatial segregation of race:

The norming of space is partially done in terms of the *racing* of space, the depiction of space as dominated by individuals (whether persons or subpersons) of a certain race. At the same time, the norming of the individual is partially achieved by *spacing* it, that is, representing it as imprinted with the characteristics of a certain kind of space. (42)

In other words, the relationship between space and identity is a discursive one that represents the naturalization of certain stereotypes intertwined with how we view certain spaces – particularly socioeconomically marginalized spaces – and certain people – particularly people who occupy such spaces. The fact that this discursive system circumscribes black people more often than it does people of other races and nationalities intrinsically connects the black identity to stereotypically lower-class parameters of performative possibility.^{xiii}

And so our “reading” of the images of both the beating of Rodney King and the L. A. Riots comes with an embedded perspective that often reflects the perspective of a predominantly white sociopolitical order. In the case of the former, I would argue that even reading racial motivation into the beating of Rodney King expresses the fundamental assumption that, in instances wherein the power of the State is violently enacted on its subjects, the relationship between whites and non-whites mimics, on a smaller scale, the relationship between the State and its subjects. This assumption is problematic: We might justifiably speculate about what would have been different if King were not black, but in so doing we also perpetuate a perspective of racialized subjugation to institutional authority. Simply put, talking about the beating of Rodney

King in racial terms mimetically articulates the surveillance of race. We ensure that the black identity remains ideologically circumscribed by pointing out that the black identity itself is subordinate to, and arguably contingent upon, white power.

As for “the photographic negative” of the beating of Rodney King during the LA Riots, from an objective perspective, the media images – which collate the ground perspective taken by a handheld camera with an elevated vantage point from a media helicopter – of the beating of Reginald Denny show a white truck driver dragged out of the cab of his truck and severely beaten by, at first, four black men who are then joined by a few others. These images, as they were broadcast in “real time,” provided the impetus and occasion for four local residents – Bobby Green, Titus Murphy, Terri Barnett, and Lei Yuilleto – to mercifully take action and rescue Denny. But what is perhaps most striking about this is that several bystanders in “real space” at the scene of the beating took pictures of Denny but did nothing to intervene while it took the mediated perspective of the television broadcast to render the images into an event interpretable as one that required action. This is not to undermine the empathy and courage of Denny’s rescuers: they may certainly have helped had they been on the street near Denny’s beating; however, their action does represent one of many subjective and interpretive reactions to the televised video images.

Nevertheless, it was only the spatialized context of the chaos and destruction during the LA Riots – which briefly represented an ad hoc exceptional, periphractic space – that allowed the tables to be turned. In other words, when media images portray a white man being beaten by several black men, it happens not inside the parameters of State power, but in the parameters of the dissolution of State power. This perspective,

too, is problematic because it suggests that black empowerment comes with the cost of lawless chaos. In other words, institutionalized interpretations of the images of the LA Riots and of the beating of Reginald Denny can too often and too easily justify the surveillance of race. Instead, I propose that the riots themselves represent another collective reaction to an interpretation – a collectively constructed narrative – of visual information. When the officers involved in the beating of Rodney King were acquitted, the African American Community was justly outraged at the failure of the institutionalized and ultimately authoritative interpretation of Holiday's personal film.

Smith articulates this failure from a few perspectives. For instance, Josie Morales, described as a "clerk typist, City of Los Angeles, Witness to Rodney King beating," reports receiving a subpoena to testify in the trial against the accused officers, but says that the prosecutor tells her "I can't really talk to you / and I don't think we're going to be using you because / it contradicts what the highway patrol said'" (51). Sergeant Charles Duke, "Special Weapons and Tactics Unit, LAPD" and an expert witness for the defense in the King trial, justifies the "fifty-six baton blows" against King by noting that Officer Powell "was weak and inefficient with the baton training": that because the officer was holding the baton incorrectly, it took more blows to subdue King (53). Duke also asserts that the LA city council prohibited the use of choke holds as an inhumane use of force, and that the council was thus indirectly responsible for the excessive measures taken against King. Keith Watson, co-assailant of Reginald Denny, amazingly hits closest to home in hinting at the interconnected underpinnings of both the beating of Rodney King and the LA Riots:

Southern California was *rocked*.
You know?

I mean the the
the whole infrastructure
the foundation was *cracked*
Know what I'm sayin'?
The seams of that fine fabric,
that that Los Angeles image that we have?
That California? That sunshine?
You know?
See we showed the insides.
The core. (66)

Smith's editorial choices in including these particular perspectives doesn't necessarily suggest that "the core" of Los Angeles is fundamentally violent; rather, as I have suggested, she points out the way a perceptual framework simultaneously represents the collective whole of the subjects represented by it while demonstrating that such subjects are as much product as perpetrator of the embedded ideological perspectives.

The embedded ideologies are, in Cornel West's words, "the ghosts of white supremacy"^{xiv}:

We've created certain spaces
where we can take off that mask
and be ourselves.
Our churches,
our nightclubs,
certain streets,
but they are very circumscribed, and
in the end they are still haunted,
by the ghosts of white supremacy. (106)

Ideologically circumscribed, charged with political and socioeconomic currents, and often subject to surveillance, such spaces simultaneously serve as both the place where one "can take off that mask" and the place that validates mask-wearing. Institutionalized surveillance of such spaces – periphractic spaces – theoretically guarantees the continued circulation of a racialized performative imperative. In other words, as part of a systemic

circulation of power, surveillance of “black space” is the materialization of the ghosts of white supremacy.

The System’s Vital Failures: Surveillance, Space, and Race in *The Wire*

The surveillance of periphractic space is central to the HBO crime-drama series *The Wire*. For instance, the show’s opening title sequence includes a black-and-white surveillance footage scene in which a hooded, black male throws a rock at a surveillance camera’s lens.^{xv} In this scene, we viewers share the perspective of the camera (see image 5), and we see the lens crack and the field of vision quickly shift upwards, illustrating that the rock has not only cracked the lens, but also loosened the camera’s support and caused it to either fall from its mantle or simply turn downward. This scene, taken from the fourth episode (entitled “Old Cases”) of the first season of *The Wire*, illustrates a point of resistance to hierarchical surveillance practices in a distinctly black, low-income housing project known as “the low-rises” in West Baltimore. In the camera’s frame, we see two key players in a Baltimore drug organization – Preston “Bodie” Broaddus and D’Angelo Barksdale – facing the camera’s lens. The camera faces an open quad known as “The Pit” in the low-rises where D’Angelo operates a drug operation under his uncle and gang boss Avon Barksdale’s direction, and so, of course, neither D’Angelo nor his crew want their activity in The Pit to be on the visual record.

What is more important, though, is that both this camera and its destruction represent the functions of overlapping and arguably co-dependant systems: the camera itself is symbolic of the larger system of surveillance which is politically, ideologically, and practically designed to watch and regulate people inhabiting low-income, high-crime areas; while the camera’s destruction at the hands of members of Baltimore’s drug

“Game” (hereafter referred to as The Game to stay consistent with the language of *The Wire*), itself a social system, represents a symbolic act of resistance. The camera is located in the spatial and symbolic overlap where state power and criminal activity mingle – government housing in a high crime area. In spaces like these, mechanisms of surveillance (such as the camera or wiretap) and representatives of both State power and The Game, themselves interlocking and intermingling systems, bleed together and open the space (such as the Low Rise) for each system’s destruction and self-perpetuation. These are overlapping or liminal spaces where surveillance sutures and separates two systems – the system of hierarchical power circulated and maintained by the State and its reciprocal system of the criminal underworld. In the third season of *The Wire*, for example, one such space representing the overlap and co-dependancy of these two systems is “Hamsterdam,” a space in Baltimore where drugs are effectively legalized and sanctioned.

While season two of *The Wire* largely represents a departure from the show’s focus on the inner-city drug trade centered around the Barksdale operation, the third season returns to this focus and begins with the destruction of Franklin Terrace, the coveted “212” real-estate for Barksdale’s drug ring. Baltimore mayor Clarence Royce promises that this low-income high-rise will be replaced with low and moderately priced homes and a new neighborhood free from the crime and corruption that had, up until the point of its destruction, characterized it. As characters Malik “Poot” Carr and Bodie approach the destruction ceremonies where the Mayor gives his speech, Poot waxes nostalgic about feeling homeless and about losing the place where he “became a man” (or at least lost his virginity). Bodie responds by noting that what Poot should be feeling bad

about is the loss of the best place in Baltimore to sell drugs. They are effectively disenfranchised by the project to reclaim the projects while the city council asserts that they are returning this zone to the people. The show's writers often exploit the similarities between major crime organizations and state institutions such as law enforcement organizations and political organizations, and this scene is no exception: while Poot and Bodie discuss the capital value of Franklin Terrace and its inhabitants, so does the Mayor.

The relationship between space, capital, and subjectivity is an important one: It is this relationship that, as I discuss earlier, enables the surveillance of race insofar that low-income areas are typically treated as both non-white neighborhoods and high-crime areas, and they are surveilled as such. In a metropolis like Baltimore, at least as it is depicted on *The Wire*, living in a low-income, high-crime area is essentially synonymous with being black, and being black in such an area means being subject to surveillance. Moreover, in *The Wire*, being a part of a low-income, high-crime, periphractic space carries the social imperative of being a part of the collective body upon which paradigmatic State power is focused and enacted. In other words, periphractic spaces in *The Wire* represent the larger spatialized context for the surveillance and regulation of race.

I should also note that a study of surveillance and race is necessarily a distinctly metropolitan one that, as so many studies of race do, considers black identity, in particular, from a distinctly socioeconomic perspective.^{xvi} In urban areas, the geographic segregation of black neighborhoods often conflates race with socioeconomic status so that it becomes difficult to separate racial marginalization from economic

disadvantage.^{xvii} Added to the assumption that crime rates are higher in lower income areas, the policing of segregated neighborhoods often translates into the surveillance of race. Clive Norris says it best: “rather than promoting a democratic gaze, the reliance on categorical suspicion intensifies the surveillance of those already marginalized and further increases their chances of official stigmatization” (266). In other words, surveillance in racially and socioeconomic marginalized spaces such as housing projects confirms and perpetuates the social and political stigmatization of the people who live in them, and, in turn, it guarantees the conditions of its own existence by circulating the conditions that make this brand of surveillance seem necessary. The urban housing development, like the aforementioned Baltimore low-rises or Franklin terrace, is the segregated space where the surveillance of race is most easily justified.

Speaking of the housing project high rise as the “appropriate *image* of racialized urban space,” Goldberg notes that the “racial poor [are] simultaneously rendered peripheral in terms of urban location and marginalized in terms of power” (188). Along these lines, Goldberg defines *periphractic* space as relational:

It does not require absolute displacement of persons to or outside city limits, to the literal margins of urban space. It merely entails their circumscription in terms of location and their limitation in terms of access – to power, to (the realization of) rights, and to goods and services. (188)

In other words, and as I have previously suggested, periphractic space is the space of marginalized subjects, those who have been pushed to the periphery literally or metaphorically. It is spatial insofar as it is circumscribed in a number of ways – ideologically, commercially (periphractic spaces tend to have more liquor stores than department stores), financially (more pawn shops than banks), and thus politically.

Periphractic space is further racialized to the extent that race can be considered in socioeconomic terms. As Goldberg notes, “[a]s status, race is simply an index of social standing or rank reflected in terms of criteria like wealth, education, style of life, linguistic capacity, residential location, consumptive capacity, or having or lacking respect” (69). If, as Goldberg puts it, “[r]acisms become institutionally normalized in and through spatial configuration, just as social space is made to seem natural, a given, by being conceived and defined in racial terms” (185), then a housing project like *The Wire*’s low-rises or an ad hoc space like Hamsterdam are the institutional realizations of the spatial regulation of race as a socioeconomic status. Any lens through which we see the racial performative in these spaces is thus tainted by the ideology of periphractic practice. Simply put, you see what you expect to see, even (and especially) if what you *see* is through the mediated lens of the surveillance camera, the wiretap, or other ideologically-justified mechanism of collecting information. This perspective informs the parameters of ontological possibility; sets of deeply rooted, and problematically naturalized expectations inform the discursive system of subjectivity that would have us simply understand that if one needs to escape the harsh realities of having been born into a life in the projects, one essentially has two choices: to do drugs or sell them. And so the visual circumscription of a periphractic space where the parameters of possibility for racial performance offers its inhabitants with few choices for subjective expression also comes with the caveat that those who inhabit the space must also behave according to the ideological scripts that justify the surveillance of the space to begin with. In other words, surveillance of periphractic space regulates and guarantees the limits to which those inhabiting it can aspire.

This is not to suggest that *The Wire* presents only one option for the black identity. Lieutenant Cedric Daniels of the special task force that comprises the central cast of police officers is played beautifully, albeit woodenly, by the black, Baltimore-born actor Lance Reddick. Aspiring politician Tommy Carcetti (Aidan Gillen) seeks to unseat Royce as mayor, and his biggest obstacle is that he, Carcetti, is white. The show depicts African Americans living and working amongst all strata of the social hierarchy; however, the hood, the low-income housing projects, and The Game are populated almost exclusively by blacks, with one striking exception: the tragically white Johnny Weeks.^{xviii}

Before discussing Weeks in greater detail, as I do below, I want to note that the options for the articulation of black identity in *The Wire* are as numerous as the various subject positions with which we viewers are invited to identify. In *The Wire*, our invitation to identify with characters like Daniels, Carcetti, Weeks or a host of other major and minor characters comes as an imperative to share their perspectives. Often multiple perspectives are intertwined to illustrate the vastly interconnected and rhizomatically dispersed network of marginalized perspectives in periphractic spaces. For example, in the fourth season of the show, the Baltimore City Police watch an upcoming drug Kingpin Marlo Stanfield by concealing a surveillance camera in the open area where Marlo holds court with his immediate subordinates. Marlo quickly learns of the camera, which he steals and mounts on a fixture facing his collection of carrier pigeons. All the while, Omar Little, the urban Robin Hood of *The Wire*, watches both Marlo and the cops who are watching Marlo. From scene to scene, the authority of hierarchical perspective is simultaneously undermined and augmented by the

sousveillance inherent in the presentation of lateral perspectives. Along these lines, as in the cases involving Oscar Grant III, Rodney King, the LA Riots, and the multiple observers of these instances, postmodern subjects are equipped to observe and record the blind spots in primary systems of power by borrowing the camera's authority to augment subjective perspective.

On Being “Green” and Turning Brown: Johnny Weeks in Hamsterdam

Weeks is, in the first three seasons of *The Wire*, Bubbles's sidekick and a “soldier”-in-training (see Image 6). Repeatedly told by Bubbles that he is too “green” for the streets but assured that he will be made “brown,” Weeks's comparable ignorance of rules of the street and of The Game make it clear that he was born an outsider to the social system that he is trying to enter. One gets the sense that Weeks probably came to Baltimore for college and drugged his way into homelessness fairly quickly; regardless, however he got to the street, it is clear that Weeks comes from a very different background than that of those he is amongst. He doesn't belong. His repeated failures in The Game – repeat arrests, beatings, hospitalization, and so on – are interpreted as bad luck, but they only further his role as an outsider and as one who has difficulty internalizing the social scripts – the implicit rules – of The Game no matter how much he overcompensates through over-indulgence and exaggerated, and occasionally fabricated, adherence to the rules of The Game as he sees them. Shortly after we first meet Weeks, he is severely beaten when he and Bubbles try to scam D'Angelo and Poot by using counterfeit money

Image 5: We share the perspective of the camera that faces The Pit in the low-rises.

Image 6: Johnny Weeks and Bubbles collecting scrap metal to sell for drug money.

Figure 7: Johnny Weeks in Hamsterdam.

Figure 8: Weeks's death bed, surrounded by the accoutrements of his habit.

to buy heroin. Shortly after being hospitalized, he is given a colostomy bag and diagnosed with AIDS. Bubbles reacts to Weeks's "bad luck" by turning informant for the Baltimore police, working with Officers Jimmy McNulty and Kima Greggs to identify members of the Barksdale drug operation in hopes of getting vengeance against those who injured Weeks.^{xix}

Initially, Bubbles's decision to become an informant is an act of loyalty to his friend and vengeance against Bodie and Poot, but once he realizes that "snitching" brings fairly easy money, he continues to snitch well after Weeks has healed from the beating and well beyond the scope of targeting Weeks's initial aggressors. Weeks is affronted by Bubbles's snitching, and he asserts that even his beating was all part of The Game. He admonishes Bubbles for not sticking to the code of a "soldier" and urges him to return to stealing and scamming for cash to support their habit. Bubbles, or "Bubs," responds by declaring Weeks to be too much of a "pup" to understand that paying work is paying work, regardless of its nature. After a period of disagreement, Weeks convinces Bubbles to scam a working man into giving them cash; however, once Bubbles sees that the scam is successful, he absconds as Weeks collects the cash.^{xx} We are invited to see that this, too, is part of The Game.

The Game clearly has its own rules, and it is clearly a self-perpetuating social system unto itself. I would argue that it is an autopoietic system *par excellence*: existing to justify and perpetuate its own existence, circulating the conditions for its own survival, and using its inhabitants and players as the environment and conditions for its own continuation. It is holistic and complete unto itself and, like discourse, only adapts to its environment when adaptation is necessary for survival. The individuals in The Game are

far less important than The Game itself: People – players, users, dealers, soldiers, hoppers, snitches, etc. – can come or go, but The Game continues regardless of who plays provided that the intrinsic positions within The Game are filled. When, for example, a drug kingpin is killed, another quickly rises to fill his place (see Marlo’s ascent that coincides with Bell’s and Barksdale’s fall). Weeks’s devotion to the game is interesting, particularly since Weeks occupies a space so low in The Game’s social hierarchy: Weeks is a junkie. He exists to consume the product upon which a great deal of The Game depends. But, as one who comes to The Game as an outsider, he must overcompensate in order to be naturalized, and so his excessive consumption and self-destruction provide the guarantee of his place in The Game’s structure. It is his only way in.

It is all too significant, then, that Weeks is amongst the first junkies to be released into the space where The Game and State Power come together in, to use Giorgio Agamben’s phrase, “a state of exception”: Hamsterdam, a *portmanteau* combining the words “ham,” a reference to the police who sanction the area, and “Amsterdam” (Image 7).^{xxi} As Agamben describes the state of exception as “neither external nor internal to the juridical order” and “a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other,” so too does Hamsterdam blur the distinction between what falls outside and inside of the law (Agamben, *State of Exception*, 23). It is within these parameters that Weeks becomes the paradigmatic Agambenian character: the *homo sacer* – “who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*” – whose life is lost inside the state of exception in order to preserve the State and its exceptions (author’s italics, Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8).^{xxii} But prior to his death, Weeks represents an important subject position: He is autopoietic while caught up in an autopoietic system – one of the

exceptions in the state of exception. He effectively re-creates himself as a soldier in The Game by losing his life to his heroin habit in the exceptional, periphractic space of Hamsterdam.

I should note that Hamsterdam is free from technological surveillance. Shawn “Bunny” Colvin, the Western District police Commander who essentially creates Hamsterdam and unofficially sanctions the legalization of drugs in this space, repeatedly tells the dealers who have set up shop in Hamsterdam that the area contains “no cameras, no microphones.” Appropriately, much of the third season of *The Wire* also contains fewer instances of the type of surveillance that otherwise characterizes the series. In this season, tapping cell phones has become far more complicated because the members of Baltimore crime organizations have started using “burners” – pre-paid cell phones that are tossed after their minutes are used. By the time an affidavit for a wiretap can be approved, the telephone number for which the affidavit was written has expired. Moreover, people who do business in The Game do it face-to-face and rarely in the same location twice, thus obviating the use of cameras or microphones.^{xxiii}

In a television series named for the show’s MacGuffin – the wire is the mechanism most closely associated with auditory surveillance and data-veillance – Hamsterdam would appear to be a significant departure from the show’s focus. It is tempting to say that the police who physically surround Hamsterdam’s borders mimetically reproduce the metaphorical circumscription of space that would otherwise be facilitated by technological surveillance. Furthermore, it is tempting to suggest that once social workers enter Hamsterdam with clean needles, condoms, and religious pamphlets and other materials, that the ideology of State surveillance enters with them.

Hamsterdam quickly becomes what we would expect it to be: lawless, chaotic, out of control. Junkies regularly overdose, unemployed hoppers and look-outs (kids once employed by dealers to keep an eye out for cops) start drinking and fighting, prostitutes appear in alleyways and in boarded up, vacant residences, and so on. However, rather than concede that Hamsterdam replicates the practice and ideologies of Panoptic surveillance, I suggest that it functions on another diegetic level. To take a metaphorical step away, we see that through its depictions of Hamsterdam, *The Wire* simultaneously replicates the ideologies that it critiques, particularly insofar that it suggests that the absence of the enactment of State Power brings lawlessness, while it mimetically dilutes the centralized power inherent in these ideologies, particularly insofar that we are invited to identify with several characters in several subject positions.

However, Weeks's subjectivity in the context of *The Game* brings about a striking conundrum: On one hand, if Weeks does not "belong" to *The Game*, he is thus doomed to perpetual inauthenticity, but the problem with a model of authenticity is that this model is ultimately essentialist. It comes, as Kwame Appiah notes, from romanticism, and it is "the idea of finding one's self [...] and it is] a matter of being true to who you already really are, or would be if it weren't for distorting influences" (17). In other words, authenticity means being true to an essential Self and choosing social contexts that fit one's pre-existing, subjective condition. And so, by the internal logic of the show, Weeks should be punished by death for his unapologetic inauthenticity. On the other hand, it is clear that Weeks's dogged and often over-compensatory adherence to the code of the street is ultimately Weeks's attempt at something more existential: to forge a self in the social system he has chosen. Along these lines, Weeks's death would finally grant

him full membership in The Game in which he doggedly tried to fit. But, as Appiah says of the essentialism vs. existentialism dichotomy, “neither of these pictures is right,” because the self is not necessarily so rigidly fixed and free from creativity as the essentialist and romantic model would suggest, nor is the Self entirely free from certain preconditions that, at the very least, guide the existential, creative, ontological process (17-18). And so I argue that Weeks at once symbolizes subjectivity under continual construction, or an ongoing *autopoiesis*, that is deeply entrenched in the social parameters of The Game while he continually doomed to repeat the shortcomings that, by his “nature,” plague him. He represents a subjective formation whose one great stability is that it is in constant flux and ongoing re-creation. His death, then, is more than just the necessary condition for the arc of his subjective formation to be complete: it is, according to the ways in which *The Wire* mimetically reproduces the ideologies it critiques, what happens to characters who take too much liberty with their own subjectivities.

