UC Riverside

Title
Characterizing Profiles: Data Surveillance and Literature in the Twenty-First Century

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3z9605mh

Author
Johnston, Katherine Danielle

Publication Date
2016

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Characterizing Profiles:
Data Surveillance and Literature in the Twenty-First Century

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Katherine Danielle Johnston

June 2016

Dissertation Committee:
        Professor Katherine Kinney, Chairperson
        Professor Toby Miller
        Professor James Tobias

The Dissertation of Katherine Danielle Johnston is approved:

_____

_____

_____
<div align="right">Committee Chairperson</div>

University of California, Riverside

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to express great appreciation to my dissertation committee: Katherine Kinney, Toby Miller, and James Tobias. Throughout my graduate career, each of these professors has encouraged my intellectual growth, helped me cultivate my own critical voice, and shown great patience as I completed my dissertation.

Katherine Kinney, my dissertation chair, deserves special thanks for her generosity, insight, and time. From the outset, Professor Kinney trusted the intuitions that motivated my research and challenged me to crystalize my analysis into a coherent argument. Over the years, I have been impressed by her insightfulness and ability to express difficult ideas with remarkable clarity and ease. Thank you, Professor Kinney, for your encouragement and perspective.

I also owe a special debt of gratitude to my parents, Reta and David Warren, for their tireless support and encouragement.

Finally, I'd like to thank Justin Johnston, my husband, for listening with enthusiasm and challenging me with respect and kindness. I am grateful for our continuous conversation about my work and for your infectious passion about your own work. Mostly, I am grateful for your love and support.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Characterizing Profiles:
Data Surveillance and Literature in the Twenty-First Century

by

Katherine Danielle Johnston

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, June 2016
Professor Katherine Kinney, Chairperson

Data profiles have come to proliferate across the private and public sectors as digitization has engendered new technologies and techniques for gathering, aggregating, and sharing data. My dissertation interrogates the epistemologies, affects, and power-relations of this increasingly ubiquitous data surveillance. I argue that, despite disavowing its own points of view and partiality, data profiling is indeed a form of storytelling. As such, the prominence of profiling critically reframes contemporary fiction and metafiction in particular, challenging literary modes of watching and representing the world. I also maintain that postmodern literature can enact its own counter-surveillance and engage the narratological and ideological foundations of profiling culture. My dissertation draws on and contributes to literary studies, the digital humanities, affect studies, surveillance studies, critical race studies, and gender studies because, ultimately, these discourses are inextricably knotted together around the problems of profiling.

In my first chapter, "Consumer Surveillance and Profiling in William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*," I analyze the novel's passage from the simulacra of brand culture and consumption to the sites of hidden labor within the profile economy. The second chapter, "Metadata, Metafiction, and the Stakes of Surveillance in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit From the Goon Squad*" considers how metafiction is especially well-suited to grapple with the significance of metadata, given its own preoccupation with watching itself watch. I argue that the novel's network of characters and stories speaks to the constellation of forces that not only convert analogue recordings into digital data, but also translate relationships, habits, and subjectivity into metadata. The third chapter, "Looking Back at Profile Epistemologies and Racializing Surveillance in Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*," contextualizes data profiling within the history of racializing surveillance and illustrates how critical race theory and affect theory can open up forms of "oppositional looking" to undermine the ostensible objectivity of data. In the fourth chapter, "The Orbiting Eye/I in Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*," I argue that Hamid produces what I call "profile narration" or "surveillance story-telling" by hacking into the structures and infrastructures of paramilitary surveillance in the era of drone warfare.

Table of Contents

Introduction

"In this context, I want to side firmly with the technological forces, but against the liberal individualistic appropriation of their potential. Let me instead emphasize the liberatory and transgressive potential of these technologies, against the predatory forces that attempt to index them yet again onto a centralized, white, male, heterosexual, Eurocentric, capital-owning standardized vision of the subject." –Rosi Braidotti

The twenty-first century has been widely hailed as the data age. My dissertation, *Characterizing Profiles: Data Surveillance and Literature in the Twenty-First Century* explores how contemporary literature characterizes and critiques increasingly ubiquitous methods of data collection and the proliferation of personal profiles. These ever-more exacting profiles represent neither individuals nor populations, but rather endlessly divisible subjects, encoded and dispersed in data. The first half of my dissertation analyzes the coerced visibility of consumer-citizens versus the relative invisibility of big data, and the ways this reframes forms of labor and cultural production as convenience and participation. These two chapters on William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* (2003) and Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad (*2010*)* also situate metafiction as itself a technology of surveillance with the power to "watch the watchers," thereby subjecting contemporary fiction to its own critiques and affirming the need for embedded and embodied metafiction that engages the power relations of writing, watching, and meaning-making in the data age. Building on the force and speculative potential of data profiling, the second half of my dissertation illustrates the fallacies and limitations of

profile epistemology, which professes, for example that "data speaks for itself" and that "if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear." My reading of Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* (2015) posits an "oppositional looking" and affective epistemology to counter or deconstruct the supposed objectivity of data profiling. This chapter also carefully links the truth-claims of data surveillance—which are meant to suppress dissent—to the history of "racializing surveillance" in order to illustrate the interdependence of profile epistemology and white supremacy (Browne). Finally, my analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* undermines profile epistemology's neoliberal appeal of neutrality by portraying the technologies and techniques of data surveillance as forms of story-telling which work to make lives legible and intelligible—or given the geopolitical context of drone warfare in *Filthy Rich*—which work to make certain lives expendable.

Taken together, these two halves argue that algorithmic profiling is not merely an important topic in contemporary fiction, but rather an increasingly dominant technology of storytelling and characterization. These stories are being told inside boardrooms, banks, presidential briefings, police stations, advertising agencies, and technology companies. To the extent that data has taken up story-telling, literature *must* take up data. After all, profiling intersects directly with notions of character; surveillance intersects directly with notions of narration and point of view; data points intersect directly with notions of plot-points and storyboarding. My dissertation engages this energetic and urgent reformation of metafiction and postmodern literature to account for this frenetic *counting*. Indeed, contemporary literature is capable of addressing precisely that which

algorithms can not or do not account for: the affects of profile culture, the ideologies and truth-power of profile epistemology, the gendered and racialized dynamics of watching and being watched, the politics of who counts and what gets counted. Contemporary literature reverses the gaze and unmasks the profilers. In the last decade, the Digital Humanities has begun, in part, productively using the tools of data to analyze literature; the literary analysis in my dissertation contributes to the Digital Humanities by edifying the questions of power and knowledge production raised by these tools. My dissertation contributes to literary studies, affect studies, surveillance studies, critical race studies, and gender studies because, ultimately, these discourses are inextricably knotted together around the problems of profiling. Before delving into the literature and pulling these threads, it is necessary to now establish the economic, political, and cultural context of profiling, including the scale of the data deluge.

In the background of my dissertation is the proclamation made by various journalists, scientists, politicians, entrepreneurs, and investors that data profiling and analytics will "revolutionize" the world. Accordingly, in 2006 "You" were *Time* magazine's "Person of the Year." The cover featured a Macintosh computer and keyboard with the single word "You" typed across what appears to be a YouTube frame on the screen. Alternate covers used a reflective material for the computer screen in order to quite literally put readers' faces on the magazine. The caption read: "Yes, you. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world." This greeting echoes the startup screen of a Mac, which ushers the user into their personal computer, customized with their preferences, desktop, folders, bookmarks, and histories, and exemplified by the

language-choice of that first "Welcome." In the case of both the computer start-up and the magazine, this rhetoric—hailing people as the sovereigns of their own digital world—is meant to encourage and reward self-expression and participation online. Yet, by boldly declaring this "your world," *Time* implicitly raises the question of exactly whose world we were living in before. Ultimately, this presentation evokes the psychology of bestowing a child with their very own room within a house that in fact belongs to the parents.

Looking back, the incredulity of that first line—yes, really, you—has aged better than the dubious notion that because you are on YouTube you are now in "control." The magazine article professes to tell "a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before. . . about the many wresting power from the few" but upon closer reading, it is actually telling a story about the many *working* for the few. This language by *Time* is especially rich given AOL's acquisition of Time Warner in 2000 for a staggering 350 billion dollars, the largest mergers and acquisitions deal in history. Still, the article cites Wikipedia, YouTube, and Myspace as examples of ordinary people coming together "and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes." What this irrational exuberance neglects is that contributing—"for nothing"—does not "wrest" power from "big media"; rather, it provides them with free content along with free data to sell in the burgeoning market of data profiling. In fact, the article is more correct than it seems willing to admit when it says, "And we didn't just watch, we also worked. Like crazy." Crazily indeed, consumer/users have "worked" online producing content and data

for free. The magazine cheers that, "We made Facebook profiles and Second Life avatars and reviewed books at Amazon and recorded podcasts. We blogged about our candidates losing and wrote songs about getting dumped. We camcordered bombing runs and built open-source software." While none of these activities are in and of themselves world-changing, the article is right to say that, "The new Web is a very different thing. It's a tool for bringing together the small contributions of millions of people and making them matter." It is true that these discreet "contributions" online do "matter." They have, in fact, mattered greatly, not only for the individual companies like Facebook and Amazon using these free "contributions," but also for an entire industry of data brokers.

Time boasts that while "Silicon Valley consultants call it Web 2.0 . . . it's really a revolution." I'll argue that the profile industry and what I call "profile culture" is indeed immensely consequential, but to call it a "revolution" mistakenly suggests that political or economic power has changed hands. Despite all its utopianism, even the *Time* article captures the hidden labor that ostensibly earned "You" the "person of the year":

> Who are these people? Seriously, who actually sits down after a long day at work
> and says, I'm not going to watch *Lost* tonight. I'm going to turn on my computer
> and make a movie starring my pet iguana? I'm going to mash up 50 Cent's vocals
> with Queen's instrumentals? I'm going to blog about my state of mind or the state
> of the nation or the *steak-frites* at the new bistro down the street? Who has that
> time and that energy and that passion?

Setting aside the simultaneous flattening and aggrandizing of these examples, I am most struck by the incredulousness and admiration for people choosing these ostensibly more

difficulty activities "after a long day at work" rather than passively plopping down in front of the television. This is clearly reflective of the knee-jerk reactions that pit the internet (framed as active and forward-looking) against television (framed as passive and retrograde), despite the fact that, as of 2015, seventy-eight percent of internet bandwidth was used to stream videos (Wolff). Indeed, at the time, many blogs were *about* the television show *Lost*, including one Wikipedia style blog called *Lostpedia*. Moreover, in April of 2006, Disney announced that *Lost* could be streamed for free online, and in 2009, *Lost* was named the most-watched show on the internet. In the end, this false competition between the internet and television is actually indicative of the greater utopian thinking about the promise of the internet as democratizing and "participatory." Most significantly, this article circumvents the fact that when someone reviews a restaurant, blogs, or remixes 50 Cent's vocals—it is their data and information that is then remixed for profit in the form of a data profile.

The article dramatically responds to its own question about who exactly chooses to do all this with, "The answer is, you do. And for seizing the reins of the global media, for founding and framing the new digital democracy, for working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game, TIME's Person of the Year for 2006 is you." Having just stressed that these "contributions" effectively extend the workday, it is hard to see how "working *for nothing*" is "beating the pros at their own game." In fact, if we accept the article at face value, then the only thing distinguishing "the pros" from "you" is a salary. Furthermore, if consumer/users are the founders and framers of a "new digital democracy," then making videos about *steak-frites* is akin to writing the constitution,

begging the question, what exactly are the politics of this participation? The author ends

with the caveat that, "Sure, it's a mistake to romanticize all this any more than is strictly

necessary. Web 2.0 harnesses the stupidity of crowds as well as its wisdom. Some of the

comments on YouTube make you weep for the future of humanity just for the spelling

alone, never mind the obscenity and the naked hatred." However, this complaint still

misses the latent problems of labor and power. The fact that Web 2.0 "harnesses" all

opinions, including the obscene and hateful, is yet another reason why it is so lucrative.

Ultimately, to the extent that information is power, all data is valuable. The ostensible

lack of gatekeepers in this context is less about democracy and more about profitability.

Finally, the data surveillance and profile industry is by definition self-effacing, so it is

only fitting that *Time* puts your face on the cover. Flattery over your "participation" is,

after all, a kind of cover for the profile industry and the production of personal profiles

that treat consumer-users as not only unpaid employees but also the product itself.

The Profile Industry

Ten years later it's clear that people were not only producing content "for

nothing," they were also producing troves of personal data, which has, in a sense,

"harnessed" them inside what Eli Pariser calls a "you loop." Undoubtedly, for consumers,

this personal data profile can be a convenience: for example, when someone searches

"pizza places," it is useful that Google returns local results. In general, it is fair to say that

advertisements, both in the mail and on the computer, are more targeted and relevant. In

this sense, data collectors sell consumers convenience in exchange for personal data and

information. The expediency of credit cards is a prime example, but so are email, GPS, Google, ApplePay, Facebook, online shopping, Fast-Track, and TSA Pre-Check, to name a few. The concern over "you loops" is that, while they might be convenient for consumers, they are detrimental to citizens. One might even say, that they collapse citizenship into consumerism. Pariser's most salient example is the fact that after the BP oil spill in the gulf, some people googling BP were shown the devastating environmental effects while others were given stock quotes (2). To the extent that their "filter bubbles" are opaque and unknown to them, they all thought they were getting "the news." Cultural theorists have different names for this phenomenon to emphasize their various concerns: Eli Pariser warns against a "filter bubble" that limits access to information and opportunities; Christian Parenti describes "the soft cage" of routine data surveillance; Frank Pasquale critiques the "black boxes" of "big data" that simultaneously demand the transparency of citizens while hiding behind the convolutions of legalize and the protections of trade secrets; and Simone Browne contextualizes the discrimination of algorithmic surveillance within a long history of racializing surveillance that reifies color-lines. These theorists, among others, all grapple with the proliferation of personal data profiles and algorithmic surveillance by what I call the "profile industry," comprised of advertisers, data brokers, and online "sharing" platforms, as well as the constellation of national security apparatuses that co-operate with this industry.

To be clear, for the profile industry, data not only helps businesses advertise and sell more products—it is the product. Business writers and executives have touted "big data" as the "gold rush of the twenty-first century" (Rossi) and the "currency of the

twenty-first century enterprise" (Koepell). Accordingly, some companies are focusing on how to buy, sell, and trade the unfathomable amount of data being collected, while others are invested in transforming "raw data" into "actionable insights" ("Creating Revenue From Customer Data"). Former CEO of Google, Eric Schmidt claimed in 2010 that "every two days now we create as much information as we did from the dawn of civilization up until 2003" (Siegler). That is around five *exabytes* of data. As of 2013, ninety percent of all of the data in the world had been generated over the last two years (Selinger). Moreover, according to Cisco, the Internet of Things[1] (IoT) will generate 400 Zettabytes of data every year by 2018 (Rossi). Collecting and processing this data already is a massively profitable enterprise. For example, Acxiom—a 1.15 billion dollar a year company and the largest processor of consumer data—sells companies lists of consumers, such as "potential inheritor," "adult with senior parent," and "diabetic focus" (Schneier). Similarly, retailers pay major US banks roughly 1.7 billion dollars a year to send "targeted discount offers" to their customers, based their "shopping habits gleaned from credit card records" (Koepell). This is apparently a wise investment given that "data-intensive advertising helps generate over $150 billion a year in economic activity" (Pasquale 2).

For their part, Facebook ingests over 500 terabytes of new data into their databases daily, and as Jay Parikh, the Vice President of infrastructure at Facebook, explains, "If you aren't taking advantage of big data, then you don't have big data; you

---

[1] "The Internet of Things" refers to a network of physical objects that collect and exchange data, such as cell phones, fitness trackers, advanced hearing aids, animal biochips, and a host of other "smart" products and "smart" systems.

have just a pile of data" (Kern). In this context, "taking advantage of big data" means

parsing it, analyzing it, and selling it. Profiles, thus, reconceive of individuality as the

point of intersection between cross-sections of data—changeable depending upon which

variables are selected. They move beyond demography, which designates swaths of the

population based on general criteria, to instead target people based on specific

information about their habits, health, views, relations, interactions, purchases,

movements, and so on. This is, for example, the difference between identifying groups of

college-educated, middle-class, middle-aged, single white men and specifically targeting

those fitting these criteria who *also* watch *Game of Thrones*, buy low-fat organic milk,

have a gym membership they rarely use, voted for Obama, and take Lipitor. A difference

in exactitude or degree becomes a difference in kind.

Profile Nation

"*The unidentified American—we find him everywhere where trouble is.*" — New York

Times*, 1912

Still, private companies are not the only ones in the business of data profiling; nation-

states, of course, also have a long and consequential history of surveillance and data

collection. Whether targeting consumers, citizens, or potential combatants, profiling often

amounts to sorting the *right* person from the *wrong* person. To this point, Christian

Parenti excavates IBM's role in the Holocaust in order to "problematize the political

implications of everyday surveillance and information technology" and trouble the

public's comfort with the ongoing rise in routine digital surveillance (84). He reminds

readers, for example, that upon taking power in 1933, the Nazis contracted IBM to create a more exacting national census that included eighty variables, allowing them to identify not only Jews, but "select subsets of Jews" (83). Similarly, Simone Browne traces the current technologies and techniques of surveillance to their historical antecedents in American slavery and the Jim Crow era. She reminds readers that technologies such as the slave pass depended upon the illiteracy of slaves, clarifying the importance of being able to read the documents and data that define our rights and personhood—including, for example, unintelligible "privacy agreements," opaque algorithms, and national security programs. This is, after all, one reason why "encryption" is such a crucial site of contestation between the National Security Agency (NSA) and the technology industry.

After the terrorist attacks on September 11 2001, the *Philadelphia City Paper* captured a dominant theme with their headline, "Nothing Will Ever Be the Same." In retrospect and with a longer look at history, 9/11 seems "less like a seismic shift from freedom to tyranny and more like an aggressive and opportunistic acceleration" of the nation's surveillance programs (Parenti 184). Surveillance scholarship persistently reminds readers that national surveillance programs are hardly new. While post-attack polls did indicate that more Americans were willing to trade civil liberties for security, this supposed sea change in public opinion is also often overstated. In the aftermath of 9/11, a Pew Research Center survey found that "'a third of Americans worried that the government's new anti-terrorism laws would excessively restrict'" civil liberties, whereas only a year later, about half of the respondents worried that the laws would "'undermine civil liberties'" (Parenti 184). That is, while US digital surveillance has certainly

11

intensified since 9/11, we must also resist ahistorical narratives that treat profiling as an entirely new phenomenon within a brave new world. Still, one thing we learn by historicizing data profiling is that the ability to scrutinize others while remaining free from scrutiny is central to maintaining asymmetrical power relations.

Without describing every known program, it is worth offering a sense of the scope and scale of national security surveillance and its relationship with the private sector. To be sure, the current approach by the NSA, according to one former US intelligence officer, is not to look for a single needle in the haystack, but rather, to "'collect the whole haystack . . . Collect it all, tag it, store it . . . and whatever it is you want, you go searching for it'" ("The Crux of the NSA Story"). While this approach seems to eschew or the very least postpone any selection or preconceptions, how the information gets tagged and indexed in addition to the eventual terms is certainly curatorial. The fact that "whatever it is you want" is there actually provides more opportunities to tell whatever story you ultimately want as well. Edward Snowden's remarkable leak of classified documents beginning in 2013 exposed some details of this dragnet approach as well as the extraordinary extent of intelligence gathering. Perhaps most notably, the documents disclosed the NSA's "PRISM program," which intercepts internet communications from companies including, Microsoft, Yahoo, Google, Facebook, Paltalk, YouTube, AOL, Skype, and Apple. The PRISM program began in 2007 and is subject to the United States Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISA Court); although, during its entire thirty-three years, the FISA court has granted 33,942 warrants and denied only eleven (Perez). Moreover, in 2001 the Obama Administration won permission from the FISA court to

12

reverse the restrictions authorized by Congress in 2008 under the Foreign Intelligence

Surveillance Act (Nakashima). With this change, the NSA can now access intercepted

phone calls and emails and deliberately search for Americans' communications in its

massive databases without a warrant or probable cause that the people they were

communicating with were terrorists, spies, or foreign powers. To gather data, the NSA

uses a plug-in called GUMFISH to seize control of laptop cameras,

CAPTIVATEAUDIENCE to take over computer microphones (Gallagher), and

XKEYSCORE software to see 'nearly everything a user does on the Internet,' including

emails, social media posts, web sites you visit, addresses typed into Google Maps, files

sent, and more" (Stray).

In addition to these programs and plug-ins designed to *intercept* data, the NSA's

"Sigint Enabling Project" works to *decrypt* data, in part by collaborating with technology

companies to "covertly influence" their product designs to build in vulnerabilities. For

example, at Microsoft, the NSA "worked with company officials to get pre-encryption

access to Microsoft's most popular services, including Outlook e-mail, Skype Internet

phone calls and chats, and SkyDrive, the company's cloud storage service" (Perlroth) For

perspective, while the PRISM program operates on a budget of twenty million dollars a

year, the "Sigint Enabling Project" cost over 800 million between 2011 and 2013. The

expense and extent of these programs should help clarify the magnitude of this issue.

It would be a mistake to discuss data profiling by the private and public sectors

as simply concurrent or even intersecting trends, when they often work as partners—

despite each supposedly standing as the check or balance on the other. For example, a top

secret court order issued in April of 2013 requires Verizon on an "ongoing daily basis" to provide the NSA with the metadata on all telephone calls in its system, both within the US and between the US and other countries ("NSA Collecting Phone Records"). This information includes the identity of both parties, their respective locations during the time of the call, and the duration of the communication. Moreover, as part of the post-9/11 "Information Sharing Environment (ISE)," the government has established over seventy "fusion centers" to facilitate "information sharing." The Department of Homeland Security describes fusion centers as "collaborative effort[s] of two or more agencies … with the goal of maximizing their ability to detect, prevent, investigate, and respond to criminal and terrorist activity" ("Fusion Centers and Emergency Operations Centers"). As Frank Pasquale explains, "with their generous federal funding, slick conferences, and firm corporate backing, they are beginning to unite the public and private monitoring of individual lives into unified digital dossiers" (153). And so, while the government is constitutionally constrained, they are, for a price, able to tap into the unregulated collection of data by the private industry, leaving "plenty of room for dealing on both sides" (Pasquale 17). For example, after announcing that they would cooperate with the government, "FedEx received a range of government perks including special access to government security databases, a seat on the FBI's regional terrorism task force—where it was the only private company so represented—and an exceptional license from the state of Tennessee to develop an internal police force." In this case, "FedEx is sharing the privileges and immunities of the state, but not the accountability" (Pasquale 49). This is precisely the sort of covert cooperation by the private and public sectors that Hamid

addresses in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. It is imperative that we grasp this

technological, political, and corporate surveillance-scape before analyzing the various

literary representations of data profiling.

Profile Culture

For our purposes, there are two general types of profiles in circulation. First is the

profile that consumer/users knowingly create about themselves: for example, the

Facebook profile, the Match.com profile, and to a certain extent even something like the

Netflix profile that users actively curate by rating different choices. This first-order

profile is certainly part of what *Time* magazine was celebrating by naming "You" the

"Person of the Year." However, behind this public profile is a data profile, largely

unknown and inaccessible to consumer/users. This second-order profile is often regarded

as *merely metadata*[2]—usually to quell concerns about privacy—but that is a somewhat

misleading. For instance, while data brokers and online sharing platforms certainly sell

metadata, they also target people based on the *content* of their searches, emails, posts,

purchases, and so on. Still, this personal information is aggregated and recontextualized

according to state or corporate interests. Office Max for example, sent a grieving father a

letter addressed to his name, followed by "daughter killed in car crash" (Beckett). In

addition to its profound insensitivity, one reason this mistake became noteworthy is

---

[2] The Obama Administration, for example, defended the NSA's collection of phone
records by explaining that they only access "the metadata," such as the duration of the
call, but not the "content" or what was actually said ("NSA Collecting Phone Records").

15

because while user-generated profiles are designed to share information, data profiles remain relatively hidden.

Nevertheless, these two types of profiles are interdependent. First, the public profile created by the consumer-user serves to screen or obscure data profiles by reassuring consumer/users that they are "in control" of their own persona, if not the "reins of global media" ("Person of the Year"). Second, public profiles underwrite data profiles by providing the platforms for people to "share" information about themselves. Moreover, I argue that celebrity culture cosigns this phenomenon by promoting the perception that a high public profile amounts to greater individual worth. Accordingly, social media sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, simultaneously sell themselves as public relations firms for the famous and non-famous alike, even describing "followers" or "friends" as "fans," while also insisting that users divulge their "authentic selves."

Facebook has been especially adept at addressing and reconciling these two types of profiles in their public relations. At the 2011 Facebook F8 (pronounced "fate") Developers' Conference, Mark Zuckerberg stressed that the then recent changes to the social networking site eliminate routine privacy consents to create a "frictionless experience" while the "open graph" system tallies and charts more and more user activity, even offering, for example, monthly and annual reports of individual's eating and exercising habits. The only way that this experience could seem "frictionless" is by the sheer magnitude and frequency of data collection—like driving quickly enough over the ruts in a road to smooth out the ride. The ubiquity and popularity of Facebook (along with a suggestion of its fatedness) produce the necessary sense of "anonymity and

whateverness" in this incredibly particular and individualized data set. Zuckerberg here is speaking simultaneously to both investors and users. In order to accomplish this rhetorical feat, he must seem like both an enthusiastic user while still communicating the lucrativeness of these changes to advertisers and market researchers. In other words, he has to smooth over the friction between users and investors. Take for example, Zuckerberg's claim that "Facebook's mission is to make the world more open and connected," a perfectly friendly project that obscures exactly for whom the information is now open. He likewise boasts, "we're helping *you* create a graph of connections," a double-speak that addresses users and investors alike (emphasis added).

Mimetically, David Fincher's 2010 film *The Social Network*, a fictionalized account of Facebook's beginnings, likewise shifts the critical focus away from Facebook's business model and toward the personality or public profile of the founder. The plot begins with Zuckerberg's billion-dollar idea, focusing on the supposed controversy over its originality, and ends with a corporation valued at upwards of eighty billion dollars, never once mentioning *how* Facebook makes money. Granted, we see Mark Zuckerberg receive a 500,000 dollar angel investment, but the film fails to illustrate how the popularity of Facebook translates to profit, obscuring or simply ignoring that the wealth of information on users' profiles is sold to marketers. Instead, the film focuses on exposing Zuckerberg's motivations and *who he really is*. Likewise, in his aforementioned announcement at F8, Zuckerberg attempts to similarly convince his audience that Facebook exists for users to "express who they really are," repeating variations on this phrase no less than fifteen times. He encourages "people [to] feel an intense ownership

17

over their profile," even as his company profits by selling this "really personal product" to marketers—again obscuring the data profiles generated by users' content and activity. Egan's portrayal of nostalgia for a more "authentic" experience of music speaks to this contradiction within our profile culture. That is, taking entertainment industries and advertising as its primary examples, *A Visit From the Goon Squad* ostensibly questions the ethics of "selling out" for fame or money, while the novel ultimately and, more seriously, questions the existence of any such "outside" by destabilizing the meaning of personal ownership in profile culture.

Profile Epistemology

To be sure, data profiling is not merely a collection of information, but rather the ideological production of knowledge and meaning. Still, profile epistemology insists upon its own objectivity and neutrality. In 2008 an article in *Wired Magazine* confidently declared that, "with enough data, the numbers speak for themselves" (Anderson). An economist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Sloan School of Management, Erik Brynjolfsson, likewise compares the "potential impact of Big Data" to that of the microscope, which also "allowed people to see and measure things as never before," suggesting that data collection is also a "revolution in measurement" (Lohr). While data certainly provides new ways of seeing, it neither speaks for itself, nor does it merely magnify reality. Despite this appeal to scientific discourse, I argue that the act of measuring individuals and populations through data analytics actually *produces* dividuals based upon the terms of the search, the algorithms applied, and perspective of the

analysis. And to be sure, human biases and values are embedded into each and every step of this development. Surely, data collection is a valuable tool for understanding the scale and scope of problems and trends; however, the novels I analyze clarify that data profiles can also calcify norms and exacerbate inequality.

Hamid's work is especially explicit about how a society of surveillance can mark individuals and maintain systemic discrimination by deeming groups of people "risky investments" who don't fit the "profile for success." Nevertheless, recognizing that participation and visibility in profile culture is "both a gift and a trap" (*Pattern Recognition* 22), I also distinguish between how subjectivity is produced and how it is occupied, lived, and resisted—realizing that both are crucial conversations. Social media, for example, is undoubtedly a useful tool for sharing information, organizing movements, connecting with others, and attracting visibility. The organizers of "Black Lives Matter," the protestors during the "Arab Spring," and any political campaign will tell you as much. Nevertheless, these same platforms also expose their users to the vulnerabilities of hyper-visibility and having one's information sold to the highest bidder. Moreover, it is typically the most vulnerable populations are placed at the highest risk.

The official motto of the NSA is "If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear" ("Domestic Service Directorate"). Yet, my chapter on *Citizen,* for example, contextualizes various technologies that professes to "revolutionize" the gaze within a long history of racializing surveillance that promises to reveal the "truth" about a subject. Similarly, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* clarifies that the mandates to be accessible and hypervisible have long been demanded of women, steadfastly situating the profile

industry and consumer surveillance within patriarchy. Furthermore, I argue that all four texts illustrate the ways in which profile epistemology links up with neoliberalism, which preaches personal responsibility and encourages consumer/users to dutifully manage their profiles like personal investment accounts, despite having neither the necessary information nor any meaningful recourse. My dissertation thus raises critical epistemological questions about who makes knowledge and meaning, through what means, and to whose benefit.

Profile Narration

Certainly literature is a more instructive model for understanding profile's *ways of seeing* than the microscope. Postmodern literature, in particular, is characteristically explicit about its own constructedness, cognizant of the Heisenbergian uncertainty principle, and suspicious of totalizing perspectives. Rather than misrepresenting characters as coherent and fully knowable, the literature I analyze undermines the supposed precision of pinpointing individuals at the cross-section of data, by conceiving of characters at the intersections of historical forces and ideologies and through particular points of view. This means embracing the gaps and flux of profiles and resisting the ideology that "data speaks for itself." Finally, I argue that we must deconstruct the false dichotomy between subjective writing and objective data by focusing on their power relations that condition both. After all, data analytics is akin to "close-reading," with a similar conceit that every bit and byte is potentially significant. Like literature, algorithms are attempts at making meaning by constructing a story.