Mimetically, *The Wire* reproduces the surveillance of periphrastic blackness that conflates race with socioeconomic class. For those who, unlike Weeks, grow up in the projects, there is a clear and clearly circumscribed parameter of possibility for subjective expression. Take Stringer Bell, for example: Avon’s right hand man who, after Avon’s arrest, becomes the interim leader of Barksdale’s crime organization. Under Bell’s tutelage, the organization becomes more like a business than a crime organization: Bell organizes and conducts regular meetings for those in his employ where street dealers and “enforcers” can voice concerns, cast votes for decisions that may effect the organization, and so on. Furthermore, Bell essentially unionizes the drug trade by bringing Baltimore’s

gang bosses together into the “New Day Co-Op” of equally divided territory and equally shared product. As he becomes more of a businessman, his behavior changes: he loses the stereotypical gangland verbiage in favor of more characteristically white businessman behavior. He begins buying and developing property and investing dirty money in legal business ventures. And he does experience some degree of success crossing socioeconomic expectations for subjective identity expression. However, the ultimate payback for Bell’s ambition is, of course, murder.^{xxiv} He is killed in the elite condominium building he has commissioned with drug money after being “given up” by Avon.

But Bell’s death, like Weeks’s, is presented as a necessity. The surveillance of race must guarantee that the visibility of race conforms to the expectations embedded in our perspective of periphractic racial expression. When what once was made to conform defies the conventions of conformity the systems fails to recognize the failure as that which can fall within the institutionalized parameters of performative possibility. If, then, *The Wire* mimetically replicates the function of institutionalized surveillance, Bell’s metaphorical and literal attempt to escape from surveilled periphractic space cannot go unpunished. And herein, perhaps, lies the failure of surveillance as an ideological apparatus: Municipal surveillance programs of high-crime spaces neither ideologically deter crime nor practically prosecute it; instead, such programs often do more to punish than protect those who seek to escape the parameters of such space.^{xxv} But I want to suggest that the failure also lies in the distribution of mechanisms of surveillance. Where this distribution theoretically ought to similarly distribute a Panoptic gaze, it instead enables the aforementioned sanctioning of the authority of subjective perspective. Rather

than carry the ideology of State Power through the circulation of surveillance technology, this circulation effects the dilution of State Power. The real failure, then, may be in the assumption that the authority of a primary perspective gets carried over into the perspectives of those who are also watching. This is, in practice, is simply not the case. What happens is that marginalized subjects in periphractic space are able to objectively capture the blind spots inherent in the primary observations of the ideological system. Weeks's and Bell's deaths, then, merely represent a manifestation of an internalized, racialized perspective; however, they do not undermine the possibilities for lateral agency.

Conclusion(s)

In the August 2007 issue of *The Believer*, the popular, ad-free, hipster staple source of quirky essays, odd interviews, and unusual product reviews, Nick Hornby interviews *The Wire*'s creator David Simon. Simon, who started his writing career by writing for the *Baltimore Sun* for twelve years and also wrote *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets* (1991) and *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood* (with Ed Burns, 1997), refers to *The Wire* in terms of a multiple point-of-view narrative structure, noting that the show's writers come from a much more solid background of writing traditional print novels rather than writing for television, and he suggests, as others have, the structure of the entire series is plotted out much more like a novel than a traditional television show. He describes his approach to writing for the show in the following terms: "My standard for verisimilitude is simple and I came to it when I started to write prose narrative: fuck the average reader," noting that he would much more prefer those represented by the show to feel that they have been portrayed accurately rather than

produced a canned version of the housing projects gangster or inner city cop so often circulated on crime dramas (76).^{xxvi} Appropriately, reviews of *The Wire* often present it as a work in American Realism, suggesting that the show depicts the everyman as one subject to unstoppable, external, and malign forces. *The Wire* effectively illustrates that no organization – from crime organizations to the police force, from the educational system to the political system, and from the manual laborer’s trade union to the media – is free from corruption. In fact, it suggests that corruption is a fundamental aspect of organization, and it often suggests that, when confronting corruption, one is given the choice to “play or get played.”

To take a step back, I posit, is to see that *The Wire* mimetically reproduces what it describes. *The Wire* opens a space for viewers to conduct the same type of surveillance being depicted in the show and to theoretically be complicit with the corruption. But, in so doing, we’re put into the lateral vantage point that enables us to see the blind spots of the primary observing system. We’re invited to do this, to some degree, by the occasional use of black and white images that are overtly meant to represent the perspective of the surveillance camera. The aforementioned scene shot from the perspective of the housing project surveillance camera is only one such instance. For example (and these are only a few of many), *The Wire* presents the perspective of an elevator surveillance camera located in the Baltimore police department headquarters; we see Stringer Bell’s legitimate business front – his copy shop – from the perspective of surveillance cameras installed just outside on the street; we see Lieutenant Cedric Daniels through the mediated screen of a surveillance system at a State building security check point; and so on. But more importantly, although we rarely see from the perspective of

any single character, we are continually invited to identify with characters occupying various subject positions in the various aforementioned systems. Along these lines, *The Wire* also presents the opportunity to legitimize marginalized perspectives. The show is, in many ways, an aesthetic realization of the postmodern narrative practice of *sousveillance*.

Outside of the show, we are granted some agency through the use of second-generation surveillance technology to practice *sousveillance* and to add the camera's objective authority to our lateral, subjective perspectives. However, where a multiplicity of perspectives may, for example, bring justice for Oscar Grant III, it also has the potential to circulate systemic ideology that would have us spatialize the periphrastic black identity and to collapse socioeconomic status with black urbanity. As I argue in Chapter Four, the implications of the regulation of categories of identity and identification expands also to regulate and circumscribe gender and sexual orientation. For instance, the airport security checkpoint often serves as a regulatory ideological apparatus that severely limits the postmodern subject's expressions of gender identification.

ⁱ Mehserle's trial began on June 10, 2010. The jury delivered its verdict – guilty of involuntary manslaughter and not-guilty of second degree murder or voluntary manslaughter – on July 8. Mehserle was sentenced to two years in prison with time-served. Although the public response was not as violent or destructive as was the case in response to the case of Rodney King, it should be noted there were several protests and small-scale riots.

ⁱⁱ The case of Grant's murder is not the first instance in which second-generation surveillance technology has been used to question and refute police testimony. New York City detective Debra Eager, a detective who, in her career, has been responsible for 1,300 arrests, was herself charged with three counts of perjury when her testimony regarding a 2007 drug bust "starkly contradicted" surveillance footage. Moreover, privately captured videos of police brutality have been used to question the legitimacy of several arrests, including the charge of disorderly conduct aimed at cyclist Christopher Long. After a videotape of the 2007 "Critical Mass" cycling event in Manhattan showed officer Patrick Pogan charging Long and knocking him violently to the ground, Pogan was indicted on charges of filing false paperwork and assault, and he was released from duty after a long career as a New York police officer. And when a private video showed fellow New York police officer Maurice Harrington repeatedly and brutally striking black truck

driver Michael Cephus with a metal baton in February 2009, assault charges against Cephus were dropped (Hauser).

ⁱⁱⁱ Queennandi X Sheba of the *San Francisco Bay View*, a “National Black Newspaper,” calls the shooting a “legal lynching,” and she writes that the murder “was a reminder of the superiority complex that lies deep within the Western slavemass that leads him to believe that it is OK to shoot an unarmed Black man lying face down, detained, and in the back” (Sheba par. 1).

^{iv} Domenici also claimed that she wouldn’t have handled the scene any differently than she did and that Grant wouldn’t have been killed “[i]f they [Grant and the others who were pulled from the BART train] would have followed orders” (Bulwa, “Cop,” par. 2). Moreover, she also confessed that she didn’t feel the need to call for back-up, even though she asserted that the incident was intense enough to make her think that she might shoot someone.

^v Meserhle’s defense asserts that he meant to grab a Taser. His apparent astonishment after firing his weapon is the basis for this claim (Bulwa, “Mehserle’s Defense,” par. 7-9).

^{vi} According the southern Florida photographer and blogger Carlon Miller, several cameras were actually confiscated at the scene.

^{vii} In an interview with YouthRadio, broadcasted on YouTube, Vargas recently said, “My life has changed a lot since that night [...] I think about the Oscar Grant shooting all the time. It’s become part of my daily life. I get stopped in stores. I get people asking me questions. It’s a hard thing for me because I know I have to sit there, and even though I know that I’m telling the truth, it’s hard because I know that the officer will be sitting there as I testify, just looking at me. And, basically, you know, he’s going to be sentenced to a long term. If he does.” Clearly, the fact that Vargas has offered her video of the shooting along with an accompanied testimony has affected her life, but what also becomes clear is that people who, like Vargas, are in positions to provide subjective testimony have good reason to feel hesitant about doing so.

^{viii} In a similar effort to use the interpretive act of watching this type of video to police advantage, Harland Braun, the lawyer who represented LAPD officer Theodore Briseno in the Rodney King trial, responds to the potential use of the videos of the killing of Grant by noting that “[v]ideotapes can be both useful and deceptive,” particularly because “they show only one angle” (Egelko par. 8-9).

^{ix} University of California, Berkeley’s Jennifer King, Deirdre K. Mulligan, and Steven Raphael recently conducted and published a study of “the effectiveness of the City of San Francisco’s Community Safety Camera (CSC) program” (6). According to this six-month study which was commissioned by the San Francisco municipality in March 2008 as an interdisciplinary program through UC Berkeley, there is “no evidence of an impact of the Community Safety Cameras on violent crime” and that “violent incidents do not decline in areas near the cameras relative to areas further away” (12). Moreover, there were “no statistically significant differences in the relationships between the before-after change in crime and the distance from the camera locations [...] and] comparison sites” (12).

^x For instance, Steve Mann has orchestrated such scenarios by building “wearable cameras” affixed to T-shirts that are scripted with the words “For **your** protection a video record of you and your establishment *may* be **transmitted** and **recorded** at **remote** locations” and, in all capital letters, “ALL CRIMINAL ACTS PROSECUTED!!!” He has discussed at length the problems with what he refers to as “totalitarian video surveillance” such as that found in department stores “where extensive video surveillance is used, yet photography is prohibited” and he has confronted such totalitarian surveillance regimes through tactics such as the wearable camera shenanigan (Mann 533). See, for example, his essay entitled “‘Reflectionism’ and ‘Diffusionism’: New Tactics for Deconstructing the Video Surveillance Superhighway” in the *CTRL [SPACE]* edited collection.

^{xi} Interestingly, George Holiday continues to make the video of King’s beating available online, while Bob Tur – co-founder of Los Angeles News Media and the man responsible for the filming of the beating of Denny – has famously sued YouTube for making the video of Denny’s beating available. A quick Google search of the Rodney King beating will result in several opportunities to actually watch the video, while a similar search of the beating of Reginald Denny is far more likely to result in articles covering the lawsuit against YouTube. Certainly, we must concede that there’s a difference between a privately shot video using consumer video equipment and professionally shot images; however, King’s ghost continues to be the far more visible one.

^{xii} See Gregory Bateson’s *Steps Toward an Ecology of Mind*.

^{xiii} This claim certainly has shortcomings, particularly insofar that it focuses on the ways in which black people experience subjection to surveillance with little regard as to the ways in which other races and

ethnicities experience such subjection. While this remains a topic for future study, I would direct readers to Wendy Chun's analysis in *Control and Freedom* of the ways Asian females experience subjection to a technologically mediated gaze.

^{xiv} West's recent arrest at his own home is yet another example of the ways the "ghosts of white supremacy" manifest as the surveillance of race. Too little, in my opinion, has been made of the neighbor who called the police to report two black men breaking into a home a "nice" neighborhood. While we all certainly do not want to discourage neighbors from looking out for each other, we still must question the assumptions that this particular neighbor made.

^{xv} Interestingly, and for no apparent reason, this same footage, as it appears in the fifth and final season of *The Wire* is in color rather than black and white. One of the ongoing themes throughout the series is the advance in surveillance technology as well as the Baltimore Police Department's increased access and use of such technology. Perhaps the switch from black and white to color is meant to portray these advances.

^{xvi} It is "necessarily a distinctly metropolitan" consideration largely because non-urban areas typically lack both the funds and the spatialized population density to justify or support municipal surveillance programs. It considers the black identity from a socioeconomic perspective because, as I discuss later in this chapter, municipal surveillance cameras are often placed in such "high-crime" areas as government housing projects and "known gang activity areas." Such spaces, as Goldberg justifiably points out, are typically spaces representing a brand racial segregation that masks itself as such by using socioeconomic terms.

^{xvii} In a 2008 issue of *PMLA*, Arif Dirlik states that "[c]lass more than ever cuts across and through racial divides. Members of the colonized and the racially excluded have always been included in the ruling classes, but the transnationalization of class structures with globalization brings forth the issue of class more insistently than ever – ironically, as class has practically disappeared from analysis with the cultural and the postcolonial turn" (1376). I would say that, rather than having "disappeared from analysis," the relationship between class and race has become naturalized to a point where an analysis of race, particularly in urban areas, carries socioeconomic implications. See, for example, David Theo Goldberg's analysis of race in "periphractic" spaces (*Racist Culture*), wherein he discusses at great length the geographic marginalization of black people wherein black neighborhoods have historically been situated in relation to places of black labor, or work that characteristically pays very low wages.

^{xviii} The name "Johnny Weeks" itself is fairly descriptive, particularly insofar that Johnny is a sort of "everyman" character who lives, within the world of *The Wire* for a fairly short period of time.

^{xix} It is tempting to read Bubbles's turn as also being a reaction to Weeks's diagnosis; however, it is not until Weeks is released from the hospital and put into a rehabilitation program that Bubbles learns that Weeks has "the bug." At this point, Bubbles has already done extensive work for McNulty and Greggs, and his reaction is ultimately mild. We are only made to understand Bubbles's assumption (an assumption that we later learn is incorrect): that Bubbles also has the bug.

^{xx} A relatively minor but important clarification: It seems to have become common knowledge that it is Weeks abandons Bubbles out of disdain for his snitching. This is inconveniently not the case. Bubbles leaves Weeks in order to continue snitching with a relatively free conscience.

^{xxi} "[...] if the law employs the exception – that is the suspension of law itself – as its original means of referring to and encompassing life, then a theory of the state of exception is the preliminary condition for any definition of the relation that binds and, at the same time, abandons the living being to law" (Agamben, *State of Exception*, 1).

^{xxii} And, as Agamben says, in much the same way that Weeks belongs to The Game despite having come to it from the outside, "*Being-outside, and yet belonging* [is] the topological structure of the state of exception" (Agamben, *State of Exception*, 35).

^{xxiii} Late in the season, the BMPD finally responds to the "burner" problem as well as the increase in face-to-face meetings by pushing through paperwork to get on a set of recently purchased burners as well as by installing cameras that focus on public, open spaces, such as the area outside of Stringer Bell's copy shop.

^{xxiv} Omar Little, who seeks revenge against Bell for a former lover's murder, and Brotha Fez, who seeks retribution against Bell for Bell's attempted assassination, successfully conspire to kill Stringer Bell together. I assert that Bell was also killed for defying the performative regulation of black identity.

^{xxv} One of the primary objectives of the previously-mentioned CSC program is to provide evidence for criminal investigations and court proceedings. In particular, the program guidelines suggest that the visual information collected by the cameras is used to corroborate rather than replace eyewitness testimony. However, in practice, the presence of the camera subverts its own aims: the Berkeley researchers quote

SFPD investigator anecdotes about instances in which witnesses have been less likely to cooperate in investigations when their “perception of power” invested in the surveillance cameras causes them to believe that the cameras might provide “alternative evidence” that could contradict or undermine their own perspectives (14). In other words, potential eyewitnesses are actually less likely to provide testimony when faced with the possibility that the camera might present a perspective that is both hierarchically superior and literally more encompassing. Furthermore, particularly in the case of homicides committed in known gang activity areas, potential witnesses find a measure of relief in believing that they need not testify (and potentially face backlash from the gangs involved in crime) since the surveillance camera has theoretically captured all pertinent information. In effect, the camera usurps both the power of eyewitness testimony and her voice in the courtroom. As those who could potentially be eyewitnesses see it, the camera replaces subjective narrative with institutionalized “truth.”

^{xxvi} Simon’s full quote from the Hornby interview reads: “My standard for verisimilitude is simple and I came to it when I started to write prose narrative: fuck the average reader. I was always told to write for the average reader in my newspaper life. The average reader, as they meant it, was some suburban white subscriber with two-point-whatever kids and three-point-whatever cars and a dog and a cat and lawn furniture. He knows nothing and he needs everything explained to him right away, so that exposition becomes this incredible, story-killing burden. Fuck him. Fuck him to hell.”

Chapter Four: **Private Parts in Public Places: The Surveillance of Sexual Subjectivities**

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault, without necessarily intending to, illustrates that both practical (or architectural, as it is in Jeremy Bentham’s design for the original Panopticon) and ideological surveillance function as systems: once prisoners in the Panopticon – or once subjects in hierarchical institutions like hospitals, factories and schools – are subject to architectural, technological, or ideological Panopticism, surveillance, according to Foucault, functions automatically. Surveillance is thus also autopoietic: subjects within ideological Panoptic institutions internalize and practice the ultimate aims of surveillance by surveilling themselves and each other. And so we can see that the ultimate result of surveillance is more surveillance.

The political and social effects of autopoietic, ideological surveillance are widespread: public surveillance has become its own excuse for further implementation; this implementation has been carried over into second-generation, private technologies that add the ostensible authority of the camera to lateral or marginalized perspectives; and this spread of surveillance affects the ways that we narrate, “read,” and identify ourselves and each other. When multiple sources of visual information gathered from otherwise autonomous surveillance systems are assembled together in a larger, explanatory narrative structure – which, as I suggest in Chapter Two, was the case for Hani Hanjour – they are linked together in a narrative framework similar to that of a conspiracy theory. Thus, when multiple sources of surveillance footage are linked together by a larger narrative, it becomes apparent that pairing visual information with explanatory narrative is as much an act of interpretation as it is description. In such cases, surveillance footage ultimately becomes subjected to some of the pitfalls and shortcomings of narrative. For

instance, crucial information may be sacrificed to maintain the appearance of chronological causality, and the ideological perspective of the narrator (or of the individual or group responsible for the accompanying text) is usually embedded in the resulting narrative itself.

As I suggest in Chapter Three, surveillance also affects how we “read” and conflate race and socio-economic status in public places, and it affects the ways in which we use visual information to narrate what happens in public enactments of hierarchical power. This, for example, was the case in the filming of Oscar Grant III’s murder, wherein multiple points-of-view destabilized the authority of police testimony. And in Anna Deavere-Smith’s *Twilight, Los Angeles*, a play that centers around the beating of Rodney King and the ensuing L. A. Riots, a multiple point-of-view structure emerges as the best way to narrate something that comes closer to the truth of a lived reality, so that the play’s narrative structure mimics the ways multiple surveillance systems can be drawn together for the purpose of creating a larger narrative about race and class. Since one positive side-effect of this type of multiple point-of-view structure is that marginalized subjects can add the authority of visual information to representations of lateral perspectives, hierarchical surveillance of race and class ultimately represents a failure of this particular regulatory system because it destabilizes itself through the narratives it generates.

But it may function differently in regard to gender and sexual orientation. This is not to say that gender and sexual orientation escape surveillance. Quite the contrary: institutions and ideologies that regulate the expression of sexual subjectivity abound. As I discuss in greater detail later in this chapter, public places such as public restrooms and

airport security checkpoints are heavily imbued with regulatory heteronormative practices and ideologies that typically seek to “out” sexual “deviance.” Thus it is the questionable visibility of gender and orientation that seem so subversive, largely because these are categories of subjectivity that can theoretically be most easily disguised or hidden from view. Where the surveillance of race and class assumes that the bodies of marginalized individuals already confess their marginalization, the surveillance of sexuality assumes that sexual subjectivity is buried further under our skin. In other words, this brand of surveillance is imbued with a complicated series of assumptions regarding the exteriority and interiority – the surface and depth – of sexuality; and such assumptions often simultaneously treat the physical manifestations of gender and sexual orientation as manifestations of an ostensibly stable core. In regulating exterior manifestations of gender – performances of gendered scripts for public behavior, enactments of sexual desire, and so on – the surveillance of sexuality also seeks to ideologically regulate the interiority from which these things manifest. Thus, the surveillance of sexuality primarily seeks to make the “invisible” visible. However, in so doing, it also seeks to instill the primacy of heteronormative binaries in the social psyche.

Regarding both the various ways in which homosexuality may be visibly disguised and the cultural panic that this practice often produces, Lee Edelman notes the process of “outing” homosexuals, or publicly revealing the orientation of gay men and lesbians, accentuates the ways in which “homosexuality remains, for most, illegible” (4). And so the practice of outing “works to make visible a dimension of social reality effectively occluded by the assumptions of a heterosexist ideology” and that this ideology “has insisted on the necessity of ‘reading’ the body as a signifier of sexual orientation”

(4). In other words, revealing a closeted homosexual's orientation serves the dual purpose of making sexual orientation visible and of suggesting that our bodies can be read as symbols of sexual identity. Heterosexuality is thus naturalized in contrast insofar as it is symbolized by the "unmarked, authentic, and non-representational" body. Heterosexual articulations of identity become rendered a part of, to use Lacan's phrase, a "mottled mass,"ⁱ further perpetuating the "us vs. them" mentality that so often pervades public and political discussions of sexual orientation.