In my first chapter, "Consumer Surveillance and Profiling in William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*," I analyze the novel's passage from the simulacra of brand culture and consumption to the sites of hidden labor within the profile economy. The elaborate plot of *Pattern Recognition* stages an arms-race between the protagonist, Cayce Pollard, and an advertising executive, Hubertus Bigend, to find the "maker" of a series of online viral videos. As a devoted fan, Cayce hopes to protect the footage from corporate cooptation, while Bigend's interest lies in the "numbers." I argue, however, that regardless of whether or not the footage is ever monetized, the fans already have been. That is, in the speculative economy of data profiling, the "numbers" *are* the product. With a twist on the traditional Marxist narrative, the novel offers a rich surveillance-scape that systematically underexposes labor and production by overexposing brands—as well as consumer-citizens themselves.

The second chapter, "Metadata, Metafiction, and the Stakes of Surveillance in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit From the Goon Squad*" considers how metafiction is especially well-suited to grapple with the significance of metadata and data surveillance, given its own preoccupation with watching itself watch. Making a critical intervention in the historically male-centered cannon of US metafiction, the novel conscientiously engages the power relations of watching. Comprised of thirteen interrelated short stories set between 1973 and 2024, *Goon Squad* centers around changes in the music industry due to digitization. In the background of the novel and at its chronological center is the attacks on September 11th and also, incidentally, the launch of the iPod. In a sense, these two events structure the novel's investments in data surveillance. Moreover, to the extent that

the novel's form mirrors a musical album it also forms a network of characters, speaking

to the constellation of forces that not only convert analogue recordings into digital data,

but also translate relationships, habits, and subjectivity into metadata.

The third chapter, "Looking Back at Profile Epistemologies and Racializing

Surveillance in Claudia Rankine's *Citizen,*" contextualizes contemporary data profiling

and "social sorting" within the history of racial discrimination, surveillance, and

biometrics. I argue that engaging surveillance entails not only reckoning with the legacies

of slavery and white supremacy, but also learning from the history of black resistance. In

an extended passage, Rankine portrays the treatment of tennis player Serena Williams by

the media and referees, highlighting the development of "hawk-eye" technology to

officiate the games. Ultimately, *Citizen* illustrates that the ways in which this sort of

technological solutionism in face of racial discrimination is flawed and fraught. In this

chapter, I also argue that the common defense of surveillance that "if you have nothing to

hide, then you have nothing to fear" is entangled with the racialized "respectability

politics" that insist upon a "proper" response to racism. After all, in both the overlapping

systems of white supremacy and ubiquitous surveillance, outrage supposedly reaffirms

guilt. Finally, I address how critical race theory and affect theory can open up forms of

"oppositional looking" and "counter-surveillance" to undermine the ostensible objectivity

of data.

The fourth chapter, "The Orbiting Eye/I in Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy

Rich in Rising Asia*" figures data surveillance and profiling as both the "carrot and the

stick" within neoliberalism. On the one hand, security surveillance is presented as

aspirational, the privilege of the wealthy and powerful. On the other hand, profiling is a means of not only targeting "risky" subjects, but also actively producing them by exacerbating the unequal distribution of life chances. The protagonist of the novel, simply called "You," is born as poor and jaundiced in the country-side of Pakistan and dies having amassed and then lost a great deal of wealth as a water industrialist. As a parody of the self-help genre, Hamid humorously and tragically represents the cruel optimism of neoliberal appeals to personal-responsibility and the way they intersect with profile culture. Ultimately, Hamid produces what I call "profile narration" or "surveillance story-telling." In effect, the novel hacks into the structures and infrastructures of surveillance to create "your" profile and tell the story of "you" differently. Specifically, the novel takes on surveillance by the "world's military apparatuses" in the era of drone warfare, portraying the discursivity of this machine, which actually characterizes as it profiles.

Works Cited

Anderson, Chris. "The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete." *Wired Magazine*. 23 June, 2008. Web. 20 April, 2016. <http://www.wired.com/2008/06/pb-theory/>.

Beckett, Lois. "Everything We Know About What Data Brokers Know About You." *ProPublica.* 13 June, 2014. Web. 20 April, 2016. <https://www.propublica.org/article/everything-we-know-about-what-data-brokers-know-about-you>.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics.* Cambridge: Polity, 2006. Print.

Browne, Simone. *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015. Print.

"Creating Revenue From Customer Data." *Accenture Digital.* Online Video. Web. 24 Feb 2016. <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insight-data-monetization-summary.aspx>.

"Domestic Surveillance Directorate." *National Security Organization Online.* Web. 20 April, 2016. <https://nsa.gov1.info>.

Egan, Jennifer. *A Visit From the Goon Squad*. New York: Anchor Books, 2011. Print.

"Fusion Centers and Emergency Operations Centers." *Official Website of the Department of Homeland Security*. 30 July 2015. Web. 13 April 2016. <https://www.dhs.gov/fusion-centers-and-emergency-operations-centers>.

Gallagher, Roy and Glenn Greenwald. "How the NSA Plans to Infect 'Millions' of Computers with Malware." *The Intercept*. 12 Mar. 2014. Web. 28 Mar. 2016. <https://theintercept.com/2014/03/12/nsa-plans-infect-millions-computers-malware/>.

Gibson, William. *Pattern Recognition.* Berkley, 2005. Print.

Greenwald, Glenn. "The Crux of the NSA Story in One Phrase: 'Collect it All.'" *The Guardian*. 15 July, 2013. Web. 20 April, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jul/15/crux-nsa-collect-it-all>.

---"NSA Collecting Phone Records of Millions of Verizon Customers Daily." *The Guardian.* 6 June 2013. Web. 20 April 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/06/nsa-phone-records-verizon-court-order>.

Grossman, Lev. "2006 Person of the Year." *Time Magazine*. 25 Dec. 2006. Web. 20
       April, 2016.
       <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html>.

Hamid, Mohsin. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia.* New York: Riverhead Books,
       2013. Print.

Kern, Eliza. "Facebook is Collecting Your Data: 500 Terabytes a Day." *Gigaom*. 22 Aug
       2012. Web. 20 April, 2016. <https://gigaom.com/2012/08/22/facebook-is-
       collecting-your-data-500-terabytes-a-day/>.

Koepell, Harvey and Randy Bean. "Big Data Analytics: The Currency of the 21st Century
       Enterprise." *Information Management*. 10 Sept. 2012. Web. 20 April, 2016.
       <http://www.information-management.com/news/news/big-data-analytics-the-
       currency-of-the-21st-century-enterprise-10023139-1.html>.

Lohr, Steve. "The Age of Big Data." *The New York Times*. 11 Feb. 2012. Web. 20 April,
       2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/12/sunday-review/big-datas-impact-in-
       the-world.html>.

Nakashima, Ellen. "Obama Administration had Restrictions on NSA Reversed in 2011."
       The Washington Post. 7 Sept. 2013. Web. 20 April 2016.
       <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-
       administration-had-restrictions-on-nsa-reversed-in-2011/2013/09/07/c26ef658-
       0fe5-11e3-85b6-d27422650fd5_print.html>.

Parenti, Christian. *The Soft Cage: Surveillance in American from Slavery to the War on
       Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 2003. Print.

Pariser, Eli. *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding From You.* Tantor Media,
       2011. Print.

Pasquale, Frank. *Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and
       Information.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015. Print.

Perez, Evan. "Secret Court's Oversight Gets Scrutiny." *The Wall Street Journal*. 9 June
       2013. Web. 20 April 2016.
       <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB100014241278873249040045785356703105146
       16>.

Perlroth, Nicole, Jeff Larson and Scott Shane. "NSA Able to Foil Basic Safeguards of

Privacy on Web." *The New York Times*. 5 Sept. 2013. Web. 20 April 2016.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/06/us/nsa-foils-much-internet-encryption.html?_r=0>.

Altman, Howard et al. "Nothing Will Ever Be the Same." *Philadelphia City Paper*. 13 Sept. 2001. Web. 20 April 2016. <http://citypaper.net/articles/091301/cov.wtc1.shtml>.

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014. Print.

Rossi, Ben. "Data Revolution: The Gold Rush of the Twenty-First Century." *Information Age: Insight and Analysis for IT Leaders*. 21 Aug., 2015. Web. 20 April, 2016. <http://www.information-age.com/technology/information-management/123460039/data-revolution-gold-rush-21st-century>.

Schneier, Bruce. *Data and Goliath: The Hidden Battles to Collect Your Data and Control Your World*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015. Print.

Selinger, David. "Big Data: Getting Ready for the 2013 Big Bang." *Forbes*. 15 Jan 2015. Web. 20 April 2016. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/ciocentral/2013/01/15/big-data-get-ready-for-the-2013-big-bang/#21fb24741678>.

Siegler, MG. "Eric Schmidt: Every 2 Days We Create As Much Data as We Did Up to 2003." *TechCrunch*. 4 Aug. 2010. Web. 20 April, 2016. <http://techcrunch.com/2010/08/04/schmidt-data/>.

The Social Network. Dir. David Fincher. Columbia Pictures, 2010. Film.

Stray, Jonathan. "What You Need to Know About the NSA's Surveillance Programs." *Propublica*. 5 Aug. 2013. Web. 28 Mar. 2016. <https://www.propublica.org/article/nsa-data-collection-faq>.

Wolff, Michael. "How Television Won the Internet." *The New York Times*. 29 June, 2015. Web. 18 April 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/29/opinion/how-television-won-the-internet.html?_r=0>.

Zuckerberg, Mark. "F8 2011 Keynote." Online Video Clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 24 Sept. 2011. Web. 20 April, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9r46UeXCzoU>.

Chapter One

Consumer Surveillance and Profiling in William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*

Katherine Hayles opened the conversation at MIT's 2012 forum on "Electronic

Literature and Future Books" by defining *apophenia*, the practice of finding patterns in

random data, and joking that it is a risk "endemic to literary criticism," where every

image, action, and word choice is subject to "close reading." Within the data age, every

purchase, keystroke, and utterance is analogously regarded as a significant bit of

information, subject to interpretation. For example, as of 2011 Acxiom, a marketing

technology and services company, had "alone accumulated an average of 1,500 pieces of

data on each person in its database—which includes 96 percent of Americans—along

with data about everything from their credit scores to whether they've bought medication

for incontinence[3]" (Pariser 19). Such perpetually updated profiles are immensely

lucrative, if not imperative, for modern marketers and the corporations buying and selling

consumer data. In their promotional videos on "data monetization"—featuring bees

pollinating fields of sunflowers followed by close-ups of dripping honeycombs—the self-

described "professional services company" Accenture cautions future clients against

"analysis paralysis" as they begin "transforming raw data into actionable insights and

generating new revenue streams." As opposed to the dirty image of data *mining*,

Accenture reimagines "raw data" as nectar waiting to be gathered and naturally

---

[3] "In marketing and advertising, profiling makes use of information from a wide range of
sources, including, for example, online and offline purchase data, supermarket loyalty
cards, surveys, sweepstakes and contest entries, financial records, property records,
census records, motor vehicle data, credit card transactions, phone records, product
warranty cards, subscription records and public records" (Lury 110).

transformed into sweet flowing "revenue streams." Despite the common claims that "data speaks for itself," Accenture tellingly concedes here that without "analysis," the data remains "raw" and of little worth[4]. Meanwhile, the public is likened to fields of flowers, dependent upon the helpful data collectors for survival or pollination in this analogy. The public is, in other words, easy pickings—an untapped renewable resource. Accenture disingenuously declares that, "where you play in this field is up to you." The problem, of course, is that of power: who does the "analysis" and what "insights" do they make? Who is actively "playing" and who is passively being played? Who owns the data and who keeps the honey?

However, whereas the "telling details" of a realist or modernist novel are thought to combine to create a more or less "round" character—indeed, the *character* of the character—the data being currently collected about every consumer-citizen does not purport to create a subjectivity that is more significant than the sum of its parts. Rather, through data profiles, everything becomes meaningful, not through its construction of an individual or self, but through parsing, collating, and creating a "dividual"—a code, a sample, a segment of the market (Deleuze 180). Still, to reiterate, data is nevertheless *made* meaningful through "analysis" that yields "actionable insights.[5]" We must

---

[4] Large sets of "raw" data are, of course, still sellable but for a lesser price.

[5] Accenture boasts: "We have been working with a number of clients in the telecommunications space who have fantastic data. Data around the geolocation of individual subscribers, the subscribers' names, then all the things they do with their phones, all the applications they download, browser searches they conduct, etc. That information is tremendously valuable. *And* there is a whole series of different use cases. It can be used to measure audience reach. It can be used to measure how people interact

vigilantly resist the false dichotomy between subjective writing and objective data by focusing on the power relations that condition both and that each has the potential to constructively expose.

While characters in realist novels "are often described with a good many superfluous, unnecessary details which are meant to enhance the mimetic effect" (Fokkema 57); in data profiling, details (never "superfluous") are not used to shore up individuality, but instead circulate as valuable in their own right. In postmodern novels, such as "in Pynchon's work, for instance, the discourse of consumerism is foregrounded by the use of brand-names that 'have usurped the place of the human subject, no longer background to character but proclaiming themselves as 'living' presences' (65)" (Fokkema 64). Within the context of corporations and governments creating ever-more exacting profiles of citizen-consumers, this attention to brand names and what might see like "superfluous unnecessary details" is again a type of mimesis or a postmodern realism. I would argue that it's not that "brand-names have usurped the place of the human subject" in the data age, but that the human subject is always in the process of becoming branded or converted into fungible data.

Unlike realism or modernism, postmodernism has been accused of "perverse" nihilism or maintaining that nothing counts (Latour 123). On the contrary, postmodern literature in the data age must instead confront the workings of a world where everything

---

with physical locations; it can be used to measure how people use their mobile phones. And there is a myriad of advertisers and marketers out there that are interested in it."

counts, at least potentially[6]. One could argue that this is simply the inverse that amounts the same thing—if everything counts, then nothings counts—but this argument misses an important distinction. Despite common claims that data mining is impartial and neutral, the information gathered about citizen-consumers is made meaningful by hegemonic discourses. Ultimately, if everything "counts" in both fiction and profiling, the pressing question for postmodern literature in the data age becomes how meaning is made and by whom.

This is indeed the question driving the plot of William Gibson's 2003 novel, *Pattern Recognition*, which was published nine years after the creation of the "cookie," four years after the first commercially available GPS phone, two short years after 9/11 and the signing of the Patriot Act, and the same year the Pentagon unveiled the "Total Information Awareness" system. Although the novel predates Facebook's newsfeed and open-graph, the invention of Google Street View, the FISA Amendments Act of 2008, Google's 2012 updated Privacy Policy purporting to create "a more intuitive Google Experience," as well as Edward Snowden's release of NSA documents, it is fair to say that the novel anticipates the subsequent and ongoing intensification of consumer surveillance and data profiling in the twenty-first century. From the novel's organizing detective story, to the lingering uncertainties in the aftermath of 9/11, to the everyday moments of characters' lives, everything potentially adds up to something in this

---

[6] That is, the profile-industrial complex collects as much information as possible, not because all of the noise will yield a signal, but because any of it *potentially* could. In the words of a former senior U.S intelligence official "'Rather than look for a single needle in the haystack,' [NSA director, Keith Alexander's] approach was, 'Let's collect the whole haystack. . . Collect it all, tag it, store it. .   . And whatever it is you want, you go searching for it'" (Greenwald).

surveillance-scape. The commonplaces of everyday life, such as passing through a shopping center or logging on to the Internet are infused with significance, mystery, and even risk, beyond the conceits endemic to literary criticism that Hayles jokingly identified. This sense that every moment is ripe with clues or meaning is, of course, a hallmark of detective fiction, which as a genre begs a paranoid reading. Gibson has said that "detective fiction and science fiction are an ideal cocktail," and while *Pattern Recognition* is neither per se, it does capture their common ground in the historical present of ubiquitous data surveillance (Salon Interview). It is now utterly reasonable to assume that, at least online—and given the vast "internet of things[7]" so much of daily life is networked—even the most mundane actions, purchases, and utterances have become charged as potentially significant information and data. *Pattern Recognition,* thus, raises critical epistemological questions about who makes knowledge and meaning, through what means, and to whose benefit, while also connecting the epistemology of profile culture with related questions about the political-economy and labor practices of profiling, such as who actually "produces" information, who then owns the data and metadata, and, of course, who profits.

An emphatically twenty-first century technique of character development convenes with data profiling when Gibson directs readers to "google Cayce" on the second page of the novel. Gibson explains that "if you look closely [online] you may see it suggested that [Cayce] is a . . . dowser in the world of global marketing," suggesting that the novel's protagonist is not only a figurehead in the marketing world but also a

---

[7] ABI Research, for instance, predicts that by 2020 the Internet of Things (IoT) will include 30 billion devices.

figure online (2). Ultimately, it is true that information about Cayce is available online in book reviews, synopsis, excerpts, and blogs. Gibson's metafictional gesture acknowledges a form of public subjectivity that often precedes people and circulates outside their control, and, in this case, outside the control of the author. This reference also casually grants the fact that Google (the company) and googling (the action), are integral to contemporary understandings of the self. By suggesting that readers consult this paratextual information to learn about the protagonist, Gibson exercises metafiction's familiar deconstruction of the inside and outside of the text in order to challenge the fallacy of digital dualism[8]. Inviting readers to "google Cayce" also contrasts postmodernism's theoretical emphasis on an "absence of totality" with the profile industry's insatiable demand for ever-more information (Lyotard). More than simply peppering the prose with brand names and neologisms, this directive to "google Cayce" acknowledges the Internet's own role in constructing defining narratives of people that then generate feedback loops in their "character development." According to the dominant profile epistemology, to be on google or google-able, as Cayce is, is to *count* more, or be a rounder character, and to "google" her is to perform due diligence, to be a good reader—to "look closely." While firmly embedding his novel within the data age[9],

---

[8] Nathan Jurgenson coined the now popular term "digital dualism" to critique what he considered a false binary in "Turkle's *Alone Together . . .* Carr's *The Shallows*, Morozov's *The Net Delusion*, Bauerlein's *The Dumbest Generation*, Keen's *The Cult of the Amateur,* Siegel's *Against the Machine,* Lanier's *You Are Not a Gadget*, and the list goes on" ("Cyborgology").

[9] For what it's worth, I relate to and appreciate Gibson outspokenness about frequently consulting the Internet as he writes, acknowledging the ways in which this easy access to information enriches his writing.

Gibson's work interrogates the forms of knowledge production exercised by the profile industrial-complex including what they actively conceal. Aware of its own entanglement and complicity[10], the novel specifically critiques the political-economy of consumer surveillance, which monetizes and brands "self-expression" online, produces supposedly "risky" subjects, and obscures actually risky labor.

Given "that the race to know as much as possible about [consumer-citizens] has become the central battle of the era," the elaborate plot of *Pattern Recognition* rightly articulates meaning-making as a power-struggle (Pariser 18). The novel stages an arms race to find the "maker" of a series of film clips released anonymously online between those with an interest in commercializing "the footage" and fans who consider it sacred and want to protect it from cooptation. On one side of this conflict is the protagonist Cayce Pollard, a "footagehead," a "coolhunter," and a freelance marketing consultant for the advertising firm Blue Ant who has physical and psychological sensitivities or allergies to brands and logos, making her uniquely talented at her work. On the other side is Hubertus Bigend, the founder of Blue Ant, who is interested in the footage as "the most brilliant marketing ploy of this very young century. And new. Somehow entirely new" (4). Despite her reservations about Bigend's intentions and character, Cayce agrees to help him find the "maker" of the footage, taking advantage of his wealth and the access it affords, while mostly withholding her discoveries.

---

[10] In fact, not only is Cayce on Google, but her prized black Buzz Rickson's MA-1 flying jacket is also available for purchase online as part of Buzz Rickson's "William Gibson Collection"—a product that might well be advertised to readers who followed Gibson's instructions to Google his characters

In many ways this quest to pull back the curtain appears to follow a familiar Marxist narrative. Marx writes in *Capital*:

> Let us therefore, in company with the owner of money and the owner of labour-power, leave this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone, and follow them into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there hangs the notice 'No admittance except on business'. Here we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is itself produced. (279-280)

As Julian Murphet glosses, "the basic promise of the Marxian narrative of production was a kind of explanatory depth, a guarantee of final decipherment," and *Pattern Recognition* ostensibly delivers on this promise (144). In fact, together with almost all of the principle characters, Cayce and Bigend climactically convene in post-soviet Russia within "the hidden abode of production" to meet the "maker" and watch her work. In this sense, the conditions of labor are indeed the big reveal of the novel. We learn, for instance, that a woman named Nora Volkova creates the footage by editing surveillance footage gathered throughout Moscow, but that she is otherwise catatonic as the result of a T-shaped fragment of a Claymore mine that was lodged into her brain during the assassination of her parents. Nora is thus unaware that her twin sister, Stella, distributes the footage and has cultivated a global following. As the ending unfolds, Gibson slowly exposes an expensive and sophisticated infrastructure and security apparatus behind these sympathetic twins provided by their oligarch uncle, Andrei. Perhaps most notably he

establishes a privatized prison in order to furnish a captive covert workforce to render the footage.

Clearly, Marx's distinction between the "noisy sphere" of consumption and the "hidden" conditions of labor and production remains crucial today, with so much of manufacturing outsourced to factories in largely poor remote areas overseas. This, of course, has the dual benefit of being both cheaper and also relatively invisible to the purchasing public[11]. Gibson highlights this gulf between what the public knows and what the consumer believes by tracing the footage not only back to its "maker," or to the WWII Claymore mine shrapnel, but also to a residual cold-war infrastructure and incredible post-soviet wealth, and finally, perhaps most importantly, to the prisoners rendering the footage behind large fences. In other words, Gibson refuses to stop at the simple gratifying image of "'The Garage Kubrick' . . . some technologically empowered solo auteur, some guerilla creator out there alone in the night of the Internet, . . . some secretive perhaps unknown genius" (48). The "makers," rather, represent a confluence of historical forces and resources.

However, as Julian Murphet unpacks in his article, "Behind the Scenes: Production, Animation, and Postmodern Value," this "dialectical moment of wonder and disenchantment . . . *has always already happened.*" Despite the protagonist's care to

---

[11] Accordingly, the public seems willing to imagine that Apple products are made in Silicon Valley by well-paid "geniuses" playing Ping-Pong during their many breaks, despite knowing the ugly truth. While Upton Sinclair importantly exposed the meatpacking industry in *The Jungle,* factory farming in the U.S. today is largely protected from public scrutiny by so-called "Ag-gag" anti-whistleblower laws that prohibit any filming or photographing of the farms without the consent of the owners, enabling the meat-eating public to pretend their food comes from happy farms with happy animals.

protect the supposedly pure footage from consumerist corruption, we come to realize that, "The community of footageheads could never have resisted the enchantments of capital anyway, which is shown . . . to have conditioned the footage's production from the start" (161). In addition to witnessing the prison, Cayce learns, for instance, that the footageheads themselves were engendered and coaxed by the distributors who surveilled and participated in the forums. Bigend's arrival on the scene, therefore, does not, in the final instance, represent the "corporate colonization" that Cayce dreaded (161). In other words, "There is thus no 'single' spectacular revelation, no straightforward turn to the site of manual production" (163). Rather, we learn of a complex assemblage of material and immaterial labor that has always already reached around the curtain that Cayce and Bigend both relish in pulling back.

In this sense, the novel also reappraises the "noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone" to account for the invisible labor that is increasingly hidden in "full view" (Marx 279). Specifically, *Pattern Recognition* addresses the ways in which, in Marx's words, "capital is itself produced" both through the *underexposure* of labor and production, and also, relatedly, through the *overexposure* of consumer-citizens. For the profile industry, information about the public's activities taking place within the "noisy sphere" is repackaged as a product in and of itself. In this regard, the public is supplying unpaid labor to the profilers, stocking their stores of data and metadata. It's not just that activities such as emailing, maintaining a social media presence, or shopping are in many contexts a form of unpaid labor; it's that this work is also invisibly exploited by an immensely profitable industry. Meanwhile, this labor is

hidden in "full view" under the banner of "sharing." The public is supposedly

"compensated" in "convenience" and access to "free services," which are, of course,

opportunities to "share" more of their data or more completely "express themselves"[12].

Outside the company and discourses of business, the public is either framed as satisfied

consumers or willing participants, but never as the product itself or even the labor-power.

Watching The Numbers: "A brilliant new marketing ploy"

Ironically, in order to optimize the conditions for data collection, profilers

manufacture a sense of ownership and control among user/consumers over the online

platforms where they identify themselves and "share" information. While discussing her

work as a "coolhunter," Cayce establishes early in the novel that there should be "no

doubt that commodification will soon follow identification" (10). In a novel where the

signs and symptoms of consumer-capitalism are predominately represented as toxins

seeping across national borders, through screens, and beneath the skin, this is

undoubtedly the looming danger of succeeding at finding the maker of the footage. Yet,

the underlying naiveté is suspending disbelief enough to think that this threat could be

denied—that Cayce could simply refuse to identify the maker to Hubertus Bigend. As the

---

[12] If we imagine other businesses in which workers are compensated through the privilege of participating, we might begin to expose the underlying racism and sexism of this epistemology. For example, low salaries for teachers, the majority of whom are women, are excused by the platitude that teachers, "don't do it for the money." The egregious underpayment of NFL cheerleaders (who make less than minimum wage) is, likewise, ostensibly excusable because the women are considered "lucky" that they have the "opportunity" to "participate" and receive "attention" (Sifferlen). The same is said of many (mostly black) professional athletes when critics interrogate the profit margins of professional sports.

novel anticipates the ubiquity of profiling and consumer surveillance, it becomes clear

that the devoted underground fans of the footage, and the market information that they

can supply, are the real find "in this very young century" (4). That is, whether or not the

footage is ever monetized, as Cayce fears, its fans already are.

Bigend extols that the footage "has already been the single most effective piece of

guerilla marketing ever. [He's] been *tracking* hits on enthusiasts sites, and *searching* for

mentions elsewhere" and marvels that "the numbers are amazing" (64, emphasis added).

When he states that Cayce has "watched a subculture being born . . . evolving

exponentially," he implies that "advertising ecologies" not only bear new products, but

also engender new subjectivities and cultures that take on a life of their own (337). Still—

on the big end—these forms of subjectivity are reducible to their numbers and culture

becomes a function of their exponents. The passive construction of subcultures "being

born" and then naturally "evolving" as a matter of course conspicuously discounts the

strategic propagation of the film clips, by both the makers and footageheads. In fact, both

Blue Ant and the distributors of the footage have infiltrated the Film:Footage:Forum

(F:F:F), where footageheads log on to discuss the latest segments, in order to study

viewers' responses and track their engagement. In the broader context of computational

profiling, this practice permits marketer researchers to bank what is private and particular

to consumers and sell it back to them. Parkaboy's "feeling that none of what we actually

do here is ever really private" is, therefore, not paranoia (226).

Still, Bigend represents the work of "tracking hits" and "searching mentions" as

merely observational or inconsequential—as though the business of profiling and

metawatching is just another form of wide-eyed spectatorship. Especially given the

novel's metafictional dimension[13], it is worth clarifying that Bigend's brand of

scopophilia does not fit the literary description of metawatching: he is not exactly

watching the watchers; rather, he is watching "the numbers" of watchers. He

distinguishes that Cayce has "watched a subculture being born," while, he, on the other

hand, has watched "the numbers" grow. As part of the common defense of profiling, this

distinction between watching people and watching data is meant to put the public at ease.

In other words, the profile-industrial complex comprised of multinational corporations

and national governments is not watching us; they are merely watching data about us—a

degree of rhetorical remove that is used to quell concerns about privacy.

However, the novel demonstrates that privacy is not the only problem[14]. Framing

mass data collection as solely a personal privacy problem fuels an escalating arms-race

toward more sophisticated technologies of surveillance, while it also neglects critical

questions about the power relations of meaning-making and the exploitive economics of

data production, among others. Gibson effectively disrupts the common sense that data

"speaks for itself" and that surveillance of citizen-consumers is dispassionate and

objective. The profile industry invites the public to intimately share information in the

name of living "authentically," creating communities, maintaining close relationships,

---

[13] While Lisa Zeidner, in her *New York Times Book Review* praises *Pattern Recognition*'s
avoidance of "any metafictional grandstanding," the novel unarguably thematizes the
standing and function of the author or "maker" in the data age while drawing conspicuous
comparison and contrast between the footage and the novel.
[14] Surveillance scholars, including David Lyon, Simone Browne, and Rob Horning, have
long stressed the importance of thinking beyond the personal privacy problem.

and even enjoying the pleasures of voyeuristically watching one another. Conversely, the data industry, maintains that they collect information neutrally, analyzing it impassively, and produce knowledge objectively. In one sense, it is the ostensible disengagement and dullness of data collection that makes it seem benign. Moreover, the "meta" in metadata seems to neutralize any outstanding threat by adding yet another degree of distance and lifelessness. Not coincidentally, postmodern metafiction has been accused of a similar sort of bloodless disengagement[15], but what is by some accounts a liability to "fiction" and its ability to move people is apparently an asset to data brokers and their capacity to preempt serious social and political pushback.

However satirical he might seem, Bigend is, thus, an illuminating character, as he explicitly and unapologetically revels in "the numbers"—transgressing the ostensible order of things by suggesting that the back end (or big-end) is not as objective and dispassionate as profile epistemology maintains. He discloses upfront: "my passion is marketing, advertising, media strategy, and when I first discovered the footage, that is what responded in me. I saw attention focused daily on a product that may not even exist. You think that wouldn't get my attention? The most brilliant marketing ploy of this very young century. And new. Somehow entirely new" (4). The footageheads' "attention" grabs Bigend's "attention," and by emphasizing his unexpected "passion," Gibson, in turn, draws ours. What he identifies as "somehow entirely new" is the "attention focused

---

[15] David Foster Wallace, for instance, wrote, "Metafiction is untrue, as a lover. It cannot betray. It can only reveal. Itself is the only object. It's the act of a lonely solipsist's self-love, a night-light on the black fifth wall of being a subject, a face in a crowd. It's lovers not being lovers" (332).

daily on a product that may not even exist"—on what may, in effect, be a bubble. In this

sense, Gibson anticipates the forthcoming questions by speculators about the economic

value of social media companies, for example[16]. What Bigend's "attention" clarifies is

that whether or not the "product even exist[s]," the footageheads themselves effectively

fill the bubble. To the extent that the fans "allow [them]selves far into the investigation of

whatever this is . . . that [they] become part of it. Hack into the system. Merge with it"—

they become the product (255). Setting aside the social and political value of this

"participation mystique" (255), the footageheads become the object of "investigation"[17].