While, then, homosexuality is rendered visible through the process of outing otherwise closeted individuals, transgender identity renders visible the problems of naturalizing articulations of gender. The transgender individual represents the subversive sexual subject who makes public the notion that gender can be scripted onto the body and who accentuates the inherent performativity of what would otherwise look like something more essential, or like the "essence" of gender.ⁱⁱ And so we run into a provocative conundrum: while transgendered manifestations of subjectivity often highlight the inherent performativity of gender, so too do they problematize the notion of authenticity in identification within the binary gender system. And so identifying with a gender in contrast to one's anatomical sex is typically explained via authenticity. Accounts of this brand of authenticity often suggest that one's essential gender has been mismatched with one's anatomy, so that performing gender becomes an act of fidelity to some essential core buried "beneath" one's physiological makeup.ⁱⁱⁱ

While we must recognize that conflating gender and sexual orientation under the broader umbrella terms "sexuality" or "sexual subjectivity" may imply that the two are co-determinate (which is clearly not the case), we must also see that the ideological

surveillance of sexuality assumes that the two are conjoined twins, particularly at the point of anatomy, the hyperbolic point where genetic interiority manifests as physical exteriority. And so it would thus seem that the surveillance of sexuality is the surveillance of private parts in public places and that this type of surveillance serves to regulate both enactments of sexual orientation and performances of gender. Edelman posits a “transformation from a reading of the subject’s relation to sexuality as contingent or metonymic to a reading in which sexuality is reinterpreted as essential or metaphoric” (8). In terms of a “readable” gender, the body becomes the metaphor for the illusion that performances of gender stem from a stable, gendered core created both by genetic preconditions and even “deeper” essential underpinnings in a subject’s psyche. In terms of sexual orientation, Edelman’s “transformation of reading” is represented by a shift from homosexuality as “a discrete set of acts” to an “indiscreet anatomy,” and this produces a “powerful tropological imperative that needs to produce a visible emblem or metaphor for the ‘singular nature’ that now defines or identifies a specifically homosexual type of person” (8).

To describe the ways in which this metaphor is metaphorically scripted onto the homosexual body, Edelman coined the term “homographesis.” Edelman defines homographesis as a “double operation”: “one serving the ideological purposes of a conservative social order intent on codifying identities in its labor of disciplinary inscription, and the other resistant to that categorization, intent on *de*-scribing the identities that order has so oppressively *inscribed*” (10). I would posit that the surveillance camera is a physical manifestation of the ideology of heteronormative inscription so that the camera not only captures, but also projects the performative

imperative of the dominant social order onto all those who are within the public visual field. In Edelman's words, "[s]eeing no longer precedes in order to produce, as by 'nature,' understanding; understanding, instead, becomes a prerequisite for a subsequent act of seeing, conjured as by 'a magician's wand,' that figures the transformative agency of ideological perception" (19). While Panoptic practice would ostensibly inscribe sexuality onto the body to render sexual subjectivity visible, it is also a practice whose ideological underpinnings determine how public articulations of sexuality are interpreted and narrated. In other words, Panoptic practice is a topology of "seeing" that follows ideologically inflected methods of understanding.

The in/visibility of sexuality thus problematizes Panoptic practices. Sexual subjectivities may represent the categories of identity most heavily surveilled by the ideological functioning of surveillance, but they are also the categories of subjectivity that must be wrestled from and then mapped back onto the body in order to be made observable. Perhaps, then, homosexuality and transgender identities represent the categories of subjectivity that "de-scribe" the dominant, heteronormative social order. Moreover, public enactments of both homosexuality and subversive gender appearance may elicit the largest cultural panic not just because such enactments are often interpreted (and narrated) as a social contagions, but also because they highlight the fact that so much of heteronormative subjectivity is essentially performative, or, as Judith Butler has famously noted, they reveal that articulations of heteronormativity are "stylized repetition[s] of acts." Enacting, and thus rendering interpretable or "readable," queer subjectivity in publicly surveilled spaces could thus also be read as a type of homographesis.

Later in this chapter, I will examine the ways in which the ideological functioning of surveillance is carried out in public male restrooms in order to surveille and regulate the performance of masculinity. I suggest that the ideology of surveillance in public restrooms ultimately highlights the ways in which heteronormative social scripts are undone by the fact that what appears as the essence of gender is clearly a manifestation of a heavily stylized performance. And I will also examine the ways in which the contemporary airport security checkpoint has become the space of sexual surveillance *par excellence*: Not only do airport technologies like the backscatter or millimeter wave scanner – or “virtual strip searches” – carry the secondary function of conflating anatomical gender with gender identification, they also provide the visual information that justifies the targeting of individuals who display discrepancy between gender markers on identification cards and gender presentation. In this regard, beyond reinforcing heteronormative scripts for gendered behavior, the airport security checkpoint reinforces the problematic notion that there is a direct, causal relationship between anatomy and identification.

Moreover, both the public restroom and the airport security checkpoint accentuate the problematic but pervasive conflation of a subject's sexuality and her body under the assumption that the link between the two is an essential core from which both sexual orientation and gender identity stem. By presuming a direct correlation between the two, the surveillance of sexuality ultimately highlights the ways in which the two are separate. It also illustrates that the essence of sexuality is not so much a manifestation of a biological or subjective essence, but a manifestation of the internalization of heteronormative social codes and scripts for performances of gender and sexual

orientation. In other words, the surveillance of sexuality doesn't so much pull the inside out as it attempts to push the outside in.

“Behold the God Hermaphroditus”: Hybrid Sexuality Under Surveillance

First, though, I want to briefly look at Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex* (2002). The novel's protagonist Cal, an anatomical hermaphrodite raised as a female who, as an adult, identifies as a male, narrates the story; and his point-of-view oscillates between first- and third-person perspectives as he traces the biological roots of a genetic “mutation” through three successive generations in his family.^{iv} Repeatedly dealing with the issue of hybrid identities, the novel seeks to reconcile seemingly contrary identity positions: racial (Cal is only the second generation of his Greek family to have been born in the United States, and he often addresses racial segregation in mid-Twentieth Century Detroit); socio-economic (Cal's grandparents come to the U.S. with few possessions and no money, his family rises to working middle-class affluence, and they are eventually financially humbled during their declaration of chapter eleven bankruptcy); familial (Cal's grandparents were born siblings, and her parents are second cousins); and gendered (Cal repeatedly ponders the duality between masculine and feminine modes of articulation).

At the forefront of various processes of reconciliation (or, at least, of becoming comfortable straddling seemingly dual identity positions) is Cal's struggle to naturalize his identification as a male through a process of expressing sexual desire: The young, female Calliope expresses and explores desire for other young women – suggesting a biological predetermination for homosexuality inherited from her maternal grandmother – however, Cal ultimately decides to live as a male rather than undergo sex reassignment surgery, effectively naturalizing his sexual orientation via gender. That gender is

naturalized through heteronormative desire is problematic; however, it *is* consistent with the novel's social, political, geographic, and familial climate and in the time and place of its setting (1960s Detroit, a Greek Orthodox family, etc.). Insofar that it weaves together disparate bits of information into a larger explanatory narrative, Cal's processes of assembling an identity that straddles various identity categories, and of creating an identity that presents the hybrid identity as a unique brand of subjectivity, resemble the types of narrative structure that surveillance practices generates.

Text or language that accompanies surveillance footage – be it as captions or explanatory narratives – represents an interpretive attempt to bridge the gap between the present moment of viewing captured footage and the historical moment of its capture. And, thus, the meaning or significance that becomes attached to ostensibly objective information creates a temporal rift wherein, in the case of sexual subjectivity, identity is composed retroactively through a series of interpreted visual markers. Narratives that seek to explain sexual subversion are interpretations that seek to place the process of identity formation on a timeline of chronological causality, as if sexual identity is the final result of a chain of events that inevitably lead to the present moment. I would suggest that this problematic but pervasive process stems, at least in part, from a long-standing cultural tendency to surveil sexual identity. In other words, cultural heteronormativity produces methods and ideologies of surveilling gender and sexual orientation, and this, in turn, affects how we read or narrate sexual subjectivity.

Unsurprisingly, narratives that seek to tell the complex story of sexual identity development are thus often narratives that piece together disparate bits of information in a narrative structure of historical predestination. Such is the case, for example, in

Middlesex. The novel's narrator and protagonist Calliope (later, Cal) Stephanides begins by explaining that he "was born twice: first as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974" (3). Born with "5-Alpha-Reductase Pseudohermaphrodites," he is an anatomically intersex person who describes the development of his sexual identity by tracing the path of the previously dormant, genetic mutation that finally manifests in his body. With the assistance of a physician who specializes in chromosomal gender differences – Dr. Luce – Cal later learns that the "mutated gene on the fifth chromosome" was "smuggled" into the United States by his grandparents, both of whom came from a long line of people who carried the gene, which appears to have dated back to 1750, manifesting periodically, albeit very rarely, ever since.

Cal explains that he was born with a "male brain," but without corresponding protruding genitalia, and that he was raised as a girl and so exemplifies a great experiment to "measure the relative influences of nature versus nurture" (19). Interestingly, Cal claims that "despite [his] androgenized brain, there's an innate feminine circularity" in his story; that, in other words, telling the story of genetic history – which, for him, begins when his grandparents, born siblings, flee Greece and marry each other – expresses something intrinsically feminine about his process of identification as a man. But the information he culls together in assembling this story is often antiseptic and clinical, which stands in contrast to his claims that a "feminine circularity" would privilege, for example, relationships over hard facts.

Aside from having an “androgenized brain,” Cal describes himself as “not androgynous in the least,” noting that “5-alpha-reductase deficiency syndrome allows for normal biosynthesis and peripheral action of testosterone, in utero, neonatally, and at puberty” and that “in other words, [he] operate[s] in society as a man,” which he contextualizes by pointing out that he uses the men’s room – “never the urinals, always the stalls” – and that he showers in men’s locker rooms, “albeit discreetly” (41). Cal possesses nearly all of the secondary sex characteristics of a normal man (all except male pattern baldness), and, upon narrating the story, has lived more than half of his life as a male. He regards the occasional resurfacing of Calliope – his pre-adolescent female self – as something like the resurfacing of “a childhood speech impediment” (41).

It is unsurprising that Cal internalizes a medical or clinical perspective of the various discrepancies between his chromosomal gender and his contrasting experience as being raised as someone of the opposite sex. During adolescence, when the genetic mutation begins to fully express itself, Cal is subjected to various medical diagnoses that separate his gender from his identity. In effect, the hospital functions Panoptically – ostensibly “seeing” the ways in which his body confesses the aforementioned gender discrepancies and projecting, back onto Cal’s body, what it sees. And so we are meant to assume, I believe, that Cal has essentially internalized his diagnosis, particularly since he so often discusses his genetic “condition” in clinical terms.

But Cal’s story also mirrors the approach of accompanying the information resulting from visual surveillance with an explanatory narrative that situates identity on a timeline of inevitability. He casts his identity as the result of a series of interlocking historical events: the burning of his grandparents’ homeland that pushed the two into the

“new world” where, rather than continue living as brother and sister, they live as husband and wife; the marriage of his parents who were conceived on the same night as each other and born as second cousins; the ultimate result of his family straddling so many contrary identity positions, and so on. In effect, Cal pieces together these otherwise disparate bits of narrative to explain his social ostracization. He later discovers that, in an old dictionary, the term “hermaphrodite” is analogized with “monster,” and he briefly internalizes his subject position accordingly.^y

Cal’s process of rationalizing queer desire is another manifestation of, to use Debra Shostak’s phrase, “the tyranny of binaries.” The young Callie’s first sexual experience is with a neighbor girl referred to as “the Obscure Object.” Her second, and far less pleasurable, tryst is with the Obscure Object’s brother Jerome. Cal’s later identification as a male is directly linked to his desire for other women expressed most honestly with the Obscure Object. But, as Shostak puts it “[t]he option does not occur to [Callie], however, to retain her ‘uncorrected’ anatomy and continue to live as a girl, a failure of imagination largely connected to her experience of erotic desire for another girl” (404). This option does not occur to her because she is incapable of recognizing that this is, in fact, an option. And so it is a massive amount of internalized guilt paired with the socially pervasive expectations for sexual behavior that underlies Cal’s process of sexual transition, in terms of both her gender and sexual orientation.

When he refuses sexual “realignment” surgery and decides to publicly identify as a male, Cal flees Detroit for San Francisco. He ultimately finds work at something like a burlesque theatre called “Octopussy’s Garden,” where, having adopted the stage name “The God Hermaphroditus,” he regularly swims in a large tank – an aquarium, as he calls

it – with sliding windows that open when change is dropped into a slot. In other words, he puts his anatomy on display, or, in his own words, “I made my living by exhibiting the peculiar way I am formed” (483). To address his comfort at displaying his genitalia in public, he notes that “[t]he Clinic had prepared [him] for it, benumbing [his] sense of shame” (483). And so it would appear that fully submitting to the surveillance of his sexuality by publicly exposing himself completes a process of transformation initiated by his biology, catalyzed by his desire, and antisepticed by the clinic (itself a Panoptic institution).

In her essay that examines the intersection of theory and praxis in *Middlesex*, Shostak notes that “questions raised by the hermaphrodite’s narrative center on embodiment, on the place of the body in constituting the subject” (387). If Cal’s narrative is, as I have suggested, an attempt to reconcile the embodiment of his process of identification as a straight male, then the very act of narrating this story represents a willful attempt to internalize and embody the history of a genetic mutation. Since, for Cal, so much hinges on his biology, something like a biological essentialism emerges. Rather than consider his sexual identity as manifesting from an essential core in his psyche (or other such nebulous, “interior” space), Cal’s essential identity is genetically determined. And so his sexual desire becomes genetically naturalized as a manifestation of his biological gender. In short, Cal does what the surveillance of sexuality attempts to do: he essentializes his identity through observation and narrative. Moreover, Cal’s narrative essentially suggests that the linkage between his gender and his sexual orientation is that they both stem from a stable core, so that this connection is made observable through narrative. However, it is also clear that the narrative’s secondary, and

more insidious, function is to actually create the illusion that such a core exists. This, I believe, is a tragic form of, to use Barthes's phrase, ideological abuse.

Piss Stance: The Surveillance of Gender in the Public Men's Restroom^{vi}

But *Middlesex* represents just one of many cultural manifestations of the pervasive surveillance of sexuality. I posit that the surveillance of sexuality has become a cultural trope that discursively manifests in cultural products and narratives as well as in the predominant social order, and so we should be able to locate a repetition of such manifestations in both culture and its products. As Roland Barthes explains in *Mythologies*, "I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there" (11). Like Barthes, I want to approach a cultural phenomenon—specifically, the "falsely obvious" behaviors that the public men's room encourages—as manifestations of ideological, heteronormative, cultural codes for behavior. Like Barthes' commentaries on popular culture phenomena, my analysis should be read as an "ideological critique bearing on the language of so-called mass-culture" (9), and in the spirit of Barthes' "ideological critique," my analysis of the public men's room seeks to locate and examine ideological, cultural undercurrents that manifest in public restroom behavior and to examine the recursive relationship between an ideological surveillance system and heteronormative male identity.

In its function as a place of gender performance, the public men's room represents a stage that both demands specific gender performances and prescribes these types of performance to its users. That is, as a theater, the public men's room is a space that arguably interpellates its users by demanding that they perform according to the

ideological context that the space requires. Additionally, the public men's room functions as a space in which gender performance is comparatively evaluated. That is, because *degrees* of masculinity ostensibly manifest at the urinal, the public men's room is also a place of competition. Along these lines, I refer to the public men's room as both a theatre and an arena to indicate the public restroom's role as both a stage that demands a performance and a space that elicits competition. Ultimately it is the restroom's roles as both a prescriptive theatre and as a place of competition that accentuate that so much of what gets publicly treated as essential gender is really just a series of heavily stylized and deeply internalized performances.

As Lee Edelman notes, "in the twentieth-century American social landscape, the institutional men's room constitutes a site at which the zones of public and private overlap with a distinctive current of psychic charge" (158). The men's room is "psychically charged" with the currents of dominant ideological behaviors that, when internalized, manifest as stereotypical, male, gendered behaviors. On one hand, then, the rules of the restroom represent ideologies that dictate these prescribed behaviors; on the other hand, anxieties around the violation of these rules exposes the underlying societal anxieties regarding gender performance and sexuality.

Unlike that private, domestic restroom, the public restroom separates users according to their biological gender, and this anatomical distinction reaches beyond a division of public restrooms. The public restroom ostensibly circulates sexual differentiation based on the genitalia of its user. For example, in an anecdote about two children who have perceived "Ladies" and "Gentlemen" restroom doors as designating

two separate countries, Lacan illustrates the delineation of “urinary segregation,” noting that:

To these children, Gentlemen and Ladies will henceforth be two homelands toward which each of their souls will take flight on divergent wings, and regarding which it will be all the more impossible for them to reach an agreement since, being in fact the same homeland, neither can give ground regarding the one’s unsurpassed excellence without detracting from the other’s glory. (144)

The gendered segregation imposed by public restrooms, Lacan suggests, also imposes a public segregation, further implying that there are gendered differences between the ways private space is used in these public places. If we entertain the idea that these differences are sufficient for delineating two genders as cultural, identifying factors, then we can also see that this delineation casts the cultural differences between men and women in the same way we might see the cultural difference between, say, a native Indonesian and a Russian. That is, if we are to perceive the Ladies’ room and the Gentlemen’s room as spaces that inherently appeal to a user based on her cultural orientation—an orientation that suggests that gender and genitalia are co-determinant—then our view of gender as being determined by much more than biological traits is exposed. Moreover, such perception further illustrates one way in which, to again use Edelman’s formulation, understanding precedes seeing.

In contrast to the more traditional view of biological determination of gender, Butler, as I’ve previously mentioned, argues that “gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an

abiding gendered self” (“Imitation” 402). Thus, gender manifests in the most minute physical actions and postures, and, in this sense, we can “read” one’s gender as being scripted by and enacted upon our bodies. Gender, “an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*,” is internalized via ritualistic, societally regulated performances (402). The manifestation of gendered behavior—what one does—is thus dependant upon the performer’s ability to recognize and internalize social gender norms; thus, gender clearly involves much more than the corresponding genitalia which public restroom facilities are designed to accommodate. In fact, I would argue that, by virtue of its ergonomic facilities and in its role as a theatre in which gender is performed, the public restroom *assigns* gender differences to its users more than it caters to anatomical genetic markers. In so doing, the public restroom is itself a physical manifestation of an ongoing, cultural narrative that seeks to simultaneously describe gender and sexual orientation while it also creates the fictional core from which the two stem.

In *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam identifies the public restroom as a stage upon which it is detrimental to perform one’s gender accurately, and she focuses on female masculinity in order to expose the problematic societal relationships that poor female performers (or, more specifically, females who refuse to perform their femaleness; or, more specifically still, persons who reject the idea of an intrinsic “femaleness” altogether) must negotiate in the public sphere. Halberstam presents “the bathroom problem” by highlighting the bathroom’s role as “a gender factory” for producing stereotypical female behavior (24). The punishment for deviant bathroom behavior may lead to an “offender’s” run-in with authorities or, at the very least, being chastised by fellow restroom users. Regardless, by virtue of its role as a place where

poor gender performers are punished, the bathroom becomes an apparatus for reinforcing gender norms and perpetuating gender stereotypes. Halberstam notes that, for women in the public restroom, revealing “decisive gender traits,” such as higher-pitched voices and protruding breasts, signifies gender, especially degrees of femininity, to other women. These traits, however, are physical, bodily expressions, or performances, of femininity, suggesting that a gendered identity is something deliberately superscripted *onto* and enacted by one’s body.

Like Halberstam, I seek to explore the ways in which the public restroom functions as a gender factory, particularly the ways in which the public men’s room regulates performances of masculinity. Accordingly, in my examination of the various social scripts that regulate performances of masculinity, I will focus on the urinal. The degree of visibility, and thus vulnerability, that the urinal actualizes necessitates a few ground rules and, at the same time, reveals sexually charged anxieties about exposing private parts in public places. Behavior in typical, public, male restrooms is governed by a system of unspoken rules that reveal underlying anxieties regarding sexuality. For instance, men generally avoid standing directly beside one another at a urinal, and they create what is commonly called a “buffer zone” between themselves and other urinal users. The exception here is when a restroom is crowded, in which case men are more likely to gravitate toward a pre-existing “pair” rather than creating a new pair altogether. Additionally, men typically avoid looking directly at each other while standing at the urinal. They tend to keep conversation to a minimum, and when conversing, they tend to discuss exaggerated stereotypical, heterosexual male topics. While these rules are clearly arbitrary, they still expose societal fears. For one, physical proximity is an important

factor in the signification of a man's autonomous, heterosexual identity; and staring blankly at the wall illustrates the lack of temptation of looking at another man's genitalia. Additionally, the deepening of the voice during sparse conversation about, for instance, sports subtly assures that, although one user is speaking to another during urination, there can be little doubt about the degree of his masculinity and, moreover, the nature of his sexual preferences.