Repeatedly, Gibson offsets the fans' feeling of participation and ownership with

reminders of consumer surveillance, which often helps produce this affect[18]. After all,

data brokers and advertisers also "hack into the system" and attempt to "merge" with

consumers[19]. For example, Nora's uncle hires someone called "Mama Arcadia" to

---

[16] We have seen, for example, the conversation shift from how much Twitter is worth to "How Much Are You Worth to Twitter" (Balfour) since the company derives a large part of its revenue from licensing data is third parties.

[17] As Andrew Lewis famously said in 2010, "If you're not paying for something, you're not the consumer; you're the product being sold" (Quoted in Pariser 35). Michael Dell (of Dell computers) similarly states that, "'Our best customers aren't necessarily the ones that are the largest, the ones that buy the most from us, or the ones that require little help or service . . . Our best customers are those we learn the most from" (Lury 35). That is, "the brand interface is a device for the creation of meta-data" (Lury 112).

[18] Celia Lury explains that this is "in some respects analogous to the control loops of new media objects. That is, these practices enable the activities of consumers to be internalised in the processes and products of production and distribution" (71).

[19] Consider, for example, Amazon's product suggestions based on their "item-to-item collaborative filtering" algorithm; Netflix's recommendations, accounting for over sixty percent of movies and shows watched; or Facebook's advanced knowledge of when a user's "relationship status" will change.

infiltrate the Fetish:Footage:Forum in order to direct the conversation and glean information. To this point, it seems fitting that online pseudonyms, such as "Mama Arcadia" are called "handles": this is, after all, precisely what a forum such as F:F:F provides for data brokers. For Cayce, realizing that the "makers" have been manipulating the forum, which is "one of the most consistent places in her life, like a familiar café that exists somehow outside of geography and beyond time zones" (4), disturbs its *heimlisch* familiarity. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to consider Mama Arcadia an outsider or intruder when her contentious posts are so integral to the forum's appeal in the first place. Gibson seems to be suggesting that this embedded surveillance and manipulation actually helped produce the fans' intense feelings of comfort and community—thereby anticipating the now pervasive use of consumer surveillance online to manufacture a sense of intimacy, familiarity, and even authenticity, despite the common logic that data collectors are passively and dispassionately watching.

From a distance, the dissemination of the footage appears smooth or unhindered, even naturalized as a kind of "virus" spreading in a world "where it's possible to upload a video file and simply leave it there" (21). We are told, "the footage has a way of cutting across boundaries, transgressing the accustomed order of things," creating new communities and affecting the world in its wake (20). However, the smoothness by which it seems to circulate is nevertheless punctuated and paused by economic, political, and social barriers, illuminating the power structures shaped by capital. That is, the ease of the footage to cut across boundaries is furnished by "a world where there are no mirrors to find yourself on the other side of, all experience having been reduced, by the spectral

hand of marketing, to price-point variations on the same thing" (341). Specifically, we

learn that it is the Russian oligarch's fortune which affords such seamlessness: "'We're

talking post-Soviet, right? And enormous personal wealth. Nora's uncle isn't Bill Gate's

yet, but it wouldn't be entirely ridiculous to mention them in the same sentence. He was

on top of a lot of changes, here, very eagerly, and . . . always has brilliant government

connections, regardless of who's in power" (330). Gibson's attention, here, to the

producer's extreme wealth complicates the "viral model" that ostensibly "cuts across" the

asymmetries of production and consumption, confusing participation with power. If the

web seems smooth it is only because the striations are so widespread. This specifically

addresses "what has become an almost unchallenged popular nostrum that the internet, in

particular, is an *inherently* democratizing technology"—a falsehood that is now rehashed

to praise the virtues of big data[20] (Miller 59). After all, when an individual chooses to

"upload a video and simply leave it there," it most typically garners a remarkably narrow

audience.

In fact, while "Footageheads seem to propagate primarily by word of mouth or by

virtue of "random exposure" (53), Blue Ant, in fact, hires people to casually mention the

footage at bars, thereby accelerating and directing its circulation. As Cayce explains, "the

model's viral. 'Deep niche.' The venues would be carefully selected" (85). Most

---

[20] For example, advocates of use big data for job hiring claim that, "The problem with
human-resource managers is that they are human. They have biases; they make
mistakes," whereas algorithms, on the other hand, are not only able to cut employee
attrition by identifying candidates who live in close proximity to the company, for
instance, but are also more impartial and fair, eliminating the errant interference of
racism, sexism, homophobia, able-ism, and so on ("Robot Recruiters"). This, of course,
ignores the ways in which bias is both protected by algorithms as well as written into
them.

importantly, Cayce clarifies that "they don't buy the product: they recycle the information. They use it to impress the next person they meet." This "viral" model echoes Bigend's enthusiasm for a kind of speculative marketing where the existence of "products" is immaterial or beside the point. However outrageous sounding, this "viral" "deep niche" model is now pervasive. I am reminded of how often people repost or "like" articles on social networking sites without ever reading them. As long as people are "sharing" and resharing, they are adding value.

By this logic, Blue Ant remains more invested in "the numbers" than finding the maker, refocusing the stakes of the novel (64). In conversation with the Stella, (Nora's twin sister) who distributes the footage, Cayce explains:

> your sister's art has become very valuable. You've succeeded, you see. It's a genuine mystery. Nora's art, something hidden at the heart of the world, and more and more people follow it, all over the world . . . We have our own rich and powerful men. Any creation that attracts the attention of the world, on an ongoing basis, becomes valuable, if only in terms of potential.'

Defensively, Stella maintains, "'To be commercial. My uncle would not allow this degree of attention.'" Cayce's response that, "'It's already valuable. More valuable than you could imagine,'" is especially critical (307). She proceeds to reassure Stella that she won't tell Bigend what she has discovered, but by now, readers have already realized that this is beside the point. Gibson, here, anticipates the speculative economy of profiling: the "numbers" *are* the product. They don't just represent the value—they are of value.

In this climactic moment, Cayce finally has the opportunity to pull back the curtain and witness the conditions of production[21]. Raising the stakes, Gibson writes that when she first contacts Stella and Nora she feels like she is "writing a letter to God," suggesting that the "maker" is also somehow her creator[22]. However, upon meeting the twins, Cayce does not "find" herself in any ontological sense. On the contrary, she feels fundamentally displaced: "She knows that it's about meeting Stella, and hearing her story, and her sister's, but somehow she no longer is able to fit it to her life. Or rather she lives now in that story, her life left somewhere behind, like a room she's stepped out of. Not far away at all but she is no longer in" (292-293). Paradoxically, the more Cayce understands that she has been "tracked, via [her] post's ISP, [her] name and address determined, logged" (339), the more disoriented and lost she feels.

As she exposes the layers of surveillance, she begins "feeling much of the recent weirdness of her life shift beneath her, rearranging itself according to a new paradigm of history. Not a comfortable sensation, like Soho crawling on its own accord up Primrose Hill, because it has discovered that it belongs there, and has no other choice" (340-341). Despite the early descriptions of Blue Ant as "post-geographic" and Cayce as a nomadic "creature of fees, adamantly short-term" (61), she is, in the end, resolutely, all too embedded—not, however, in her own life "story," which now seems "like a room she's

---

[21] As Gibson describes it, the curtain Cayce pulls back is woven with old threads from "The Iron Curtain" her father faced and new threads from the "information curtain" Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned of. While Secretary Clinton was specifically referring to the need for a "single internet" the term "information curtain" also aptly describes the opaque partitions and filters that regulate information flow online.

[22] As Marshall McLuhan states, "we shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us" (xi).

stepped out of"—but rather in a new "systematic structure" (336), where she is "tracked," identified, and, most importantly, where meaning is not made on her terms. It is not merely the invasion of her privacy that jars Cayce; by writing her as the daughter of a cold war spy, Gibson establishes that possibility as old news. Rather, with a tinge of metafiction, she feels her sense—her character—becoming redefined "according to a new paradigm of history." An employee of the Volkovas, for example, informs Cayce that, as the target of their surveillance, she has had principle role in "the creation of more systematic structure" that she was unaware even existed. In this sense, our protagonist misrecognized herself a literary character and suddenly sees herself as a profile: a traceable, valuable, data set.

"Particularly farseeing, in his recognition of the importance of computing," Andrei Volkova, in the typical fashion of surveillance, used the Internet to maintain personal anonymity while exposing the fans in order to build an audience (337). This is, of course, the common practice of online surveillance: the practices of Internet corporations, are hidden behind incomprehensible privacy agreements and trade secret protections, for example, while consumer-users are increasing exposed. Still Volkova's associate, Sergei, explains that "the anonymity, the encryption, the strategies, as they evolved . . . involved an inherent risk of exposure" for the oligarch as well—implicitly conceding that "exposure" is a potential liability, and that their "new systematic structure" depends upon exploiting the exposure gap of surveillance.

Gibson, however, historicizes data profiling within the long tradition of political surveillance, alluding to the fact that after the Cold War there were glut of unemployed

spies who went to work in corporate espionage. Projecting forward, Gibson anticipates the current trend toward Surveilling consumer-users for inside information:

> There have always been two security operations around Stella and Nora. One is a branch, or subsidiary, of the group that protects Volkova himself. The flavor is ex-KGB, but in the sense that Putin is ex-KGB: lawyers first, then spies. The other, largely the creation of colleagues of mine, is less conventional, largely web-based. Wiktor has been brought in very recently to attempt to sort out a serious lack of understanding, of communication, between the two. Your arrival on the scene, via your discovery of the stellanor address, is glaring proof of our difficulties. (338)

Here, the web-based mobility and ubiquity of surveillance in "societies of control" combines with the residues of CIA and KGB security to negotiate the strict secrecy of the corporations and the increasing exposure of the public. Cayce's "arrival on the scene" represents the integral part played by the consumer-user as they are transformed into profiles, while reminding us that participation in new media forms is not in and of itself power. After all, it matters that Cayce, for her "part," was not only unaware of the new "systematic structure" that she was helping to create by being allowed to expose the security vulnerabilities, but that she was also uncompensated for her work.

Of course, new media, online forums, and marketing are not the sole provinces of profiling—not even within the novel. Andrei Volkova's "privatized prison" in Moscow, "where healthy, motivated prisoners can lead healthy, motivated lives, plus receive training and career direction," is one of the novel's most overt examples of personal

profiling and instructively clarifies the biopolitical dimension of counting people and deciphering what counts about any given person (329). Prisoners must be "healthy to begin with, otherwise they wouldn't have been chosen for this"; they are screened for diseases and any misstep "is an instant ticket back to TB Land," the state prisons overrun with infection (329). Exercising the same "friendly power" as modern marketers, this is the "only prison in Russia that people actively try to break into" (326). In this move from Foucauldian discipline to "societies of control," containment occurs on a cellular level. That is, it is not prison cells but the cells of prisoners that regulate inmates.

The catch is that these good, clean prisoners must render all of Nora's footage. Cayce questions, "how this could all have been put together, just to facilitate Nora's art," amending that, "*how* isn't a problem . . . but *why*" (330). A member of Volkova's team answers, "'Massive organizational redundancy, in the service of absolute authority. We're talking post-Soviet, right? And enormous personal wealth" (330). It is precisely this "organizational redundancy" that makes the prison a seemingly cooperative "friendly" space, preferable to the prisoners and beneficial for the proprietor. And yet, the smoothness and efficiency of the prison is dependent upon severe social striations that distinguish between clean and dirty bodies, good and bad inmates. Waking up in this "whatever" space, Cayce thinks the prison could be any given institution—a school, a hospital, or a mere network of corridors. If this seems like a curious facility to render viral video footage, "it is important to acknowledge the roots of many developments in computing (and indirectly the brand and other informational objects) in military and state surveillance" (Lury 7). A "brilliant marketing ploy"—with the power to *watch the*

watchers—the footage clearly coalescences around images of surveillance, not only given the scrutiny of the prisoners rending the footage, and the surveillance of the fans watching the footage, but also the significant fact that Nora's art is cut from city surveillance footage. In all these instances, video and more ubiquitous online surveillance technologies "translate physical space and its dwellers into data" (Lury 112).

"As though money is just sort of a side-effect"

Despite the apparent elusiveness of both the footage and Bigend's company Blue Ant, the novel actually grounds the cultural and financial currencies of these two organizations in their material conditions. Like the enigmatic footage, the marketing agency "Blue Ant" operates mysteriously in the novel, slipping through national, social, and economic borders. This effectual slipperiness and flexibility underscores that power is not only having the means to erect blockades and gain visibility but also the ability to easily sidestep barriers (with a code or pin number, for example) and evade attention. For example, Andrei Volkova, "the invisible oligarch. The ghost" with "enormous wealth" who supports the footage "largely managed to keep his name out of the media. Which must have been a downright spooky accomplishment" (330), we are told—again representing the power to manage one's "risk of exposure" (337).

Gibson's mocking description of Blue Ant similarly captures the white, male, and class privilege of these ghost-like figures underwriting increasingly nimble and networked forms of discipline and power:

Relatively tiny in terms of permanent staff, globally distributed, more post-

geographic than multinational, the agency has from the beginning billed itself as a

high-speed, low-drag life-form in an advertising ecology of lumbering herbivores.

Or perhaps as some non-carbon-based life-form, entirely sprung from the smooth

and ironic brow of its founder, Hubertus Bigend, a nominal Belgian who looks

like Tom Cruise on a diet of virgin's blood and truffled chocolates (6).

Gibson's description of this lean and mean corporation uses ecological rhetoric

(extinction, reproduction, consumption), which is so often deployed to naturalize

privilege and predatory business. The agency's very name is borrowed from a species of

large wasps that poison and paralyze crickets in order to lay their eggs inside of them,

where the wasp larva has a ready supply of food, not so subtly evoking parasitic business

practices. Bigend's "diet" of "virgin's blood" further echoes this image of a vampiric or

parasitic food chain[23]. This combined with the novel's thinly veiled reference to Nike as

Blue Ant's most recent client points to the ways in which advertising feeds off of its hosts

in this hierarchical "advertising ecology."[24]

---

[23] For more on Bigend's portrayal as vampiric see Alex Link's article, "Global War, Global Capital, and the Work of Art in William Gibson's Pattern Recognition."

[24] The life of the footage connects Gibson's use of "advertising ecology" to "media ecologies" and, in particular, Marshal McLuhan's appeal to watch the whole field of media without erroneously supposing that one medium cancels out another (*Understanding Media*). *Pattern Recognition* importantly extends the field of media to include the meta-watchers, such as marketers like Bigend.

It is worth noting that Nike has strategically identified itself as a "marketing company[25]" and not a shoe manufacturer in order to shirk responsibility for infamously and continually shifting production sites within East Asia in order to capitalize on the low labor costs and lack of worker protections for workers in these countries. When Blue Ant hires Cayce to determine whether or not their footwear client's new logo "works," she twice compares the Nike swoosh "scribble" to "sperm." Here, the Nike Swoosh, which emphatically doesn't "work" for Cayce, connects the lifecycles of brands and corporations to the actual people that Nike so brazenly reduces to labor-power. Cayce "imagines the countless Asian workers who might, should she say, spend years of their lives applying versions of this symbol to an endless and unyielding flood of footwear" wondering, "what would it mean to them, this bouncing sperm?" (12). In fact, Nike's particular "advertising ecology" produces not only new markets, but also vast territories of people who manufacture products that they themselves cannot afford. As the gaping divide between a low-cost labor force and a relatively high-end consumer widens, greater and greater populations are impoverished by this practice. Like the Nike corporation, Bigend's new "non-carbon based life-form" is a species living high on the food chain, avoiding the heavy "drag" of "permanent staff."

Be it Blue Ant, Nike, or Acxiom, the business relies on both human labor and increasingly comprehensive consumer profiles or "life-*forms*." Therefore, the claim that

---

[25] As the CEO of Nike explains: "'we've come around to saying that Nike is a marketing company, and the product is our most important marketing tool. What I mean is that marketing knits the whole organization together. The design elements and functional characteristics of the product itself are just part of the overall marketing process'" (Lury 49).

Blue Ant is "more post-geographic than multinational" is as ironic as Bigend's smooth

brow: the company's emphatic mobility only underscores the persistence of differently

draw boundaries and reinforced walls, from the pin-number check-points that the

company credit card routinely passes without problem to the concrete enclosures of the

privatized prison in Moscow than renders the footage. In this context, "post-geographic"

means smoothing out the passage of products from third-world factory workers to first-

world consumers, from prison enclosures [leaking toxins] to "chance encounters" on the

Internet. In other words, it does not signify the dissolution of national boundaries and

geographic zones but rather their reification.

Just as the novel continuously indulges and then undermines the romantic notion

that the footage emerged fully formed from the "maker's" brain, it likewise posits then

contests the grotesque and naïve fantasy that a business is the brainchild of its founder.

Elizabeth Grosz's key question, "Can we deromanticize the construction of knowledges

and discourses to see them as labor, production, doing?" must now also be asked of

twenty-first century businesses in a world where each consumer has a profile and Nike

can legally identify itself as merely brand or logo (158). *Pattern Recognition* mocks this

romanticization through Bigend's rejection of the very term "producer," suggesting

instead, "Advocate, perhaps? Facilitator?" (70). This rhetorical stance that there are no

producers proper is emblematic of profile culture's *friendly power* that obscures the

asymmetries of actual labor relations. Bigend professes, "the client and I engage in a

dialogue. A path emerges. It isn't about the imposition of creative will" (62). Skeptical

of this fiction of the benevolent benefactor, Cayce quips, "If Bigend can convince himself

that he doesn't impose his will on others, he must be capable of convincing himself of anything" (62). Another Blue Ant contractor, Boone Chu, also scoffs at the notion that "it's all about excellence, not money" for Bigend—as though "the money's just a sort of side effect." He astutely recognizes that this premise allows Bigend to keep his business practices "vague" (106-107). I argue that to suggest money is just a "side effect" is a key component of profile epistemology: for if money were the object, then the public (as content producers and data producers) should be compensated.

Moreover, focusing on the character and intentions of CEO's dangerously obscures more important questions about the business practices and effects of corporations. Consider, for example, Mitt Romney's dismissal of the crowd's concerns over low corporate tax rates with the cavalier defense, "corporations are people too, my friend" at the Iowa State Fair in 2011. In addition to the serious problems of considering corporations people, which Naomi Klein so thoroughly exposes in her book *No Logo*, Romney's attempt at amiability with the repeated address "my friend," echoes Bigend's rhetorical stance that ostensibly smoothes over severely asymmetrical power relations with "friendly power" (Preciado 109).

Resisting the measly matter of whether or not CEOs (and corporations for that matter) are in fact our "friends," *Pattern Recognition* vigilantly reminds readers that Blue Ant, indeed, has a history and materiality, thereby undermining claims that it exists virtually nowhere and is reducible to the spawn of a single spooky figure. Bigend himself explains that "'It's as though the creative process is no longer contained within an individual skull, if indeed it ever was. Everything, today, is to some extent the reflection

of something else'" (68). According to Bigend, the "creative process" can be, in part,

outsourced to the consumer, who reflects and "recycles" (85) the advertising campaigns

while producing the added value of data. His phrasing also smacks of postmodern

simulacra, but I'd argue that the novel actually represents the way "processes" are

"developed from below, from particular organization of matter" (Grosz 116). It is in this

sense that advertising is in fact ecological—meaning materially embedded—and not

because of some rhetorical "reflection" of Darwinian evolution.

Brand Culture and Invisible Labor

I have argued that the footageheads represent a workforce in the profile economy

and Bigend's new "advertising ecology." That is the hypervisiblity of participating in the

data age, which necessarily subjects consumer-users to surveillance, distracts from the

forms of invisible and uncompensated labor this demands. I argue that Cayce's acute

allergies to brands and logos represent a return of the often repressed labor of both

industrialism and post-industrialism. It is symbolically fitting that she would have a

physically painful reaction to signs and signifiers that are so often brandished to distract

from the conditions of physical labor and production. In other words, Cayce's allergies

dramatize and make vivid within lived experience the harmfulness of companies

concealing the physical conditions of labor behind their brand names. For Cayce, brands

and logos are not merely representative, but rather manifest physically. It is not until

Cayce is walking with Boone along the "canal's shabby towpath" in Camden Town that

she recounts "the basis of her peculiar sensitivities." The spot "too-powerfully back-lit"

like the sky in a "gray-scale Cibachrome of a Turner print" reminds her of a trip to

Disneyland that she took with her parents when she was twelve. She recalls "Pirates of

the Caribbean" breaking down and her family being "rescued by staff wearing hip-waders

over their pirate costumes, to be led through a doorway into a worn, concrete-walled, oil-

stained subterranean realm of machinery and cables, inhabited by glum mechanics"

(110). In crossing this threshold, Cayce witnesses the "realm" of labor, and "these

backstage workers" remind her "of the Morlocks in *The Time Machine*." Made of

concrete, oil, cables and mechanics, this repressive and gritty channel actualizes the terror

that "Pirates of the Caribbean" playfully approximates and displaces to a far-off

fantasyland. Even identifying the employees as "workers"—a dirty word to Disney,

which prefers the euphemism "cast members"—effectively breaks the illusion of pure

pleasure without the real stains of human toil and material consumption. The novel is also

interested in challenging the distinction between labor and performance, but unlike

Disney, for example, the novel aims to reveal the ways in which, within profile culture,

performance functions as a form of uncompensated labor.

The "advertising ecology" that Gibson introduces early on moves beyond the

metaphoric to include sincere questions of labor, consumption, and material waste.

Directly following this confrontation with the dark underbelly of infrastructure and

invisible labor, Cayce begins to "avoid having Mickey in her field of vision, and by the

fourth and final day" she develops her first "rash" in response to the masks or icons of

consumerism. After recalling this moment in her childhood, Cayce "goes to the canal's

edge and looks down." She notices, "a gray condom, drifting like a jellyfish, a lager can

half-afloat, and deeper down swirls something she can't identify, swathed in a pale and billowing caul of ragged builder's plastic." Again, facing the enduring waste products of consumerism, "she shudders and turns away" (110). The murky water of "Pirates of the Caribbean" or the canal's edge might give anyone a rash, but for Cayce, it is "look[ing] down" at the submerged systems of labor and residues of consumption that make sparkling brands and icons such as Mickey so unbearable. The sequence of information Gibson presents (Cayce's exposure to the scaffolding of Disneyland, an account of her first "close shave" with brand allergies, and finally her glimpse at the debris in the canal along Camden Town) contextualizes Cayce's physical reaction to labels and brand logos within broader concerns over expendable resources and expendable workers, which persistently float to the surface of the page.

From here, brands circulate for Cayce as physical manifestations of corporations with their own impact and consequence exceeding the products they mark. For instance, "Tommy Hilfiger does it every time . . . When it starts, it's pure reaction, like biting down hard on a piece of foil" (17). Her particularly severe reaction to Tommy Hilfiger, however, is not arbitrary—none of the brands that Gibson selects are. Despite what she says, her aversion or sensitivity to the brand is not a "pure reaction." Her response is more accurately grounded in knowledge of Tommy Hilfiger's history:

My God, don't they know? This stuff is simulacra of simulacra of simulacra. A diluted tincture of Ralph Lauren, who had himself diluted the glory days of Brooks Brothers, who themselves had stepped on the product of Jermyn Street and Savile Row, flavoring their ready-to-wear with liberal lashings of polo kit and

regimental stripes. But Tommy surely is the null point, the black hole. There must

be some Tommy Hilfiger even horizon, beyond which it is impossible to be more

derivative, more removed from the source, more devoid of soul (17-18).

Given how expertly she traces the derivations of the brand back through its sources, what

Gibson describes as Cayce's sixth sense, might then be better understood as an embodied

"historical sense" (Nietzsche). It is relevant then that "Tommy Hilfiger is run entirely

through licensing deals. Hilfiger commissions all its products from a group of other

companies: Jockey International makes Hilfiger underwear, Pepe Jeans London Hilfiger

jeans, Oxford Industries makes Tommy shirts and the Stride Rite Corporation makes its

footwear (ibid.). Companies such as Hilfiger, and to a lesser extent Ralph Lauren, Calvin

Klein and others, are thus able to acquire virtual (or 'weightless') production capacities

through an extensive network of licensing agreements" (Lury 98). Ultimately, Cayce

favors products that acknowledge their material construction, and she recoils at the

tendency of brand labels to eclipse their production.

In other words, she refuses to see brands as immaterial signifiers. Instead, she

experiences their real weightiness physically, in the form of allergies. "Cayce knows, for

instance, that the characteristically wrinkled seams down either arm" of her esteemed

MA-1 Buzz Rickson bomber jacket "were originally the result of sewing with pre-war

industrial machines that rebelled against the slippery new material, nylon" (11). Fittingly,

Buzz Rickson's tagline is "linking you with the past," which arguably accounts for

Cayce's admiration for the jacket. Similar to Cayce, the company identifies themselves as

"devoted historians"—perfectly contrasting Tommy Hilfiger's glossy ahistoricism and obfuscation of its own genealogy (History Preservation Association).

In addition to the power of labels to circulate as free-floating signifiers, Alex Link notes that the "most important common quality is that the majority of the brands to which Cayce feels the greatest aversion, if not actively engaged in the colonization of the local, share an intimate codependency with twentieth-century warfare" (216). Her first and worst trademark trigger, the Michelin Man (or Bibendum), is perhaps the clearest example, given that "In the First World War, Michelin pioneered the practice of transforming national trauma into a marketing strategy . . . offer[ing] guidebooks to, and tours of, major battlefields even before the war was over" (Link 217). Cayce succinctly describes Bibendum as "maggot-like," signaling the brand's parasitic practices during WWII, and recalling Bigend's choice to name his marketing agency after the Blue Ant wasp. In addition to churning out their "Red Book" tour guides, Michelin also operated the largest rubber plantation in Vietnam during the 1920s and 1930s, and their brutal exploitation of Vietnamese workers initiated the important labor movement, Phu Rieng Do. I argue that it is ultimately the visibility and acknowledgement of labor that differentiates products that "work" from products that don't in the novel.

Of course, Buzz Rickson's replicas of WWII fighter jackets also engage with the history of warfare, but they do so from a decidedly different perspective. Gibson writes, "the Rickson's having been created by Japanese obsessives driven by passions nothing at all to do with anything remotely like fashion," produce "an imitation more real somehow than that which it emulates" (11). In this sense, the MA-I replica reveals America to

Americans, exemplifying the positive potential of postmodern simulacra—simulacra that

is not free-floating, but rather historicizing. Given the United States' devastating fire-

bombings of Japan, the "passions" that drive this meticulous production are far deeper

than postmodern pastiche or some fleeting fashion statement. In the words of Jane

Bennett, Cayce's Buzz Rickson is "vibrant matter"[26] that does not merely refer to history

but rather, in all its ironies and complexities, plays history forward.

    Pattern Recognition contrasts this with "a square of clear acrylic: laser-etched in

its core are the Coca-Cola logo, a crude representation of the Twin Towers, and the

words "WE REMEMBER" sitting atop Nora's computer monitor (302-303). Here, the

juxtaposition of the Coco-Cola logo and the veritable slogan of September eleventh

epitomize capitalism's "crude" response to war and terrorism. To be sure, this reductive

trinket reeks of George W. Bush's post-attack encouragement to "go shopping more."

Similarly, in contrast with the Buzz Rickson, Swastikas "induce a violent reaction [for

Cayce], akin to Tommy-phobia but in an even worse direction." Importantly, it is "not so

much from a sense of historical evil (though she certainly has that) as from an awareness

of a scary excess of design talent." It is her sense that "Hitler had had entirely too brilliant

a graphics department, and had understood the power of branding all too well" that

makes the symbol so sickening (264). As opposed to the ahistorical and practically

metaphysical excess of brands like Tommy Hilfiger that circulate above and beyond the

products they label or the "excess of design talent" that has made Swastikas as well as

---

[26] Not unlike Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory, Bennett's book, *Vibrant Matter: The Political Ecology of Things* argues for the agency of things and the web of forces (both human and nonhuman) that affect events and conditions.

Bibendum global icons (albeit on very different registers), the excess or "obsession" that Cayce distinguishes in Buzz Rickson lies in its awareness of how materiality matters, its attention to labor, and its engagement with national and local histories.

Conclusion: "Both a Gift and a Trap"

I have argued that *Pattern Recognition*, with a keen historical sense, hears the "powers of the future [which] are knocking on the door" (57, *Toward a Minor Literature*) and insightfully addresses the complex relationship between surveillance and the new profile economy as an epistemological matter of knowledge production and labor relations, and not simply a problem of privacy. In many ways, this chapter has argued against the neoliberal suggestion that online participation and sharing are in and of themselves liberating by focusing on their limitations and cooptation. I have argued that the coerced visibility of user-consumers, which has proven immensely profitable for the profile industry, also conveniently obscures the contrasting invisibility of big data. Additionally, I have suggested that the public's part in this "new systematic structure" of supplying valuable data represents a form of unpaid labor, which intersects with brand culture's use of logos and trademarks to stand in for companies and mask the material conditions of production. This form of obfuscation that presents a glossy, likeable face for the company (Bibendum, Disney, etc.) is not unlike the "profile pages" and forms of personalization that people feel affection for and ownership over, but which are meanwhile supplying the unseen wealth of metadata profiles over which the public has little to no control or knowledge.

Nevertheless, and to be sure, the disciplinary structures that ultimately reorder Cayce's relationship with the footage are also not totalizing or exhaustive. There is undoubtedly a difference between how subjectivity is produced and then how it is occupied, lived, and resisted—and both are crucial conversations. Parkaboy posits that, "Homo sapiens are about pattern recognition . . . Both a gift and a trap" (22), and I would argue that the same could be said of data profiling. Gibson portrays the "gift" of "niche" profile culture in the community and sincerity of the footageheads. Parkaboy notes, for example, that while people think they are just sitting there staring at a screen, "some of them, anyway, are adventurers" (255). The distributors paid "people to lurk on F:F:F" because it "quickly emerged as the liveliest, the most interesting forum. And potentially the most dangerous" (339). In this sense, their movement seems to have a political energy, if not a political consciousness. Still, Bigend explains that it precisely this "passion" in Cayce's online-posts that "makes [her] so valuable" to Blue Ant (65). At the novel's end, trademarks "register neutral" fro Cayce, yet it is unclear "whether this change, whatever it is, will affect her ability to know whether or not a given trademark will work" (355). It is, therefore, possible that she has escaped the "traps" of "pattern recognition" while maintaining the "gifts." As Cayce lies curled up like a question mark in the novel's final scene, the lingering question for the coming century, already accustomed to near ubiquitous data profiling, is whether or not we will be able to make best use of the "gifts" that innovations in both online communication and data collection offer while escaping the "traps" that are too often made invisible.

Works Cited

Balfour, Lili. "How Much Are You Worth To Twitter?" *Huffington Business.* 16 Oct 2013. Web. 24 Feb 2016. <*http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lili-balfour/how-much-are-you-worth-to-twitter_b_4099327.html*>.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things.* Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2009. Print.

"Big Data and Hiring: Robot Recruiters." *The Economist*. 6 April 2013. Print.

"Creating Revenue From Customer Data." *Accenture Digital.* Online Video. Web. 24 Feb 2016. <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insight-data-monetization-summary.aspx>.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guatarri. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. University of Minnesota Press, 1986. Print.

---."Postscript on Societies of Control." *Negotiations*. Trans. Martin Joughin. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. 177-182. Print.

Fokkema, Aleid. *Postmodern Characters: A Study of Characterization is British and American Postmodern Fiction*. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1991. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. Trans. A. Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1995. Print.

---. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975–1976.* ed. M Bertoni & A Fontana. London: Penguin, 2003. Print.

Gibson, William. *Pattern Recognition.* Berkley, 2005. Print.

---."William Gibson: I Never Imagined Facebook." Interview by Michael Schulson. *Salon*. 9 Nov 2014. Web. 24 Feb 2016. <http://www.salon.com/2014/11/09/william_gibson_i_never_imagined_facebook/>.

Greenwald, Glen. "The Crux of the NSA Story in One Phrase: 'Collect it All.'" *The Guardian.* 15 July 2013. Web. 24 Feb 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jul/15/crux-nsa-collect-it-all>.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power (Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies)*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2005. Print.

Hardt, M. "The Withering of Civil Society." *Social Text* 45 (1995): 27-44. *History*

Preservation Associates. n.d. Web. 11 October 2011.

Hayles, Katherine. "Electronic Literature and Future Books." MIT. Bortos Theater, Media Lab, Cambridge, MA. 4 May 2012. Keynote Address.

Jurgenson, Nathan. "Digital Dualism Versus Augmented Reality." *Cyborgology*. Feb 24 2011. Web. 24 Feb 2016 <https://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2011/02/24/digital-dualism-versus-augmented-reality/>.

Klein, Naomi. *No Logo.* Picador, 10 Anv. Edition, 2009. Print.

Konstantinou, Lee. "The Brand as Cognitive Map in William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition.*" *Boundary 2*. 36.2 (2009): 67-97. Print.

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. Print.

Link, Alex. "Global War, Global Capital, and the Work of Art in William Gibson's Pattern Recognition." *Contemporary Literature.* 49.2 (2008): 209-231. Print.

Lury, Celia. *Brands: The Logos of the Global Economy (International Library of Sociology).* Routledge, 2004. Print.

Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 279-80. Print.

McLuhan, Marshall, and Lewis H. Lapham. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.* The MIT Press, 1994. Print.

Miller, Toby. *The Routledge Companion to Global Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge. 2015. Print.

"More than 30 Billion Devices Will Wirelessly Connect to the Internet of Everything." *ABI Research*. 9 May 2013. Web. 24 Feb 2016. <https://www.abiresearch.com/press/more-than-30-billion-devices-will-wirelessly-conne/>.

Murphet, Julian. "Behind the Scenes: Production, Animation, and Postmodern Value." *Sydney Studies in English,* Vol. 32. 2006. 143-165. Print.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic. By Way of Clarification and Supplement to My Last Book Beyond Good and Evil (Oxford World's Classics).* Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.

Pariser, Eli. *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding From You.* Tantor Media, 2011. Print.

Preciado, Beatrice. "Pharmaco-pornographic Politics: Towards a New Gender Ecology." *Parallax*. 14:1 (2008): 105-117. Print.

Sifferlen, Alexandra. "NFL Cheerleads File Suit Saying They Make As Little as $2.85 Per Hour." *Time.com.* 14 Feb 2014. Web. 24 Feb 2016. <http://time.com/44069/cheerleaders-rebel-over-low-wages/>.

Wallace, David Foster. *The Girl With Curious Hair*. W.W. Norton & Company New York 1996. Print.

Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics.* Zone Books, 2005. Print.

Zeidner, Lisa. "*Pattern Recognition:* The Coolhunter." *New York Times Book Review.* 19 Jan 2003. Web. 24 Feb 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/19/books/review/19ZEIDNET.html?pagewanted=all>.

Chapter Two

Metadata, Metafiction, and the Stakes of Surveillance in

Jennifer Egan's *A Visit From the Goon Squad*

Neoliberalism demands that consumer-citizens dutifully manage their personal

profiles like investment accounts. Yet, as it happens, individuals have about as much

control over their data-profiles as they do the financial market. Sure, they can post only

the most prudent pics under the most restrictive security settings, or pick only the most

prudent securities in the market, but ultimately, the algorithms and systems that govern

both are largely opaque (Pasqual). Moreover, some people have a greater vested interest

in sustaining this opaqueness while others are more vulnerable to poor profiling and

predatory marketing[27]. From shopping records to credit reports to computer clicks,

profiles attempt to ascertain and represent a person's "human capital" and riskiness.

Personal data is parsed, interpreted (often incorrectly), repackaged, and auctioned off. In

other words, profiles ostensibly make "human capital" visible and ratable in an economy

of speculation[28]. For this reason, a study of profiles is inextricable from the sexual and

racial politics of meta-watching and surveillance.

---

[27] One particularly egregious example involves a data-firm selling the names of rape victims for target marketing of anti-depressants.

[28] In this regard, data-profiling attempts to make good on the work of Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911), a statistician, the founder of eugenics, and a cousin of Charles Darwin who drawing on the popularity of profile portraits and physiognomy, created composite photographs to establish "scientific" categories of faces. According to Galton, these composites were capable of depicting and detecting human types, such as the Jew, the Englishman, the prostitute, and the delinquent.

This chapter posits both metadata and metafiction as forms of surveillance within our profile society and considers the politics, technologies, and affects therein. As a form of surveillance itself, so often preoccupied with watching itself watch, metafiction can help contextualize the proliferation of personal data-profiles within a longer history of surveillance that links 19th century imperialism to 21st century securitization and the state's recent cooperation with the consumer profiling industry. At its best metafiction models "open book" transparency by the watchers themselves, while simultaneously allowing for individuals (or characters) to remain complex and irreducible. Even as my work continues to critique contemporary modes and affects of surveillance, metafiction as a technology of surveillance, clarifies that "watching" in and of itself is not the problem. After all, as Upton Sinclair and Edward Snowden have illustrated, society needs watchers. However, whether reading metafiction or metadata we must conscientiously consider the power relations between the target and watcher.

A Washington Post book reviewer cheered, "If Jennifer Egan is our reward for living through the self-conscious gimmicks and ironic claptrap of postmodernism, then it was all worthwhile." Egan's 2010 Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *A Visit From the Goon Squad* is comprised of thirteen interrelated short stories, all reflexively written in different literary styles, and yet it has avoided the stigma of gimmicky metafiction. I will argue that this is, in part, because, in addition to being self-reflexive and formally experimental, *Goon Squad* is also critical of the ideologies that underpin postmodern metafiction. Pivoting on Patricia Waugh's definition of metafiction as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in

order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality," I contend that Egan's "profile-fiction" also interrogates the modes of ambient surveillance sitting at the intersection of "fiction and reality" (2). In other words, *Goon Squad* keenly depicts the politics of positionality with regards to surveillance, metafiction, and metadata.

Because metafiction, since at least the 1960's, has thought critically about perspective and reflexivity, it is now especially well-suited for grappling with the meaning and consequences of metadata. Jennifer Egan's work, in particular, draws on the critical contributions of metafiction while also acknowledging that it too has been subject to hegemonic powers. For example, feminist critics have pointed out that as feminism, postcolonialism, and critical race theory worked to recover lost histories, metafiction (and postmodernism more broadly) conveniently pronounced the end of history. Sabina Lovibond, for example, asks, "How can anyone ask me to say goodbye to 'emancipatory metanarratives' when my own emancipation is still such a patchy, hit-and-miss affair?" (395). Now, metadata provides an emerging model of history that can be either "cached" or "cleared" but, most importantly, sold for profit. This is the new "history" of *homo-economicus*—represented by profiles that unevenly benefit or harm consumer-users. To be sure, this neo-liberal version of history captured in metadata reinforces and widens the existing inequalities, which various discourses of history have either shamelessly whitewashed on the one hand or attempted to redress on the other. However, Egan's work suggests that as long as writers elide their own privilege and embodiment, metafiction and metadata emerge as mirror images in a neoliberal funhouse.

Of course, metafiction has long been interested in surveillance, but while Pynchon's early fiction, for example, is seeped in cold-war paranoia and the possibility of some intrigue to be untangled, Egan's novel theorizes not only the ubiquity but also the disturbing banality of being watched.[29] Here, it's not conspiracy—it's capitalism. *Goon Squad* not only "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact," but it also highlights the consumer or users' own status as an object by portraying the narrative and regulatory power of profiles to police living bodies as divisible and searchable code. In this sense, her entangled narrative accurately depicts profiles as the technology and technique of control in a network society and explores the material and discursive consequences of this development.

Still, Egan's work brings the lessons of metafiction to bear on our understanding of profile culture: the fallacy of grand narratives or totalizing perspectives; the Heisenbergian uncertainty principle that observing something necessarily affects it (Stam, Waugh); and the recognition that identity is always an "artistic construct" (Hutcheon). And yet, her work also illustrates crucial lessons of profile culture which must likewise inform our understanding of metafiction: that the writer's perspective, while not totalizing, can nevertheless reflect privilege; that observation or surveillance is political, contextual, and embodied; and that while identity is "an artistic construct," it is also, and crucially, a commercial construct. *Goon Squad* speaks to both sets of concerns, at once critiquing and enriching postmodern metafiction. Specifically, Egan's novel emphasizes

---

[29] For a thorough reading of paranoia in 1960s American literature see Patrick O'Donnell's essay, "Engendering Paranoia"

the need for embedded, embodied, feminist metafiction that critically addresses the power relations of writing, watching, and surveillance.

Profiling consumer-users is a growing industry that demands ever-more sophisticated and ubiquitous forms of data collection. The profiles themselves represent neither individuals nor populations, but, rather, the endlessly divisible subject, encoded and dispersed in data. Still, the profile industry positions subjects schizophrenically straddling the individual/mass divide. It entails that people simultaneously feel both newsworthy but also relatively insignificant[30]. These contradictory states of mind encourage consumers-users to casually "share" their habits, purchases, "likes," photographs, and whereabouts[31]. Celebrity culture underwrites this comprehensive surveillance by promoting the perception that a high public profile equals high "human capital" and individual worth[32]. Accordingly, social media, such as Twitter and Facebook[33], position themselves as public relations firms for the famous and non-famous alike, tracking and treating "followers" or "friends" as a fan-base. In fact, a current

---

[30] As Rosi Braidotti quips, "Welcome to capitalism as schizophrenia!" (*Transpositions* 58-59).

[31] And, yet, the extent to which consumer-citizens "share" their information willingly is, as I hope to show, also a smoke-screen for the ubiquitous surveillance from which there is no meaningful way to opt out.

[32] Cultural theorists Su Holmes and Sean Redmond rightly argue that "Stars articulate what it means to 'be human' in capitalist society, dramatizing 'ideas of personhood, in large measure shoring up the notion of the individual'" (9).

[33] To be clear, I do not aim to diminish the often profound uses of social media, but rather to address the less-visible uses and abuses of social media by the profile industry which fund these sites.

Facebook ad depicts a young woman holding a microphone with the copy, "If you've got friends, you've got fans"—dangerously conflating the two.

Through the lens of celebrity culture, what might be considered an invasion of privacy is dismissed as the price of publicity. Conversely, the more the culture focuses on "celebrities who try to perform our publicness for us," the more anonymous—and therefore protected—the public feels in comparison (Warner 70). In fact, I argue that social media's voluntary model of user created profiles distracts from the industry's far more extensive practices of data-based profiling that is both concealed and pardoned by cursory privacy "agreements." With the help of celebrity culture, the profile industry cultivates this complete disclosure and self-promotion as well as the delusion of being securely anonymous and inconspicuous. As Egan summarizes in her story "Black Box," released on Twitter one hundred and twenty characters at a time: "The goal is to be both irresistible and invisible." Finally, Egan's fiction acknowledges that the profile industry's relatively new mandate that consumer-users be both "irresistible and invisible" has long been demanded of women, and her work steadfastly contextualizes the profile industry and consumer surveillance within patriarchy.

By setting *A Visit From the Goon Squad* around the music industry's transition from analogue to digital platforms, Egan is able to tease out the symbiotic relationship between the profile industry and celebrity culture, especially as it pertains to questions of privacy, publicity, and surveillance. While the character Bennie Salazar, a disillusioned music producer, blames the "decline" of the music industry on digitization, the novel critiques a more complicated set of forces that do not merely convert analogue recordings

70

into digital data, but more disturbingly, translate consumer behavior into metadata. In other words, Egan sets her characters' anxiety about personally "selling out" within the larger context of neoliberalism and widespread data-profiling. As Bennie puts it, "It's not about music. It's about reach" (312). Just as the novel structurally and stylistically resembles a concept album,[34] it also approximates a database of networked characters. Rather than simply denouncing digital technology, Egan's account of the recent history of the music industry more importantly scrutinizes the "reach" of the profile industry.

Overseeing and Overlooking

Chronologically, the novel begins with the chapter "Safari" which sets Lou, a music executive, his girlfriend Mindy, his two children, and his band-mates on a safari in Kenya. Occasioned by a safari, the story is especially thick with themes of watching. It also carries the baggage of the great white male explorer made so familiar by Hemingway, who is credited with first introducing the Swahili word "safari" into the English language. In fact, Egan's chapter specifically recalls Hemingway's contentious short story "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber"[35]: not only are both stories

---

[34] The novel is divided into "Part A" and "Part B" and on Egan's website she even names the musicians that she associates with each chapter. A UK application for the iPad also allows readers to "shuffle" the chapters like a playlist.

[35] Writer and literary critic, Frank O'Connor, for example, provides this summary mocking the gender dynamics: "Francis runs away from a lion, which is what most sensible men would do if faced by a lion, and his wife promptly cuckolds him with the English manager of their big-game hunting expedition. As we all know, good wives admire nothing in a husband except his capacity to deal with lions, so we can sympathize with the poor woman in her trouble. But next day Macomber, faced with a buffalo, suddenly becomes a man of superb courage, and his wife, recognizing that[...] for the

about safaris in Kenya but they also share an implied affair between the central female character and the tour guide. In Egan's story the "surly" (64) Hemingway-esque guide, Albert, "with his longish brown hair and mustache" "looks like a real explorer" to Lou's son Rolph, evoking the history of both how a "real explorer" appears and sees 74). The chapter depicts what could be called "safari surveillance," by combining the imperial tourist gaze rooted in naturalizing and trivializing "the other," with a form of violent masculinity that assumes mastery over something or someone deemed risky or dangerous. Lou's band-mates, for example, are "locked in a visceral animal-sighting competition," indicating that mastery and the threat of danger are integral to the experience (66). Even when one of the men is attacked by a lioness who is then shot and killed in an entirely preventable encounter, the characters gleefully regard the event as a "story they'll tell for the rest of their lives"—thereby reaffirming the safari-goers' dominance (71). This too is reminiscent of Hemmingway's characters approaching Africa as a testing ground for violent masculinity.

Crucially, this sense of power (like both tourism and surveillance) depends upon overlooking as much as it oversees. Egan projects this history into the future when the narrator tells us that Albert's grandson "Joe will go to college at Columbia and study engineering, becoming an expert in visual robotic technology that detects the slightest hint of irregular movement (the legacy of a childhood spent scanning the grass for lions). He'll marry an American named Lulu and remain in New York, where he'll invent a scanning device that becomes standard issue for crowd security" (62). We will see Joe

---

future she must be a virtuous wife, blows his head off. [...] To say that the psychology of this story is childish would be to waste good words" (163).

and his "visual robotic technology" briefly in the novel's final chapter, "Pure Language," set in 2024. This genealogy between "scanning the grass for lions" and "a scanning device . . . for crowd security" connects the safari's imperial gaze to the security-state's investment in detecting "irregular movement." Egan draws out the racist legacy of this colonial or imperial gaze when Lou sees his daughter, Charlie, dancing "alone, by the fire" and "wants to grab his daughter's skinny arm and yank her away from these black men, but does no such thing, of course. That would be letting her win" (61). His response to Charlie dancing near "these black men" as well his concern over "letting her win" epitomizes the economy of colonial white masculinity also present in Hemmingway's story.

While ostensibly an opportunity to *see* Africa, the safari itself—which centers white western men—is designed to conceal and make unintelligible the experience of the African people, represented here as a dangerous "black, muttering expanse of the bush, where they've been cautioned never to go" (62). While, despite Lou's bigotry, interaction with African men is unavoidable during the safari, Egan's prose signals the complete invisibility and incomprehensibility of black African women through the colonial trope of the dangerous "black . . . bush." And yet, by drawing cross-generational connections between Albert, who is apparently a white Englishman and Joe, his black African grandson, Egan marks the absent presence of black women. And so, whether "scanning" Africa or "scanning" a crowd, surveillance is always also a matter of who and what is overseen as well as overlooked.

By tracing future technology used for crowd control and security back to the Safari

and imperial alibis of protecting white women, Egan situates the prison industrial

complex and the proliferation of surveillance technologies within a longer history of

imperialism and hegemonic control. After all, surveillance technologies are not

developed in a vacuum outside the context of social inequalities. On the contrary, they

are often the vanguard of violence against women and minorities[36]. Not unlike the optics

of safaris, state surveillance—represented by Joe's "robotic eye" and the "whirring"

helicopters—is designed to expose and then expunge "dangerous" subjects or bodies.

Who is deemed dangerous is always itself political.

Not only do the chapters "Safari" and "Pure Language" (which are chronologically

the first and last chapters) draw out the connections between imperialism and

securitization through Albert and his grandson Joe, but they also represent the link

between state-surveillance and rampant consumer surveillance, pointing toward a very

real and troubling cooperation. Like these other forms of watching, consumer

surveillance is designed to conceal its own biases (formalized in algorithms) as well as its

"reach." In *Goon Squad*, we move from watching from the edges of the "black, muttering

expanse of the bush" which has long been misrepresented as "pure nature" to glimpsing

backstage at the ostensibly distilled and "pure language" of profiling and marketing, for

which Joe's wife Lulu is the poster-child. Working for Bennie Salazar to orchestrate a

word-of-mouth marketing campaign for Scotty's upcoming concert, Lulu helps persuade

---

[36] For example, fingerprinting, developed by Sir Francis Galton, "has its origins in
eugenics" and "is now used to police, surveil and track criminalized individuals in the
contemporary prison system, one that has been described as the system *par excellence*
demonstrating U.S. racial apartheid" (Mason and Magnet 109).

a character named Alex to participate by appealing to marketing jargon from her graduate

classes in order to deconstruct his reasoning. Despite his ethical reservations about

working in secret, Alex accepts Bennie's offer to let "each team member deal

individually with Lulu, with Alex orchestrating in secret from above" (319). That is, the

"blind team" is unaware that there is a third level of oversight. While much is made of the

novel's "horizontal" or lateral structure that so obviously invokes the internet and online

platforms like Facebook, *Goon Squad* also draws attention to the hierarchies of

communication, visibility, and capital that is more than often concealed. For example,

most consumer-users are well aware that Facebook, Google or any given internet

platform is overseeing their communications and usage, but they might not be fully aware

of the extent to which this data is visible to a third parties, including law enforcement

agencies[37]. The marriage between Lulu and Joe dramatizes the marriage of securitization

and consumer surveillance, both of which depend upon overseeing consumer-citizens

who are overlooking this troubling partnership.

"A Graduate student at Barnard *and* Bennie's full-time assistant," Lulu is "a living

embodiment of the new 'handset employee': paperless, deskless, commuteless, and

theoretically omnipresent" (317). Like the phrase "blind team," which strategically

evokes the friendly rhetoric of sports and games, "full-time" takes on new meaning here.

Following current trends, the fact that Lulu's work is "paperless, deskless, and

commuteless," actually means that there is more of it. Moreover, Egan draws out the

---

[37] The U.S. government refers to this cooperation as an "Information-Sharing
Environment (ISE)". In this new environment, surveillance operates "with the privileges
and immunities of the state but not the accountability" (Pasqual).

ways in which the uncounted (and, therefore, deeply discounted) labor of post-industrial

society directly depends upon the technologies and techniques of ubiquitous surveillance.

Mark Fisher's book *Capitalist Realism* situates this "new 'handset employee'" within the

societies of control identified by Deleuze, which "operate using indefinite postponement:

Education as a lifelong process . . . Training that persists for as long as your working life

continues . . . Work you take home with you . . . Working from home, homing from

work." Moreover, an important "consequence of this 'indefinite' mode of power is that

external surveillance is succeeded by internal policing" (22). It is this exhausting work of

self-control in post-industrial society that Lulu so perfectly characterizes—along with all

of the bodily symptoms it produces.

Lulu is aware of the metaphors we live by and argues to Alex that "those

metaphors" for critiquing new forms of marketing—"'up front' and 'out in the open'—

are part of a system we call atavistic purism. AP implies the existence of an ethically

perfect state, which not only doesn't exist and never existed, but it's usually used to shore

up the prejudices of whoever's making the judgment'" (319). On the one hand Lulu is

acknowledging that there is no such thing as "Pure Language," but, on the other hand, she

seeks solace in "capitalist realism" and the rationalizations of neoliberalism, which

purports to operate outside ideology as simply a fact of nature. Egan mockingly portrays

Lulu as a disciple of this thinking the same way that she portrays the novel's other

graduate student, Mindy, as a disciple of structural anthropology. And yet, by linking this

neoliberal capitalism to structuralism, imperialism to law enforcement, and state

76

surveillance to consumer surveillance, Egan underscores the naiveté and cost of accepting these systems as "pure."

When Alex easily deconstructs Lulu's reasoning, she is overcome with exhaustion and the physical symptoms of self-policing and the burden of upholding this capitalist realism:

> Lulu underwent the most extreme blush Alex had ever witnessed: a vermilion heat encompassed her face so abruptly that the effect was of something violent taking place, as if she were choking or about to hemorrhage [. . .]
>
> 'You're right,' Lulu said, taking a rickety breath. 'I apologize.'
>
> 'No sweat,' Alex said. The blush had unsettled him more than Lulu's confidence. He watched it drain from her face, leaving her skin a jarring white. 'You okay?' he asked.
>
> 'I'm fine. I just get tired of talking.'
>
> 'Ditto,' Alex said. He felt exhausted.
>
> 'There are so many ways to go wrong,' Lulu said. 'All we've got are metaphors, and they're never exactly right. You can't ever just Say. The. Thing.' (321)

By emphasizing Lulu's physical symptoms ("the most extreme blush . . . a vermilion heat . . . something violent . . . as if she were choking or about to hemorrhage . . . rickety breath . . . drain from her face . . . her skin a jarring white"), Egan turns questions of linguistics back toward the body, materialism, and affect. As Fisher points out, "Without delirium and confidence, capital could not function," and Lulu embodies this struggle (35). This is labor, and it is "exhaust[ing]" precisely because the body is never exhausted

by language. However, neither is the body simply "The. Thing." that exists outside language. Rather, the body stands at the threshold between binaries—both public and private, internal and external, natural and social—and is thus a powerful place to consider and help deconstruct the conflict that Lulu experiences. In other words, the body "is not simply a sign to be read, a symptom to be deciphered, but also a force to be reckoned with" (Grosz 120). Taking this "force" seriously, Lulu's physical response pushes back against her notion that "all we have are metaphors."

As an exemplary "handset employee," Lulu relies on the "pure language" of the marketing and attempts to repress the body by, for example, foreswearing the language of "epidemiology" in favor of physics: "'no one says "viral" anymore,' Lulu said. 'I mean, maybe thoughtlessly . . . now we study particle physics'" (317). However, by emphasizing Lulu's own physical response to the constraints of language, Egan stages the return of the repressed, not just for Lulu but also for postmodern metafiction, which like modernism still perpetuates a mind/body dualism that positions women as "being *the* body for men while men are left free to soar to the heights of theoretical reflection and cultural production" (Grosz 22). This is also the precise problem that feminist studies of surveillance and metadata must confront. Tracing the genealogy from "safari surveillance" to security surveillance to consumer surveillance, it is evident that surveillance is designed to conceal certain externalities. Metafiction, on the other hand, is ostensibly a matter of revealing externalities and showing how they were always already internal to the text. Egan presses on these connections to demonstrate how metafiction has produced its own outsiders through what amount to the same set of imperial and

patriarchal biases. Without being both embedded and embodied, metafiction is ill equipped to confront the serious questions posed by metadata, which is rooted in a long and fraught history of surveillance.

Throughout *Goon Squad*, Egan fastidiously embeds minor characters into the margins who observe the action and whose presence provides critical insights[38]. Most notably, two "elderly bird-watching ladies" occupy a readerly position of overhearing or overseeing the action from the periphery of the scene in "Safari" (60). In this regard, the story's title recalls not only Hemingway's work but also the Apple "Safari" web browser, which ostensibly positions users as concealed explorers and observers while layers of "trackers" inconspicuously monitor their movements across the web. After a private conversation between Lou's girlfriend, Mindy, and the safari guide, with whom she has a quiet affair, "it occurs to Mindy, vaguely, that they elderly bird-watcher was inside the jeep the whole time that she and Albert were talking" (70). To continue the analogy, it is not that people are entirely unaware that their seemingly private actions and interactions are increasingly being monitored; it is just that this awareness remains "vague" and

---

[38] In the first chapter we are introduced to Alex as Sasha's one-night-stand, a minor character in her story, and yet she and we are "drawn to the sight of him taking everything in" (15). Even though the chapter "As Me If I Care" it is written from her point of view, Rhea still explains that "In this story, I'm the girl no one is waiting for" as though she is an extra in her own story (42), so that her marginal status and invisibility provide her a clear vantage point from which to watch.
Likewise, Bennie and his wife Stephanie's neighbor, Noreen, seems to always be watching from the periphery. These and other "watchers" ultimately thematize the practices of watching and metawatching.

unthreatening[39]. Lou's daughter, Charlie, also notices, "'The bird-watchers are watching us,'" and in the final sentence of the chapter her brother, Rolph, says, "I don't think those ladies were ever watching birds" (83). Egan repeatedly calls attention to the bird-watchers' inconspicuousness, explaining that, "being old and female, they're easily missed" (72). If the bird-watchers symbolize the seemingly innocuous *friendly power* of surveillance, I argue that, metafictionally, they also represent undervalued female readers and writers. After turning down Oprah Winfrey's invitation to be included in the Oprah Book Club, author Jonathan Franzen[40], for example, expressed some dissatisfaction with the idea of writing for a predominately female readership: "So much of reading is sustained in this country, I think, by the fact that women read while men are off golfing or watching football on TV or playing with their flight simulator or whatever. I worry—I'm sorry that it's, uh—I had some hope of actually reaching a male audience and I've heard more than one reader in signing lines now at bookstores say 'If I hadn't heard you, I would have been put off by the fact that it is an Oprah pick. I figure those books are for women. I would never touch it.' Those are male readers speaking." (NPR Interview).

Incidentally, as Laura Helmuth explains in her article for Slate.com, "Jonathan Franzen is the World's Most Annoying Birdwatcher," Franzen is also "probably the *most* famous [bird-watcher], thanks to his novels and the essays he's written for *The New*

---

[39] To the extent that online surveillance is feminized it appears nonthreatening. "Cookies," for example, were introduced as only a way to implement a "virtual shopping cart."

[40] Franzen's novel *Freedom* came out the same year as *Goon Squad* and was favorited to win the National Book Critic's Circle Award, an assumption that the popular blog Jezebel mocked with the headline, "Jonathan Franzen Loses Book Award to Some Lady."

Yorker about his birding exploits." Franzen frequently frets about his image (he has to

wear a "birding-*bra*"!) and fears that bird-watching makes him stand out in New York

City (please!), all while rejoicing in the powerful position of watching nature, which he

routinely feminizes. In all of his celebrations of bird-watching, he is decidedly the subject

while the birds—often conflated with his past lovers—are the clear objects[41]. Moreover,

he carefully establishes that his "affair with birds" makes him a better lover and not more

feminine as he worries people might think, exclaiming, "How much different my

marriage might have been if I'd been able to go birding!" ("My Bird Problem 186).

Parroting this sort of patriarchal logic, the women in Egan's chapter are either

dangerously visible (Mindy and Charlie standing out like wild animals) or virtually

invisible (Fiona and Mildred blending into the scenery like plants). By foiling Franzen's

persona as a birdwatcher, "the elderly bird-watching ladies" call attention to an

alternative subject position for women as readers/writers/watcher, which doesn't rely

upon either over-identifying with the object or assuming the male gaze. Egan emphasizes

that the bird-watchers are practically invisible, but the narration repeatedly brings them

and the fact that they are watching into view. We might call this metafiction without the

male gaze. By evoking Franzen, his take on "watching," and his standing in the literary

community, Egan's work productively addresses the politics and privilege of watching or

metawatching, which includes the surveillance of women as animals or "nature."

---

[41] He routinely refers to his ex-girlfriend as "the Californian" and he becomes "mystified
and angered . . . when she took wing to Santa Cruz and refused to fly back" (178).