The frequency that these rules are followed depends largely upon the extent to which they are internalized. Apparatuses for social control play an important role in maintaining the restroom's role as a theatre for prescribing gender roles. Lee Edelman notes that, in response to the increasing need for preserving the ideals of this private space, "[r]efinements in techniques of interrogation, surveillance, and security examination" have been increasingly implemented as "technologies of social control" (560). As I've already noted, surveillance functions as an autopoietically self-perpetuating means of social control once it, too, is internalized by both the surveilleurs and the surveilled. As Foucault notes in *Discipline and Punish*, "a state of conscious and permanent visibility [...] assures the automatic functioning of power" (201). Along these lines, I would assert that the public restroom, a place of "conscious and permanent visibility," assures "the automatic functioning" of inscribed gender roles, particularly when ideological surveillance and heteronormative identity formations become entwined in a negative feedback loop. It is, of course, the restroom users who themselves enact this brand of ideological surveillance. Although it is not entirely unheard of, the placement of surveillance cameras in public restrooms would unsurprisingly be met with great resistance. Even so, technological surveillance in public restrooms is largely

unnecessary since restroom users themselves carry out the ideological imperative to surveille each other.

Displays of masculinity in the bathroom along with the unspoken rules of public urination have become common tropes in popular culture, manifesting not only in web-based games (such as *Clevermedia's The Urinal Game* which depicts the aforementioned urinal “rules”), but also in popular literature, film, and television. For example, in Walker Percy’s novel *Love in the Ruins* (1971), the narrator and protagonist Dr. Tom More prepares to present his revolutionary invention to a crowd of his peers by making “a last visit to the men’s room.” “Why am I so nervous?” he asks himself, “The Director has to be on my side”; nonetheless, More’s performance anxiety over giving his presentation carries over into his restroom observations (199). The scene in which More finds himself exemplifies some of the rules I mention above:

A man takes the urinal next to me though there are six urinals and mine is at the end. I frown. Here is a minor breach of the unspoken rules between men for the use of urinals. If there are six urinals and one uses the first, the second man properly takes the sixth or perhaps the fifth, maybe the fourth, tolerably the third, but not the second. (200)

More’s subsequent observations of his fellow restroom user Art Immelmann link Immelmann’s inappropriate urinal usage to his failure at heteronormative, masculine performance: “I notice that he ‘dresses’ on the wrong side. He dresses, as tailors say, on the right, which not one American male in a thousand, ask any tailor, does” (200). This “small oddity,” as More notes, is “slightly discommoding to the observer” (200). In other words, More, as both a socialized performer and spectator, questions Immelmann’s

masculinity based on his poorly performed bathroom behavior. In light of More's position as the more heteronormative socialized male, Immelmann is even cast as More's intellectual inferior, but the opportunity for judgment of gender performance is only enabled by the close proximity to More that Immelmann subjects himself to.

The degree of potential surveillance in a men's room is increased by the exposed vulnerability a urinal affords; thus, urinal rules implicitly depend upon the degree to which a user both watches and is watched by other users. If, as Foucault would suggest, "visibility is a trap," then the men's room itself, by virtue of its role as a place of ideological surveillance, is a trap to ensnare and expose potentially sexually deviant behavior. If, as Edelman suggests, the perceived "rhetorical gesture[s] whereby homosexuality becomes discernible" as effeminate acts are so accentuated in sexually charged public places, then deepening one's voice at the urinal plays a double-role in bolstering one's gendered identity while also suggesting another way a gay man can "pass" as straight (558). The public men's room, simply by virtue of its role as a place of surveillance, provides a place where private acts can be publicly surveyed and stereotypical male behavior can be subtly reinforced.

Like *Love in the Ruins*, Nicholson Baker's novel *The Mezzanine* (1986) also illustrates the common issue of the urinary anxiety of public performance. The novel's narrator confesses his psychosomatic reactions to the vulnerability to surveillance that the urinal enables:

I was just on the point of relaxing into a state of urination when two things happened. Don Vanci swept into position two urinals over from me, and then, a moment later, Les Guster turned off his tap. In the sudden quiet you could hear a

wide variety of sounds coming from the stalls [...] The problem for me, a familiar problem, was that in this relative silence Don Vanci would hear the exact moment I began to urinate. More important, the fact that I *had not yet begun* to urinate was known to him as well. I had been standing at the urinal when he walked into the bathroom—I should be fully in progress by now. What was my problem? (author's italics, 83-4)

The narrator's urinary anxiety renders him unable to perform under relatively close proximity to a fellow urinal user. Vanci appropriately distances himself from the narrator, providing a buffer zone that would enable the illusion of distance; nonetheless, in order to appropriately perform, the narrator must ultimately imagine himself "dispassionately urinating onto the side of [Vanci's] head" (84). That the narrator must imagine himself urinating on his colleague suggests that he must picture himself in a superior position in order to relax his urethra for a piss. In this sense, the narrator assumes an imagined dominance over his fellow users, thereby alleviating the burden of performing under surveillance—a burden appropriately referred to as "stage fright." Thus the narrator's performance on the center stage of the urinal demands that he assume superiority over those for whom he must perform.

These fictional examples essentially do what they describe: by depicting the "falsely obvious" behaviors that equate anatomy with sexual identity, they circulate the same ideological underpinnings that they expose. To return to Halberstam's examination of the public female restroom, wherein "decisive gender traits" are essentially exaggerated forms of the types of performances Butler critiques, the heteronormative masculine behaviors described above also point towards problematic encounters

transgender individuals may have in public male restrooms. For instance, Lacan's anecdote describing "urinary segregation" as assigning gendered difference based on genitalia alone ignores sexual orientation and gender identification, much less anatomical transsexualism, or intersexualism.

And so I view the transgender identity as a beacon of hope, especially insofar that the transgender identity subverts neat identity categories that the ideological function of surveillance in public restroom circulates. Unfortunately, however, such subversion is not often met with kindness and tolerance especially in sexually charged places like public restrooms: as Halberstam and Edelman point out, transgender people in public restrooms are too often met with hostility, violence, and, occasionally, detainment by police. Thankfully, significant measures to protect the rights of transgender individuals in public places are being taken. For instance, on May 19, 2011, the Connecticut House of Representatives passed a bill – voting 77-62 – to prohibit the discrimination of people based on "gender identity and expression." The bill, which was passed by the Senate on June 4, 2011, provides protection for transgender individuals in gaining employment, in attaining credit, and in using public accommodations such as public restrooms.^{vii}

Unsurprisingly, during the five-hour debate that preceded the House vote, the issue of transgender people in public restrooms dominated the conversation (CBS New York), and the bill itself has been repeatedly called the "Bathroom Bill."

As Halberstam asserts, "the bathroom is a domestic space beyond the home that comes to represent domestic order, or a parody of it, out in the world" (951). Moreover, the public restroom has come to represent a paradigmatic space of public, gender surveillance. If provisions such as Connecticut's "Bathroom Bill" can be passed, then we

can effectively change the environment of gendered subjective identity formation. In theory, changing a system's environment can give a system the opportunity – in this case the system of gendered subjectivity – to manifest pre-existing components of its internal structure. In practice, perhaps, public, urinary segregation, a practice that is clearly a part of a larger system of gender identity segregation, could be ended by such systematic changes.

Later, I will return to the power of altering public narratives regarding sexuality as a way steering the discourse itself (such alterations may be made through enactments of, to use Lauren Berlant's phrase, "Diva Citizenship," which I discuss in greater detail in this chapter's conclusion). First, though, I want to continue my examination of how this discourse manifests in technologies of surveillance and gender inscription. If urinary technology represents a way in which common ideologically heteronormative narratives are enacted and enforced, so too does the technology at the airport security checkpoint represent the most recent mimetic manifestation of the surveillance of sexuality and gender inscription.

From Ticket Booth to Terminal: The "As-If" of the Airport Security Checkpoint

As I've already suggested, the surveillance of sexuality happens at the airport as well in the public restroom.^{viii} Where public restrooms represent the space wherein its occupants enact ideological surveillance by watching each other, the airport security checkpoint represents the ways in which such ideologies manifest as technological and hierarchical practices. In both spaces, the surveillance of sexuality serves to create the illusion of an essential core from which sexual subjectivity manifests. And, in both spaces, the performance of gender and sexual orientation are first conflated and then

regulated, effectively separating the performance from its ostensibly essential core. But by doing so, it ultimately accentuates the fact that there is no such core. As I note earlier, Edelman asserts that seeing no longer precedes understanding, but that understanding precedes seeing. Along these lines, ideological surveillance in the public restroom represents the ideological order of understanding essentialized gender. This ideological order later manifests as a technology of making gender visible at the airport security checkpoint. In short, airport security is part of a larger historical continuum wherein the understanding of gender later gives way to the technology of seeing, or surveilling, gender. Before discussing the surveillance of sexuality in the airport, I first want to discuss the development and rise of airport security technology and how it seeks to create a rift between a subject's psyche and her body.

Between the ticket booth and the terminal, most air travelers know what to expect: the wait lines that, at times, wrap and coil themselves in convoluted mazes and ultimately usher us into one of a few queues in front of a magnetometer (metal detector) or an Advanced Imaging Machine (like the backscatter or its competing technology, the millimeter wave scanner); the plastic bins into which we put our keys, watches, jewelry, cell phones, iPods, laptops (removed from their cases), jackets, shoes, pocket change, and so on; the airport security screener employee who functions as the gatekeeper to the airport terminal; and the hustled dance of returning displaced pocket items, donning the recently removed sports coat, and fumbling with shoelaces. Everything and everyone gets undressed. We air travelers typically accept this orchestrated stripping away of visual makers of identity with necessarily serene complaisance, and, once we have reassembled ourselves, we enter into the airport terminal. While most such security

screening measures might make the airport and air travel safer (even if only by creating an illusion of safety), they also ostensibly function as part of a larger ideological aim of subjective assimilation. For instance, an air traveler who doesn't neatly fall into a binary gender category could be exposed in ways that are unwanted, uncomfortable, and arguably unconstitutional.

Contemporary systems of airport screening may have inevitably developed along with rapidly developing technologies; however, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, methods of and the implementation of advanced surveillance systems were catalyzed by the ensuing paranoia and fear. Beginning by banning all knives in airports, including in the dining areas of airport restaurants, on September 12, 2001, the U. S. government proposed a series of procedures that would dramatically increase a seemingly justified system of surveillance that would ultimately govern all American airports. On September 19, for example, *New York Times* columnists Dean E. Murphy and Joel Brinkley reported on proposals for future airport security systems, such as “large security cones, which would be enclosed structures where passengers would be screened by machines that read molecular structures of the items they wear and carry” and technological methods of “facial recognition technology, which would compare physical characteristics of passengers to those of known and suspected terrorists” (Murphy and Brinkley B1).

Before 9/11, the system of security that governed most U. S. airports was, as Murphy and Brinkley report, “a convoluted system, where airport owners, airlines, and the Federal Aviation Administration all [had] overlapping responsibilities” (Murphy and Brinkley B1). This tri-fold system, put into place in 1973, quickly changed to a more

regulated system imposed by government legislation. By September 21, 2001, airports were already “putting into effect new federal security measures, and their presence [was] evident everywhere, including additional X-ray screenings, body pat-downs, and multiple identification checks from the ticket counter to security checkpoints to the departure gates” (Janofsky B9). On September 28, George W. Bush announced official plans for government-regulated airport security measures, announcing that he “would work with Congress to put the federal government in charge of passenger and bag screening and all safety inspections” (“Excerpts” B6); and on November 16, the government announced the passage of a bill that gave the federal government full control over airport screening. By May 30, 2002, the U. S. government also instilled a modified version of their “Computer Assisted Passenger Profiling System,” at the security checkpoint (Wald, “Plan,” A21). This system has repeatedly come under attack by the American media and public alike; however, such a system is still in place and has become increasingly bolstered by biometric techniques that catalog a traveler’s physiology and compare it with databases of both known frequent fliers and known terrorists.

In addition to screening a traveler’s possessions, the TSA has controversially begun to implement more invasive biometrics systems that check an air traveler’s identity through fingerprint recognition, iris scans, and facial recognition technologies. In fact, the National Science and Technology Council’s (NSTC) subcommittee on biometrics has also developed systems of speech recognition, “dynamic signature” measures (which measure and compare the speed and pressure with which an individual signs her name), gait/body recognition, and “facial thermography” (which measures the heat a person’s face emanates).

More invasive still, and more common, are Advanced Imaging Technologies (AIT) such as the backscatter and millimeter wave scanners, the latter of which emits far less harmful radiation than the former in rendering naked images of the traveler. Opponents to such technologies tend to refer to them as “visual strip searches,” noting that such searches violate the Fourth Constitutional Amendment, which protects Americans from unreasonable searches without probable cause, and for good reason. These machines essentially depict the traveler fully unclothed, and they have proven repeatedly unsuccessful in detecting materials within body cavities. Moreover, despite the TSA’s repeated statements that these machines do not store the resulting images, the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) obtained documentation from the TSA in 2008 that clearly shows that the machines *do* store and transmit images “for training purposes” (“EPIC v. DHS” and Rosen 9).

As the implementation of AIT at airport security checkpoints has increased, so has the number of complaints regarding the TSA’s practices in what many are calling “security theater” (insofar that such technology creates the illusion of safety without actually increasing safety). A growing flood of privately captured video, much of which has been posted on YouTube, bolsters such complaints. Searching YouTube for phrases like “TSA,” “screening,” and “airport security” yields a surprisingly large number of videos of people receiving secondary screening. Videos of children, the elderly, and infirm being subject to invasive pat-downs destabilizes the apparent, hierarchical power of the TSA, at least in the public eye. As a result, the issue of invasive screening has fast become a bi-partisan one: right-wing pundits like Ann Coulter are as likely to decry invasive searches as are representatives of the more “liberal” media. And politicians on

both sides of the aisle have raised the issue. Even so, the TSA continues to receive funding to increase the number of AIT machines nationwide.

In the modern airport, at the terminal entrance, the airport security checkpoint represents a threshold between the ticket booth and the terminal—between the earthly place of consumer agency to the purgatory that prefigures the traveler's ascent. Marc Augé notes that, in places such as airports (or, in his term, “nonplaces”), “the passenger accedes to his anonymity only when he has given proof of his identity; when he has countersigned (so to speak) the contract” into which he has entered and by which he is governed by the ideological apparatuses at work (Augé 102). There are ways in which the security checkpoint functions as a facilitator of anonymity in the “nonplace” of the terminal by only granting such anonymity to those whose identities have been checked. A gateway between the open, public domain of the ticketing area and the closed, gated, and guarded terminal, the security checkpoint determines who can and cannot pass into the transitory space of the terminal. To use Agamben's phrase, the security checkpoint is a threshold into a “state of exception” wherein subjects, as they disrobe, empty their pockets, present photo identification, and, in some cases, surrender physiological signs of identity, are monitored and even controlled by a system of surveillance that captures, reconfigures, and re-projects their visual, subjective identities back onto their bodies. They represent what Agamben calls “homo sacer,” the “sacred yet sacrificial” individual whose exception reinforces a larger socio-political norm.

Mark Wallinger, “Threshold to the Kingdom” (2000)

Much like the “rules” for heteronormative masculine behavior in public restrooms, the methods by which airport security surveillance systems regulate the subjective identity formations of air travelers manifest in various cultural phenomenon—from literature, film, and art to internet blogs and television commercials. For example, Mark Wallinger’s video art installation “Threshold to the Kingdom,” highlights the actual spectral “capture” of video surveillance equipment. First shown at the Venice Biennale in 2001, “Threshold to the Kingdom” depicts airline passengers entering the UK from the International Terminal at the London Heathrow airport. The video is played in slow-motion and is set to the soundtrack of Allegri's “Miserere,” a song of redemption from the fifty-first Psalm: “Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness / In your compassion blot out my offence.” Referring to both the entrance to the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Heaven, “Threshold to the Kingdom” captures travelers at a unique scene of

identity transformation. In each scene of the film, the airport security guard functions as both a gatekeeper to the UK and, metaphorically, as St. Paul, the gatekeeper to Heaven.

But the film depicts more than just the ethereal, slow motion arrivals of air-travelers to the UK: it depicts the transformative nature of both accelerated travel and systems of identity signification. In the case of the former, systems of accelerated travel function to “make the world a smaller place,” thereby rendering airline passengers subject to a more global ideological framework. As travelers in Wallinger’s video art installation enter London at the international terminal, the gap between their respective places of international departure and England have been sutured together at their point of arrival in London. In this way, Wallinger draws an analogy between the “Kingdom of Heaven” and the International Arrival airline terminal: the terminal, like heaven, functions as a non-space that, although not limited by national boundaries, is nevertheless circumscribed by its own set of rules and ideologies. In the case of the airport functioning as a site of identity formation, in “Threshold to the Kingdom,” for example, as the passengers move in slow motion to the sounds of “Miserere,” they are caught in a process of fragmented identity formation. Under erasure, their identities are subject to the system of interpellation that arguably reconfigures them. Along these lines, as the Psalmist of “Miserere” pleads to God to have his offences blotted out, so does an airline traveler have her past erased. As the traveler begs entrance at the mercy of the security checkpoint guard, so does her plea render her subject to the ideological confinements of the airport threshold. As the traveler’s past is blotted out and she is interpellated into the ideological framework of the airport, so does she become rendered faceless in the crowd of those who have preceded her.

In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben notes that, in the state of exception, “[m]an is not a living being who must abolish or transcend himself in order to become human—man is not a duality of spirit and body, nature and politics, life and *logos*, but is instead resolutely situated at the point of their indistinction” (Agamben 153). Along these lines, Agamben presents the body as the external signifier of his interiority. In the scene of the airport security checkpoint, each subject must present himself as the “point of indistinction” between interior and exterior. The photo ID represents another layer of indistinction between interiority and exteriority: a visual amalgamation of identity information—from home address to social security number to categorical gender markers (information that could be further used as methods of surveillance). In the case of Wallinger’s exhibit, passengers have hypothetically already subjected themselves to the system of surveillance; however, as “Threshold to the Kingdom” illustrates, by virtue of literally visually capturing and visually re-projecting subjects in the final act of airport interpellation, the system of surveillance is not entirely bound to the confines of the airport. Subjects themselves carry with them the ideology at work.

Perhaps most importantly, exterior, visual representations of the duality of the subject’s interior and exterior provide evidence that the subjective interior is constituted *by* the visible exterior, rather than vice versa. As Lacan writes:

What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which—if you will allow me to use a word, as I often do, in a fragmented form—I am *photo-graphed*. (Lacan 106)

The instrument of the externalized gaze at the airport security checkpoint—the network of video and audio surveillance, the security guards, the baggage scanner, the metal detector, AIT, and other methods of visual identification—functions quite literally as a mechanism of fragmentation—of graphing the photo, mapping the visual, both off of and on to each subject’s visual representation—each subject’s body. In this sense, systems of surveillance, like the gaze, do not only see—they project.

Lacan also discusses the relationship between a subject’s appearance and his interiority in “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function.” He describes the mirror stage “*as an identification*, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [*assume*] an image—an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase” (Lacan 4). The exterior image that is projected onto and reflected from a mirror is reciprocally projected back onto the subject so that he must always be a representation of his reflection—twice removed from his Self and once returned. This process of externalization and return introduces a new temporality in the composition of the Self. That is, the subject is not just currently the image he reflects, but always has been this image and will continue to be the image. In the scene of the airport security checkpoint, as each subject’s image is captured, it is also projected back onto his Self. As each subject further externalizes his interior by presenting his photo identification as a signifier of his identity, he reciprocally becomes that which he has externalized. This is the complex, entwined, recursive system of surveillance and subjectivity at work.

However, external markers of subjectivity are open to inspection and interpretation. As Gillian Fuller notes, “I have been scanned, checked and made to feel

guilty. I could be a body containing wrong bodies (a smuggler), a body that could explode (a ‘terrorist’), or I could be a body with no rights (an ‘illegal alien’),” (Fuller par. 16). The key here is that the traveler herself may not even be aware of her guilt. “As shoes are searched and fire teams do drills,” Fuller continues, “innocence is not presumed, it must be proved” (Fuller par. 21). Having passed through the security checkpoint, each subject must not only be deemed safe, but she must also be deemed to have always been safe. Moreover, it is in relation to the other subjects who have successfully passed through this threshold and have likewise been deemed safe that each subject is not only safe herself, but also safe from others.

As Agamben states “[f]or life under a law that is in force without signifying resembles life in the state of exception, in which the most innocent gesture or the smallest forgetfulness can have the most extreme consequences” (Agamben 52). In this sense, the airport security checkpoint functions much like Agamben’s state of exception: “The state of exception is thus not so much a spatiotemporal suspension as a complex topological figure in which not only the exception and the rule but also the state of nature and law, outside and inside, pass through one another” (Agamben 37). Along these lines, the state of exception, a “complex topological figure” wherein “the most innocent gesture” can be interpreted with dire consequences, thus conflates a subject’s *zoe* and *bios*. The state of exception simultaneously treats the subject’s “private life and political existence” (Agamben 187) by, for one, reading private, “innocent gestures” as public, political statements. In the case of the airport, for example, a joke, albeit one in poor taste, told privately about bombs, explosives, terrorist actions, or other politically charged topics can have “extreme consequences.” Yet, in the case of the public airport, travelers still

behave “as if” they can still privately say anything they want, but this is only true if they say what is deemed contextually appropriate in this ideologically-charged and regulated space.

If all travelers are subject to a system of rules that transforms private conversation into a public concern, then each subject is rendered an autonomous, anonymous, but individual part of a larger whole: a blank face blended in with a conglomerate of blank faces—each of which has passed through the threshold of the security checkpoint and thus operates in an ideological framework of (non)existence. As Lacan states, “[m]imicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an *itself* that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage, in the strictly technical sense. It is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled” (Lacan 99). The performative aspect of the airport security checkpoint identity enables subjects to “harmonize” with a “mottled background”: it enables subjects to become mottled. More importantly, the function of rendering passengers part of the mottled mass further serves to spread the underlying ideological aims instilled in the security checkpoint. That is, as travelers become mottled, they performatively assume the contextual demands of the ideologically charged space of the airport.

As a state of exception for which subjects must first qualify for entrance, the airport security checkpoint functions as a gateway between the semi-public space of the ticket booth to the semi-private, exclusive space of the terminal. Not only must each subject satisfactorily pass through this system of surveillance, but each must also appropriately signify membership to the gatekeeper. As depicted in Wallinger’s video

installation, as in the Kingdom of Heaven, those who will pass through the threshold are those who already belong. Most obviously, each subject must present a flight ticket and photo identification card to a gateway guard, but more importantly, each subject must continue to signify a seemingly unstable identity formation at a scene wherein the subject's visible presentation has been stripped of some layers of signification. That is, once the subject has stripped himself of some key outward signification of identity—jackets, shoes, wallets, and other personal items—the subject must continue to perform as if he *is* what—or *who*—he signifies. Moreover, *who* he signifies is one that behaves as if he already belongs in this scene of identity interpellation—as if his behavior at the scene of surveillance is congruent with his behavior everywhere else. As if to bolster this feeling of being in the “everywhere else,” the airport terminal functions as if it were a shopping center or marketplace. As a reference to the consumerist outside world, the semi-private, exclusive space of the terminal mimics the open public.

In this space, the traveler's visible performance and its capture by camera and other devices offer “evidence” of the act, as if visually documented proof dictates identity formulation. In this sense, the system of surveillance not only captures and records but it also projects a formulation onto the subject. What has been captured becomes a sort of prescriptive definition that demands that each subject conform to what has been captured. On the other side of this scene of visual capture and interpellation, the subject must then behave as if he is who has been captured, and as if he was the same subject before his visual capture and interpellation. In this sense, a subject conforms to a unique, hybrid identity formation woven from three strands: 1) The performative, outwardly signified identity formation the subject brings into the airport, particularly at the scene of the ticket

booth; 2) The interpellated, captured visual representation wherein the subject is simultaneously stripped of some of the outward signification and is nevertheless asked to manifest an internalized version of the visual representation; and 3) The reconstructed identity formation that operates in a fantastical scene of false representation.

That is, the visible projection of the self furthers the fragmentation of the self in much the same way that Lacan's "mirror stage" does. A fissure between the subject's interior and exterior—a fissure that both disrupts and is disrupted by the fantasy of spatiotemporality between the ticket booth and terminal. The security checkpoint is a unique spatiotemporal space unto itself. Because each subject is rendered a part of the mottled mass, because she engages in series of repeated acts, and because this repetition imposes a retroactive judgment (of safety), the airport operates within a problematic temporality. Moreover, because this event is not limited to one time or to one place, a unifying thread is interwoven through each space and in each time of the series of international security checkpoints. Specifically, the network of surveillance cameras and other machines used to "detect" harmful materials also capture the subject's appearance at the point of his destabilized exteriority. In this sense, the subject's image—his exteriority—is captured by the surveillance network.

Perhaps a greater, and more tangible, personal price for the illusion of increased safety is the exposure of private parts in public places, particularly by the aforementioned Advanced Imaging Technology, which clearly renders the subject's body fully, visibly naked. Some arguably pay more dearly: for instance, travelers with catheters or other medical issues that require hidden medical devices, such as breast cancer survivors who wear aesthetic prosthetics, may suffer embarrassment at having such private, hidden

information made visible. Transgender individuals (particularly pre-operative transgender individuals) also suffer unnecessarily. Once an air traveler has been channeled into a line that would take her through an AIT machine, her only options for avoiding the visual strip search are to leave the line and airport altogether or to subject herself to an invasive, and too-often aggressive, pat-down by an airport employee. In both cases, transgender travelers have reported being subject to greater scrutiny and public humiliation – often through unwarranted outing – by invasive screening methods.

Part of the problem is that of identification markers. A person whose driver's license or passport suggests a discrepancy between an assigned gender marker and gender identification or presentation is routinely subject to greater scrutiny. But a larger part of the problem is that Advanced Imaging Technology so oversimplifies gender that it altogether fails to recognize subject positions that fail to conform to one of the two binary gender categories. The airport security checkpoint thus seeks to theoretically stifle and erase the subjective legitimacy of those who fall outside of its ideological gaze. Therefore those who don't fall neatly into heteronormative modes of presenting and performing gender are further marginalized by technological and ideological surveillance practices. This both represents and highlights a significant failure of the complex, recursive system of gender identity and public surveillance: figures who don't neatly fit into a gender category are subject to greater interpellation; however, the result is rarely, if ever, greater assimilation. Again, the transgender individual in this public space of surveillance represents the hope of a paradigmatic shift in the environment of heteronormative subjectivity by positing a unique homographesis that, as Edelman puts it, ultimately describes "neat," binary gender categories.

Until practical measures are taken to protect and respect transgender individuals at airport security, such individuals are likely to suffer increased targeted surveillance. The National Center for Lesbian Right (NCLR), along with the Transgender Law Center and the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), have begun collecting personal reports from individuals who feel they have been targeted for additional screening because they don't neatly identify or present as the gender marked on their identification cards. Amongst the common complaints that the NCLR identifies are that security officials "[make] an inappropriate comment about [one's] gender," "[out the individual] to other passengers," refuse the individual's right to opt out of scanning by requesting a pat down, and forcing the individual "to be searched by a security official who was not of the same gender" ("TSA Incident Report"). The organization intends to present the results of the reports to both the TSA and the Department of Homeland Security.

Such reports could potentially carry with them one of the greater powers of narrative: to put the reader or listener in someone else's shoes. There are a small, but growing, number of individuals striving to do just that. For example, Kyle Jones, who identifies as a genderqueer butch, runs a blog entitled *Butchtastic*. A recurring theme on the blog concerns Jones's experiences at airport security checkpoints. And, like many trans people, he addresses the anxieties raised by "passing" at the airport security checkpoint. For some trans individuals, passing at the airport is the ultimate test of passing in society, but such behavior only reaffirms the social underpinnings of an oppressive gender binary. Instead, Jones offers the following advice: "Don't hide." For him, amongst other things, this means wearing a "packy" (a prosthetic penis) through

security. Such prosthetics are typically registered by AIT as objects that warrant more invasive secondary screening. Moreover, there have been reports suggesting that wearing prosthetics through screening often results in the wearer being publicly, and unjustifiably, outted. The more common approach to prosthetics is to pack them in checked luggage, which, for many, often feels like removing or amputating a significant part of one's own body in order to avoid more public measures.

But Jones wears his. Writes Jones:

Why do I want you to consider packing through security, even if it might get you challenged, harassed, searched and humiliated? Because the idea of hiding who I am, just to make the rest of the world comfortable, curdles my insides, and I don't think I'm alone in that reaction. Sure, "me being me" is more than uncomfortable to some people — it's threatening, it's confusing, it doesn't compute. Fuck them.

I do not exist to make other people comfortable and secure in their little bubble of conformity. (Jones, "Airport Security and Gender Deviance")

Such "subversive" acts have caused Jones to be targeted for extensive scrutiny. For instance, he describes an experience at the San Francisco airport, wherein, after being screened in a backscatter machine, he was approached by a female agent who "asked [him] if [he] had anything else in [his] pockets or 'around this area' as she gestured at [his] pelvis" (Jones "Exposing Myself at Airport Security"). Upon admitting that he was wearing a "packing cock," he was taken to a private room with multiple agents and forced to unzip his pants and expose his prosthetic penis. Upon leaving the private search area, Jones discovered that his computer bag would be subject to additional screening by one of the agents who witnessed his disrobing. In the end, Jones takes the experience in

stride, noting that the search could have been more invasive. More important, however, is that Jones circulates subjective narratives in contrast to those circulated by the dominant social order. In making his story heard, Jones enacts a sort of narrative therapy: he treats the predominant social narratives regarding gender as something that need to be healed. And he does so wherein a triangulated system of surveillance mimics the multiple points of view that surveillance narratives often share.

But not all are as comfortable as Jones in acting in such bold contrast to the dominant social order. There are several reports that suggest that trans individuals experience a great deal of anxiety about passing through the airport security checkpoint, and for good reason. A number of these reports describe instances wherein security agents have forced individuals to state aloud the gender marker on their passport or licenses when the marker and the individual's presentation don't neatly match. Others have quoted disparaging remarks received from security agents and fellow travelers. And many have felt that the discrepancy between their identification cards and their appearance has caused them to be targeted for additional screening at a disproportionately higher rate than what less "subversive" individuals might experience.

As exemplified in Wallinger's "Threshold to the Kingdom," on the other side of the checkpoint, subjects typically continue to behave "as if" they haven't just deconstructed themselves in a scene of power and interpellation, behavior that continues the prerequisite performances for gaining admittance to the airplane itself. Subjects behave as if they have retained their subjective identity throughout the process, as if they haven't just removed items of clothing, as if they are in a shopping mall, as if they can say anything they want, and so on. This denial only functions to further the

fragmentation of subjectivity. That is, the fissure between the exterior and interior that is exploited at the security checkpoint is widened and maintained in the “non-space” of the terminal. Once the traveler has arrived at her destination, she exits the terminal “non-space,” and, before leaving the airport altogether, collects her luggage at the baggage claim. The baggage claim scene confirms the tragedy of the process, bags that, upon entrance into the terminal, are checked and secured by the system at work—bags whose contents have been questioned and protected—are now idly cast to anyone—to no one—in particular. They have, like the air traveler, been processed and forced into the parameters of a regulated space, and, having been examined, they have been carelessly ejected back into the public. They, like their owners, typically carry the marks of their journey into the outside world.

“Diva Citizenship”: Conclusion

Perhaps, as Lauren Berlant suggests in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, there “is no public sphere in contemporary United States, no context of communication and debate that makes ordinary citizens feel that they have a common public culture, or influence on a state that holds itself accountable to their opinions, critical or otherwise” (3). The surveillance of sexuality, of private parts in public places, certainly points towards the erasure of a truly public sphere. And the practices and techniques of reinforcing essentialized scripts for performing gender and sexual orientation do more to perpetuate the ideology of difference than to promote the feeling that “ordinary citizens” share “a common public culture.” And perhaps, as Berlant writes, a “sexually toxic American culture and a national fantasy of corporeal dignity will

characterize this story” of marginalized people who are systematically denied agency and whose identities are de-legitimized (228).

But I will conclude here with another figure of hope: the person who, in Berlant’s terms, enacts “Diva Citizenship,” which, as Berlant puts it,

occurs when a person stages a dramatic coup in a public sphere in which she does not have privilege. Flashing up and startling the public, she puts the dominant story into suspended animation; as though recording an estranging voice-over to a film we have all already seen, she renarrates the dominant history as one that the abjected people have once lived sotto voce; but no more; and she challenges her audience to identify with the enormity of suffering she has narrated and the courage she has had to produce, calling on people to change the social and institutional practices of citizenship to which they currently consent. (223)

This is as much a description of subversive agency as it is a call to action: an imperative for those of us who have been marginalized and disenfranchised by the dominant social order, as well as those of us who seek social justice for the disempowered. Enacting Diva Citizenship, as, for example, Kyle Jones does, in places like public restrooms and airport security checkpoints could ostensibly become one way of “renarrating” the dominant history, so that the social environment that surrounds issues of normativity can change, and, in so changing, provide the social milieu for trans individuals or other individuals who resist neat categorization to flourish.

To return to Edelman’s phrase, enacting Diva Citizenship in surveillance spaces is a type of homographesis that visually publicizes the inherent problems in so many of the practices and technologies of the surveillance of sexuality. Since sexual orientation must

be made visible through the public outing of closeted individuals, we must re-narrate the dominant social script by publicly decrying the various ways in which sexual identity is extracted from and then mapped back on to the body. In much the same way that previously mentioned surveillance narratives rely on multiple points-of-view to legitimize the truth of a lived experience, so too should we publicize as many subjective points of view as possible in order to correct the hierarchical, panoptic, and regulator perspective that has become embedded so deeply in our cultural psyche.

Fictional characters such as Cal/lie Stephanides exemplify a pervasive real world conundrum: heteronormative ideologies and panoptic institutions too often force those who don't fall neatly into one binary identity category or the other to internalize something like a diagnosis. For Cal, the hospital that recommends corrective anatomical surgery only projects a method of heteronormative articulation and presentation, so that he later briefly comes to view his sexual identity as something diseased and horrifying. Moreover, similar real world practices serve to, as Agamben would say, situate individuals at a "point of indistinction" between the body and the psyche, so that individuals who could otherwise be subversive are effectively drained of all agency via the extraction of identity from and the subsequent mapping of identity back onto the body.

As Edelman says, understanding precedes seeing, and this is certainly true. However, Diva Citizenship turns this particular table. By publicly enacting social subversion, what she renders visible may have a profound impact on what we come to understand about transgressive identity formations. Diva Citizenship thus represents hope that the surveillance of sexuality will ultimately fail to function as a stifling,

invasive, and regulatory practice. More importantly, enactments of Diva Citizenship reappropriate the aforementioned narrative structure wherein disparate bits of information are culled together to create a larger narrative regarding subjectivity in public: such enactments represent homographetic corrections to the narrow vision and ideological short-sightedness of the larger, hyperbolic, panoptic eye. In other words, Diva Citizenship is one way of pushing against heteronormative social scripts in a way that facilitates greater recognition, legitimacy, and agency for those who are so often marginalized.

ⁱ See Lacan's "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud."

ⁱⁱ I should note that many transgender individuals view their gender as something essential. My constructivist approach is not meant to undermine or devalue any means or method of forming and experiencing a stable identity. Instead, what I am here suggesting is that so much of what we consider to be the essence of each of the two, traditional binary genders is really nothing more than a product of a long-standing and ongoing process of naturalizing what are, in fact, constructions. In other words, gendered articulations of subjectivity are products of pervasive social scripts. I personally find it troubling that so many people, cisgender and transgender individuals alike, often feel that they must legitimize their gender identities via essentialized authenticity when, in fact, gender identities that don't neatly conform to the gender binary should be openly and publicly recognized as equally valid ways of being in the world (as should identities that do conform more closely to an essentialized gender script). I view the essentialization of gender as another way in which individuals who don't neatly or readily conform to the dominant social order are further marginalized. One of my intentions is to add my voice to the growing chorus that seeks to legitimize non-binary gender categories.

ⁱⁱⁱ This is not to suggest that the transgender identity is not legitimate as a category of identity that falls outside of the male/female gender binary. Quite the contrary. Trans individuals suggest that there are many ways of identifying in the world that are both legitimate and that subvert the aforementioned binary.

^{iv} The switches between first- and third-person perspectives happen most notably when the older male-identified Cal discusses his sexual experiences, desires, and processes of maturation as the young, female Calliope. In other words, Cal consciously refers to his younger, female self as another entity altogether in an attempt to distance himself from that part of his identity.

^v It should be noted that Cal also clearly associates his genetic mutation as a direct result of inbreeding, effectively re-articulating his grandmother Desdemona's belief that the family would eventually be punished for her and her brother's incest. That hybrid identity is viewed as a form of familial punishment associated with incestuous love underpins Cal's view of himself as a freak or a monster.

^{vi} A longer version of this section was published as an essay, entitled "Piss Stance: Private Parts in Public Places," in 2006 in *Studies in Popular Culture* (28.3).

^{vii} The passing of this bill makes Connecticut the fifteenth state, in addition to D. C., to protect transgender individuals in the workplace.

^{viii} I am indebted to Emilia Dunham, the Program Associate for the Network for LGBT Health Equity at Fenway Community Health Center in Boston, Massachusetts, for providing insight into the issue of transgender identity at airport security checkpoints. Emilia also directed me to organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Center for Transgender Equality who have been fighting

the implementation of invasive screening procedures. Perhaps most importantly, Emilia helped me cultivate greater empathy for the suffering that unwarranted and unconstitutional searches cause members of the LGBT community.

Chapter Five: Dataveillance: Data Narratives in the Age of Information Proliferation

Until this chapter, my focus on visual surveillance has been underpinned by a basic assumption that the primacy of visual information supercedes that of other sensory information – both in terms of the ways our brains have evolved to privilege sight over other senses and in the ways American culture has increasingly privileged visual media over other forms of media. Accordingly, the most readily apparent forms of technological surveillance are visual – both insofar that visual surveillance technologies are meant to themselves be seen, which includes the strategic placement of cameras (or devices that are made to look like surveillance cameras) in public places along with accompanying signage that declares the surveillance of public space (such signage serves as a powerful visual symbol which, as I report in Chapter Three, functions nearly as well without the actual accompaniment of cameras) and in the fact that so much of this surveillance is conducted via cameras as opposed to audio recording devices or other technologies of non-visual surveillance.

As for the evolutionary primacy of visual information, our cerebral cortex and our occipital lobes – the parts of our brain responsible for processing what we see – represent the brain's largest centers for processing sensory information.ⁱ And it's easy to see why: Amongst our earliest animal ancestors, the sense of sight would have been vital for survival. In the process of becoming ambulatory, early animals and insects needed to see the space in which they would move about as well as to see all potential threats to their vitality. Undoubtedly, the development of the eye played an enormous deciding factor in natural selection, thus it is also of little surprise that the eyeball so fascinated and perplexed Darwin, who viewed the eye as the body's most advanced organ, so much so

that he allegedly questioned his own theories of natural selection when faced with explaining how it came into existence. We have since come to understand that the eyeball likely evolved from light-sensitive brain matter. Thus, perhaps it is the evolutionary, developmental age of the eye as well as the probability that it evolved from brain tissue that further explains why our brains have so accommodated and ostensibly privileged the visual information they receive.

Because of the ways our brains privilege visual information, it is no surprise that the primacy of vision has long been a pervasive cultural force – from the role of public theatre as a prevalent form of entertainment that has historically superseded its print counterparts (for instance, in Sixteenth Century England, more people saw Shakespeare's plays than read them) through the multifarious forms of visual entertainment like cinema, television, and YouTube that proliferate today. Examples of a widespread preference for visual media abound, and arguably, because they have been so favored, they have developed and proliferate exceedingly rapidly. In fact, I would argue that contemporary practices and technologies of visual communication have grown and proliferated exponentially in accordance with Moore's Law.

Moore's Law is named after Gordon Moore, a co-founder of Intel, who, in 1965, successfully predicted the exponential increase in the number of transistors that can be placed on an integrated circuit at a relatively consistent cost. In short, Moore predicted that this number would double every two years. It turns out that he was not only uncannily prescient, but that this prediction also has broader applicability to other types of technological progress. For instance, the storage size of computer hard drives has progressed accordingly. Optical networking is progressing at a rate faster than what

Moore predicted. And, while critics have noted that Moore's Law has become a self-fulfilling prophecy in the technology world insofar that manufacturers now set goals for expansion accordingly, and while it has been further noted that such progress induces the obsolescence of a great deal of technology, others have asserted that technology tends to progress at its own, independent rate: that if one tech company does not develop technology that pushes forward exponentially, another will.

Perhaps more interestingly, as visual media technologies have both exponentially expanded and diverged, so too have various forms intermingled. Many television shows include supplementary web-based phenomena to create a greater and more involved experience for the viewer. Likewise, television entertainment has migrated to the web. Virtual venues ranging from YouTube to Hulu to Netflix and so on have naturalized the conflation of personal computers, television, and the cinema. This move is significant for many reasons. For one, it represents the increasing convergence of computer technology and entertainment, a convergence that seems to be having increasing spillover effects, not the least of which is inherent in some significant, fundamental ways in which information is legitimized and disseminated. Moreover, this convergence mirrors the convergence of hierarchal surveillance technologies and private, second-generation surveillance technologies. Taken together, the convergence of multiple forms of surveillance added to the convergence of communication technology and entertainment has created new narrative forms wherein multiple sources of surveillance footage are disseminated through social media outlets like YouTube which have been, in the brief period of their existence, primarily associated with entertainment. While the phenomenon resonates deeply with so much so-called "reality television," it does exemplify a cultural trend

towards viewing surveillance footage for the purpose of entertainment, not unlike the emergence of the hybrid forms of “docutainment,” “edutainment,” and “shockumentary.”

Such convergence is perhaps best exemplified and demonstrated by the modern smart phone. Triangulate the modern phone’s ability to capture video with its perpetual connection to the internet with the internet’s many opportunities for distributing privately-captured video, and you have a pocket-sized method of practicing what I’ve previously referred to as Diva Citizenship (a phrase and a figure I borrow from Lauren Berlant). Such was the case, for example, in the filming of the killing of Oscar Grant III and the digital distribution of this footage. And such continues to be the case for a variety of purposes: 2011 has, as of this writing, been a year in which smart phone technology combined with social media has been exceedingly significant in international cultural and political movements such as the “Arab Spring” phenomenon in the Middle East and the recent “Occupy Wall Street” movement, or in a phrase that more accurately parallels its Middle-Eastern predecessor, the “American Fall.” The smart phone conflates various forms of media and communication so that the line between entertainment and communication is continually blurred, so much so that to distinguish the two from one another seems superfluous – as is the case in many social networking sites like Facebook and YouTube. Moreover, such social media sites are increasingly becoming preferred venues for information dissemination, thus the ways in which information is legitimized and circulated have been fundamentally and, in all likelihood, permanently changed.

As I’ve already noted, surveillance footage is typically accompanied by an explanatory narrative, at the very least in the form of captions, so that such footage often triangulates various forms of media – particularly text, video, and audio. Friedrich

Kittler, in his essay “Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,” famously presented these three technologies of media production as having “separated the data flows of optics, acoustics, and writing and rendered them autonomous,” so that these technologies of capturing sensory information created individual categories of media (114). The ways in which modern communications technologies conflate text, film, and sound have brought us to a point where the work that Kittler’s three media-making machines no longer represent distinct categories of mediality. However, one need look no further than the smart phone to see that modern communication technologies have returned us to a point prior to the historical divergence of audio, video, and text captured and created by the gramophone, camera, and typewriter.

Each of these screen shots were taken on the evening of September 12, 2011.

Each image comes from a live feed of an Axis 2100 surveillance camera.