Overseeing and Overhearing

Critics have pointed out that September 11, 2001 is at the chronological center of *Goon Squad,* but then so is the launch of the iPod, which occurred on October 23, 2001. The new methods of consumer surveillance engendered by the iPod and success of iTunes and described by theorists such as Bull and Levy therefore coincide with the surge in state-surveillance and profiling post-September 11th. In *Security, Territory, Population* Foucault succinctly clarifies that "sovereignty is exercised with the borders of a territory, discipline is exercised on the bodies of individuals, and security is exercised over the whole population" (25). The iPod operates on all three of these registers, especially as it intersects with the "war on terror." First, earbuds create the illusion of "sovereignty" over what artist and theorist Brandon LaBelle calls "acoustic territories." In the face of increased state surveillance, the iPod represented a personal retreat or sonic barrier. Picture, for example, passengers tolerating long lines at airport security within the "acoustic territory" of their own playlists. Next, the iPod exercises discipline "on the bodies of individuals" by materially and affectively impacting work, waiting, moving, and commuting. In fact, the iPod's iconic advertising campaign specifically highlights its affect on the body. Silhouettes letting loose and dancing to a beat only they can hear, apparently in their own world of different bold colored backdrops, become emblematic of freedom—freedom of movement and freedom of expression. As Foucault clarifies freedom is "no longer the exemptions and privileges attached to a person, but the possibility of movement, change of place, and processes of circulation of both people and things" and the iPod, both affectively and commercially embodies this ethos (71).

However, Foucault also warns that "More precisely and particularly, freedom is nothing else but the correlative of the deployment of apparatuses of security" (48). Lastly, as much as the iPod brand emphasizes personal expression, Apple, and specifically the iPhone, participates in the security "exercised over the whole population"—most obviously through their use to the National Security Agency[42], but also through consumer profiling. In fact, it is precisely because of their emphasis on personal expression that they are so well suited for security and surveillance.

Egan captures the complications and implications of this when Lou first exposes Mindy to a personal cassette player while on the safari:

> Occasionally he'll hand the device to Mindy, wanting her opinion, and each time, the experience of music pouring directly against her eardrums—hers alone—is a shock that makes her eyes well up; the privacy of it, the way it transforms her surroundings into a golden montage, as if she were looking back on this lark in Africa with Lou from some distant future. (65)

This gesture of Lou handing the earphones to Mindy and sharing the music with her is communal and social, yet the experience of listening is, nevertheless, "hers alone." She is overcome by the "privacy of it," and, at the same time, the event "transforms her surroundings into a golden montage," indicating a cinemafication of her reality. For

---

[42] As described in NSA documents: ""DROPOUT JEEP is a software implant for the Apple iPhone that utilizes modular mission applications to provide specific SIGINT functionality. This functionality includes the ability to remotely push/pull files from the device. SMS retrieval, contact list retrieval, voicemail, geolocation, hot mic, camera capture, cell tower location, etc. Command, control and data exfiltration can occur over SMS messaging or a GPRS data connection. All communications with the implant will be covert and encrypted."

Mindy, the "music pouring directly against her eardrums" is both physically intimate—a "shock that makes her eyes well up"—and also an out of body experience, "as if she were looking back . . . from some distant future." Egan echoes this sentiment later when she suggests that "years from now" the characters on the Safari will "search for each other on Google and Facebook, unable to resist the wish-fulfillment fantasy these portals offer" (71). This first encounter with the technology and techniques of personal portable players anticipates the experience of music in the digital age, which confers anonymity as well as individuality, privacy as well as publicity.

Novelist William Gibson argued that the Walkman did "'more to change human perception than any other virtual reality gadget" (Levy 68), and according to sociologist Michael Bull, "the iPod, even more than the Walkman, privatizes one's space. The Walkman was 'an in-between device,'—you'd use it in transit—but the iPod, storing days and days of your music, can be a persistent presence, 'giving the user the unprecedented ability to weave the disparate threads of the day into one uniform soundtrack'" (127). This experience of listening to a "soundtrack" to the subject's life-story produces a sense of both seclusion as well as publicness through an implied audience. Even as earphones provide a sense of "aloneness" or "sonic space" (131), there are still two distinct types of visibility at play here: the shift to a cinematic perspective of the self that personal players bestow and the newfound sharing of these personal "narratives" on a mass scale with the profile industry. In describing the early days of the iPod, Steven Levy writes in his book *The Perfect Thing: How the IPod Shuffles Commerce, Culture, and Coolness* that, "because the ubiquity of the iPod amplifies such

concerns in the media and in Web sites like Myspace (where musical choice is as much a badge of identity as is gender or geography), we seem to be immersed in an age of musical voyeurism. Not to mention musical exhibitionism" (23). He claims that, "simply handing over your iPod to a friend, your blind date, or the total stranger sitting next to you on a plane opens you up like a book. All someone needs to do is scroll through your library on the click wheel, and musically speaking, you're naked. It's not just what you like—it's *who you are*" (210). Arguably, the same could have been said about displaying your record collection; the significant difference is that we are all "handing over" this information to multinational corporations (and carrying the entirety of it in our hands)[43]. Not only are users effectively advertising their musical choices to other potential listeners, they are also providing social networking sites with valuable demographic data that they can then sell to advertisers. In other words, users are both the promoters and the product.

Egan again raises critical questions of surveillance and profiling when Bennie plays music for Sasha in the car, piecing together a tacit argument through his selection of songs about the decline of the music industry:

---

[43] Both Facebook and the now obsolete Twitter #Music, for example, have deals with digital music services that stream the songs that users' followers or friends are listening to in real time. People are listening in private, but sharing their listening activity with the public. As Kyle Bylin of *Sidewinder.fm* explains, "What music you listen to on Spotify is automatically shared to Facebook in real-time in the Ticker and chronicled on your Timeline. Your top artists, albums, and songs are listed and broken down by the number of times you have listened to them. . . . Unless you designate certain listening sessions on Spotify as being 'private' or simply turn Facebook integration off, it assumes that you want to share your listening with friends. This creates the expectation that you *should* share with them."

He began weighing each musical choice, drawing out his argument through the

songs themselves—Patti Smith's ragged poetry (but why did she quit?), the jock

hardcore of Black Flag and the Circle Jerks giving way to alternative, that great

compromise, down, down, down to the singles he'd just today been petitioning

radio stations to add, husks of music, lifeless and cold as the squares of office

neon cutting the blue twilight. (36)

Sasha remarks, "'It's incredible . . . how there's just nothing there,'" and Bennie

momentarily thinks that she is responding to the narrative he is attempting to tell before

realizing that she is actually referring to the space where the World Trade Center had

once been (36). Pankaj Mishra's review of *Goon Squad* for the *London Review of Books*

understands that this scene, which connects the "lifeless and cold" music that Benny

dislikes with "squares of office neon" and finally the attack on the World Trade Center,

"commemorates not only the fading of a cultural glory but also of the economic and

political supremacy that underpinned it." Benny's reference to the "squares of office

neon" undermines any sentimentality in Sasha's statement, even as both characters

clearly long for something less "lifeless." Ultimately, Benny is relieved that Sasha hadn't

followed this thinking, recalling a time when Lou said that the music industry peaked in

the nineties and how he had thought, "*You're finished.* Nostalgia was the end—everyone

knew that" (36). Whether in response to 9/11 or the state of the music industry, Benny

understands that nostalgia is a tool of conservatism that forecloses action or the

possibility of a future. He suggests that the music industry has degraded from politically

engaged "ragged poetry" to commercially responsive "husks of music." Relatedly,

Sasha's remark that there is "just nothing there" evokes the Bush Administration's neoliberal response to 9/11 of "encourag[ing]" the public to "go shopping more." Both characters' critiques speak to the "great compromise" of neoliberalism that substitutes shopping for political engagement and marries consumer data-mining with state surveillance. At the end of the novel, Scotty's inspiring concert at ground zero brings together both Benny and Sasha's concerns and exposes their complicated connections.

Again, the novel's final chapter, "Pure Language," projects current trends in marketing and music into the future to envisage a society of comprehensive consumer and state surveillance. Around the year 2024, Bennie is working to produce and promote his long-time friend Scotty Hausmann's first live concert to be held in Lower Manhattan. Bennie hires Alex, who "promised Bennie fifty parrots to create 'authentic' world of mouth" for the show. Alex determines that effective "parrots" are those unique individuals with the right combination of "need," "reach," and "corruptibility" (315). Scanning his contact list, Alex initially concludes that none of his contacts have more than two of these three traits. He then questions why he himself has agreed to be a parrot: he certainly "needs" the money and has the "reach," but had previously thought of himself as a "purist." He wonders if it is "because he never could quite forget that every byte of information he'd posted online (favorite color, vegetable, sexual position) was stored in the databases of multinationals who swore they would never, ever use it—that he was owned, in other words, having sold himself unthinkingly at the very point in his life when he'd felt most subversive?" (316). Egan's tone captures the mass naivety of selling personal information online to multinationals that simply swear to "never, ever

87

use it." Alex decides that, "what he needed was to find fifty more people like him, who had stopped being themselves without realizing it." What Alex recognizes here is that people "stopped being themselves" by unwittingly becoming profiles of themselves, shifting from individuals to "dividuals" through technologies and economies of consumer surveillance (317).

Taking entertainment industries and advertising as its primary examples, the novel ostensibly questions the ethics of "selling out" for fame or money; however, Egan ultimately and, more seriously, deconstructs the notion of any such outside by undermining the meaning of personal ownership in a profile culture. For example, "Bennie had never used the word 'parrot;' since the Bloggescandals, the term had become an obscenity. Even the financial disclosure statements that political bloggers were required to post hadn't stemmed the suspicion that people's opinions weren't really their own. 'Who's paying you?' was a retort that might follow any bout of enthusiasm, along with laughter—who would let themselves be bought? But Alex had promised Bennie fifty parrots to create 'authentic' word of mouth for Scotty Hausmann's first live concert" (315). Here, the idea of creating "'authentic' word of mouth" becomes doubly ironic. In addition to the fact that advertising is already popularly regarded as unauthentic, everybody, to the extent that their profile proceeds them, is already a parrot. The "suspicion that people's opinions weren't really their own" proves to be true, but not in the sense that people are simply insincere; rather, "people's opinions" are already sold within the marketplace of consumer surveillance. In this sense, we have all "let [ourselves] be bought." What Egan first presents as a scandalous exception, she smartly

illustrates to be the new rule. Moreover, for the vast majority, the answer to the quip,

"Who's paying you?" is nobody. The real joke is that, by and large, consumer-citizens

are *not* paid for their highly valuable opinions and profiles, but the joke is on us. Like,

Lulu, who embodies "the new 'handset employee,'" and whose labor is mobile, constant,

and, therefore, largely unpaid, consumers too are working for free.

In an otherwise dystopian techno-future impacted by climate change and

characterized by rampant consumerism and state surveillance, Scotty's concert at ground

zero or "The Footprint" hit a nerve

> when he began singing the songs he'd been writing for years underground, songs
>
> no one had ever heard, or anything like them—'Eyes in My Head,' 'X's and O's,'
>
> 'Who's Watching Hardest'—ballads of paranoia and disconnection ripped from
>
> the chest of a man you knew just by looking had never had a page or a profile or a
>
> handle or a handset, who was part of no one's data, a guy who had lived in the
>
> cracks all these years, forgotten, and full of rage, in a way that now registered as
>
> pure. Untouched.

As Egan explains, "two generations of war and surveillance had left people craving the

embodiment of their own unease in the form of a lone, unsteady man on a slide guitar"

(336). On the one hand, Scotty "registers as pure" or authentic because he has managed

to live outside the reach of the profile industry. On the other hand, this entire chapter

focuses on Alex's ethical comprises and efforts to promote Scotty's show, the waves of

"preverbal" toddlers or "pointers" who shore up Scotty's success, and the "whirring,"

"humming," "low, deep thrum" of police choppers overhead which, in effect, provide

musical accompaniment to this ostensibly "lone, unsteady man." Taken together, Egan

provides a complicated portrait of the *new authenticity* engendered within profile culture.

In fact, Scotty's artistic integrity is heavily produced, promoted, and protected, so that

being "off-the-grid" becomes a fashion statement or publicity stunt that is itself

advertised through the grid[44]. In other words, Scotty might "register as pure" or

"untouched," but his purity is still registered or authenticated within profile society.

Scotty's song "Eyes in My Head" might sound like the title to a silly children's

song, but to the adults in the crowd, it seems like a revelation or rebellion given that in

the age of panoptical reproduction, so many "eyes" exist *out there*: "the density of police

and security agents (identifiable by their government handsets) suddenly palpable, along

with visual scanning devices affixed to cornices, lampposts, and trees" (331). Of course,

the panopticon also internalizes the gaze so that the "Eyes in [one's] Head" are not only

their own. Alex's efforts and conflicted feelings about managing the "blind team" and

using social marketing to promote the concert represent both experiences of

surveillance—the "eyes" he strategically places around the venue and the internalized

"Eyes in [his own] Head" which produce his paranoia. Indeed, the question does become

"Who's Watching Hardest?" in an arms race between manufacturers of metadata, the

metawatchers who endeavor to "watch the watchers," and arguably the metafictionalists

who meaningfully engage profile society.

---

[44] Egan portrays the profile and public relations industries similarly producing
"authenticity" first with publicist, Dolly, reviving the image of "*a genocidal dictator*"
(139) by "humaniz[ing] a man who seemed inhuman" (144) by placing him a "fuzzy hat"
(141) and beside a beautiful movie star, and again with Bosco's "Suicide Tour" designed
to make his imminent death "an attraction, a spectacle, a mystery," adding "Reality TV,
hell—it doesn't get any realer than this" (129).

Moreover, the interdependence of government surveillance, social marketing, and techno-consumer surveillance in Egan's near future speaks to a troubling profile-military industrial complex. Egan writes, "Traffic had stopped, and choppers were converging overhead, flogging the air with a sound Alex hadn't been able to bear in the early years—too loud, too loud—but over time he'd gotten used to it: the price of safety. Today their military cackle felt weirdly appropriate, Alex thought, glancing around him at the sea of slings and sacs and baby backpacks, older children carrying younger ones, because wasn't this a kind of army? An army of children" (330). If the emerging consumer demographic of toddlers or "pointers" driving the music industry[45] appear as an "army" in this distinctly post-9/11 security state then "handsets" are their weapons, again suggesting a trajectory towards further assemblages between military security and the profile industry, namely through the ubiquity of mobile technology. In other words, part of what "converge[s]" in this scene is the "price of safety" and the "price of publicity" or the "cost of doing business"—disturbances that "Alex hadn't been able to bear in the early years . . . but over time he'd gotten used to." As Egan writes it, the sounds of the military "flogging the air" create a "cackle" that reverberates the sounds of 9/11, which are now "just of out of earshot, the vibration of an old disturbance." Here, the

_____

[45] Projecting into the future, the "Pointers" emerge as the dystopic continuation of ever-younger market demographics. In his article, "The New Tween Music Industry: The Disney Channel, Kidz Pop and The Emerging Childhood Counterpublic," Tyler Bickford explains that "tweens" (ages 9-12) have "become a powerful force in popular music" (417) and that "The history of tweens coincides with a dramatic increase in children's purchasing power: children directly spend tens of billions of dollars annually and influence as much as $200 billion in family spending" (418).

shockwaves of September 11th "seemed more insistent that ever: a low, deep thrum that

felt primally familiar, as if it had been whirring inside all the sounds that Alex had made

and collected over the years: their hidden pulse" (331). It is impossible to hear Scotty's

music without the accompanying "cackle," "vibration," "deep thrum," "whirring," and

"pulse" of September 11[th,] the "war on terror," and military-industrial surveillance. In

fact, Scotty's concert—"orchestrated" through the very practices that his fans celebrate

him for critiquing in his music—makes this noise seem "more insistent than ever." In this

regard, the concert provides a platform for security just as the security ostensibly protects

the crowd. Finally, it is significant that the sounds of security surveillance seem to have

been "whirring inside all the sounds that Alex had made and collected over the years."

After all, the data he "has made and collected" is a reasonable definition of a profile, and

here Egan insightfully posits "security" as the "hidden pulse" of the profile industry.

Next, we are told that "it's hard to know anymore who was really *at* that first

Scotty Hausmann concert—more people claim it than could possibly have fit into the

space, capacious and mobbed though it was. Now that Scotty has entered the realm of

myth, everyone wants to own him. Any maybe they should. Doesn't a myth belong to

everyone?" (336). It is, first of all, ironic that Scotty should "belong to everyone,"

considering that it was his ability to remain un-owned that affects the crowd. Moreover,

the crowd's ownership over Scotty conjures another pervasive "myth" that the systems of

surveillance, which effectively co-produce his concert, also "belong to everyone"—that

social media, metadata, and security surveillance are egalitarian *services*. As literary

scholar Aaron DeRosa argues, "Scotty's music possesses no intrinsic purity, no timeless

exceptionalism toward which the listeners journey . . . Rather, a community constructs its exceptional fantasy in the moment" (104). In doing so the community arguably also constructs itself. That is, Scotty's "paranoid ballads of disconnection" in effect connect the public through its "exceptionalism," not unlike the ways in which surveillance generally and the profile industry specifically must bestow a sense of "exceptionalism" as well as a sense of anonymity within a crowd so large that it seems too "hard to know anymore" who it comprises.

Finally, Scotty's concert conjures the pervasive and dangerous "myth" that something isn't real unless it is visible. This "myth" is clearly connected to the assumption that visibility is the most important marker of achievement or value, an "exceptional fantasy" that I discussed previously with regard to celebrity culture buttressing the profile industry. Egan smartly captures the wrongheadedness of this "myth" by placing Scotty's concert at the "Footprint"—the future memorial for the World Trade Center. By calling it the "Footprint," she points to both the geopolitical and ecological imprints of 9/11, invoking the physical impact of the attack as well as its related carbon *footprint* through negative space.

In both cases it might seem like "there is just nothing there," as Sasha says in disbelief earlier in the novel, but through her depiction of the "Footprint" Egan connects the surge in state surveillance which hovers overhead and the crisis of global warming which heats the earth from below. The penultimate chapter, "Great Rock and Roll Pauses," which is written in PowerPoint describes the effects of climate change most vividly: "Cool air, but you feel the heat coming up from the earth like from behind a

person's skin. I think I feel it through my shoes, but do I? I was right: the ground is warm." (238). Paralleling then noisy "choppers . . . converging overhead" is a heat "coming up from" below; these dual pressures framing the concert force an ecological critique of consumer and state surveillance that moves beyond the more common concerns over privacy and access. In other words, *Goon Squad* suggests that the surge in surveillance post-9/11 as well as the proliferation of consumer surveillance and profiling should be addressed in both social and ecological terms[46]. This includes acknowledging the ecological and embodied impact of surveillance.

Egan strategically emphasizes sound to counter this "primacy of the visual" (Braidotti 103) and call attention to the more or less invisible systems of surveillance, impacts of 9/11, and effects of climate change. In this sense, the various sounds synchronizing into music during the concert encourage an intersectional reading. With this in mind, consider this passage written in text speak from the final scene of the novel:

And the hum, always that hum, which maybe wasn't an echo after all, but the sound of time passing.

th blu nyt

th stRs u cant c

th hum tht nevr gOs awy

First, "u cant c" the stars because of the light pollution and even air pollution, again connecting climate change to the invisible systems of surveillance—"the devices affixed to cornices, lampposts, and trees." Still, however invisible, these technologies create a

---

[46] After all, the U.S. military is the worlds top consumer of oil.

"hum tht nevr gOs awy." One the one hand this hum is like white noise that can also easily go unnoticed, can just become naturalized (like the trees) as part of the environment. However, in a novel that is so much about sound and music, Egan tunes our ears into this common frequency that cuts across the personalized soundscape of the ipod. Finally, the fact that this passage is written in text-speak also emphasizes the sounds of the words over their obscured visual representation.

From Celebrity Profiles to Data Profiles: "Points of Light on a Radar Screen"

Celebrity culture, surveillance, metadata, and metafiction converge most literally in the chapter, "Forty-Minute Lunch: Kitty Jackson Opens Up About Love, Fame, and Nixon." Most importantly, this chapter thoroughly embodies and embeds this set of practices within the asymmetrical power relations of gender and race. Formally, this chapter is a celebrity profile that ends with a pointed description of data profiles. It most overtly parodies a type of masculinist metafiction that neglects to consider how questions of gender are central to understanding the embodied experience of watching and being watched, writing and being written about, surveilling and being surveilled. In Egan's words, the chapter is "a send-up to celebrity profiles" (NEA Interview), but it might also be understood as a send-up to the self-conscious ogler/writer that David Foster Wallace describes in his 1993 essay, "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction." Wallace begins this essay by declaring that, "fiction writers as a species tend to be oglers. They tend to lurk and to stare. They are born watchers. They are viewers. They are the ones on

the subway about whose nonchalant stare there is something creepy[47], somehow. Almost

predatory. This is because human situations are writers' food" (21). From its outset,

Wallace's essay is interested in identifying and classifying writers. He not only describes

their tendencies and demeanors; he defines fiction-writers as a "species" of "born

watchers." The extent to which this classification draws on the topoi of aggressive

masculine sexuality has thus far been under-theorized.

Immediately, the image of "writers as a species" hunting down "human

situations" as "food" evokes the all too familiar and violent image of women as meat.

Even when Wallace makes a seemingly concerted effort to provide an example of both a

male and a female writer worrying nervously about "how they appear, how they seem,

whether their shirttail might be hanging out of their fly, whether there's maybe lipstick on

their teeth, whether the people they're ogling can maybe size them up as somehow

creepy, as lurkers and starers," the words "creepy," "lurkers," "starers," and especially

"predatory" still connote a familiar form of sexual violence against women (21).

Furthermore, the images of a man's shirttail hanging out of his fly and a woman with

lipstick on her teeth are themselves sexually suggestive and hardly neutralize the

importance of gender. On the contrary, by ostensibly balancing his examples, Wallace

instead presents a false equivalency that neglects the significance of gender, as well as

race and class, in the act of staring at another person. The writerly gaze that Wallace

describes is, indeed, also the male gaze—the male gaze watching itself watch and feeling

---

[47] As I will elaborate, the word "creepy" captures a particular affect of surveillance. CEO
Eric Schmidt once explained that "Google policy is to get right up to the creepy line and
not cross it."

creepy about it. The repetition of "somehow creepy" elides the implicit gender dynamic and signifies Wallace's refusal to acknowledge it. Wallace attributes his anxiety to the act of openly watching strangers in public; he imagines that this behavior and shame is unique to fiction-writers as part of some exceptional "sub-species" (21). In reality, what underpins the "almost predatory" quality of this scenario is the terrible commonness of men lurking and staring at women in public.

Wallace's essay goes on to explore how television resolves the discomfort of people-watching, accounting, in part, for its addictive appeal. Yet, he argues that as television viewers become accustomed to self-consciously "watching [themselves] watching" and "yearn[ing] to experience 'experiences,'" a certain subset of U.S. literature (best exemplified by Don DeLillo) begins writing more and more about writing, taking metawatching itself as a significant subject for fiction (34). However, to take seriously Wallace's argument about the impact of metawatching on fiction, a feminist genealogy of metafiction and late-postmodernism must consider the embodied politics of watching and being watched as a type of surveillance, which, I argue, increasingly takes the form of a digital profile. By connecting the gender politics of surveillance to Wallace's well-known essay on the state of metafiction, "Forty Minute Lunch," makes just this intervention.

Moreover, by writing from within the genre of celebrity profiles, Egan is able to merge the high-art aspirations of highly self-conscious writing with the low-art obsessions of celebrity culture—all the while taking into account the ways in which women are excluded in the first instance and over-exposed in the second. This ultimately problematizes Wallace's classification of fiction writers as a "human subspecies that

loves to watch people but hates to be watched itself" (22) by contextualizing this penchant for watching within a world where women are so often valued for their "watchableness" (23) and where lurking and staring at someone on a subway can seem not just "creepy" (21) but threatening.

The humor and horror of Jules's profile of Kitty Jackson comes from his self-absorption and self-pity, which bear an uncanny resemblance to Wallace's descriptions of "terribly self-conscious" fiction writers who are debilitated by the pretty people who populate television (26). Jules shares Wallace's wonder at the ability of celebrities to "act natural"; he, like Wallace, laments celebrity culture's "deep thesis that the most significant quality of truly alive persons is watchableness" (26). While Wallace's point is well-taken, it neglects to see how this imperative to be "watchable" affects "persons" unevenly based on other "significant qualit[ies]"—such as gender, race, and sexuality. Kitty's watchablity, for instance, is both demanded of her and dangerous (176). Whether addressing celebrity profiles, which promise "access" to celebrities or data-profiles, which ostensibly provide access to celebrity itself, Egan steadfastly brings to bear the serious impact of gender in her portrayals of profiling. After all, as long as publicity is itself scandalous for women and minorities, profiling—whether by the profile industry, the entertainment industry, or the NSA is risky business.

"In the footnote-ish fashion that injects a whiff of cracked leather bindings into pop-culture observation," the narrator, Jules Jones, focuses his profile on the nineteen year-old Hollywood actress's effect on him, his ego, and his writing (168). Importantly, he writes this profile piece from prison after attempting to rape Kitty in Central Park,

thereby connecting his status as a sexual predator with his "predatory" view of writing. In contrast to Jules's style of metafiction, which is superseding and self-centered, Egan's novel jumps through time and between characters with a glance, approximating Lev Manovich's call for art-in-the-age-of-the-database to "spacialize" elements (55). In fact, the digital quality and reference point in *Good Squad* makes Jules's article in *Details* magazine seem all the more analog and constricting. Much has been said about the unique structure of *Goon Squad,* but, to be sure, it is not simply the formal features that distinguish Egan's writing from the class of contemporary writers that she mocks in this chapter. After all, once you escape what Robert Coover calls the "tyranny of the line" you must confront the oppressive social reality that it cuts across.[48]

From prison, he determines that his encounter with Kitty hinged on the moment when she dipped her finger into the salad dressing and licked it off. He explains that women "normally stifle behavior that might be construed as overly encouraging, or possibly incendiary." He tells himself that she does not stifle this behavior "because you do not register as a 'man' to Kitty Jackson, and so being around you makes her no more self-conscious than would the presence of a dachshund" (173). On the one hand, Kitty recalls Wallace's claim that "the most colorful, attractive, animated, *alive* people in our daily experience—are also people who are oblivious to the fact that they are watched," a realization that according to Wallace leaves writers feeling all the more self-conscious

---

[48] For example, Wikipedia, at first glance is emblematic of postmodern prose: multiple voices combine without signaling where one ends and another begins in order to create an always incomplete and unfinished picture. And yet, merely thirteen percent of its contributors are women. The formal features hardly guarantee political or social progressiveness.

and insecure (26). On the other hand, Kitty represents the pressure on women to police their every gesture, for fear of either being "overly encouraging" to men, or in this case overly discouraging—either of which is potentially "incendiary." Egan's work clarifies that the demand to seem unselfconscious and also completely watchable while still obliging and performing for every onlooker is not simply a postmodern pressure of media culture that propels the profile industry and spurred a new wave of self-conscious metafiction. Rather, like so many symptoms of postmodernism (fragmentation, schizophrenia, and indeterminacy, for example) this is precisely the type of bind that women and racial minorities have long faced. In sum, Egan's *brief interview by a hideous man* exposes the gendered politics-of-watching, which seem so conspicuously repressed in Wallace's otherwise astute essay.

In an interview Egan addresses the limitations of "trying to render up an authentic experience having no access to the star, really" in order to satisfy readers who "want a sense of having really touched some heretofore unseen aspect of the star" (NEA Interview). By characterizing closeness and access to celebrities as a matter of "touch," Egan importantly connects the shortcomings of celebrity profiles to Jules's vexation at not having physical and sexual access to Kitty. In this sense, she draws out the sexual aggression intrinsic to Wallace's conception of postmodern fiction writers. Wallace warns, for example, that watching celebrities "leads us to confuse actual fiction-research with a weird kind of fiction-consumption"—as opposed to relying on "human situations" for "food" (26). And, yet, for Wallace, both approaches position writers as aggressive consumers. Egan parodies this model of the writer-predator, when Jules, unable to "wrest

100

readable material" from Kitty, repeatedly resorts to reducing her from a "lofty" star to a

lowly animal that he can imagine devouring (174). For Jules, Kitty is either larger than

life or bare life, but never exactly human. For example, directly after admitting to the

"volatile stew of anger, fear, and lust" he feels toward Kitty, he describes her shoulders to

squabs and imagines "pulling apart all those little bones and sucking the meat off of them

one by one" (176). By linking Jules's sexist fantasies of consuming Kitty to his frustrated

attempts at "wrest[ing] readable material" from her, Egan's work provides a pointed and

powerful critique of the rapacious method of metafiction that Wallace's descriptions take

for granted.

  If we accept Wallace's claim that Metafiction—"this high-cultural genre"—was

profoundly influenced by television and the popularity of self-conscious watching, then a

consideration of the gender-politics of metawatching might help account for the

masculinization of American postmodernism and metafiction (34). Kathleen Fitzpatrick's

work *The Anxiety of Obsolescence* considers the canonization of Don DeLillo, John

Barth, Don Barthelme, William S. Burroughs, Robert Coover, Jonathan Franzen, William

Gass, John Hawkes, Norman Mailer, Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, and David Foster

Wallace to question, "not whether print culture is dying at the hands of the media, but

rather what purposes announcements of the death of print culture serve, and thus what all

this talk about the end of the book tells us about those doing the talking" (3).

Overwhelmingly, of course, "those doing the talking" about the death of the novel are

white men. And underlying this vilification of visual media, is a conservative defense of

the status quo, including the white male privilege enjoyed by so many postmodern

novelists who bemoan the death of the novel. In this sense, the self-reflexivity of

postmodernism can be understood as a self-protective mechanism that directs attention

inwardly and away from those marginalized by gender, race, and class.

Egan dramatizes Kathleen Fitzpatrick's argument that so much self-conscious

concern over their careers and reputations actually masks many postmodern writers'

anxiety about preserving white male privilege, a privilege which depends upon remaining

unmarked. Recounting his attack, Jules, in his typically self-referential fashion asks,

"how is all this affecting me?" He answers, "well, we're lying on a hill in Central Park, a

somewhat secluded spot that is still, technically speaking, in plain sight. So I feel

anxious, dully aware that I'm placing my career and reputation at some risk" (182). By

redirecting attention back to his own career and reputation, Jules embodies a rape culture

in which violence towards women matters only insofar as it threatens men's reputations

and well-being[49]. It is important that the source of Jules's anxiety is being in "plain

sight." Here, Jules's alignment of authorship and authority with seeing while remaining

unseen echoes the protagonist from Don DeLillo's metafictional novel *Mao II*: the

reclusive writer Bill Gray reluctantly decides to finally be photographed and then

laments, "'I've become someone's material." As the photographer, Brita, takes his

---

[49] News coverage of the 2013 Steubenville rape trial blatantly represented this thinking;
CNN correspondent Poppy Harlow lamented outside the juvenile court in Steubenville,
that, "It was incredibly emotional—incredibly difficult even for an outsider like me to
watch what happened as these two young men that had such promising futures, star
football players, very good students, literally watched as they believe their life fell apart."
This single-minded concern for how the rapists' lives and reputations might be
compromised—as opposed to any empathy for the girl who was raped—echoes Jules's
sentiments and helps contextualizes his remarks and behavior within a culture that
normalizes violence against women and privileges the "promising" lives of men.

picture, Bill wonders, "What am I giving up to you? And what are you investing me with, or stealing from me? How are you changing me? [. . .] And when did women start photographing men in the first place?'" (43). Again, the power or authority of writers is aligned with an unmarked white masculinity that watches but is not watched. Like Jules's fear of Kitty "reversing the beam of scrutiny," DeLillo's protagonist expresses the dominant thinking that, "*men act* and *women appear*" (Berger 47). Ultimately, Egan's work unravels the ways in which the power and authority of being both a man and a writer are entangled—repositioning metafiction as itself a form of surveillance.

While postmodern literature has been credited with representing identity as artistry, it must also reckon with how identity is constructed and constricted by the marketplace. However, this must include calling into question the supposed newness of identity as a commercial construct and reminding readers that women and racial minorities have long been valued or devalued as commodities within white-supremacist patriarchal capitalism. By writing through both narrative and data profiles Egan embeds and embodies her critiques of traditional metafiction as well as metadata surveillance within the irreducible and messy contexts of asymmetrical power relations. Jules considers it a vulgar affront to his own middle-class masculinity that "the promotion of said movie is the sole reason [Kitty] is in [his] company," bemoaning that she, a woman, is the more public figure (180). Kitty's profile is indeed a commodity and this interview is an investment of her time, time that is carefully monitored throughout their meeting and supposedly kept by her manager off-site—another nod toward the neoliberal imperative that individuals take personal responsibility for managing their own profile or

preventing their own rape. Yet, Egan makes clear, there is a difference between having a public profile (or even being high profile) and having public agency or legitimate access to public-ness. Even as it critiques familiar, often tone-deaf, voices of postmodernism, *Goon Squad* clarifies that postmodernism is not the threat to feminism—neoliberal capitalism is. After all, a postfeminist neoliberal capitalist perspective would dangerously claim that a woman's earning potential is the sole indicator of her status in society, a position that Kitty's character blatantly refutes.

Notably, both celebrity profiles and data profiles are a matter of access. On the one hand, celebrity profiles promise the public access to the celebrity's inner life. I agree with Egan that the celebrity profile is a "bankrupt genre"—not only because it places writers in the impossible position of "trying wildly to infuse some kind of meaning into the exchange…trying to render up an authentic experience having no access to the star, really"—but also because it clings to the pretense of any such authentic or coherent identity in the first place (NEA Interview). Hence, the mocking tone and "mystical appearance of a rainbow" when Jules ostensibly discovers the "real Kitty." Data-based profiles, on the other hand, are uninterested in fixed identities or even a fixed subject positions; rather, they encode a person's dividuality to regulate access across various platforms[50], Of course, sites like Facebook pitch themselves as platforms for users to express their "authentic selves," but in practice no matter how much personal information

---

[50] Jules's electronic bracelet so clearly recalls Deleuze's description of an electronic card: "thanks to one's (dividual) electronic card that raises a given barrier; but the card could just as easily be rejected on a given day or between certain hours; what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person's position--licit or illicit--and effects a universal modulation" (Deleuze 7).

users provide or updates they post, the profiles are forever incomplete and perpetually outdated. Thus, celebrity profiles, as a genre, model and underwrite the cultural compulsion to "share" more and more personal information by promoting fame and visibility as the ultimate signs of success and significance. Only then, is one's privacy even worth protecting. In this sense, profile culture banks on celebrity profiles: through our profiles we are all "reality stars."

By ending this "take down of celebrity profiles" with a paradigmatic description of data-profiles, Egan draws attention to the multiple dimensions of profile society. In a lengthy footnote, Jules's responds to a "recent editorial ('Vulnerability in our Public Spaces)" by suggesting that the city "simply erect checkpoints at the entrances to Central Park and demand identification from those who wish to enter" (185). Emblematic of the security apparatus in profile culture, he explains,

Then you will be able to call up their records and evaluate the relative success or failure of their lives—marriage or lack thereof, children or lack thereof, professional success or lack thereof, healthy bank account or lack thereof, contact with childhood friends or lack thereof, ability to sleep peacefully at night or lack thereof, fulfillment of sprawling, loopy youthful ambitions or lack thereof, ability to fight off bouts of terror and despair or lack thereof—and using these facts, you can assign each person a ranking based on the likelihood that their 'personal failures will occasion jealous explosions directed at those more accomplished.' (185)

The strategy here is to subdivide the population in order to control it, protect it, safeguard it, and manage its riskiness. The personal "facts" needed for the profile and ranking move from the quantitative to the qualitative, from data to narrative, and, as Jules's explains, "The rest is easy: simply encode each person's ranking into an electronic bracelet and affix it to their wrist as they enter the park, and then monitor those encoded points of light on a radar screen, with personnel at the ready to intervene" (185)[51]. As "encoded points of light" the public reaches stardom: their private lives are made public and flashed across a "screen" as their status or "ranking" rises and falls.

However snarky or sarcastic, Jules's solution to crime in Central Park echoes the "Society of Control" that Deleuze diagnoses: "The numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to information, or reject it." (5). In our profile culture, identity is dispersed across and through multiple databases, complicating or undermining a notion of coherent identity and linear and totalizing life narratives. That is, profiles are not biographies or autobiographies; they are always incomplete and ongoing. *Goon Squad* itself is so often praised for its open-endedness and webbed structure, and, yet, Egan makes clear that openness in and of itself should not be mistaken for freedom: profiles are no more open than the "open graph"; they are no more free than the "free market." They are governed by algorithms and, therefore, by politics. Existing at the intersections of databases and algorithms, profiles are both open-ended and completely regulated.

---

[51] Jules quips that this is "sure to appeal to Mayor Giuliani" alluding to the famed CompStat program initiated under Giuliani's tenure as well as the mayor's controversial decision to release Patrick Dorsimond's sealed juvenile record during his 2000 senate campaign against Hillary Clinton.

Profiles depend upon emergent forms of embodied and incessant surveillance, but their very vastness is paradoxically reassuring. The public is both enchanted by their newfound significance and relieved by their utter insignificance.

Egan's story mockingly critiques how protecting women in public is so often an alibi for protecting the public *from* women. In other words, public spaces are deemed "risky" when occupied by women. The vulnerability of women in public then authorizes a security state with increased police intervention, while also reinforcing the given-ness of sexual violence. The "easy" solution is not to address the structural problem of sexism and dangerous masculinity, but rather to accommodate, control, monitor—and ultimately exploit—this supposed fact of life[52]. Jules's over-the-top suggestion frightfully resonates with many post-9/11 profiling practices, from provisions of the Patriot Act to the NSA's PRISM program highlighting the expanding role of mobile technology. Furthermore, Egan's chapter recalls the case of the Central Park Jogger Case in 1989, which made so terribly clear that crimes against women are often exploited as an alibi for racist reactions and bolstering public support for a security state and the prison industrial complex— which disproportionately incarcerates minorities. As Dean Spade clarifies, "The criminal punishment system has the same biases (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia) that advocates of these laws want to eliminate" (357). Those who claim that surveillance is a non-issue "if you don't have anything to hide" more than

---

[52] As Rosi Braidotti succinctly states in *Transpositions*, "power today is a matter of selection and control, entitlement and access: it is bio-power centered on the body in its material and immaterial manifestations. It engenders a system of integrated and all-encompassing surveillance which postulates potential, virtual enemies everywhere, also and especially within the by now exploded boundaries of the subject" (53).

likely enjoy white cis-heterosexual privilege, and too often the "protection" of one group is used to oppress another.

Goon Squad contextualizes the practices of "metawatching" within gender politics and technologies of surveillance, advancing a form of metafiction that takes into account the prevalence of profiling in contemporary culture as well as its own status as a form of surveillance or metawatching. Profiles increasingly govern access and regulate risk across platforms through the policing of living bodies as divisible, searchable, social code, and Egan's fiction is keenly engaged with this development. Unlike the notion of character, which misinterprets information about an individual as complete or totalizing, profiles are inherently incomplete and changeable. Egan's novel embraces the gaps and resists the mythology of coherent, knowable identities. Nevertheless, *A Visit From the Goon Squad* also acknowledges that the algorithms that make data legible are never neutral or divorced from real bodies. This critical lesson must also inform our understanding of metafiction as it is likewise embedded and embodied within this profile society.

Works Cited

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books, 1972. Print.

Bickford, Tyler. "The New Tween Music Industry: The Disney Channel, Kidz Pop and
        The Emerging Childhood Counterpublic." *Popular Music.* Volume 31.3 (2012):
        417 – 436. Web. 15 Oct 2014.

British Film Institute. 6 June 2012. Web. 15 Oct. 2014.
        <http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/filmmusic/detail.php?t=d&q=9>.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics.* Cambridge: Polity, 2006. Print.

Bylin, Kyle. "How Spotify Changed Music." *Sidewinder.fm.* 25 Oct. 2012. Web. 15 Oct.
        2014.

Colebrook, Claire. *Gender.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. Print.

Coover, Robert. "The End of Books" *The New York Times*. 21 June 1992. Web. 27 Oct.
        2014.

Charles, Ron. "Jennifer Egan's *A Visit From the Goon Squad* Review." *Washington
        Post.com.* 16 June 2010. Web. 27 Oct. 2014.

DeLillo, Don*. Mao II.* New York: Penguin Books, 1991. Print.

Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on Control Societies." *Negotiations* 1990 (1972): 177-182.
        Print.

DeRosa, Aaron. "The End of Futurity: Proleptic Nostalgia and the War on Terror."
        Literary Counterhistories of U.S. Exceptionalism Spec. Issue of *Literature
        Interpretation Theory*. 25.2 (2014): 88-107. Print.

"DROPOUT JEEP: NSA Exploit of the Day." *Schneider on Security*. 12 Feb. 2014. Web.
        27 Oct. 2014.

Egan, Jennifer. *A Visit From the Goon Squad*. New York: Anchor Books, 2011. Print.

        --"Black Box." *The New Yorker*. 4 June 2012. Web. 27 Oct. 2014.

        --"Conversation with Jennifer Egan." *National Endowment for the Arts.* Web. 27
        Oct. 2014. <http://arts.gov/audio/jennifer-egan>.

Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism*. Ropley: O Books, 2009. Print.

Fitzpatrick, Kathleen. *The Anxiety of Obsolescence*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University
      Press, 2006. Print.

Foucault, Michael. *Security, Territory, Population*. New York: Picador, 2004. Print.

Franzen, Jonathan. "My Bird Problem." *The Discomfort Zone*. New York: Picador, 2006.
      157-208. Print.

      --"Novelist Jonathan Franzen on *Fresh Air*." *NPR.org*. 15 Oct. 2001. Web. 27
      Oct. 2014.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana
      University Press, 1994. Print.

Harlow, Poppy. "Transcripts: Guilty Verdict in Steubenville Rape Trial." *CNN.com*. 17
      Mar. 2013. Web. 27 Oct. 2014.

Helmuth, Laura. "Jonathan Franzen is the World's Most Annoying Birdwatcher."
      Slate.com. 16 July, 2012. Web. 27 Oct. 2014.

Hemmingway, Ernest. "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." *The Snow of
      Kilimanjaro and Other Stories*." New York: Scribner, 1995. 121-154. Print.

Holmes, Su and Sean Redmond. *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity
      Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Hutcheon, Linda. *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. Wilfrid Laurier
      Univ. Press, 2014. Print.

Iedema, Rick and Hermine Scheeres. "From Doing Work to Talking Work:
      Renegotiating Knowing, Doing, and Identity." *Applied Linguistics*. 24.3. (2003):
      316-337. Print.

LaBelle, Brandon. *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture in Everyday Life*. New York City:
      The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010. Print.

Levy, Steven. *The Perfect Thing: How the IPod Shuffles Commerce, Culture, and
      Coolness*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 2006. Print.

Lovibond, Sabina. "Feminism and Postmodernism." *Postmodernism: A Reader*. Ed.
      Thomas Docherty. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993. 390-414. Print.

McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial*

Context. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.

Manovich, Lev. "Database as Symbolic Form." *Database Aesthetics: Art in the Age of Information Overflow.* (2007): 39-60. Print.

Mason, Corinne and Shoshana Magnet. 2012. Surveillance Studies and Violence Against Women. *Surveillance & Society* 10.2 (2012): 105-118. Print.

Marshall, P. David. "Intimately Intertwined in the Most Public Way: Celebrity and Journalism." *Journalism: Critical Issues*. Berkshire: Open University Press (2009): 19-29. Print.

Mishra's, Pankaj. "Modernity's Undoing." *London Review of Books.* 33.7 (2011): 27-30. Print.

North, Anna. "Jonathan Franzen Loses Book Award to Some Lady." *Jezebel.* 14 Mar. 2011. Web. 27 Oct. 2014.

O'Connor, Frank. *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story*. Brooklyn: Melville House Publishing, 2004. Print.

Spade, Dean. "Trans Politics on a Neoliberal Landscape." 18 Temp. Pol. & Civ. Rts. L. Rev. 353 (2009).

Wallace, David Foster. "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction." *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*. New York: Back Bay Books, 1998. 21-82. Print.

Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics.* Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2005. Print.

Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1984. Print.

Chapter Three

Looking Back at Profile Epistemologies and Racializing Surveillance in

Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*

In the neoliberal data age, discrimination is regarded as not only excusable but prudent. Credited with "taking personal responsibly," consumer-citizens are lauded as discriminating shoppers, discriminating fans, discriminating viewers, discriminating voters, discriminating patients, the list goes on. On the other hand, less discriminating subjects are blamed for their own misfortune, quality of life, incarceration, and poor healthcare, for example. This neoliberal ethos also offers yet another rubric for naturalizing and rationalizing "social sorting" or discrimination against individuals themselves, as well as the massive routine surveillance this demands. While "social sorting" sounds more innocuous than racial profiling, David Theo Goldberg reminds us that "Classification, as [Zygmunt] Bauman argues, is at basis about setting apart, about cutting things off from each other into discrete containers, about *segregation*. Classification thus involves those acts of inclusion and exclusion so central to the experience of racism (cf. Bauman 1991)" (Goldberg 94). Increasingly, these "discreet containers" take the form of databases and spreadsheets filled through routine methods of surveillance. In fact, scholars such as Simone Browne, Christian Parenti, David Lyon, and Craig Robertson all contextualize contemporary surveillance technologies within a long history of racialization and racial subjugation that moves, for example, from slave

passes to passports[53].

As I mention in previous chapters, algorithmic surveillance demands consumer-citizens be evermore visible even as the technologies and techniques of data collection are sheltered under technical and organizational opacity[54]. Put differently, surveillance depends upon the illiteracy of its targets. Christian Parenti explains in his book *The Soft Cage* that, "The [slave] pass and the racially defined contours of (white) literacy and (Black) illiteracy upon which it relied, acted as the slaveocracy's information technology and infrastructure of routine surveillance" (18). With this realization in mind, we can better understand our current "infrastructure" of surveillance and the possibilities for deconstructing it. This includes not only reckoning with legacies of slavery and white supremacy, but also learning from the history of black resistance:

> First and foremost we see the openings provided by literacy: the slave who could read and write became the antebellum hacker, the information outlaw, who could crack the code of the planters' security system. Literate African Americans could resist with the very tools of white oppression; they could in effect bend the political technology of literacy back upon itself (20).

This history exposes that any call for technological literacy must include an analysis of hegemonic power. Furthermore, this description of the literate "hacker" or "information

---

[53] For example, Simone Browne productively identifies 18th century "lantern laws," which required black, mixed race, and indigenous people to carry lanterns after dark, as a precursor to current "stop and frisk" laws (Browne Lecture).

[54] Michel Foucault argues that disciplinary power is "exercised through its invisibility," while imposing a "compulsory visibility" on its subjects (*Discipline and Punish* 187). *Black Box Society* by Frank Pasquale investigates how recent policies and technologies have amplified this discrepancy.

outlaw" uses the language of informatics to portray abolitionists such as Frederick Douglas and Harriet Tubman, drawing together the work of poets, novelists, activists and the likes of Edward Snowden in the "openings provided by literacy" (Parenti 20).

Meanwhile, the standard defense of surveillance and profiling—that "if you have nothing to hide, then you have nothing to fear"—has become a neoliberal commonplace masquerading as common sense and masking over white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. After Dontre Hamilton, Eric Garner, John Crawford III, Michael Brown Jr., Ezell Ford, Dante Parker, Tanisha Anderson, Akai Gurley, Tamir Rice, Rumain Brisbon, Jermane Reid, Tony Robinson, Phillip White, Eric Harris, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray were all fatally shot by police officers while unarmed between April 2014 and July 2015[55], it is impossible to credibly claim that black Americans with "nothing to hide" actually have "nothing to fear." Past and present practices of racial profiling refute this declaration of fairness. And yet, in the overlapping systems of white supremacy and ubiquitous surveillance, outrage perversely reaffirms guilt and justifies abuses of power. In this chapter, I will argue that the ways in which systemic racism and anti-blackness depend upon this "cruel optimism[56]" are interdependent with respectability politics, which insist upon a "proper" response to racism.

Following the insights of Lauren Berlant, Sarah Ahmed, and Claudia Rankine's "American Lyric," it's my contention that disrupting the commonplace that only guilty

---

[55] And this list is hardly exhaustive.

[56] Lauren Berlant tells us that, "A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (1). Accordingly, the public's desire for state legitimacy and protection actually helps ensure their obedience and precarity.

people object demands an affective epistemology that directly counters algorithmic epistemologies and their truth claims. This also means upholding the "value of anger" as elaborated by Audre Lorde and others, to help sever the ties between algorithmic profile societies and patriarchal white supremacy in order to destabilize both. I will focus my analysis on Claudia Rankine's 2014 award winning book, *Citizen: An American Lyric* to both tease out the relationship between anti-blackness and the U.S. profile society and to maintain what literature and critical race theory can teach data studies about forms of "oppositional looking" and "counter surveillance" (Browne).

"The Line Judges"

Rankine's "American Lyric" moves between essay, image, and poetry, to recount and reflect on racially charged encounters in this supposedly "post-racial" era. She repeatedly returns to a narrator watching tennis matches on television and provides a relatively long analysis of Serena Williams at the intersections of racism and sexism. While the following pages will connect the micro-aggressions faced by Serena Williams to over-policing and racializing surveillance, I am not suggesting an equivalency between police brutality and the acts of racisms directed at Williams, nor do I wish to ignore the relative privilege afforded to Williams by her wealth. Rankine herself has been quick to acknowledge that *Citizen* largely inhabits a world of middle-class professionals. Nevertheless, "[w]hen one reacts, one is not reacting to any one of those moments," and Rankine importantly connects the micro-aggressions faced by Serena Williams with various and varying forms of racializing surveillance and violence (Rankine Interview).

115

After the publication of *Citizen*, Williams completed her second "Serena Slam" by

winning all four majors in a row. Notably, the *New York Times* published two articles

surrounding Williams's latest win at Wimbledon, the first titled "Tennis's Top Women

Balance Body Image With Ambition" and another titled "It's Time to Appreciate Serena

Williams's Greatness." Even after a significant backlash to the offensive sexism and

racism of the first article[57], the second article still feigned a naïve disbelief about the lack

of appreciation for Williams's "greatness," vaguely suggesting that, "It will indeed be

intriguing to see whether Williams, still winning big at age 33, will connect with her

public on a deeper level after some of the ambivalence and controversies of the past."

Aside from a brief mention of the "racists taunts" hurled at Serena and her sister Venus at

Indian Wells in 2001 the article never once addresses race in its wonder about why

Williams doesn't "connect with the public on a deeper level," nor does it attempt to

clarify what is actually meant by "the ambivalence and controversies of the past." The

NYT conspicuously refuses to confront the racism Williams faces, opting instead to

imply, in a stunning reversal, that the public must adopt the "bias" of her supporters if

they are to "come around": Andy Roddick, who the writer is quick to point out "has

known Williams since childhood" explains: "'I'm biased. I know Serena behind the

---

[57] As Zeba Blay writes in, "When We Attack Serena Williams's Body, It's Really About
Her Blackness," "just so we're clear, this isn't just about how Williams' muscular
physique sets her apart from her white counterparts. It's about the way black women --
world-class athletes or otherwise -- find themselves continuously othered and compared
to white women, no matter what they do or how they look." Likewise, in a follow-up op-
ed for the Online New York Times Opinion Page, Margaret Sullivan begins by defending
her colleague Ben Rothenberg's "intentions," but finally asserts that "Most of all, it's
unfortunate that [Rothenberg's] piece didn't find a way to challenge the views expressed,
instead of simply mirroring them."

curtain. I've seen the sweet side, and I know what kind of person she is. I wish other people got to see more of her. It's pretty impressive. The story goes that if you win long enough, people come around. She's won plenty long enough.'"

It is here, in the blind-spot connecting these two *NYT* articles—in the cruel optimism that more exposure is the solution—that Claudia Rankine intervenes and asks, "What does a victorious or defeated black woman's body in a historically white space look like?" (*Citizen* 25). She clarifies that this is not just a matter of seeing *more* of Serena, but rather to "know Serena behind the curtain" of anti-blackness, to see not just Serena's "sweet side," but to appreciate "the anger built up through experience and the quotidian struggles against dehumanization every brown or black person lives simply because of skin color" (24). Rankine does not write a celebrity profile claiming to peek "behind the curtain" of fame and provide access to the "real" and sweeter Serena; instead, she provides a study in racial profiling and its resistance, as well as the affects they produce.

Rankine frames her analysis of Serena Williams' treatment by the public, the mass media, and the umpires with Zora Neale Hurston's statement, "'I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background'" (25). On the one hand, the "'sharp white background'" refers to tennis, often called the "lily-white sport." On the other hand, in *Citizen,* the "'sharp white background'" of the tennis court comes to mimetically represent various instantiations of the color-line with Serena's positioning reflective of systemic and everyday discrimination against black people in America. The tennis court represents the supposedly even playing field, which is actually anything but, and offers a rich field for considering "surveillance and the work it does to zone spaces, draw lines

and shape looking relations" (Browne 72). Rankine highlights how Serena Williams's body is deemed always already at fault and out of place. She moves from Zora Neale Hurston's frank statement to a description of Glenn Ligon's installation art in which he stenciled the quote on canvas with "plastic letter stencils, smudging oil sticks, and graphite to transform the words into abstractions" (25). Rankine's interpretation that the "this appropriated line . . . seemed to be ad copy for some aspect of life for all black bodies," critiques the commodification of black bodies which abstracts their lived experiences. Against the "'sharp white background'" of the page, Rankine's own lines of poetry and prose insist upon the embodied and affective experience of the color-line that the treatment of Serena Williams, for example, so overtly produces and then denies.

To unpack the relationship between sports officiating and surveillance in Rankine's work, I will draw on Simone Browne's term "racializing surveillance" to signal "those moments when enactments of surveillance reify boundaries and borders along racial lines, and where the outcome is often discriminatory treatment." (72). I also begin with John Fiske's formulation that "surveillance is a technology of whiteness that racially zones city spaces by drawing lines that Blacks cannot cross and whites cannot see" (69). Of course, the bright white lines of the tennis court demarcating the boundaries and zones of the game are spectacularly visible, as are the "line judges" and officiates minding them. The rules of racializing surveillance, however, draw another set of lines, which "Blacks cannot cross and whites cannot see." Trapped in a "Soft Cage," Serena Williams, therefore, is always at risk of stepping out of bounds or crossing a line that her overwhelmingly white opponents, officiates, and spectators naturalize to the point of

invisibility and deniability. Rankine's analysis reveals the power of the "even playing-field" as a spectacle to overshadow color-lines and provide an alibi for surveillance and discrimination.

Rankine's description of a game officiated by Mariana Alves, "the most notorious of Serena's detractors," immediately highlights a conventional deference to the white gaze by identifying Alves as "the *distinguished* tennis chair umpire" who was merely "*excused* from officiating any more matches on the final day of the US Open after she made five bad calls against Serena in her semifinal matchup against fellow American Jennifer Capriati" (26-27, emphasis added). She goes on to ironically and sardonically extend the benefit of the doubt toward Alves, even as "the serves and returns Alves called out were landing, stunningly unreturned by Capriati, inside the lines, no discerning eyesight needed. Commentators, spectators, television viewers, line judges, everyone could see the balls were good, everyone, apparently, except Alves" (27). Rankine rhetorically feigns ignorance at what could possibly be behind the bad calls: "No one could understand what was happening." Of course, this is untrue; many viewers, including Rankine herself, understood this as racial discrimination. Yet, Rankine's recalls the formulation that color-lines, which "define what is in or out of place," are maintained by the presumption that "whites cannot see" them (Fiske 69). To point out these lines would be to betray the color-blindness of neoliberal and neo-racist politics. Like the stance of the *NYT*, the rhetorical commonplace is simply to watch in apparent bewilderment.

Rankine, however, emphatically calls out "what was happening," thereby undermining the rhetoric of bewilderment and colorblindness: "Though no one was

saying anything explicitly about Serena's black body, you are not the only viewer who thought it was getting in the way of Alves's sight line." That is, Serena's "black body" is simultaneously hyper-visible, overwhelming the entire field of focus, while also "explicitly" ignored. Rankine highlights Serena's physicality and blackness when she describes "Serena, in her denim skirt, black sneaker boots, and dark mascara . . . wagging her finger and saying 'no, no, no,' as if by negating the moment she could propel us back into a legible world." First, to the extent that Serena's styling recalls street clothes, it "negates" or threatens the exaggerated white decorum of tennis and "propel[s] us back into a legible world" outside the strict gentility of the sport. Secondly, Serena's finger wagging and protest—"no, no, no"— rebukes Alves for violating the rules herself. Of course, herein lies the problem of who has the power to define and then suddenly change the rules: to define what is "legible." Like Serena's attempts to "negate the moment," Rankine's also inscribes a counter narrative that foregrounds the power-relations in determining what is "legible," knowable, and sayable (27).

In the spirit of technological solutionism and "democratic" surveillance, that match between Serena and Capriati "would be credited for demonstrating the need for the speedy installation of Hawk-Eye, the line-calling technology that took the seeing away from the beholder" (27). This description by Rankine captures the irrational enthusiasm for surveillance technologies to solve the problem of personal bias or perception, as though algorithms are not written, employed, and interpreted by people with prejudice. Moreover, Rankine illustrates that this form of discrimination exploits oppressed people as an alibi for more surveillance, which only further disempowers them. "Hawk-eye" is a

prime example of a technological solution to discrimination that fails to address the

underlying bias or the ways in which "rules" are enforced unevenly:

> [Serena] is in the second set at the critical moment of 5–6 in Clijsters's favor, serving
>
> to stay in the match, at match point. The line judge employed by the US Open to
>
> watch Serena's body, its every move, says Serena stepped on the line while serving.
>
> What? (The Hawk-Eye cameras don't cover the feet, only the ball, apparently.) What!
>
> Are you serious? She is serious; she has seen a foot fault, one no one else is able to
>
> locate despite the numerous replays. "No foot fault, you definitely do not see a foot
>
> fault there," says McEnroe. "That's overofficiating for certain," says another
>
> commentator . . . Yes, and even if there had been a foot fault, despite the rule, they
>
> are rarely ever called at critical moments in a Grand Slam match because "You don't
>
> make a call," tennis official Carol Cox says, "that can decide a match unless it's
>
> flagrant.' (28-29)

While before Hawk-Eye, Mariana Alves called Serena's serves out of bounds despite

their landing within the lines, a year later, the "line judge" called Serena herself out of

bounds, because "apparently" the "cameras don't cover the feet." The commentators

were again left in disbelief, but Rankine's writing cuts across the confusion. Specifying

that the "line judge [was] employed by the US Open to watch Serena's body, its every

move," Rankine speaks to a targeted form of surveillance and scrutiny, so that when a

commentator says, "That's overofficiating for certain" we immediately think of "over-

policing." Perhaps most revealing, is Carol Cox's explanation that a foot fault is rarely

called at a critical moment in the game, "unless it's flagrant." How and when rules

apply—on and off tennis courts, in and out of legal courts—is a matter of discretion and discrimination. Hawk-eye didn't "take the seeing away from the beholder": it merely redirected the sightline to the real problem—Serena's body, which has been coded always already "flagrant" and at "fault."

Furthermore, Rankine emphasizes that over-officiating is not just a matter of policing what spatial lines Serena may cross, but also a matter of policing the lines of affectivity restricting opposition. After the bad call, "Serena turns to the lineswoman and says, 'I swear to God I'm fucking going to take this fucking ball and shove it down your fucking throat, you hear that? I swear to God!'" (29). Rankine affirms that, "As offensive as her outburst is, it is difficult not to applaud her for reacting immediately to being thrown against a sharp white background. It is difficult not to applaud her for existing in the moment, for fighting crazily against the so-called wrongness of her body's positioning at the service line" (29). Williams is routinely told to contain herself in the face of racism, less she become the "angry black woman" that she is assumed to be. Of course, no record of "respectability" would ever free her from this assumption, much less address the racism underlying it. Rankine "applauds" Williams for "fighting crazily against the so-called wrongness of her body's positioning" because her right to "react" and even "exist" is routinely challenged. Audre Lorde's work on the "uses of anger" is invaluable here: "Women responding to racism means women responding to anger; the anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, of silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-optation" (Lorde 124). As a black woman, Williams's personhood and position is routinely subject to "racial

distortions," literalized by the line judges calling out the "so-called wrongness of her body's positioning." It is not surprising that "Serena's reaction is read as insane" (30)— another "distortion," "misnaming," and dismissal so frequently used against women and especially women of color.