But the cell phone is far from the only example of the ways previously separate forms of technology have conflated. Private and public surveillance cameras often provide news stations with the opportunity to remotely monitor traffic or weather; store owners with the ability to monitor their store during off hours; child and pet-care facilities with the option to provide their clients with the ability see their children or pets while away from them; and so on. Many such systems – such as the Axis 2100 series of surveillance cameras – can be easily hacked by performing a simple Google search for a

bit of code embedded in the software that provides otherwise encrypted web-based access.ⁱⁱ When this software flaw was first discovered in 2007, hacking into such systems became a form of entertainment for even the most amateur hackers (the first two images above were taken by me after searching for a bit of code indigenous to the Axis 2100 software platform).ⁱⁱⁱ Since then, unsurprisingly, many such systems are being increasingly implemented for the dual purpose of entertainment and panoptic practice: such as New York City's systems of cameras that are not only hosted through an openly accessible website, but that can also be repositioned remotely by its users (the third image above is a screen shot of a feed that has been made publicly available). Systems such as New York's put paradigmatic Panoptic practice to use: there might ostensibly always be someone in the proverbial observation tower.

Arguably, surveillance technology has also developed exponentially, even as it has dovetailed with entertainment technology. In fact, surveillance has clearly become a form of entertainment unto itself: this was perhaps most overtly acknowledged with the creation of the aptly titled reality television series *Big Brother*. The growing number of other such "reality" television programs, a genre that, amazingly, also seems to exponentially expand, only bolsters the role of the surveillance camera as a technology of entertainment. Subversive figures, such as the New York City players, who enact public dramas in publicly surveilled places, further force this into our public conscience.

This phenomenon resonates with much of what I have claimed throughout this dissertation: that, as visual surveillance technologies continue to proliferate, and as we see second-generation technologies being increasingly used to add the illusion of objective authority to marginalized perspectives, we see the subversive significance of

representing multiple perspectives show up in several ways and in many cultural products, not least of all in web-based phenomena like Elahi's *Tracking Transience* project or the more ubiquitous practice of posting videos of police officers abusing their authority; in literature such as Deavere-Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1991* or DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*; in news broadcasts that link together multiple surveillance systems in a larger, explanatory narrative structure, such as in the story about Hani Hanjour; and so on. This phenomenon is becoming increasingly pervasive and is having some significant, cultural effects. For instance, as I'll discuss later, this phenomenon has rendered multiple-point-of-view narrative frameworks more intuitive, natural, and common. More importantly, it has also fundamentally destabilized the reliability of traditional narratives told from singular perspectives. And I should note, again, that text accompanying video footage, for instance, typically represents the hierarchical position of the person or organization presenting the material. The proliferation of visual information accompanied by social media's multiple venues for information dissemination is a game changer in the world of subverting hierarchical structures. As I'll argue later, information-disseminating websites like *Wikileaks* along with phenomena that spring up around the liberation of information (such as the Arab Spring and American Fall) have altered the ideological structures in which they operate so much that the ways in which one might even *act* subversively within a modern hierarchical structure have changed.

As a narrative structure, the multiple-point-of-view approach that I have repeatedly discussed in this dissertation is becoming increasingly common. And this narrative approach is arguably expanding so that multiple independent narratives sometimes provide an additional perspective for each other. For instance, in the popular

reality television program *Project Runway*, a group of designers parade their clothes in front of judges by choosing models to wear their clothes on a runway. Since the show's inception, a companion piece developed which centers on the models themselves – *Models of the Runway*, which aired for only two seasons. *Models of the Runway* depicts the events in *Project Runway* from the models' perspectives rather than the designers'. This certainly isn't the first instance of a television show spin-off providing another perspective on the characters or contestants in the original, but it is an excellent example of the ways in which the narrative approach mirrors a larger approach to representing the world as we experience it: through multiple perspectives that draw from visual information to add authority to otherwise marginalized subjectivity.

And, of course, it is not visual information and accompanying narrative alone that mirror this structure. In the Information Age, all information – be it visual, auditory, textual, numerical, and so on – might simply be considered pure information, pure data. The practice of collecting information – often described by the inadequate portmanteau *dataveillance* – is another massively proliferating approach to surveillance.^{iv} From the Puritanical witch hunts of the late Seventeenth Century to McCarthy's Cold War hunt for communists, the practice of gathering multiple streams of information and tying them together through explanatory narratives charged with hierarchical, ideological perspectives is nothing new. Dataveillance, or the process of collecting data transmitted via computers or other communication technologies such as smart phones, is practiced by corporations that mine for consumer trends, by the government to ostensibly monitor terrorist or other criminal activity, by individuals for purposes ranging from monitoring spouses or romantic partners for signs of infidelity to business owners or managers who

monitor their employees' computer usages. It is a prevalent practice and is conducted within an ideological, hierarchical structure far more often than not.

Dataveillance is essentially another manifestation of a cultural system wherein techniques of observation ultimately feed into pervasive narrative frameworks. Used by an investigative branch of the government, the material collected via dataveillance typically feeds into a narrative structure that points towards whatever inevitable conclusion that particular hierarchical system wishes to reach. Performed by corporations for the ostensible aim of gathering consumer data, the information typically serves to create targeted marketing campaigns for very specific demographics. Used by individuals, the information is typically plugged into an explanatory narrative structure, about, for instance, what one's spouse or children "do" on the computer when they are alone. In all cases, dataveillance is not unlike traditional, Panoptic practice: the observer almost always represents a hierarchical position of proverbially looking down from above. And so my intention in this chapter is to examine the ways in which this pervasive cultural force 1) affects popular narrative structures and influences the ways in which we read and interpret information and 2) opens up new virtual spaces and facilitates hitherto uncommon methods of subversion. In short, I believe that both emerging narrative structures and methods of subversion stem from the same phenomena, that emerging methods of observation have had great influence on the rising popularity of multiple point-of-view narrative structures that serve to decentralize the authority of hierarchical surveillance and that this phenomenon has some significant "real world" analogs, such as *Wikileaks*.

To equate visual information with pure data may, to some, seem counterintuitive: in part, because information gathered via dataveillance is generally seen as being less subject to interpretation, largely because it is ostensibly objectively verifiable. But insofar that so much visual information is disseminated via modern communication technologies, it is all ultimately reducible to the same type of code used to transmit any message between two or more electronic communication devices. Moreover, since, as I suggested earlier, multiple forms of media have been conflated into streams of digital information, the encoding of all information – visual or not – ultimately suggests that all information is either already digital or waiting to become digitized.

As a result, there has been a massive conflation of various types of media as well as a conflation of what exists as digital information and its analog counterparts. As this conflation continues, several interesting phenomena take place. For one, the line between the digital and the analog is increasingly blurred, and the significance of a difference between the two is all but lost. Virtual environments are increasingly setting the stage for various types of “real world” practices and policies: by, for instance, simulating war environments in order to craft better approaches to actual warfare; designing economic structures based on game theory wherein non-material consumption in virtual worlds offers a new way to understand real world economics; and setting stages for massive and immersive narratives across various different media platforms and venues.

Edward Castronova notes that, in the so-called “exodus to the virtual world,” so much of what is happening in various virtual environments is having an increasing real world effect. For instance, non-material production in virtual spaces like Second Life may earn an avatar a certain amount of Linden dollars, the currency of this world, which

may be traded for real world currency. It is estimated that thousands, if not millions, of dollars are circulating in this way or in similar ways (such as selling “experienced,” and thus powerful, *World of Warcraft* characters on Ebay), little of which is accounted for in any single country’s gross domestic product. In other words, the virtual world has a significant impact on global economics. Moreover, and more clearly, the virtual world impacts politics, as it has in cases wherein grassroots organizations make real world change through social media. The instances of political change in the Middle East during the aforementioned Arab Spring, particularly in places where social media and “leaked” information has been used to broadcast images that governments would want to suppress or to organize rallies in ways that would have otherwise been impossible (as was the case, for instance, in Tunisia and Egypt), have exemplified the virtual world’s power to be a place that facilitates change by giving voice to marginalized perspectives. Such has also been the case in the aforementioned American Fall, or Occupy Wall Street / Occupy Together, movements.

As various forms of media converge to create hybrid media and new narrative structures, so to does the amount of recorded information increase. Insofar that the internet might be considered a continuously expanding repository of information, so to does it become a virtual primordial ooze from which new genres and narrative forms may arise. There are those who argue that virtual narratives represent a move beyond postmodernism, and this stance is certainly compelling. For instance, Postmodern cultural products, as Frederic Jameson observes, might be viewed through the lens of schizophrenia and trauma – especially insofar that both divorce symbols from what they symbolize and break and restructure chains of symbolic associations so that the person

who suffers from schizophrenia or PTSD engages in a productive narrative process of creating new meaning from old symbols. Along these lines, much of the work of Postmodern literature, film, and art similarly deconstructs culturally pervasive symbols and metaphors and reconstructs alternative chains of associations – between popular tropes, historical periods, perspectives, and so on. Accordingly, works in Postmodern literature often “borrow” from various genres to create a pastiche of conflated genres and hybrid narrative forms.

If schizophrenia and PTSD are the indigenous psychological disorders of Postmodernism, then autism and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) are arguably the representative psychological conditions for what comes next. The majority of those who suffer from autism suffer also from a hypersensitivity to sensory information, and those with ADD tend to struggle to focus on singular streams of information for an extended period. In the age of massive information proliferation, the rise of disorders related to information sensitivity highlights the ways in which we understand the significance of information dissemination. Accordingly, contemporary narratives have increasingly become assemblages of multiple streams and forms of information. Many contemporary narrative structures mimetically reproduce the anxiety associated with managing information overload. Moreover, the contemporary novel may “borrow” from another genre, but rather than use a borrowed genre to also borrow its inherent conventions, the practice of assembling together multiple genres looks more like the modern day “mash-up,” or a narrative structure that blends together multiple genres and multiple media in a way that mimics the larger proliferation of information – a proliferation wherein the distinction between various types of information or various forms of media matters very

little. In other words, contemporary narrative structures often mimetically represent the contemporary convergence of multiple genres and media, a method of artistic production not entirely unlike the autistic or ADD experience of information overload. Moreover, by virtue of presenting multiple threads of information, many contemporary narratives are also often constructed much like conspiracy theory narratives, wherein the proverbial “end” of the story is known and essentially all associated information can be plugged into an explanatory narrative structure that seems to point towards a specific, inevitable end. But where conspiracy theorists assume that a conspiracy is tied to a hierarchical power structure, this new contemporary narrative structure is rarely built upon hierarchical authority. More often than not, it is quite the contrary: contemporary narrative structures often go so far as to remove even the ostensible authority of a narrator or of an unlimited point-of-view. For these reasons, it would appear that such structure is predicated upon the relative equality of information from multiple sources and perspectives.

Convergence Culture and Information Multiplicity

Convergence Culture, explains Henry Jenkins, happens when and “where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (2). The phrase speaks to the ways in which content and information flows “across multiple media platforms” as it also describes interactions and cooperation between media industries as well as “the migratory behavior of media audiences” who tend to refrain from privileging one platform over another in search of entertainment.

We see this occurring in many ways. One of the more prevalent is the development of contemporary spoiler cultures that spring up around popular television

shows. Jenkins focuses on *Survivor* in describing this culture, particularly since the show can ostensibly be “spoiled” by people living in or visiting the areas where the show is filmed or by people who are close to one or more of the shows participants – both contestants and crew alike. This culture surrounds other programs as well: most recently, televised dramas with sprawling narrative arcs are often subject to scrutiny and informed speculation by zealous fans. On *True Blood* fansites, for instance, fans that are able to procure promotional materials such as frame shots or promotional photos, or those who respond to casting calls to discover the descriptions of new characters, speculate endlessly on the directions the show will take. And this particular show is already loosely based on a series of novels! In other words, the print media that itself contains detailed information about the possibilities for the various televised narrative threads is not enough to satisfy a spoiler culture once it has sprung into existence.

As Jenkins notes, one thing that the spoiler culture demonstrates is a larger cultural tendency to simultaneously distrust and desire insider knowledge. On one hand, spoiler culture illustrates a clear privilege for those who know over those who don’t. Accordingly, within this culture, as in many other web-based social spheres, a great deal of policing by the culture’s members serves to weed misinformation from true spoilers. On the other hand, by removing expertise from those recognized as experts by, more often than not, removing information from institutions that are designed to circulate it, spoiler culture also exemplifies the ways in which cultural hackers strive to reconstruct the system by which expertise is conferred. This is very much in line with the hacker’s maxim that “hackers should be judged by their hacking, not criteria such as degrees, age,

race, sex, or position.” In other words, spoiler culture often decentralizes the authority by which expertise is conferred or earned.

This position is a familiar one to those who publicly leak information online. Inarguably, the most famous leaker of the Twenty-First Century thus far is Julian Assange, the editor-in-chief and the public face of *Wikileaks*. While I must note that Assange claims only to be the face of a formerly wiki-based website that has historically allowed its users to leak information on their own, he occupies an interesting cultural position: Assange is at least popularly viewed as a disseminator of information across several channels of communication, and, even if only because he has become the de facto “face” of *Wikileaks*, he is accordingly subject to much attention and scrutiny. Regardless, by virtue of the fact that he is the face of an organization that seeks to make all information “free” (both in capitalistic terms and in “spatial” terms, insofar that his information is not limited to one virtual space) he symbolizes one of the great ways that the hacker credo has helped liberate information. In short, Assange does not so much represent a new authority in the realm of information dissemination as he represents an ultimate manifestation of the internet’s potential to destabilize authority and open authority to the scrutiny of multiple perspectives. Moreover, Assange illustrates that the greater authority goes to those who provide the most unfettered access to information as opposed to those who guard and disseminate it.

While I’ll save extensive discussion of *Wikileaks* and Assange for later in this chapter, what I want to suggest now is that *Wikileaks* has become another information generator for the types of multiple point-of-view narratives that are highly saturated with various streams of information. John Johnston calls the literature that stems from this

narrative approach “novels of information multiplicity.” To contextualize, Johnston explains that “contemporary culture – or more specifically, what is called postmodern techno- or cyberculture [...] is] an artifactual space created when information restructures modern or traditional culture in order to make it a better habitat for information” (3). In other words, contemporary culture’s relationship to the proliferation of information is to make of itself a more suitable environment for the proliferation of information.

Accordingly, in Johnston’s formulation, novels written in the Information Age take on the characteristics of the culture of information that produces it. Such novels look like assemblages of otherwise disparate bits of information and otherwise unrelated genres. Johnston draws from Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* to explain that an assemblage “constitutes not a structural unity or totality but only a functional consistency or ‘jelling together’ of diverse parts and processes” (14). As such, the novel of information multiplicity, or the application of the assemblage to other narrative forms (which I’ll call DataNarrative), appears fragmentary and incomplete: under perpetual construction with no real conclusion. I posit that more and more novels and other narratives (like many of those I’ve discussed in this dissertation) that fit this description will be produced alongside the exponentially growing proliferation of information, and that popular narratives and the popular media outlets through which they are disseminated will become increasingly enmeshed. In other words, I argue that because technologies of information capture and dissemination are becoming increasingly prevalent, so, too, will the types of narratives such technologies generate proliferate. One recent and excellent example of this is Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. I feel I must note that this novel, as many recent novels are, is available with additional

multimedia components when purchased for e-readers such as the Kindle or iPad.

Clearly, narrative frameworks are not just being influenced by the proliferation of digitized information, but they themselves are also part of such proliferation. Moreover, they represent a brand of media aware of their own shifting mediality. Many of them have arguably become both examples of exponential technological growth and cultural metaphors of such growth. Such is arguably the case for *A Visit from the Goon Squad*.

“X’s and O’s”: Human Beings as “Information Processing Machines” in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

2010’s Pulitzer Prize in Fiction winner *A Visit from the Goon Squad* has been heralded by some critics as a novel that pushes beyond the characteristics of postmodern fiction. In other words, it has been suggested that the novel is post-postmodern, or, as some would have it, “post-contemporary.” It is not terribly difficult to see why: it is a multiple-point-of-view and multi-genre novel comprised of a series of interlocking short stories that privileges no single perspective of one character over another, each of whom play only a distant role in the focus of most of the novel’s chapters, and jumps between various historical periods and locations. Moreover, the narrative framework spills far beyond the boundaries of the printed (or, as is the case in its e-reader versions, digital) text itself: for instance, Egan has created a soundtrack to accompany the novel which she hosts on her website; there exists a widely circulated, full-color PowerPoint presentation to mirror the one that appears in the novel; the novel itself becomes a part of its own internal framework (a narrative approach I explain in greater detail below); and, perhaps most notably for the sake of my larger argument, it represents an assemblage of data, pieces of which are situated as independent chapters, which can be assembled together by

the reader in different ways into a larger narrative structure. Theoretically, the reader could read the chapters in any order she chooses (although they have already clearly been ordered by Egan); however, as one reads, it becomes clear that the narrative structure is not predicated on chronological causality. In much the same way that digital information on the Internet blends multiple historical periods in coexisting components of the present, so too does the novel arrange the histories of each character as part of a larger present-tense assemblage.

Most of the novel's chapters can function as independent short stories, and some have been published as such: *The New Yorker* alone published three of the novel's chapters as shorts – “Found Objects,” “Ask me if I Care,” and “Safari.” And so it would appear that the novel, as a set of interlocking stories, is something like a modern-day *Winesburg, OH*. Thus, clearly, this narrative approach is not altogether new. Even the fact that the novel blends genres – one chapter appears as a newspaper article, another as a PowerPoint printout – doesn't really push us beyond Postmodern narrative structures. Using multiple genres as pastiche is certainly a defining characteristic of postmodern fiction, and the practice of linking together multiple short stories into a larger narrative predates postmodernism (by a long shot, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* arguably follows a similar narrative structure). Even so, I assert that the novel represents something that has only been fully recognizable in the Twenty-First Century: First, the novel mimics the multiple-point-of-view narrative framework facilitated by information gathering and disseminating machines like surveillance cameras and smart phones; second, to use Kate Hayles's phrase, the novel models an “infinite regress of observers” – a series of non-hierarchical, if not marginalized, perspectives – necessary for an authentic depiction of its

foci; and third, it mirrors the ways in which the contemporary, massive proliferation of information coalesces into raw material from which multiple narratives told from multiple points-of-view can be culled. As such, it represents a DataNarrative not unlike what Johnston has called “the novel of information multiplicity.”

The novel’s setting is loosely centered on the periphery of the punk rock scene in and around Los Angeles in the late 1970s and early 80s, but it jumps forward to the present day and our near future and as far back as the mid-60s. Its final two chapters flash forward into a dystopian future where corporate-driven, consumer dataveillance (or as it is most often called, “data mining”) is the rule. As it raises questions regarding the authenticity of the central characters’ subjectivities, it examines the relationship between socioeconomic status and labor, particularly in light of the relative value of artistic labor, and characteristically blends elements of high and low culture so that the difference between the two is essentially indistinguishable. Moreover, a recurring theme that runs throughout the novel is the existential, inevitable, deathward progress of all narratives. The novel’s title itself plays on the metaphor of a time as a goon that robs us all of our youth, potency, and power.

Perhaps what is slightly less common is the way that central characters so often appear in the distant periphery of each chapter’s focus. The narrator of each chapter is typically so far removed from the other characters that we only retrospectively understand their role in lives of the characters with whom we are ostensibly meant to identify. Moreover, the novel itself decentralizes the notion of central characters altogether. Where the overarching story line at one point seems to be about Bennie Salazar, it quickly shifts to his mentor Lou, and later it becomes apparent that so much of

the larger story is actually about Bennie's former assistant Sasha. Even so, the novel contains stories about Bennie's wife Stephanie; Stephanie's boss Dolly; Dolly's associate Kitty, who was once interviewed and then assaulted by Stephanie's brother Jules, a focus of another chapter; Bosco, an aging punk-rocker who plans a suicide tour and gives sole coverage rights to Jules; Sasha's best friend in college Rob; Sasha's daughter; and so on.

To best illustrate the ways in which *A Visit from the Goon Squad* exemplifies a post-contemporary narrative structure that mirrors the intermingling of narrative forms, themes, historical periods, and subjective perspectives, I feel that some small amount of summary is warranted. The novel opens a few years after Sasha has stopped working for Bennie in what appears to be modern-day New York City. It depicts the first (and only) date Sasha has with a man named Alex who has just moved to the city and who Sasha finds exceedingly boring. This story is framed by a visit to Sasha's therapist, and we learn that Sasha is a kleptomaniac. During the date, she steals a woman's wallet in the restroom and is unwittingly apprehended but not arrested. Later she steals a personal note kept in Alex's wallet. The second chapter focuses on Bennie a few years prior. In this chapter, Bennie struggles with the impotency that accompanies age and takes odd measures to regain the potency of his youth: by, for instance, putting gold flakes in his coffee and making a sexual advance on Sasha. Both of these chapters are told from an unlimited, third-person perspective.

Every chapter thereafter moves us further away from or in various social constellations around Bennie and Sasha. The third chapter moves us one step away from Bennie and several years back to the late 1970s Los Angeles punk rock scene. The chapter's narrator, a freckled young girl named Rhea who is a groupie for Bennie's punk

band, muses on her friendship with Jocelyn and their inner-circle love triangle where everyone loves someone else except that no-one loves Rhea. In this chapter, we, along with Bennie, are introduced to a wealthy music producer named Lou, who, we later learn, hires Bennie into a major L.A. record label. This is followed by a fourth chapter that centers around Lou's middle-aged excursion to South Africa where he takes his children and young girlfriend, a picture of whom appears in Rhea's narrative, suggesting it occurred nearly a decade prior to Rhea's story. Neither Bennie nor Sasha appear in Lou's safari, but we see the return of the issue of dealing with the stereotypical, aging male fear associated with declining potency, power, and machismo. The fifth chapter moves forward to depict Lou on his deathbed. It is narrated by Joceyln, the once dear friend of the aforementioned Rhea. Jocelyn and Rhea visit Lou in his home, and the time that has passed since their last visit is illustrated through Jocelyn's remembrance of squandered opportunities and of Rhea's comparative successes, even if only as a mother. Lou, in this chapter, becomes the spectre of impotency, a metaphor for the deathward spiral of all narrative arcs, especially, in the context of the novel, Bennie's.