Rankine explains that Serena's "punishment for this moment of manumission . . . result[ed] in the loss of the match, an $82,500 fine, plus a two-year probationary period by the Grand Slam Committee" (30). The use of "manumission" to describe Serena's offense specifically evokes the emancipation of slaves, citing Serena's real offense—self-possession and rebellion against racism.[58] Focusing on Serena's breech of "decorum" attempts to excuse and distract from the racism and discrimination she was reacting to in the first place[59]. If only Serena could act "properly"; if only Serena could comport herself like Arthur Ashe whom "the sports writer Bruce Jenkins felt was 'dignified' and 'courageous' in his ability to confront injustice without making a scene" (35)[60]. Yet, to praise Arthur Ashe's "calm and measured logic," and his "dignified" and "courageous" ability to avoid "making a scene," is to privilege white comfort and blame black people for the uneasy "scene" of confronting injustice. As Sarah Ahmed aptly argues, "feelings

---

[58] To be sure, this is not to draw a false equivalency between the racial discrimination that Serena faces and slavery, but rather to recognize the historical antecedents to current forms of oppression and racialized surveillance.

[59] Again, Audre Lorde addresses exactly this type of derailment by the Grand Slam Committee: "my anger is no excuse for not dealing with your blindness, no reason to withdraw from the results of your own actions" (131).

[60] Never mind that Arthur Ashe once corrected a reporter who "suggested that having AIDS must be the greatest burden [he] ever had to bear," with "No, it isn't . . . Being Black is the greatest burden I've had to bear . . . Having to live as a minority in America. Even now it continues to feel like an extra weight tied around me" (Phillips 156).

become fetishes . . . through the erasure of the history of their production and circulation"

(11). That is, in the obsession with appraising either Serena's former "stubbornness" or

her "new comportment" the media deliberately obscures the racist history of these

affects.

To be sure, when Serena does fall in line, "without any reaction to a number of

questionable calls," this too is used to eclipse the racism she faces: "She is a woman in

love, one suggests. She has grown up, another decides, as if responding to the injustice of

racism is childish and her previous demonstration of emotion was free-floating and

detached from any external actions by others" (35). In addition to the sexist assumption

that "love" would cure Serena of her "childish" emotions, these responses typify a

disregard for "the injustice of racism" and subsequent pathologizing of black men and

women's anger. This is the reality of respectability politics: they provide no protection

and, in fact, advance white-supremacy. When "Caroline Wozniacki, a former number-one

player, imitates Serena by stuffing towels in her top and shorts, all in good fun, at an

exhibition match," Rankine mocks CNN for glibly asking, "Racist? CNN wants to know

if outrage is the proper response." Again, this type of news stunt reinforces respectability

politics, by presuming that CNN viewers should be invited to weigh in on the "proper

response" to racism[61] (36).

Citizen, thus, clarifies, that the conservative appeal to "respectability" is a call to

obedience and a "cruel optimism" at that:

---

[61] I'm reminded here of the media's obsession with praising the "prayer vigils" after the
mass shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, NC, in
effect, further demonizing the protestors in Ferguson, Missouri who were represented as
not grieving "properly."

In any case, it is difficult not to think that if Serena lost context by abandoning all

rules of civility, it could be because her body, trapped in a racial imaginary, trapped

in disbelief—code for being black in America—is being governed not by the tennis

match she is participating in but by a collapsed relationship that had promised to play

by the rules. Perhaps this is how racism feels no matter the context—randomly the

rules everyone else gets to play by no longer apply to you, and to call this out by

calling out "I swear to God!" is to be called insane, crass, crazy. Bad sportsmanship.

(30)

The reason racial discrimination in sports so perfectly captures the interdependence and

injustices of white supremacy and neoliberalism is because sports, like neoliberalism are

predicated on the "imaginary" of simply establishing rules and letting the game play out

fairly—even as the players are subject to strict surveillance. Operating under this

premise, any complaints of injustice or "bad calls" are derided as "bad sportsman[ship]".

This is precisely the trap of white supremacist profile culture that "promise[s] to play by

the rules" and then calls you "crazy" when "the rules everyone else gets to play by no

longer apply to you"—when you appear on the no-fly list, when you are denied a loan

based on your neighbor's bad credit, when you are stopped and frisked, when you are

arrested and killed, when your peaceful protests are met with military force. Meanwhile,

the public is placated that if they have nothing to hide, then they have nothing to fear—

until they do. Throughout *Citizen,* Rankine crystalizes these connections between

racialized surveillance, respectability politics, and the neoliberal profile culture at large.

She highlights the affective lines that bar people from "fighting back crazily" by

classifying anger and opposition as transgressions in and of themselves in order to

suppress dissent and make routine surveillance and profiling seem reasonable and

warranted[62].

As opposed to the commonplaces of personal insanity and individual impropriety,

Rankine resituates Serena's "disappointments and frustrations" within an aggressive

"system" of anti-blackness. Rankine's analysis expands beyond the "sharp white

background" of the tennis court to explicitly reject black erasure and the neoliberal

rationales of fairness and decorum:

> Again Serena's frustrations, her disappointments, exist within a system you
>
> understand not to try to understand in any fair-minded way because to do so is to
>
> understand the erasure of the self as systemic, as ordinary. For Serena, the daily
>
> diminishment is a low flame, a constant drip. Every look, every comment, every
>
> bad call blossoms out of history, through her, onto you. To understand is to see
>
> Serena as hemmed in as any other black body thrown against our American
>
> background (32).

Rankine warns against the con of "fair-minded[ness]" that is used to naturalize the

erasure of black people as "ordinary" and rational. In fact, the very term "*fair*-minded"

exposes the relationship between white supremacy and what counts as reasonable—

between light and right. Unlike Serena's so-called "insanity," the slow-violence[63] of

---

[62] When Sandra Bland was arrested after failing to signal during a lane change, the best the officer could offer was that she was being arrested for resisting arrest, tragically indicative of this circular logic.

[63] I am taking this valuable term from Rob Nixon's book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.

"daily diminishment" that torments like a "low flame, a constant drip" is not so easily representable as a media spectacle. It is through the slow-writing of someone like Rankine that "every look, every comment, every bad call" can "blossom out of history, through her, onto you." In fact, *Citizen* steadfastly faces micro-aggressions and "over-officiating" with close-ups and paused frames to enact a counter-surveillance that "understands" differently. In this way she manages to expose the practices and affects of racialized surveillance that are meant to be unseen and undetectable as such.

It has been my contention that in addition to hiding behind technical and bureaucratic black boxes as well as rhetorically foreclosing resistance by treating criticism as in and of itself grounds for suspicion—our contemporary profile society also solicits our complicity by promising convenience and "human capital" in exchange for our privacy and data. Serena Williams also calls out the politics of looking when she responds to the umpire Asderaki's bad calls by repeating, "Don't look at me. Really, don't even look at me. Don't look my way. Don't look my way' . . . because" as Rankine says, "it is that simple" (32). As a player with media endorsements, Serena clearly courts some degree of celebrity[64]; nevertheless, the politics of surveillance extend beyond the hot-button topic of privacy, as this moment makes clear. Serena is standing before an audience and umpires expressly there to watch her, and yet her insistence that Asderaki not "even look at [her]" is perfectly understandable: it is not her "privacy" that Serena demands, but her freedom from an unaccountable racializing surveillance. This moment

---

[64] Mind you, between June 2014 and June 2015 Serena Williams made 10 million dollars less in endorsements than her opponent Maria Sharapova. (Forbes)

illustrates the importance of surveillance studies thinking beyond "privacy" to contemplate how "those processing personal data do so responsibly, fairly, and accountably" (Lyon 197). It is not enough to say that if Serena doesn't want the officials "looking at [her]" she can simply leave the court, just as it's not reasonable to suggest that the public simply turn off their devices or opt out of "privacy agreements."

Still, more and more contemporary practices of surveillance ask that we not only look the other way, but that we also say "please." To this point, Rankine recalls hearing "someone ask the philosopher Judith Butler what makes language hurtful" to which she responded, "we suffer from the condition of being addressable." Reflecting on Butler's answer, Rankine writes, "you begin to understand yourself as rendered hypervisible in the face of such language acts. Language that feels hurtful is intended to exploit all the ways that you are present. Your alertness, your openness, and your desire to engage actually demand your presence, your looking up, your talking back, and, as insane as it is, saying please" (49). While addressability does leave people vulnerable, it also allows for some possibility of speaking back, of actively engaging. As a black woman, Serena is especially "rendered hypervisible" and her "detractors" routinely "exploit all the ways that [she is] present" as well as her "desire to engage"; yet, surveillance not only "demand[s] your presence"—it also insists on solely passive engagement. In this moment, Serena forbids the gaze of white supremacist surveillance—or at least she refuses to say "please." Moreover, Serena forcefully invokes and reverses a history of

policing and punishing African Americans for merely looking at white people[65]. Given this history, it is especially significant that Serena responds to racial discrimination by specifically thwarting the entitled and hostile gaze of the umpires.

Concurrent with the racism of respectability politics is the cultural supposition that one's body can betray who they really are, underneath it all[66]. So, on the one hand, is the pressure to dutifully perform "respectably" because the power to transcend race (and racism) is in one's own hands; on the other hand, no matter how people act or what they say, their bodies can ultimately reveal the "truth" about them. While seemingly contradictory, these two messages both reflect the epistemology of profile culture, which demands visibility while controlling perception. According to the logic of this racializing surveillance, it's up to Serena Williams to and act "respectably," and yet her gestures, her musculature, and her speech are over-determined as evidence of who she really is. While much is made of Williams's so-called aggression, nowhere is this logic more obvious than in the criticisms of her celebrations. After winning two gold medals at the 2012 Olympics, Serena's "three-second celebratory dance on the center court at the All American Club" was reported by the American media as Serena "Crip-Walking all over the most-lily-white place in the world." Reporters reprimanded her by saying, "You

---

[65] In 1955 Emmet Till, at fourteen-years-old, was brutally murdered for allegedly looking at a white woman. In September 2014 a twelve-year-old black boy was suspended from school for "staring" at a white girl, a punishment upheld by the Ohio courts.

[66] This can take the form of biometric authentication (fingerprint template technology, facial recognition software, and retinal scans, for example), trans-phobic gender identification, genetic essentialism, and even the long practiced "soft biometrics" that sort and assess people's worth, riskiness, and so on, based on their physical appearance.

couldn't help but shake your head. . .. What Serena did was akin to cracking a tasteless,

X-rated joke inside a church. . .. What she did was immature and classless" (33) Again,

the coded "color-blind" rhetoric of decorum avoids any explicit reference to Serena's

race, freeing the media to equate blackness with the pornographic, the unholy, the

excessive, the gross. Furthermore, this hyper-sexualization of Williams's "X-rated"

footwork typifies the characterization of black women as jezebels, as opposed to the other

common critique that Williams is too masculine. Either way, as a black woman she is

denounced as "unladylike." To say, "You couldn't help but shake your head,"

automatically implies a white audience or "line judge" in the position to denounce Serena

while also naturalizing "your" racist response.

During a later interview with Piers Morgan, "Serena responds incredulously by

asking if she looks like a gangster to him. Yes, he answers" (Rankine 34). As absurd as

his answer sounds, Morgan's uncritical racial profiling evidences the power of tropes to

shape "common sense" or what counts as reasonable[67]. Furthermore, as much as

technologies such as "Hawk-eye" profess to revolutionize the gaze by capturing some

objective truth, they exist within a long history of maintaining that the racialized "body

would reveal a 'truth' about the subject, despite the subject's claim" (*Routledge*

Handbook 77). We are to believe that through this three-second dance, Serena's body

exposed the truth about her. Of course, this supposed marker of truth is entirely over-

determined and interpreted by the delusional perceptions of racial profiling.

---

[67] Speaking to the same set of "delusions" Christian Parenti's research in *The Soft Cage*
connects the rise in home security systems in "the late 1980s, before terrorism eclipsed
communism as official enemy number one, [to] the media and political class [becoming]
almost delusionally obsessed with gangs" (175).

Speaking Affect to Power

An article in *Wired Magazine* expectantly declared*,* "with enough data, the

numbers speak for themselves." Admittedly, the easiness of this statement is appealing.

In a postmodernism era, this promise of transparency and certainty might even seem like

a relief. And yet, this specious realism raises the question of whether or not individuals

can also "speak for themselves" and, if so, who speaks with more authority. Indeed, the

"truths" that data or biometric profiles reveal about people often contradict what people

claim about themselves. As Robert D. Behn from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy

School of Government writes, "When the data speak, they do so only through some

framework, some theory, some causal model, some logical construct, some perception of

the world and how it works. After all, any set of data is just a collection of abstract

numbers. The data acquire meaning only when they are connected to some version of

reality" (1). And yet, with the surge in data profiling, "there's notions that these

technologies are infallible, that they are objective, and that they are based on

mathematical precision without error or bias on the part of the computer programmers

who calibrate the search parameters of these machines or on part of those who read these

templates to make decisions[68]" (Browne 115). Such confidence has helped data profiling

gain traction across the private and public sectors through a theology of absolutes and

absolution. This ethos is apparent, for example, in George W. Bush's repeated derision of

---

[68] Simone Browne specifically addresses the "underlying assumptions with surveillance
technologies such as passport verification machines, facial recognition software, and
fingerprint template technology" (*Dark Matters* 114). Her work on biometric
technologies, indispensable in its own right, raises critical questions for non-biometric
data profiling as well, which also emerges from a history of racializing surveillance.

"nuance" as "something between pedantic nuisance and genuine treason" ("Epistemology of State Power" 46). Data profiling claims to remove "nuance" and human prejudice, thereby freeing users to disproportionately harm underprivileged populations under the auspices of merely letting "the numbers speak for themselves."

An affective epistemology disrupts the exploitive truth power of the now pervasive profile epistemology, which claims to "know better." Speaking with Lauren Berlant, Claudia Rankine clarifies that she is "not interested in narrative, or truth, or truth to power, on a certain level," but rather is "fascinated by affect, by positioning, and by intimacy. . .. What happens when I stand close to you? What's your body going to do? What's my body going to do?" Poetry is thus a fitting medium for Rankine, a way of provocatively juxtaposing the unfamiliar to allow for "what happens." Formally, Rankine also refuses narrative, instead positioning photography and news-clippings along side the personal accounts of her lyric poetry, effectively stepping outside the bounds of traditional lyric poetry to produce new affects. Unlike those who put total faith in data (or language, for that matter), Rankine recognizes that "on myriad levels, we are both going to fail, fail, fail, each other and ourselves. The simplicity of the language is never to suggest truth, but to make transparent the failure" (Rankine Interview). The same should be said of the seductive "simplicity" of data. I am not calling for the demise of data, any more than the post-structuralists called for the end of language. Still, we must untether epistemologies of data and profiling from objectivity and neutrality and address how data functions both rhetorically and materially.

Speaking affect to power means deconstructing the supposed objectivity of profile epistemologies by exposing both their own embedded affects as well as the affects they attempt to exile. Even as their proponents profess profile technologies to be objective, they undoubtedly gain popular and political support through affective appeals. For instance, "security"—the go-to alibi for "dataveillance"—is triggered by emotional appeals misrepresented and misunderstood as common sense[69]. Accordingly, the "war on terror" cultivated an amorphous atmosphere of terror (as opposed to a feeling of fear, which has an object) that supposedly called for a similarly enigmatic and nebulous response by the state (Berlant). That is, the public embodies terror (always yellow, orange, or red levels), while the state safeguards "intelligence." Exploiting this "affective atmosphere[70]," the defenders of the "war on terror" claimed intellectual superiority in purely statistical rationalizations for racial profiling and covert mass surveillance that promised to someday return transparency and "normalcy." Paul Sperry of the Hoover Institution wrote for the NYT, "Young Muslim men bombed the London tube, and young Muslim men attacked New York with planes in 2001. From everything we know about the terrorists who may be taking aim at our transportation system, they are most likely to be young Muslim men. . .. [Profiling is] based on statistics. Insurance companies profile

---

[69] As Lauren Berlant says, "What we call 'political persuasion' must entail shaping political affections" (*Cruel Optimism*).

[70] While I have some reservations about the term "affective atmosphere" to describe the historical sensorium, lest we ignore its embodied and palpable impacts, within the Anthropocene where we are directly changing and changed by the atmosphere, this phrasing also takes on a productively material meaning: how do we affect the atmosphere? What are we breathing in?

policyholders based on probability of risk. That's just smart business. Likewise, profiling

passengers based on proven security risk is just smart law enforcement." The next day the

Washington Post published a similar opinion by Charles Krauthammer: "It is a simple

statistical fact. Yes, you have your shoe-bomber, a mixed-race Muslim convert, who

would not fit the profile. But the overwhelming odds are that the guy bent on blowing up

your train traces his origins to the Islamic belt stretching from Mauritania to Indonesia."

As we see here, the dominant epistemology of data underwrites an affect of terror and

helplessness[71] while conveniently dismissing dumb "p.c." feelings that might interfere

with what is "just smart business . . . just smart law enforcement." Furthermore, evoking

insurance companies was apparently meant to add a sense of matter-of-factness to this

argument for racial profiling, but it actually introduces an important set of concerns and

connections. By this logic, redlining and the ongoing racial profiling in the property

insurance industry, for example, which has long contributed to "racial segregation and

uneven metropolitan development" is "just good business." Never mind that these

systemic disadvantages are also cited as a major contributing factor in a subject's

"probability of risk." Never mind the over-generalizations and mistakes involved in

identifying a supposedly "*proven* security risk." In fact, what counts as "smart business,"

"smart government," or a "risk" is constituted through the surveillance and exclusion of

racialized others.

Unlike the maxims of profile epistemology, such as "let the data speak for itself,"

the simplicity of Rankine's language doesn't promise organization. Instead, *Citizen*,

---

[71] This affect of both terror and helplessness is epitomized in the color-coding of terror
levels without any attendant recommendations of what to, therefore, do in response.

offers "a way to access the disciplines of normativity in relation to the disorganized and disorganizing processes of labor, longing, memory, fantasy, grief, acting out, and sheer psychic creativity through which people constantly (consciously, or unconsciously, dynamically) renegotiate the terms of reciprocity that contour their historical situation" (*Cruel Optimism* 53). After all, "the ordinary" that profile epistemologies claim to count and contain is actually "a porous zone that absorbs lots of incoherence and contradiction, and people make their ways through it at once tipped over awkwardly, half-conscious, and confident about common sense." Without doubt, "Laws norms, and events shape imaginaries," but it is also the case that "in the middle of the reproduction of life people make up modes of being and responding to the world that altogether constitute what gets called 'visceral response' and intuition intelligence" (*Cruel Optimism* 53). *Citizen* demonstrates both of these facts and produces a visceral response, which can then offer a line of flight. Facing profile epistemology, poetry, here, defiantly represents affects and experiences that cannot be captured or exhausted numerically.

Citizen's insights begin with an unease that becomes a question—an intuition intelligence: "Each moment is like this—before it can be known, categorized as similar to another thing and dismissed, it has to be experienced, it has to be seen. What did he just say? Did she really just say that? Did I hear what I think I heard? Did that just come out of my mouth, his mouth, your mouth?" (9). Variations on this litany of questions become a kind of refrain in *Citizen,* registering the "crisis ordinary." Rankine makes clear that simultaneously anticipating micro-aggressions while also experiencing degrees of disbelief is exhausting. Importantly, it is not just the micro-aggressions that buildup (and

they do), but the repetition of this cruel optimism. As Rankine explains in the section on

hearing Judith Butler describe the inherent vulnerability of being addressable—in order

to feel the shock and sting of words, one has to continually make oneself vulnerable. Yet,

Citizen makes the case that knowledge production comes from being sensitive to the

world and starts with experience. This is why it is so critical that *Citizen* not only

describes micro-aggressions or discusses them abstractly; the power of poetics here is to

simulate the experience of this accumulation and make them felt by the reader. In this

regard, *Citizen* counters the commonplaces of profile epistemology, which profess to

control for "risks," first, by establishing that definitions of riskiness are informed by anti-

blackness, and, second, by affirming that an affective epistemology demands putting

oneself at risk nonetheless.

The refrain of questions accomplishes this, in part, by pausing on these impasses

and swelling the moment so they cannot simply slide by. Because they don't slide by:

> The world is wrong. You can't put the past behind you. It's buried in you; it's
>
> turned your flesh into its own cupboard. Not everything remembered is useful but
>
> it all comes from the world to be stored in you. Who did what to whom on which
>
> day? Who said that? She said what? What did he just do? Did she really just say
>
> that? He said what? What did she do? Did I hear what I think I heard? Did that
>
> just come out of my mouth, his mouth, your mouth? Do you remember when you
>
> sighed? (63).

Again, these questions are structured by positionality and the "forced laced through with

structural causality" but they nonetheless "avoid the closures of symptomatic readings"

that would reduce the subjects to mere "symptoms of economic, political, and cultural inequality" (Berlant 15). As a poetic device, Rankine's use of questions opens the text and expands each moment to allow for the experience to become palpable. Likewise, by drawing our attention to "my mouth, his mouth, your mouth" and second "when you sighed," she amplifies the unpalatable, intimate experience of "What happens when I stand close to you? What's your body going to do? What's my body going to do?" (Rankine Interview).

Against a backdrop where "memory" is increasingly digitized and externalized as a chip, drive, or bank wherein "not everything remembered is useful but it all comes from the world to be stored," Rankine insists upon on the fleshiness of memories[72]. Ultimately, the sensuality of poetics and style is precisely what data lacks: data doesn't lack bias and it doesn't lack ideology, but it does deliberately eschew a sense of embodiment and style. Some data theorists like Lev Manovich, for example, are interested in aestheticizing or "visualizing data," but the strength of this project lies in its dissonance and unexpectedness. Rankine clarifies that not only is the past not "behind you" or externalized and compartmentalized for safe keeping elsewhere in the world, "it all comes from the world to be stored in you." And like the data centers which not only "store" information about the past, but in so doing claim the future, the past has "turned your flesh into its own cupboard," transforming you and inhabiting you. Lyric poetry,

---

[72] Relatedly, Allison Carruth's article "The Digital Cloud and the Micropolitics of Energy" argues for a material understanding of data and memory that counters the ethereal and clean image of "cloud computing" in order to more accurately represent the real environmental impact of computing.

here, represents an alternative fleshy cupboard that can hold and embody the weight of experiences. Finally, the domestic image of the cupboard also conjures the indisputable effects of racism on health that converge with but also go beyond the more common discussions of nutrition or what's in the cupboard[73].

As opposed to the familiar accumulation of data that gets reified into "facts" in order to stabilize or fix subject positions, Rankine's lyric produces an accumulation of feelings and affects in response to this fixity, a response that is powerfully destabilizing. In a sense, *Citizen* is questioning what counts and how lives "add up":

> And, of course, you want the days to add up to something more than you came in out of the sun and drank the potable water of your developed world— yes, and because words hang in the air like pollen, the throat closes. You hack away. That time and that time and that time the outside blistered the inside of you, words outmaneuvered years, had you in a chokehold, every part roughed up, the eyes dripping. That's the bruise the ice in the heart was meant to ice. (55)

This physical description moves from the space between people, "in the air like pollen," to the, at times, debilitating effects inside one's body. "You hack away" smartly depicts the body's efforts to fight against noxious words, which like pollen, can sicken, spread, and ultimately germinate. Rankine pivots from this image of insidious harm to the more overtly violent image of serial abuse ("that time and that time and that time"), which also

---

[73] According to a new study by Northwestern University, people who experienced racial discrimination during adolescence had disrupted stress hormone levels twenty years later. Importantly, this study controlled for other factors that cause stress, such as socioeconomic status, depression, and health behaviors (Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study).

makes "the throat close" but, this time, through "a chokehold." Both emphasize a difficulty breathing and, therefore, speaking, representing the non-symbolic relationship between a shortness of breath and lack of voice. Moreover, the rhythm of the line "that time and that time and that time" practically parodies dataveillance's patterns of recording and time-stamping experiences. Unlike data profiling, Rankine doesn't identify which time, which place, or specifically what happened; rather, she expresses the real rhythms of memory and experience, the ones that go un-captured by profiling and don't "add up" in the neoliberal data world. After all, these lines of poetry are speaking to the uncounted or discounted pain that goes unrepresented. Finally, Rankine ends with "the bruise the ice in the heart was meant to ice" poignantly reimagining so-called "coldness" as an act of self-care, an attempt to numb or nurse the pain of words that can "rough up," "blister," and "bruise."

Indeed, "The 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, the contact we have with others" (Ahmed 10). Rankine's use of the second person maneuvers the reader from the outside to the inside of the subject while also underlining that the "you" Rankine writes is always relegated to being the *second person*. By addressing the affective atmosphere that "hangs in the air"—the "outside that blister[ed] the inside of you"—Rankine disrupts a profile or biometric epistemology: "the body does not hide or reveal an otherwise unrepresented latency or depth but is a set of operational linkages and connections with other things other bodies." And so, "you hack away" because, "the body is not simply a sign to be read, a symptom to be deciphered, but also a force to be reckoned with" (Grosz 120).

139

In fact, Rankine's work clarifies that simply "sitting in silence" can be a forceful

defense, a rebellious act of self-care against the "the stresses stemming from racism" and

the cruel optimism of achieving oneself out of racial capitalism. Again, slowing and

swelling the moment, she offers,

> When you arrive in your driveway and turn off the car, you remain behind the
>
> wheel another ten minutes. You fear the night is being locked in and coded on a
>
> cellular level and want time to function as a power wash. Sitting there staring at
>
> the closed garage door you are reminded that a friend once told you there exists
>
> the medical term—John Henryism—for people exposed to stresses stemming
>
> from racism. They achieve themselves to death trying to dodge the buildup of
>
> erasure. Sherman James, the researcher who came up with the term, claimed the
>
> physiological costs were high. You hope by sitting in silence you are bucking the
>
> trend. (11)

This passage moves from what "you fear" to what "you hope": from the fear of "being

locked in and coded on a cellular level" to the hope of "bucking the trend." The digital

and biometric meanings of "coded" and "cellular" in the study of "trends" evoke the

hegemonic epistemologies of profiling, which increasingly structure the hopes and fears

of the historical present. Yet, by citing John Henryism and highlighting cumulative

effects and affects over discreet data and singular traumas, Rankine represents the

systemic slow violence of racism as well as the mostly unsensational modes of resistance.

This scene describes a person exhausted by the taxing work of "achiev[ing],"

"dodg[ing]," and "bucking," who is, nevertheless, "remain[ing]," "sitting," and "staring."

Rankine suggests here that what might look like inactivity—sitting in the garage with the

door closed, not driving—can be a self-protective, even hopeful gesture. After all, "in the

impasse induced by crisis, being treads water; mainly, it does not drown. Even those

whom you would think of as defeated are living being figured out how to stay attached to

life from within it, and to protect what optimism they have for that, at least" (*Cruel*

Optimism 10).

The self-care of sitting in a parked car, actively resisting the pressure to drive

oneself "to death trying to dodge the buildup of erasure," evokes and complicates the

notion of "driving while black" in the United States. For instance, Rankine connects the

fact that black people are assaulted by the police for, "fitting the description" (105) with

the woefully inadequate mandate that black people "Feel good. Feel better. Move

forward. Let it go. Come on. Come on. Come on. . .. move forward. Let it go. Come on"

(66). Rankine clarifies that the same forces "setting up a blockade" (105) and shouting,

"get on the ground. Get on the ground now" (106) are also those insisting that black

people simply "move forward." First, this mandate that black people simply "feel good"

illustrates how the color line circumscribes a "proper response" to racism. Like women

being told to "smile" on the streets, this imperative has no real regard for the subject's

feelings or experiences. In fact, to not "feel good" about racial profiling is itself treated as

grounds for suspicion. Statements such as "let it go" and "come on" speak to the

intersections and interdependence of anti-blackness and profile epistemologies. Both rely

upon the investments and movements of people who might be stopped, as Rankine says,

"at any random moment" (NPR Interview). To be sure, no amount of achieving or driving

141

forward will reconcile this madness: "In a landscape drawn from an ocean bed, you can't drive yourself sane—so angry you are crying. You can't drive yourself sane. This motion wears a guy out." Again: "You can't drive yourself sane. You are not insane. Our motion is wearing you out" (105). Endemic to the cruel optimism of racial capitalism, the problem is sold as the cure, and "you" are regarded as insane for noticing. Finally, Rankine's description of this "crisis ordinary" evokes the objectification and commodification of black lives that are worn out like driving-machines.

Alongside *Citizen's* accounts of everyday micro-aggressions are ten "scripts for situation videos created in collaboration with [photographer] John Lucas," retelling major news stories of anti-black racism, such as the response to Hurricane Katrina, the Jena Six Case, and the murder of Mark Dugan in London. "Stop-and-Frisk" provides the simultaneously predictable and appalling "script" for racial profiling from the point of view of the person who "just knew" he would be stopped by the police for "fitting the description." In the course of the narrator being pulled over, "stretched out on the hood," "handcuffed and pushed into the police vehicle's backseat," and finally fingerprinted and undressed, we are told, "this is what it looks like. You know this is wrong. This is not what it looks like. You need to be quiet. This is wrong. You need to close your mouth now. This is what it looks like. Why are you talking if you haven't done anything wrong?" (108). Rankine shows us explicitly what forced visibility "looks like," emphasizing the specific procedures of surveillance, while the "description" itself remains conspicuously undisclosed. This contrast calls out forms of looking that

supersede the tropes themselves and refocuses the account on the experience and affects of surveillance, of being stopped and frisked.

Moreover, this familiar question—"Why are you talking if you haven't done anything wrong"—epitomizes the interdependence of white supremacy and profile societies, both of which suppress dissent by propagating the fallacies that "if you haven't done anything wrong," you don't have anything to fear, and, therefore, if you do object, you must be "wrong." Rankine turns over the word "wrong" here several ways to illustrate how the power to positively identify a person is an ethical issue. Ultimately, profiling is not merely descriptive, responsive or even pre-emptive. Indeed, this "script" clarifies how profiling is also "prehensive" or a matter or "making the present look exactly the way it needs to in order to guarantee a very specific and singular outcome it the future" (Puar)[74]. In other words, profiling does not only repress or preempt unwanted outcomes through discipline and panopticism ("If you see something say something")—it *produces* outcomes, often by "collecting, curating, and tabulating data and affect" (Puar). This is true in police profiling and it is true of algorithmic consumer profiling. Stop-and-frisk doesn't just prevent crime; it produces neighborhoods, family relations, futures, affects, and data—data that might then deem an area or person risky.