This chapter is followed by another first-person narrative, this time narrated from the perspective of Scotty – Bennie's bandmate in youth and a former friend of Joceyln and Rhea's. Scotty visits Bennie in a Manhattan high rise at the height of Bennie's success as a record label owner and producer. This confrontation forces Scotty to recognize his own impotence, although he had convinced himself that all experience was reducible to "Xs and Os" – pure information – that one can acquire either via direct experience or indirectly through popular media like television and the internet. Thus, Scotty had assumed that the experience of potency and power was something he could

gain second-hand; however, in his confrontation with Bennie, Scotty realizes that his view – that humans are essentially “information processing machines” and that information can be gained either first-hand, through direct experience, or second-hand, by vicarious experience, such as what one might get through watching television or surfing the Internet – is problematic. We later learn that, as systems of communication and entertainment continue to converge and exponentially advance, Scotty withdraws from a life of vicarious experience, choosing instead to spend his evenings repetitiously eating the same meal (string beans), drinking the same thing (Jagermeister), and essentially doing the same thing (fishing in the early morning, ostensibly writing songs in the evening). Because of this withdrawal, Scotty later becomes a beacon of hope as a musician who has clearly been untainted by the corporate processes by which consumer taste is monitored and manufactured. Moreover, the repetitive pattern of Scotty’s life stands in stark contrast to that of an information society that operates under the notion that experience *is* attainable second-hand through communication and entertainment technologies. In other words, because Scotty ultimately rejects the notion that all experience is reducible to “X’s and O’s,” or as the zeroes and ones of which digital information is comprised, he ultimately symbolizes the inherent hope of neo-Luddism: to live free from the shackles of technological progress and retain the authenticity of direct, real-world, albeit repetitive, human experience.

Scotty tells Bennie, who has assumed that the visit was prompted by a desire to gain a recording contract, that he only wants to know Bennie’s story of “A to B” – or the story of how Bennie has gone from being a poor, untalented bass player in a largely unknown L. A. punk band to a powerful and reputable producer. This phrase has greater

significance to the novel itself. The novel is split into two parts: A and B. In this sense, the novel exemplifies another way in which media has become aware of its own mediality, that on various diegetic levels, the novel itself straddles the “inside” and “outside” of the story. The novel as a thing is a part of the novel as a narrative. Scotty’s visit marks the end of the novel’s first part, the tale of a character who shares striking resemblance to Scotty – the story of Bosco, the aging punk rocker who once fronted the The Conduits, the band who brought Bennie his success – begins part B.

In this first chapter of the novel’s second half, Bosco has recorded an album entitled *A to B*, another nod to 1) the passage of time implied by Scotty’s original statement; 2) the separation of time both within and outside of the novel’s narrative structure; and 3) the structure of the novel itself. Although we learn much about Bosco in this chapter – that, for instance, he wants one last stab at fame in attempt to “flame out” on stage by returning as a grossly overweight, haggard, washed-up fifty-something wannabe rocker – the story focuses on Bennie’s wife Stephanie. The couple has moved to an affluent, conservative neighborhood whose social circle finds its hub at a posh country club. Their move into this area, along with their accompanying country club membership, symbolizes Bennie’s rise to affluence at the height of his potency. Stephanie, accompanied by her ex-con brother Jules, visits Bosco to discuss promotion of *A to B*, and Bosco gives sole rights to record the process of his ultimate decline and demise to Jules. In this chapter, Bosco calls time a “goon,” a phrase after which the novel is titled, and he declares that he will embark on a suicide tour, effectively draining death itself of its potency.

Chapter Eight returns to the metaphor of time as the proverbial power-sapping goon. This chapter focuses on Dolly, who was once known as La Doll while leading the promotions firm where Bennie's wife Stephanie worked. Dolly's own power was lost at a promotional event wherein a poorly planned, large, ambient art installation made out of a dangerous concoction of oil, water, and intense (and subsequently hot) light melted and collapsed, injuring several high profile guests. In this chapter, Dolly has been hired as a political promoter to revamp the image of a highly controversial South American general. Her final stunt is to pair the General with the washed-up Hollywood actress Kitty Jackson who was once known for being exceedingly polite and benign, but who, after being attacked by Stephanie's brother Jules, has become acerbic and publicly opinionated. Upon meeting the General, Kitty makes several deliberately offensive political remarks, including an accusation regarding genocide, and things initially go horribly until Kitty is, presumably by the General, given back her life as a high-profile actress. This chapter is followed by a news article written by Jules while in prison awaiting charges resulting from his earlier attack on Kitty. From it, we are meant to understand that Kitty ultimately internalizes Jules' own harsh perspective on reality.

Chapter Ten returns us to Sasha in the form of an unusual, present tense, second-person account from her close, college friend Rob. It is the early 1990s. Mainstream culture is abuzz with the change in the White House: Clinton has recently been sworn in as president. We learn that Sasha is a freshman at NYU: a student in her early twenties, having spent time overseas – first in Japan, then Hong Kong, and finally Italy – under shady and dubious circumstances. It is in this chapter that Sasha meets Bennie at a Conduits show. She returns to Bennie's apartment for an after party, and it is presumably

there that she first agrees to work as Bennie's assistant. Rob, who clearly projects his desire for Sasha onto her boyfriend Drew, reveals to Drew that Sasha had once been a prostitute and thief. Rob follows Drew, who seeks to escape from both Rob and the information Rob has provided, into the Hudson River and drowns. From here, the narrative moves back a few years and centers on Sasha's uncle who has traveled to Naples to search for Sasha at her parents' behest. We see, in greater detail, the version of Sasha that Rob describes to Drew. Here, again, the multiple perspective approach of this novel illustrates a relatively recent, but pervasive, cultural trend towards representing the truth of a lived reality through an intricately interconnected series of perspectives. Theoretically, the more perspectives there are, the fewer the blind spots.

The novel's penultimate chapter moves forward to a dystopian near-future: May 14 and 15 of 202_. The chapter takes the form of a PowerPoint printout that Sasha's daughter Ally creates in lieu of maintaining a personal journal.^v In it, Ally reveals that Sasha had once lost contact with Drew, but that they were reunited via Facebook, shortly after which they married. Drew has become a successful medical doctor, a career path he chose the day Rob drowned. We also learn that, in addition to having a daughter, Sasha also has a son who appears to be autistic. They live in what once was a golf course that has since become a desert. Global warming has destroyed much of the earth's fertile soil, and drastic measures have been taken to preserve the earth's remaining natural habitats. It is in this chapter that the novel's own structure is allegorically represented by one of Sasha's hobbies: assembling collages of disparate and relatively insignificant bits of information – from grocery receipts to notes about meetings to newspaper clippings and so on – so that the loosely assembled information aesthetically represents a larger story

that revolves around the nuances and banality of her life as a mother and wife. In so many ways, this narrative approach of assembling together bits of information that lack strong, clear ties to each other is strikingly similar to the novel's own narrative structure.

The concluding chapter returns us to NYC where Bennie, having been fired from the record label he founded, works as an underground and largely unknown record producer. We learn that he was fired for serving cow feces at a CEO dinner in order to make a point about the ill effects that marketing music to young children – a hitherto largely “untapped” market in the music industry – has had on the quality of popular music. In this chapter, he has reunited with his childhood bandmate Scotty, who has managed to evade having any web presence as well as having managed to remain free from the massive interconnectedness and conflation of various forms of media. Most communication, consumption, and entertainment is facilitated by “handsets,” which have clearly evolved from the modern-day smart phone, that function as communication devices, multimedia centers, cameras, GPS locators, and so on. This future depicts NYC, and the world at large, as having fully evolved into a complete surveillance state; however, most of the surveillance is conducted by marketing firms seeking to track and regulate consumers buying habits. As a result, consumers have become desensitized to marketing via communication technology, and so word-of-mouth endorsement has become the most valuable and highly coveted method of advertising. Consequently, legitimacy and authenticity have become high character traits: the instant that one is suspected of being paid to endorse a product or event – such people are called “parrots” – their credibility completely and permanently crumbles.

Each chapter of the novel legitimizes a singular perspective and focuses on a different character or set of characters. This narrative approach ultimately has the larger effect of destabilizing the traditional approach of privileging a protagonist and a singular perspective in a larger narrative arc. *A Visit from the Goon Squad* takes an approach that, while illustrating the interconnectedness of its characters, does so more to illustrate that a network of perspectives feels more intuitive in the contemporary cultural milieu than narratives told from a singular perspective. Arguably, it is the novel's approach to blending multiple perspectives across time that, beyond illustrating fundamental similarities between characters, illustrates something that has only been fully realizable in the Twenty-First Century: a narrative structure that, in so many ways, mimetically reproduces the narrative structure inherent in the dissemination of information in social media. It is only in that such a narrative approach approximates the aforementioned process of retroactively assembling information into a larger narrative structure (similar to the aforementioned narrative structure of conspiracy theories) that this approach harkens back to a time before virtual, social media existed. However, as I've already suggested, this approach also represents a clear break from the conspiracy theory narrative framework. It instead mimetically represents the way in which a proliferation of information can be assembled together, largely arbitrarily, in an overarching narrative framework. Moreover, it also points towards the ultimate destabilization of an authoritative narrative perspective that plays some larger role in the story's significance. The larger story is significant only insofar that it has been assembled as such.

Again, no perspective has any privilege over any other: it is only through multiple perspectives, across time and space, that the narrative takes shape. And no

singular narrative perspective represents an authoritative perspective. Instead, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* represents the types of narrative we can cull from various investigatory methods inherent in collecting data. That there is so much information from which one can draw, the significance of any single bit of data is no greater than any other bit. In short, the novel illustrates the massive interconnectedness of multiple perspectives facilitated by the Information Age, wherein information flourishes at the expense of the cohesiveness of information, so that information itself ostensibly has the ability to alter information. Moreover, this massive interconnectedness of multiple perspectives brings the reader back to her awareness of a position she must ignore in order to fully immerse herself in the story: the reader, too, is an observer. This novel, then, illustrates an internal, and closed, system represented by a series of observers that ultimately closes in on itself, effectively creating an internal feedback loop. The reader occupies a position outside of this system and thus mimetically performs a function analogous to that of the novel's characters. She also carries the narrative burden of secondary perspective.

In her aforementioned essay, "Making the Cut: The Interplay of Narrative and System, or What Systems Theory Can't See," Kate Hayles observes that "[t]o be effective, narrative requires a sense of how the present relates to past and future and of at least potentially causal relations between events" (79) and that narrative "characteristically reinscribes historical contingency, relating events that might have happened other than they did" (81). And this certainly rings true for *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. While the historical period of each chapter shifts back and forth between the future and past of the novel's present, it does give a vague sense of the historical

contingency between the novel's events, particularly of how Bennie's and Sasha's lives unfold between their rebellious youths and comparatively tame late adulthoods. But creating this contingency is entirely up to the reader. In this way, the reader is put into a position to perform an interpretive act of dataveillance or data-mining of her own. In other words, the reader is presented with a proliferation of information about several characters' lives. From this collection of what is essentially data, the reader may construct a larger story of historical contingency about any character she chooses.

As for Egan's intentions in structuring the novel, she has noted that she asked herself, "Who is the person you've glimpsed from the corner of your eye in this chapter, and would be surprised and interested to find is the *subject* of the next chapter? That's how [the novel is] organized" (Ciabattari). Here, again, we find that each chapter centers on a character at the periphery of the previous chapter. This structure mirrors the "infinite regress of observers" that Hayles suggests is necessary to fill in on the multiple blind spots generated by communicative systems.

Maturana and Varela, in *Tree of Knowledge*, discuss the significance of the autopoietic process of generating explanations of what we see and the related significance of the blind spots we generate in doing so:

All we can do is generate explanations, through language, that reveal the mechanism of bringing forth a world. By existing, we generate cognitive "blind spots" that can be cleared only through generating new blind spots in another domain. We do not see what we do not see, and what we do not see does not exist. (242)

Hayle's argues that "[o]ne of these cognitive blind spots is narrative. And one of the windows that opens onto it," she suggests, "is the construction of the observer in systems theory" (94). In other words, we might see a narrative structure as a blind spot generated by human social systems, particularly those communicative systems involved in the generation of explanations of the world around us, a distinctly linguistic process that, as Maturana and Varela note "reveal[s] mechanism of bringing forth a world." In other words, as we explain the world, we bring it forth. In so doing, narratives are generated as by-products of translating the natural world into verbal description.

Each narrative we generate through the process of piecing together the bits of information at our disposal contains blind spots: spaces that we not only fail to see, but that which we cannot see simply by virtue of being at the center of the explanation-making process.^{vi} It is through multiple perspectives, or via an "an infinite regress of observers," that we fill in each other's blind spots. This is a narrative process in which both the reader of *A Visit from the Goon Squad* and the various characters therein engage. In much the same way that the singular perspective represented in each of the novel's chapters creates both another observer of other observers' blind spots while generating blind spots of her own, the novel also provides a series of observations for the reader to similarly piece together. We, the readers, can see what the characters do not, and we can see that for those characters what goes unseen does not exist.

This process returns us to the primacy of vision. Even as we examine the linguistic processes of explaining our sensory experiences and of narrating the world around us, we once again experience the fact that so much of the process of harvesting information from its various sources is often understood and explained as a way of

seeing. Perhaps, too, then, the process of dataveillance is another way of “seeing,” of harvesting information to assemble together in an explanatory, narrative structure. If this is the case, then we might view dataveillance as being simultaneously a method of generating explanatory narratives that contain their own blind spots and of revealing the blind spots of other observing systems. Such is the case, for instance, for whistle-blowing news sources, like Wikileaks, that use subversive countermeasures that, in many ways, mirror the practices of the hierarchical structures they seek to subvert.

State Surveillance vs. Wikileaks

Covert, data-gathering surveillance programs have been a longstanding tradition in government-operated investigations for quite some time. From the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, COINTELPRO (the Counter Intelligence Program) involved a series of FBI initiatives that aimed to infiltrate, surveil, discredit, and disrupt organizations that the government deemed subversive: various civil liberties groups and women’s rights groups as well as the Ku Klux Klan, Martin Luther King, Jr and his associates, the NAACP, and Vietnam War protest groups, and so on. Unsurprisingly, such investigative measures both manifested from and perpetuated the deep, cultural undercurrent of paranoia that characterized that historical time period. Also unsurprising is that government counter intelligence programs ideologically lodged themselves firmly into the American social conscience so that they have repeatedly manifested in various forms: Most notoriously, COINTELPRO was allegedly ended in 1971 when it was exposed to the public; however, there has been evidence that suggest that its work continued far beyond 1971. For instance, most recently, it is abundantly clear that government-sanctioned and supported surveillance initiatives proliferate, particularly since September 11, 2011.

Since 9/11, the passage of the Patriot Act along with the subsequent sanctioning of warrantless wiretaps has ushered in a new era of state surveillance. The technology that has developed alongside the rise of state surveillance suggests that a massive amount of wiretapping occurs fairly regularly: hardware technologies and software programs capable of detecting targeted phrases and words – both spoken and written – have repeatedly appeared in news headlines, as have the names of major corporations like AT&T and Google who’ve worked with the NSA for these purposes. Such revelations have become fairly, albeit disturbingly, commonplace.

Also becoming increasingly common are reports of FBI “informants” who are hired to bait individuals who might be deemed as a security risk into taking part in highly orchestrated (and well-funded) terrorists plots. The arrests of these baited individuals are often depicted as preventative measures in the war on terror. As Trevor Aaronson and others have reported, such procedures arguably create the terrorist before arresting him as such, effectively creating the illusion that such FBI initiatives are necessary. Aaronson explains it as follows:

Here’s how it works: Informants report to their handlers on people who have, say, made statements sympathizing with terrorists. Those names are then cross-referenced with existing intelligence data, such as immigration and criminal records. FBI agents may then assign an undercover operative to approach the target by posing as a radical. Sometimes the operative will propose a plot, provide explosives, even lead the target in a fake oath to Al Qaeda.

Take, for instance, James Cromite, a psychologically unstable former Wal-Mart employee who met an FBI informant and operative, Shahed Hussain, at a Newburgh

mosque in 2008. Over the course of ten months, during which Hussain paid Cromite's rent and promised to buy him a barbershop, Cromite – a notorious anti-Semite – was coerced into taking part in a bomb plot. At Hussain's behest, upon planting fake car bombs near a synagogue in the Bronx, Cromite was apprehended by a SWAT team and arrested (Aaronson).

I would be remiss to ignore that the above narrative does much of what I have been describing all along: it assembles together bits of information into a larger explanatory structure. But there is a poignant moral to the story that must not get lost: such schemes essentially serve to create the terrorist plot that is subsequently thwarted. It is an undeniable ill effect of a malicious form of state surveillance. For instance, were Cromite's anti-Semitic and racist remarks not so forthright, and were he not so clearly susceptible to suggestion – conditions that were certainly clear to the FBI – he would not likely have been targeted for such intense measures. All reported examinations of Cromite suggest that he would have continued to be an ineffectual, albeit annoying, loudmouth had the FBI not coerced him into a phony terrorist plot.

And then there are those who are charged for being part of a terrorist plot without overtly knowing that they were taking part in one. In August 2011, Petra Bartosiewicz reported in *Harper's* magazine on the case of Yassin Aref and Mohammed Hossain, two leaders in a New York mosque who were sentenced to fifteen years in federal prison because of their involvement in an FBI-constructed terrorist plot that the press later called the Albany "missile plot." Regarding this particular plot, the FBI later admitted that the public had never been in jeopardy and that Aref and Hossain posed no real, credible threat. Subsequently, the Muslim population of New York was justifiably outraged.

During the course of a sting operation that lasted roughly eight months in 2003, the FBI's informant befriended Hossain, the owner of a restaurant whose livelihood was in jeopardy, and promised to loan him \$50,000 to support his business. Surveillance video that has been used in the testimony against Hossain and Aref shows that the FBI's informant once showed Hossain a rocket launcher that he claimed could be used to attack an airplane. Hossain responds by saying, "Holy is Allah." Four months later, Hossain brings Aref, a local imam, to a meeting with the informant where the informant has agreed to provide \$5,000 of the promised \$50,000 loan. Aref's presence as a credible third party is part of Muslim custom in such dealings. The FBI parlayed this transaction into a so-called "missile plot" and arrested both Hossain and Aref, the latter of whom never knew that a missile had been shown to the former (Bartosiewicz, Aaronson).

It becomes clear very quickly that an ideological narrative structure can be constructed prior to generating the data that retroactively justifies the "story." In other words, there is clearly a pervasive government narrative that, a decade after 9/11, continues to typecast Muslims as terrorists. Furthermore, the U. S. government continues to bolster and circulate this narrative. The result is that a hauntingly large number of Muslim Americans are targeted for surveillance, and far too often, the result is that targeted Muslims are either "flipped" into becoming FBI informants or are coerced into a phony plot simply so the FBI can create the illusion that the so-called war on terror continues to be successful.

In his essay, "Visible Secrets: Ethics in a World Without Secrets," Peter Singer wonders if the proliferation of various forms of surveillance mirrors a cultural trend towards the decline of the ways in which Western culture has historically valued privacy.

As he points out, most social networking websites encourage people to volunteer various personal bits of data about themselves that could ostensibly be used in many of the same ways of constructing narratives that I've been describing. Along these lines, social media also represents an autobiographical, DataNarrative framework wherein the user creates an autobiographical story about herself as she selectively chooses and publicizes personal information.^{vii} Singer notes that the advantages that come along with social spaces like Facebook – for instance, “the benefits of connecting with others, sharing information, networking, self-promoting, flirting, and bragging” – paired with the fact that personal information is shared voluntarily “outweigh breaches of privacy that accompany such behavior” (33). But Singer's justifiably greater concern is with instances wherein the distribution of personal information is involuntary and unannounced. For instance, Singer reports that “Verizon alone receives 90,000 demands for information from law-enforcement agencies annually,” typically without the consent of the Verizon subscriber (33). Arguably, one of Facebook's more insidious effects is thus to naturalize the erosion of privacy so that intrusions such as those facilitated by Verizon feel less invasive, even in the imaginably rare event wherein such intrusions are noticed.

But social media, and the associated erosion of the value of privacy, may also force a hitherto unrealized openness amongst government and corporate organizations. Historically, whistle-blowing and investigative journalism actions have repeatedly pulled back the proverbial veil covering government secrets. Furthermore, contemporary, whistle-blowing organizations such as *Wikileaks* arguably push beyond traditional methods of conducting investigative journalism and reporting its results.^{viii} By creating a virtual venue for “crowd-sourcing” information and by facilitating the dissemination of

what would have otherwise been classified information, *Wikileaks* exemplifies the ways in which the digital sphere – the networked fourth estate – has profoundly affected the means by which information is legitimized, circulated, and consumed. No longer is it the responsibility of a single investigator or a single news source to get the scoop: instead, it becomes the responsibility of those with access to information to make it free and available to all those who wish to both disseminate and consume information. Moreover, by providing the virtual space for this phenomenon, *Wikileaks* has fundamentally altered a larger ideological structure.

In a conversation between Slavoj Žižek and *Wikileaks*'s Julian Assange, a conversation sponsored by *Democracy Now* and funded by the organization *Frontline*, Žižek reminds us that hierarchical, ideological structures contain both their own internal, governing laws and principles as well as the methods by which those laws may be broken and principles violated. From the perspective of a subject within an ideological structure, one's options for subversion are relatively few, largely because for subversion to be subversion it must be recognized by the ideological structure as such. Behavior that falls outside of the scope of an ideological structure's internal logic and outside such a structure's internal, proverbial field of vision typically fails to be recognized, and so the aims of subversion are thwarted simply by the fact that they are not recognized by the system at which they are aimed. In other words, an ideological system essentially prescribes all possible actions that can be recognized by the system. *Wikileaks* has proven impossible for the larger ideological system to ignore. Žižek thus describes *Wikileaks* as a heartening example of an extraordinarily significant way in which an

ideological system's subjects can fundamentally alter methods and practices of subversion within a particular system.

Thus, what Žižek points out is that the greatest contribution that Assange has made to the information world is that the methods by which the rules of a predominant ideological system can be broken have been fundamentally, and arguably permanently, altered. By leaking classified government information, *Wikileaks* changes the rules within an ideological structure because the ideological structure is simply incapable of ignoring it, in part because several, major world news outlets have, whether they intended to or not, legitimized it. Therefore, *Wikileaks* represents another way in which the erosion of privacy has become a culturally pervasive force; however, it also turns a proverbial table. It pulls back the proverbial veil on government actions to facilitate greater transparency. Unsurprisingly, on several occasions, Assange has asserted that in order for a democracy to function the way it was intended to, the public must be well informed, and he makes it clear that the central aim of *Wikileaks* is to promote the same kind of transparency amongst government organizations that the government expects of its citizens. Moreover, *Wikileaks* exemplifies a method of subversion – one that has already had dramatic real-world impacts – that was once only previously attainable when a government insider or spy leaked information to the mass media. *Wikileaks* draws from a method of “crowd-sourcing” information inherent to the internet and best facilitated by social media in order to fully realize a method of information gathering and dissemination that has hitherto not been fully realized.

But Assange doesn't operate entirely outside of the usual channels of information dissemination. In fact, he has brilliantly used reputable news organizations to circulate

and validate the information that *Wikileaks* makes available. Most notably, in what has since been dubbed “Cablegate,” Assange made nearly 250,000 cables available to three major news sources: *New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *Der Spiegel*.^{ix} As it turns out, this was also a brilliant way to ensure that the cables were released to the public.

Because each news source is invested in getting the scoop on the others, the probability of the cables’ publication greatly increased. Moreover, that all three published some of the cables further increased *Wikileaks*’ credibility as a news source in its own right. This not only increased *Wikileaks* credibility as a whistle-blowing news organization, but it also demonstrated another way in which multiple perspectives can be used to bolster the credibility of objective information.

Unsurprisingly, there has been an enormous backlash. Several high-profile American politicians have declared Assange a terrorist (or, as is more often the case, a “cyber-terrorist”), and he rightfully fears extradition to the United States to be tried as such. Most notable amongst such threats has been Senator Dianne Feinstein’s call to prosecute Assange under the Espionage Act of 1917.^x Furthermore, Assange has been repeatedly accused of “having blood on his hands,” and it has been suggested that people may have been and might be killed as a direct result of the information *Wikileaks* has made available to the world. Assange’s response is that the information that *Wikileaks* publicizes may very well do more to save lives than to end them. Moreover, the same news organizations that have so often vilified Assange and *Wikileaks* have also served to bolster both Assange’s and *Wikileaks*’ credibility. Several mainstream media outlets have published several disparaging assessments of Assange’s character, ranging from *ad hominem* attacks (by, for instance, depicting Assange as a rapist per the as-of-yet

unsubstantiated allegations of two Swiss women) to oddly superficial reproaches (the *New York Times* has most notoriously characterized Assange as a beggar – one who uses his friends’ credit cards to pay for his expenses and whose unsavory hygiene manifests even in the ways he wears his socks).^{xi}

Arguably, people fear Assange not so much because he leaks information, but because he erodes our ability to ignore it. As Žižek notes, we all essentially know that, during wartime, the military branches of national governments sometimes do terrible things. In essence, we all, on some level, know that “collateral damage” sometimes means that innocent civilians are killed. The reason Assange is so feared is that he symbolizes the fact that *Wikileaks* forces information and images of governmental misdeeds into the public conscience. In other words, Assange forces us to come face-to-face with what we already know, and this may be far more shocking, if not more frightening, for far more people. Žižek analogizes this beautifully by noting that it is one thing for a husband to know his wife is sleeping with other men: this knowledge itself may afford the husband the opportunity to think of himself as an open-minded, liberal, modern man. But, as Žižek explains, it is another thing altogether for the man to see photographs of his wife’s infidelities. It is the latter – the objective information that makes it impossible to ignore what one already knows – that typically evokes the stronger reaction.

Since Assange forces us to face what we essentially already know – since he makes this knowledge tangible and thus harder to ignore by providing the hard evidence, images, and objective information – he thus also makes it more difficult for mainstream media to successfully distract us from this knowledge. In this way, *Wikileaks* is a part of

a long-standing tradition of whistle-blowers like George Holiday (who filmed the beating of Rodney King) and investigative journalists. By providing the hard and largely undeniable evidence that, for instance, the U. S. military sometimes deliberately kills unarmed civilians, *Wikileaks* exposes some of the horrors of warfare, if not the aforementioned, deeply-embedded, institutionalized racism that has targeted so many Muslims since 9/11.

Take the famous case of the *Reuters* journalists who were killed by gunfire from an American Apache attack helicopter on July 12, 2007. *Reuters* sought, under the *Freedom of Information Act*, and were refused the video footage of the event before *Wikileaks* leaked it on April 5, 2010. *Wikileaks* released two versions of the footage, both of which have been titled *Collateral Murder*, and both of which have been made available on several online video channels, blogs, and websites: a full 40 minute, uncut version and a shorter, edited version in which several minutes of extraneous and insignificant material was removed.^{xii} Both versions depict a view similar to what the helicopter pilots would have seen: taken from the moveable gun camera, itself designed to assist in targeting and firing the Apache's weapons, we see the gun's-eye view a group of men on a corner in Baghdad, two of whom were *Reuters* employees, Namir Noor-Eldeen, age 22, and driver Saeed Chmagh, age 40. A couple of the men appear to be carrying weapons – a not entirely uncommon phenomenon in Baghdad – and one of Noor-Eldeen's camera's is mistaken for a rocket-propelled grenade launcher. The Apache helicopter fires on the men, killing all but Chmagh, who is severely wounded. When a van carrying two men and two children stops to collect the wounded, the soldiers in the helicopter request and are eventually granted permission to open fire, and Chmagh

and the two good Samaritans are killed. Both children are severely wounded.

Perhaps what is most troubling about the video is its audio accompaniment (which is also subtitled in the publicly available versions). In it, we hear young, trigger-happy soldiers talking as they might while playing a first-person-shooter video game. Of one wounded, unarmed civilian, a soldier is heard saying “Come on, buddy, all you gotta do is pick up a weapon.” This civilian – Chmagh – is killed when a van of a nearby resident pulls up and the driver and a passenger get out to provide assistance. As the helicopter fires upon and kills these two men, we can hear the soldiers congratulating each other on their aim and celebrating the firing of a missile through the front window of the van, in which, as the video clearly makes visible, children sit in the front seat.

<p>Picking up the wounded?</p>	<p>Oh yeah, look at that. Right through the windshield!</p>
<p>Still shots from the <i>Collateral Murder</i> video. The subtitle reads “Picking up the wounded?”</p>	<p>“Oh, yeah, look at that. Right through the windshield!”</p>

But this audio accompaniment provides more than just insight into the troubling perspective of young American soldiers. We hear the series of communications between the pilots and the chain of command wherein the pilots note that a van has come to collect the wounded. Upon noting this, the pilot asks for permission to engage. We hear a series of messages relayed further up the proverbial chain of command. It is when permission to engage is granted that helicopter fires on all of the individuals, including the aforementioned journalists as well as the van containing children. It is this portion of

the audio accompaniment that ultimately provides the most damning evidence of the atrocities of war: that it wasn't just a bunch of trigger-happy young men whose perspectives may have arguably been influenced by playing violent video games, but that the request for permission to fire upon unarmed men who had clearly stopped to collect the wounded passed through a chain of command that ultimately granted the permission to engage.

A 22-year-old, Army intelligence analyst named Bradley Manning allegedly provided this video footage, along with the 250,000 aforementioned cables, to *Wikileaks*. In May 2010, Manning was arrested and jailed, and, as of this writing in late 2011, he has not yet received a hearing after well over a year of imprisonment under reportedly harsh circumstances, including nine months in maximum security and solitary confinement.^{xiii} Manning was first exposed as the source of this leak to *Wired Magazine* by the hacker Adrian Lamo, a hacker convicted of a hacking-related felony in 2004, when Lamo released a series of instant messaging chats he had with Manning (Greenwald). Beyond breaking the news of Manning's involvement and arrest, *Wired* has since made these materials available online (Hansen).

On May 21, 2010, Manning initiated these chats with Lamo as follows:

(1:41:12 PM) bradass87: hi

(1:44:04 PM) bradass87: how are you?

(1:47:01 PM) bradass87: im an army intelligence analyst, deployed to eastern baghdad, pending discharge for "adjustment disorder" in lieu of "gender identity disorder" (Hansen, bold and underscore appear in the original)

While I don't want to make too much of Manning's "gender identity disorder," I believe it is significant enough to note that Manning sought out Lamo upon learning that Lamo identified as bisexual whose former lover, also involved in the military, is a MTF

transsexual individual. After Manning writes that he “questioned [his] gender for several years... sexual orientation was easy to figure out... but [he] started to come to terms with it during the first few months of [his] deployment,” Lamo responds that he is “a journalist and a minister” and that Manning could “pick either, and treat this as a confession or an interview (never to be published) & enjoy a modicum of legal protection” (Hansen). In other words, Lamo cultivated an air of hierarchical benevolence to which he added his pre-established credibility as both a hacker and as someone whose sexual orientation put him in a marginalized identity category along with Manning. Furthermore, the publication of this information has arguably added to the narrative that would describe Manning as a subversive figure: his political deviance has been made to mirror what has been treated as a sexual deviance. While it is tempting to think that the military may very well have inadvertently pushed Manning to think of himself in these terms and thus provided the impetus for the leak of classified information in the first place, I want to suggest that there’s something deeply touching, humane, and extraordinarily significant about a soldier’s willingness to follow his conscience over his orders. It would not be unreasonable to imagine that Manning’s gender identification and sexual orientation would be used to undermine his credibility; however, these identity markers only further stress the power that a marginalized subject has when in possession of objective information that can be used to incriminate and destabilize a hierarchical, ideological system.

Moreover, the footage that Manning shared with Assange not only provides objective information for the investigation of the so-called “collateral murder,” but it also forces the issue into the public eye in such a way that could potentially prohibit future

uses of such excessive force. Ideally, an investigation into such uses of extensive force could keep the military's excessive use of force in the public conscience. In other words, this footage forces us to face some harsh realities of war in ways that could have some significant real-world effects. *Wikileaks* thus arguably provides information to construct narratives that counter many popular ideologically informed narratives regarding the role of government, the role of the military, and so on. As such, it is also a paradigmatic example of Diva Citizenship.

Conclusions

As of this writing, civil and political unrest in parts of Northern Africa and in the Middle East have resulted in some extraordinary political changes. While these areas have had a long history of civil unrest, the recent "Arab Spring" arguably began in December 2010 in Tunisia when Mohamed Bouazizi set fire to himself in protest to the police seizure of his vegetable cart, a means to which the unemployed college graduate had to resort after failing to find gainful employment. After ten subsequent days of protest, the Tunisian president Zine el Abidine Ben Ali promised to both arrest protestors and to pass a job creation bill. Upon failing to improve the lives of the Tunisian people, and after continued protest, Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia on January 14, 2011, and control of the government was ultimately overturned.

Concurrently, protests erupted in Egypt, where the use of social media was instrumental in organizing protests and other action as well as in raising international awareness and interest in the movement. Despite the government's attempts to suspend internet access, and thus quiet the lines of communication amongst protestors,^{xiv} the Egyptian people were ultimately successful in forcing long-time president Mubarak out

of his seat. A civilian was later appointed as prime minister, and the promise of free and open elections for a new president now lingers. Similarly, in Libya, the long-time, tyrannical leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi was first overthrown by the newly formed National Transitional Council (NTC) and then killed in his hometown Sirte on October 20, 2011 by NTC forces. In so doing, Libya effectively ended over 40 years of autocratic rule.

Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya are not the only countries in which the Arab Spring movement has brought about protest and change. Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen, and Western Sahara have all had some degree of civil unrest, protest, and political upheaval. And all have taken cues from the earliest movements in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. And this is significant for many reasons: Most notable is that the networked fourth estate – in other words, the web’s role in the circulation of information (or news) – has played a key role in the organization and perpetuation of these movements. In fact, Amnesty International has famously cited Wikileaks’ aforementioned release of the U. S. diplomatic cables as a major catalyst for the protests, uprisings, and revolts, which further illustrates the ways in which crowd-sourcing and social media have conflated in the Information Age to provide a method of information collection and dissemination in ways that fundamentally alter pre-existing ideological frameworks.

And the political unrest in parts of Europe and the Middle East have been recently mirrored in the United States and elsewhere, particularly in the growing Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement that, in its earliest incarnations, took as a slogan the phrase “Are you ready for a Tahrir moment?” – a direct reference to the Egyptian uprisings that were

organized via Facebook. The movement got off to a comparably small start on September 17, 2011 when a couple hundred people heeded the call of the Canadian, anti-corporation magazine *Adbusters* to protest corporate greed and excess. The Wall Street Occupiers have since established an encampment at Zucotti Park, a privately owned park near Wall Street, as a home base and have conducted their operations largely from there. This movement, much like the Arab Spring, has repeatedly illustrated the fundamental ways in which information dissemination have been fundamentally changed by social media.

Even as I write this, OWS, along with several other Occupy Movements across the United States and elsewhere, protesters continue to use Facebook to publicize rallies, marches, and events; they continue to use Twitter as a fast way to disseminate information; and they continue to post videos to YouTube to further engender support and to continue to document the development of the Occupation from the perspectives of subjects who would otherwise be marginalize by the hierarchical corporate and government regimes they are rallying against. Clearly, although the impetus for the OWS movement originated in a traditional print publication, a great deal of its organization has been conducted via social media. Together, this triangulated social system of information dissemination (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) has been a powerful force: for instance, since its earliest days, videos of police abusing their power by attacking, often violently, OWS protesters have been galvanized and inflamed the movements sympathizers. Such videos have inarguably caused the number of sympathizers and protesters to increase.

In the scope of what I've argued in this dissertation, the Occupy Wall Street movement illustrates the ways in which marginalized perspectives may borrow the ostensibly objective authority of the camera and other such information-collecting technologies to legitimize a counter-perspective that can fundamentally destabilize prevailing hierarchical, ideological structures (a practice that, as I've reported elsewhere, Steve Mann has called *sousveillance*). Moreover, it illustrates the ways in which the Information Age has both added to and altered predominate methods of information circulation. Taken together, the practice of *sousveillance* and the method of using social media to circulate information – be it in the form of privately captured videos, leaked government information, or other information acquired via practices not unlike dataveillance or datamining – this phenomenon has had some striking manifestations and impacts on culture and politics and, subsequently, prevailing narratives, media, and narrative forms.

Throughout the course of this dissertation, I've examined several instances wherein the conjoined technological twins of information capture and digital methods of information dissemination manifest in culture and its products. In Chapter Two, I draw from Hasan Elahi's ongoing *Tracking Transience* project to examine ways in which the modern smart phone's capabilities of capturing photos and videos as well as its perpetual connection to the web can be used to create a virtual hall of mirrors through which the bodily referent of postmodern subjectivity can vanish, and I locate a literary example of this disappearance in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*. I push my examination of smart phone *sousveillance* practices forward by examining the case of the killing of Oscar Grant III at the hands of an Oakland police officer and the subsequent circulation of videos of the

event on YouTube, and I locate other instances of the type of multiple point-of-view structure that this phenomenon engenders by tracing ways in which it has been replicated in narrative and cinematic form in, for example, Anna Deavere-Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1991* and the HBO crime-drama *The Wire*. And in Chapter Four, I examine the ways in which sexuality, particularly gender, is both ideologically and technologically surveilled – as exemplified in Jeffrey Eugenede's *Middlesex* and in the more pervasive cultural phenomenon of subjecting transgender individuals to increased targeted surveillance in airports. Also in Chapter Four, I draw from Lauren Berlant to imagine a beacon of hope for marginalized figures who are so often subjected to greater surveillance: The Diva Citizen.

It has been my intention to exemplify ways in which panoptic practices, or heirarchical surveillance, can be subverted by technologies that put the authority of the camera in the hands of marginalize subjects. I've sought to illustrate that modern communication technologies allow us to triangulate multiple perspectives on relatively singular events. I argue that the effect is threefold: First, this triangulation illustrates that such technology can effectively be used to flood the hyperbolic panoptic eye with visual information so that the postmodern subject can ostensibly disappear in the hierarchical system's blind spots. This, for instance, is the case for Hassan Elahi. Second, and concurrently, the postmodern subject is equipped to bolster the authenticity of marginalized perspective by drawing together many such perspectives. Such was the case in the killing of Oscar Grant III, and such was exemplified in the narrative structure and content of *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1991*. And, finally, I've sought to examine this as a recent narrative practice wherein multiple perspectives are necessary for depicting the

truth of a lived reality. Such is most recently exemplified by *A Visit from the Goon Squad*.

That these practices have become central to socio-political movements like the Arab Spring and the Occupation of Wall Street suggests to me that these practices will continue to proliferate. I predict that they will not only become increasingly commonplace, but that they will continue to steer emerging narratives in both form and content. Multiple point-of-view narratives, for instance, that address communication technology's ongoing impact on our lives will also become increasingly commonplace. While I've rather inadequately attempted to dub such narrative structures *DataNarratives*, largely because they mirror the approach of mining data to create a narrative assemblage, I would hope that future scholars will be equipped to more adequately describe and name this emerging phenomenon. Moreover, it will soon become important to document the history of the use of social media in political uprisings. The combination of private photo and video technologies paired with the established trend of circulating privately capture materials has inarguably changed the face of information dissemination. My assumption is that it will also play an increasingly important role in the development of emerging narrative forms.

ⁱ Much of what I have learned about the eye has come from John W. Gamel's essay "The Elegant Eye," which was originally published in *The Alaska Quarterly* in 2010.

ⁱⁱ Googling the relatively simple code "inurl:/view.shtml" enables hackers to view live feeds from Axis 2100 surveillance cameras that have not updated their security software. Unsurprisingly, many Axis 2100 users have, years after this vulnerability was exposed, still not closed this proverbial back door. As of September 12, 2011, such a search yields nearly 239,000 results.

ⁱⁱⁱ The code that allowed me to hack these surveillance cameras was obtained by a subversive form of dataveillance, further illustrating the ways in which visual surveillance and digital data are becoming increasingly conflated.

^{iv} The phrase "dataveillance" does not adequately describe the practice it represents. Etymologically speaking, since "surveillance" literally translates as "watching from above" (wherein "above" can refer both

to physical location and an ideologically hierarchical position),” dataveillance would translate as “watching data.” Since dataveillance is typically performed within a hierarchical structure, the loss of the surfix that suggests as much also loses the significance of mining data for ideological purposes. As I’ll explain later, dataveillance can be performed both as surveillance – as is the case when the government uses questionable policies, like those famously put forth in the Patriot Act, to secretly harvest information without warrants – and as sousveillance, as is the case for Wikileaks, which mines data from the government.

^v A full-color version of this chapter, with accompanying audio, is viewable at <http://www.slideshare.net/JenniferEgan/rockandroll97-2004cppt>

^{vi} The metaphor of the observer’s blind spots mirrors a suitably symmetrical fact about the eye: our eyes have their own literal blind spots that are created in the small space where the back of the eyeball connects to occipital nerves. It is one of our brain’s more amazing trick’s that it “fills in” these blind spots by assembling together peripheral visual information. In this sense, we observers metaphorically do what the eyeball literally does.

^{vii} George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson have adopted the phrase “prosumer” from economics – where the term typically refers to process of consuming the products one has had a hand in creating – to apply to the ways in which people create identities for themselves online. In this way, the prosumer identity is one wherein the subject contributes to a social network like Facebook and internalizes much of what she contributes. In this way, identity is truly a discursive process, wherein the subject creates a narrative about herself, produces that narrative by making it public, and then internalizes that creation.

^{viii} As October 24, 2011, *Wikileaks* has been effectively shut down by coordinated effort between major credit card companies, banks, and payment services who have, for how long, denied the organization access to its donations and funds. Even so, *Wikileaks* remains a paradigmatic example of the way that the networked fourth estate can work to liberate and disseminate information.

^{ix} I should note that contrary to claims that all 250,000 cables were actually published – another component of the media’s demonization of Assange – a small fraction of them were published, many of which were redacted to protect specific people named in them.

^x It should be noted that the Espionage Act of 1917 does not apply to non-Americans, and thus it cannot be used to prosecute Assange.

^{xi} See Bill Keller’s article “Dealing with Assange and the Wikileaks Secrets,” *New York Times* (26 Jan 2011).

^{xii} FOX News unsurprisingly attacked the video saying that significant details were removed, such as the presence of a ground-to-missile rocket launcher. A comparison of the two videos shows that this is clearly not the case; however, it *does* appear that the helicopter crew initially mistook the Reuters photographer’s camera as a weapon. Both versions do show that, amongst the group of people who were fired on, there *were* two individuals with AK-47s.

^{xiii} Amnesty International publicly described the conditions of Manning’s imprisonment as exceedingly and unnecessarily harsh and punitive. Later, in April 2011, approximately 295 scholars came forward in support of an initiative to declare Manning’s imprisonment a violation of his Constitutional Rights. As a result, the Pentagon transferred Manning to a medium-security facility in Kansas.

^{xiv} In January 2011, Egyptian citizen Gamal Ibrahim famously named his newborn daughter “Facebook” to honor the social media site’s role in the Egyptian revolution.

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