Rankine ends "Stop-and-Frisk" by repeating the phrase, "And still you are not the guy and still you fit the description because there is only one guy who is always the guy fitting the description." Again, this illustrates the logic of a racializing profile

---

[74] The rhetoric in favor of building a wall at the U.S. border with Mexico is clarifying example of touting the preemptive or repressive functions (that is, curbing illegal immigration) while obscuring the "prehensive" drive to produce a particular future for the country that is predominately white.

epistemology, which demands visibility while controlling perception. Under the banner of objectivity, profiling formalizes stereotypes and tropes as "descriptive," masking over their inherent biases. Still, the syntax here provides an alternative and productive understanding of what it means to "fit the description." In one sense, the description is simply of a black man, and the driver can therefore passively "fit the description" while still not being "the guy." In another sense, the "one guy who is always the guy fitting the description" is the police officer who is actively fastening or "fitting" the description onto the driver like a pair of handcuffs. That is, while some are subject to forced visibility, others have the power to control perception as they see fit, a realization that productively undermines the professed neutrality of profiling. She is not portraying the unfortunate cost of security, but the securing of stereotypes. That is, the history of racializing surveillance and biometrics evidences that descriptions don't simply fit people; people are fitted into descriptions.

"This is Not What it Looks Like": Pacing, Spacing, and Counter-Surveillance

I end this chapter by exploring modes of counter-surveillance embedded and embodied in Rankine's lyric, effective and affective techniques that speak back to the hegemonic profile epistemologies that my work addresses. I have already suggested that centering affect as a form of knowledge production can disrupt the teleological truth claims of profiling. Additionally, Rankine illustrates the power of artistic counter-surveillance, such as the "scripts for situation videos," to produce new knowledge through new visions.

While Rankine applauds Serena for resisted racializing surveillance by insisting to the officiate, "Don't even look at me," *Citizen* later breaks down another moment of protest in sports by looking more closely. Another of the "scripts for situation videos" examines the incident during the final moments of the 2006 FIFA World Cup Final between Italy and France when Zinedine Zidane head-butted Marco Matterazi in retaliation to a verbal provocation. *Citizen* includes frame-by-frame stills of Zidane passing Matterazi and then suddenly turning in his tracks and walking back before butting him in the chest. These strips of film are interposed with quotes by Maurice Blanchot, Ralph Ellison, Franz Fanon, James Baldwin, William Shakespeare, Homi Bhabba, Fredrick Douglas, and Zinedine Zidane himself, as well as the repeated quote, "Big Algerian shit, dirty terrorist, nigger," taken from "accounts of lip readers responding to the transcript of the World Cup" (126). Rankine literally reframes the event within a history of colonial oppression and anti-colonial and anti-racist opposition, again underscoring that, ""[w]hen one reacts, one is not reacting to any one of those moments" (Rankine Interview). In this context, uncovering Matterazi's hate speech through lip-reading and juxtaposing his words with a closer look at the slow sequence of events is a form of oppositional looking that sees what is meant to be hushed. Like an "antebellum hacker," Rankine "see[s] the openings provided by literacy" and "bend[s] the political technology of literacy back upon itself" (Parenti 20).

Part of what Rankine's artistic counter-surveillance "hacks" is the pacing and spacing of power relations that make certain people and events hypervisible while protecting and obscuring others:

Aesthetics is not only the place where we rehabituate our sensorium by taking in

new material and becoming more refined in relation to it. But it provides metrics

for understanding how we pace and space our encounters with things, how we

manage the too closeness of the world and also the desire to have an impact on it

that has some relation to its impact on us (*Cruel Optimism* 12).

Indeed, by freezing each frame and interposing some historical context alongside

Matterazi's racist provocation, Rankine "manages the too closeness of the world" while

also creating the necessary time and space to understand this interplay of "impacts." In

boldface and italics, she underscores Zidane's statement that, *"What he said 'touched the*

deepest part of me,'" suggestive language that recontextualizes the violent contact

between them (*Citizen* 128). Audiences are accustomed to replays of "bad behavior" or

"bad sportsmanship," but Rankine, here, reorganizes the pacing and spacing as if to say,

in Fanon's words, "notice too, illustrations of this kind of racial prejudice can be

multiplied indefinitely" (*Citizen* 122). The head-butt that was punished as "bad

sportsmanship" becomes a "rebuttal."

Earlier I clarified that profiling and racializing surveillance is not only an attempt

to preempt or repress some unwanted outcome, but also actually a means of claiming and

producing a particular future. Rankine situates her work here within the tradition of

activism and resistance she cites. Through these citations, she clarifies that counter-

surveillance—an oppositional looking-back at racializing surveillance—is not only

resistant but also productive. As Homi Bhabba writes, "The state of emergency is also

always a state of emergence" (*Citizen* 126). Rankine looks back at the emergency of

racism and racializing surveillance, and in so doing creates an "American Lyric."

Between the frames of Zidane, she quotes Fanon: "It is the White Man who creates the

black man. But it is the black man who creates" (128). Racial profiling is not just a matter

or representation, but actually a manner or "creat[ing] the black man," affectively and

materially. Yet, in the words of Baldwin, "The rebuttal assumes an original form. This

endless struggle to achieve and reveal and confirm a human identity, human authority,

contains, for all its horror, something very beautiful." (*Citizen* 128). Clearly, this

"original form" includes modes of counter-surveillance, which deconstruct the truth-

claims and teleology of profiling and its insistence on "[un]original forms."

Citizen's use of oppositional looking disrupts the interdependent epistemologies

of racism and profile societies, which together propagate the respectability politics that

defensively ask, "why are you talking if you haven't done anything wrong?" Like using

lip-reading to recuperate lost words, Rankine's lyric refuses to let these moments slide

by. Giving them a second look, she both exposes and enacts creative resistance. For

example, *Citizen* includes a photograph of the Rutgers women's basketball team at a

press conference after Don Imus's racist and sexist insults; yes, they are technically

complying with the "decorum of silence" and yet, through their body language and

expressions, they clearly register their disgust. By including this image, Rankine evokes

"the history of recognizable outrage and disbelief performed routinely and silently by

black women's bodies given their historical relationship to power, the moments when

they 'throw shade'" (Rankine Interview). In this tradition of giving oppositional "top-

eye" or "side-eye," the team rejects the value of Imus's public apology, in part, by

exposing and subverting the "decorum of silence" that they are nevertheless expected to uphold—thereby poignantly placing Imus's racist remarks within a larger system of white supremacy and racializing surveillance.

I end with the following moment from *Citizen*, which observes the complicit silence of white bystanders, drawing a stark distinction between oppositional looking and mere onlooking. Rankine describes a cashier asking a black woman, do "you think your card will work." She continues, "if this is his routine, he didn't use it on your friend who went before you. As she picks up her bag, she looks to see what you will say. She says nothing. You want her to say something—both as witness and as a friend. She is not you; her silence says so. Because you are watching all this take place even as you participate in it, you say nothing as well. Come over here with me, your eyes say. Why on earth would she?" (54). The doubt of the "man behind the register" carries the history of distrusting the documentation and identification of black people during transatlantic slavery, as well as the cultural presumption that black people are inherently "unruly" (*s* 95). To the extent that consumer transactions now amount to citizen-consumers "'checking in' with authorities" (Parenti 79), his questioning of whether or not her "card will work" implies she is perhaps misrepresenting herself or "out of place." As data and surveillance studies analyze the fact that "credit cards, of course, are leading the path forward to a future where money and identification have merged," we must bear in mind the historical antecedents of this merger, including the commodification and consequent tracking of black bodies through and since slavery. This moment in *Citizen*, reminds us that as we are supposedly "authenticated" through consumer transactions, class privilege

should not be mistaken as the sole indicator of the status of citizens. In fact, this form of authentication, which asks if your "card will work," if you have achieved enough human capital, is always already prefaced by white supremacy.

Finally, as a silent "witness," the white friend is implicated in the apparatus of racializing surveillance. Indeed, her silence announces and confirms her privilege: "she is not you; her silence says so." Yet, Rankine writes, "Because you are watching all this take place even as you participate in it, you say nothing as well." The women share the experience of "watching all this take place"—of both being silent observers; however, at the same time "you participate in it." Feeling this distance—"come over here with me, your eyes say"—gesturing toward the possibility inhabiting this difficult space together. This tension recalls Rankine's statement to Lauren Berlant that she is "not interested in narrative, or truth, or truth to power, on a certain level," but rather is "fascinated by affect, by positioning, and by intimacy . . . What happens when I stand close to you? What's your body going to do? What's my body going to do?" Rankine portrays that "on myriad levels, we are both going to fail, fail, fail, each other and ourselves." The friend does not "come over" to inhabit this space, and Rankine asks, "Why on earth would she?" And yet, through the use of the second person—here and throughout *Citizen*— Rankine optimistically opens up the text to this very possibility. The often cruel optimism, but optimism nonetheless, that a reader "who is not you," might share in this affect, see and respond to the gesture, and "come over here," both as "a witness and a friend." By highlighting micro-aggressions that, like racializing surveillance, are meant to remain inconspicuous, *Citizen* produces an affective epistemology that makes these

149

moments count, a different form of literacy and knowledge production that confronts not only our interpersonal failures but also the epistemological failures of profiling. Profile societies claim to eliminate bias by collecting ever-more information, but the operating model of what counts and who does the counting remains static. *Citizen's* "oppositional looking" at the apparatuses of profile societies re-paces and re-spaces encounters to expose their interdependence with white supremacy and undermine the supposed objectivity of data profiling and racializing surveillance.

Works Cited

Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Anderson, Chris. "The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete." *Wired Magazine 16:07*. 23 June 2008. Web. 6 Oct. 2015. <http://archive.wired.com/science/discoveries/magazine/16-07/pb_theory>.

Badenhausen, Kurt. "Serena Williams Versus Maria Sharapova: By the Numbers." *Forbes.com*. 9 July 2015. Web. 6 Oct. 2015. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kurtbadenhausen/2015/07/09/serena-williams-vs-maria-sharapova-by-the-numbers>.

Behn, Robert. "The Data Don't Speak For Themselves." *Bob Behn's Public Relation's Report*." Vol. 6.7. 2009. Web. 6 April 2016. <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/thebehnreport/March2009.pdf.>.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. Print.

---. "Affect in the End Times." *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences*. 20.2 (Spring/Summer 2012): 71-89. Print.

Blay, Zeba. "When We Attack Serena Williams's Body, It's Really About Her Blackness." *Huffington Post.* 13 July 2015. Web. 6 Oct. 2015. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/serena-williams-policing-of-black-bodies_55a3bef4e4b0a47ac15ccc00>.

Browne, Simone. *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015. Print.

---. "Race and Surveillance." *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies.* Ed. Bell, Haggerty, and David Lyon. New York: Routledge, 2012. 72-79. Print.

---. Lecture. "Dark Sousveillance Race, Surveillance and Resistance." *CUNY by the Digital Praxis Seminar and the CUNY Digital Humanities Initiative*. 9 Dec. 2013. Web. 6 April 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsMFdiLsqbg>.

Carruth, Allison. "The Digital Cloud and the Micropolitics of Energy." *Public Culture* 26.2 (2014): 339-364. Print.

Clary, Christopher. "It's Time to Appreciate Serena Williams's Greatness." *The New York Times*. 28 July 2005. Web. 6 Oct. 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/14/sports/tennis/its-time-to-appreciate-serena-williamss-greatness.html>.

Fiske, John. "Surveilling the City: Whiteness, the Black Man and Democratic
    Totalitarianism." *Theory, Culture, & Society,* 15.2 (1998): 67-88. Print.

Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Harmondsworth: Penguin,
    1979. Print.

Goldberg, David Theo. *The Racial State.* Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002. Print.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism.* Bloomington: Indiana
    University Press, 1994. Print.

Krauthammer, Charles. "Give Grandma a Pass." *Washington Post*. 29 July, 2005. Web. 6
    Oct. 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-
    dyn/content/article/2005/07/28/AR2005072801786.html>.

Lorde, Audre. "The Uses of Anger." *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches.* New York:
    Ten Speed Press, 1984. 124-133. Print.

Lyon, David. *Surveillance Studies: An Overview.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007. Print.

Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study (MADICS). The University of
    Michigan. Web. 6 Oct. 2015 <http://www.rcgd.isr.umich.edu/pgc/home.htm>.

Parenti, Christian. *The Soft Cage: Surveillance in American from Slavery to the War on
    Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 2003. Print.

Pasquale, Frank. *Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and
    Information.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015.

Phillips, Caryl. *The Right Set: A Tennis Anthology*. New York: Vintage Books, 1999.
    Print.

Puar, Jasbir. "Regimes of Surveillance." *Cosmologics Magazine.* 4 Dec.2014. Web. 6
    Oct. 2015 <http://cosmologicsmagazine.com/jasbir-puar-regimes-of-
    surveillance/>.

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric.* Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014. Print.

---. "Claudia Rankine By Lauren Berlant." *Bomb Magazine: Artists in Conversation*. 129
    (Fall 2014): n. page. Web. 2014.

---. "In *Citizen* Poet Strips Bare the Realities of Everyday Racism." Interviewed by Eric

Westervelt. *NPR Books. 3*. Jan. 2015. Web. 6 Oct. 2015.
<http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=374574142>.

Rothenberg, Ben. "Balancing Body Image With Ambition." *The New York Times*. 11 July, 2015: D1. Print.

Sperry, Paul. "When the Profile Fits the Crime." *The New York Times.* 28. July 2005. Web. 6 Oct. 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/28/opinion/when-the-profile-fits-the-crime.html?_r=0>.

Sullivan, Margaret. "Double Fault in Article on Serena Williams and Body Image?" *The New York Times: Public Editor's Journal*. 13 July, 2015. Web. 6. Oct. 2015. <http://publiceditor.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/07/13/double-fault-in-article-on-serena-williams-and-body-image/>.

Squires, G.D. "Racial Profiling, Insurance Style: Insurance Redlining and the Uneven Development of Metropolitan Areas." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 25: 391–410. Print.

Chapter Four

The Orbiting Eye/I in Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*

As a dominant epistemological framework, neoliberalism serves to coopt and

rhetorically neutralize concerns over the proliferation of personal data profiling. This is

nowhere more explicit than in the "self-help" genre. As a bastion of neoliberalism, "self-

help" books preach personal responsibility, self-determination, and calculated

investments in one's own "human capital." Profiles of wealthy people are often held up

as inspirational forms that can be emulated or approximated with the right effort[75]. Books

such as, *Profiles of Power and Success,* for instance, promise to "motivate all who dare to

reach for success and power in their own lives." To that end, many self-help books regard

individual data profiles as either assets to be developed and brandished or potential

liabilities to be personally controlled and mitigated[76]. Unsurprisingly, a number of self-

help books combine the neoliberal obsession with economic and personal "growth" with

the imperative to "grow" your digital presence and personal profile[77]. For example, with

---

[75] For further examples, consider the following titles: *The Top 2%: How to Become the Highest-Paid, Highest-Profile Person in Your Industry* by Nightingale Conant Learning System; *Profiles of Success* by Mast Brian; *Wire Yourself for Wealth: Discover Your Money Genius Profile to Effortlessly Create More Wealth* by Laura Leigh Clark; and *How to Brand Your Professional Profile? Define Your Brand, Reinvent Yourself* by Nick Brown.

[76] And, again: *E-Habits: What you Must Do To Optimize Your Professional Digital Presence* by Elizabeth Charnock; *Burn Your Resume: You Need a Professional Profile* by Donald M. Burrows and Deborah Drake; *You are a Brand!: In Person and Online, How Smart People Brand Themselves for Business Success* by Catherine Kaputa; *Social Media Made Me Rich: Here's How it Can Do The Same For You* by Matthew Loop.

[77] For instance: *Social Media Marketing: 15 Days to Growing Your Social Presence* by Brian Eugene; *Likable Social Media Revised and Expanded: How to Delight Your*

an ostensibly new take on the old notion of networking, the book, *Your Network is Your Net Worth: Unlock the Hidden Power of Connections for Wealth, Success, and Happiness in the Digital Age* by Porter Gale and Guy Kawasaki suggests that the size of one's digital presence corresponds to their "net," or actual, "worth" as a person. While it is true that people are both actively and passively constructing high-profile "selves," it is not entirely obvious whom this is "helping." The growth of data profiling certainly is making some people wealthy and secure, but, by and large, it is not consumer-citizens.

In describing how "neoliberalism has hijacked our vocabulary," Doreen Massey argues that "growth" has been "deemed to be the entire aim of our economy. . .. In its crudest formulation this entails providing the conditions for the market sector to produce growth, and accepting that this will result in inequality, and then relying on the redistribution of some portion of this growth to help repair the inequality that has resulted from its production." Despite the inequality this produces, "growth" is still regarded a kind of panacea. The title to Mohsin Hamid's 2013 novel, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, perfectly captures this ethos of "growth" in all of its complexity. First, as a mock-self-help book, the novel immediately interpellates the reader as a neoliberal subject who necessarily wants to become "filthy rich" as a means of supposed self-improvement. Next, in this context, the phrase "Rising Asia" analogously conflates national or regional improvement with "rising" or growing wealth, in fact echoing language used by the International Monetary Fund's research group in their work on,

---

Customers, Create an Irresistible Brand, and Be Amazing on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, and More, by Dave Kerpen, et al.; and *How to Win Friends and Influence People in the Digital Age* by Dale Carnegie & Associates.

"Asia Rising: Patterns of Economic Development and Growth." Furthermore, Hamid's use of "filthy" relates the moral or ethical failing of a single-minded commitment to excess and wealth with the pollution and environmental damage it produces, including "rising" sea levels.

Finally, while the novel seems to reflect Massey's position that this preoccupation with "increased wealth, especially as measured in the standard monetary terms of today, has few actual consequences for people's feelings of wellbeing once there is a sufficiency to meet basic needs, as there is in Britain," it is also worth noting that Hamid's novel is not set in Britain. While the city in the novel remains unnamed, it strongly resembles Lahore, and it would be a mistake to equate the conditions and concerns of Pakistan with the British political-economy Massey critiques. In fact, the conditions Hamid portrays from the novel's outset emphatically do not "meet basic needs": drinking water is unsafe, food is scarce, shelter is scanty, and medicine is unavailable. Indeed, the novel depicts the ways in which Pakistan has suffered and continues to suffer the excesses and growing pains of Britain and the U.S., even as (or perhaps, especially as) it satirically exploits the cruel optimism of "self-help." In particular, profiling and data surveillance serve as critical nodal points in the novel for deconstructing the discourses of self-help and self-determination. Ultimately, profiling not only reifies existing norms, it actively exacerbates asymmetrical power relations, making the ethos of self-determination all the more untenable.

Fits and Misfits

In the first pages of *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* the narrator disingenuously proclaims that, "This book is a self-help book. Its objective, as it says on the cover, is to show you how to get filthy rich in rising Asia" (4). Readers, of course, know that—"as it says on the cover"—the book is actually a novel. Soon after, however, the narrator qualifies, "all books, each and every book ever written, could be said to be offered to the reader as a form of self-help" (20). In the sense that the novel might enrich the lives of readers, or sell enough copies to make Hamid himself rich, it could be said to be "a form of self-help." On the other hand, given that the novel follows the protagonist's moral and psychological growth from infancy to death, with a coming-of-age story in between, the book also seems to be a take on the traditional bildungsroman. I suggest that, deftly positioned in between these genres, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* actually critiques the ways in which the bildungsroman has been fitted to the neoliberal quest to become a "filthy rich," "self-made," and thus "successful" adult whose maturity is ostensibly reflected in mature investments. I'll argue that, in protest, Hamid methodically stretches language and genres to create space for productive *misfittings*, while exposing the forces that uncomfortably suture the self to profiles and thereby impact the distribution of life chances and possibilities for survival.

To great effect, Hamid writes the novel in the second-person perspective, referring to the protagonist only as "you" and to other characters by general designations such as, "your sister" and "the pretty girl." The narrator introduces "you, huddled, shivering, on the packed earth under your mother's cot one cold, dewy morning"—an

unlikely start to becoming "filthy rich" (4). One could say that the reader is interpellated

as "You" or, alternatively, that the reader is figuratively reborn and relocated to fit this

new identity. Then again, as the novel states, "We are all refugees from our childhoods.

And so we turn, among other things, to stories. To write a story, to read a story, is to be a

refugee from the state of refugees" (213) and so, perhaps the reader, as a nomadic, non-

unitary misfit, is simply seeking asylum in "You." In any case, Hamid's use of the second

person, both a particular and generic pronoun, produces both a distinction and personal

connection between the reader and character. Generically speaking, Hamid describes

what is like for a vast portion of the world's population, and to read about these

conditions is to become increasingly aware of your own privilege—for literacy itself is a

privilege in this context. Still, the narrator also claims, "when I imagine, I feel. The

capacity for empathy is a funny thing" (214), suggesting that the very act of reading

undermines the individualism of neoliberal self-help books—which is perhaps the real

"help."

Even as the novel invites the reader to inhabit this subjectivity, Hamid emphasizes

the dissonance between you and the protagonist. This disconnect makes the novel as

much about us as it is about "you." The narrator explains that, "Your anguish is the

anguish of a boy whose chocolate has been thrown away, whose remote controls are out

of batteries, whose scooter is busted, whose new sneakers have been stolen. This is all the

more remarkable since you've never in your life seen any of these things" (4). By

juxtaposing these absurdly dissimilar forms of "anguish," Hamid highlights that "you"

are, in fact, not "you." The consumerist points of reference he offers are obnoxious when

contrasted with the protagonist's physical pain: "the whites of your eyes are yellow, a consequence of spiking bilirubin levels in your blood. The virus afflicting you is called hepatitis E. It's typical mode of transmission is fecal-oral. Yum. It kills only about one in fifty, so you're likely to recover. But right now you feel like you're going to die" (4). Most jarringly, with the single word, "Yum," Hamid juxtaposes "your anguish" over lost chocolate with the fecal-oral transmission of hepatitis E—an especially affective mis-fit. The narrator concedes here that survival (much less comfort or success) is a function of environmental and material conditions as well as chance. In the end, the statistical likelihood of recovery does not change the fact that "you feel like you're going to die"— a *feeling* that the reader does not share[78].

Data collection is undoubtedly valuable to understanding the scale and scope of systemic inequality. Yet, as the novel clarifies, data profiles can also calcify norms and exacerbate inequality by deeming groups of people "risky investments" who don't fit the "profile for success." Throughout the novel, Hamid deconstructs the self-help genre by routinely reminding readers of structural and environmental variables that contribute to the unequal distribution of life chances. For example, if "you" are a woman, you might as well stop reading, as we are told that the following advice, such as "Get and Education," does not apply to you. This is made especially clear through the case of the protagonist's

---

[78] Elaine Scarry's work on *The Body in Pain* is particularly instructive here. Despite what the statistics suggest about "your" likelihood of survival, "for the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that 'having pain' may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to 'have certainty,' while for the other person it is so elusive that 'hearing about pain' may exist as the primary model for what it is 'to have doubt.' Thus pain comes unsharably into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed" (4).

sister who, despite having "demonstrated more enthusiasm for education in her few months in a classroom than your brother did in his several years . . . will not be sent their in his stead." As a woman, "Marriage is her future" (28).

Specifically, Hamid illustrates how a society of surveillance marks individuals and maintains systemic discrimination. For example, the protagonist and his sister are playing together outside when, we are told that, "Viewing the scene from the lenses of an orbiting reconnaissance satellite, an observer would see two children behaving peculiarly" (27). At this point the sister is identified as simply one of "two children." However, "without warning the spell breaks. You follow your sister's altered gaze and see that a formerly shuttered window is now open. A tall, bald man stands inside, staring at your sister intently. She takes her shawl from you and throws one end over her head, the other across her still-small-breasted chest" (28). Hamid, here, illustrates that in this surveillance-scape, the sister's selfhood and future are contingent upon how she is perceived by the orbiting and lurking observers. Once the perspective shifts to the man staring from the window, she becomes sexualized and "marked for entry" (28). Whether because of gender, nepotism, or access to clean water, the novel steadfastly reminds readers of the largely insurmountable inequalities undermining the project of "self-help"—conditions often reified and policed by surveillance and profiling. To address both the force and failures of profiling, Hamid embraces the subjectivity of the "misfit," saying "it's misfits who help all people fit in everywhere." By beginning with the dissonance or *mis-fit* between "You" and the reader the novel effectively provokes a

"degree of questioning and refusal to accept what is given inside society" (*Chicago Humanities Festival* Interview).

Filthy Rich satirically exposes the *fictions* of "self-help" books: for example, that "you" can determine your own fortune; and that their advice applies to "you" in all of your particularity. However, Hamid's critique extends beyond the paradoxes and even recklessness of the self-help genre. Rather, he situates the self-help genre within the broader discourses of self-reliance and self-interestedness—providing a biting critique of the ways neoliberal globalization exacerbates a widening economic divide. In talking about his novel, Hamid succinctly captures this tension: "For people who are at the bottom economically, the world is becoming a harder and harder place . . . And yet the incentives to become rich are so great because enormous amounts of wealth are being accumulated. And so those two things, that carrot and stick, are beating people along this trajectory of trying desperately to move up in the world" (*NPR* Interview).

In the novel, surveillance serves powerfully as both the "carrot and the stick." Filthy rich characters live behind guarded gates in "premier housing societies" that are "secure, walled-off, and impeccably maintained, lit-up-at-night, noise-controlled, [and] perfectly regulated" (111). Likewise, the protagonist knows he has finally arrived as a rich man when "Security men and parking attendants salute you, elevator doors spring apart for your arrival" (145) and a military police officer "waves you through" (162). Nevertheless, when "A series of CCTV cameras observes various stages of your progress through the cantonment," through "their monochromatic optical sensors the expensive metallic finish of your sedan dulls to a ratty gray" (162), indicating that while the

protagonist may have achieved a new degree of wealth affording him an ease of mobility, that freedom is diminished and dulled in the face of military power. Notably, the many CCTV cameras positioned throughout the novel follow "You" through "the various stages of your progress" toward becoming filthy rich and represent a different view of "You." Through the "monochromatic lens" of military forces your "progress" is "ratty" in comparison to the levels of access and mobility the military enjoys. Even after joyously passing through the doors and apparently leaving the rat-race behind, the protagonist still finds himself caught as a subject of the military gaze.

By defiantly portraying surveillance and data profiling as an act of storytelling, the novel reframes these technologies and techniques as modes of narration. Gregoire Chamayou, author of *The Theory of the Drone*, suggests that "We should imagine eventual scribe-machines, flying robotized clerks that, in real time, would record the smallest actions occurring in the world below—as if, in parallel to the life of human beings, the cameras that already capture animated images would now set about producing a circumstantial account of them" (41). Insightfully, he imagines this account as "lines of text" and realizes that it "would at the same time constitute something more: a great index, an informative catalog of an immense video library in which everyone's life would become retrospectively researchable" (41). Even if *everything* were surveilled and recorded, somehow sidestepping questions concerning who is tracked and for what reasons, very different stories could be told "retrospectively" depending upon the search parameters. In an interview with *Politico*'s Glenn Rush, former director of the National Security Agency, General Michael Hayden practically boasted that as an NSA officer,

"You are a storyteller. You can't throw data through the transit and expect a policy maker to digest it and make a decision on it. You actually have to tell the story. That's what an intelligence officer does." However, when Glenn Rush quickly followed up that, "Therein also lies the danger sometimes right?" Hayden defensively fell back on the supposed truth-value of data analysis, saying, "Well, okay, so now you are really getting into the science." Hamid frames this matter of knowledge production first as a literary question, introducing the fundamentals of reader response theory: "Like all books, this self-help book is a co-creative project. . .. It's in being read that a book becomes a book, and in each of a million different readings a book becomes one of a million different books" (97). By representing data collection and surveillance as also narratological, Hamid disrupts the adage that data or footage speaks for themselves, and, perhaps, most importantly, he raises the question of who our co-creators are in this "project" and what interests they serve.

Highlighting the current epistemological and physical force of profiling and surveillance, the chapter "Patronize the Artists of War" narrates the story of "you" through the very lens of these technologies. The narration shifts from inside the point of view of Internet search histories, to laptop cameras, to flight registries, to credit card records, to aerial drones—in effect allowing the plot of the story to track the ways profile technologies plot, pinpoint, and identify the public. In other words, the novel hacks into these structures and infrastructures to tell the story of "your" profile. Raising the stakes to their most critical condition, the surveillant gaze we inhabit is specifically that the military-industrial-complex. By adopting the point of view of these devices to narrate the

163

story, Hamid illustrates the narrative structure and discursivity of this machinery, which actually characterizes as it profiles. Most notably, the novel contrasts the agility of these transitions from one lens to another with the striving and struggles of characters trapped within that web. Finally, I will analyze in depth the novel's subtle but powerful critique of drones, which crystalizes the deathly serious power of profiling. Indeed, I argue that profiling is a form of storytelling, and that at times that story is a war-story told in black and white. Whether targeting consumers or targeting combatants, profiling is a matter of minimizing costs[79] by sorting the right person from the wrong person. Despite attempting to fall back on the "science," General Hayden was entirely correct when he suggested this sorting tells a social and political story.

Information is Power

Filthy Rich most directly targets the use of data profiling by "those at the apex of organizations entrusted with national security," claiming that "no one does this with more single-minded dedication or curatorial ferocity" (160). I have argued in previous chapters that within the context of consumer surveillance and data profiling, the consumer/user becomes the product; relatedly, *Filthy Rich* illustrates that, within the context of state and paramilitary surveillance, the target is not only a potential threat to be neutralized, but an economic opportunity to be seized. As part of the program to get filthy rich, the narrator advises "You" to "Patronize the Artists of War," explaining that "these artists of war are

---

[79] Politically speaking, drones have been advantageous precisely because they reduced the political costs of losing American lives, the economic costs of armament, and the "ethical or reputational" costs of perceived destruction and harm (Chamayou 9).

active even when their societies are officially at peace, quests for power being unrelenting" (160). The narrator satirically describes this perpetual use of profiling as impressive and aspirational—a quest for power in keeping with the protagonist's own supposed objective.

National security organizations, of course, rightly or wrongly justify profiling as a means of protecting citizens and securing the nation-state; however, Hamid, evocatively reframes data profiling by the military-surveillance-network as the unapologetic pursuit of profit. He writes that "in the absence of open hostilities they can be found either hunting for ever-present enemies within or otherwise divvying up that booty always conveniently proximate to those capable of wanton slaughter, spoils these days often cloaked in purchasing contracts and share-price movements" (161). Hamid disparagingly intersperses the vocabulary of ancient warfare—"hunting for ever-present enemies," "divvying up booty," "wanton slaughter," and "spoils"—with the modern corporate rhetoric of "purchasing contracts" and "share-price movements." While certainly disturbing, this is perhaps a familiar critique of the military-industrial-complex; what is not familiar, however, is the way Hamid identifies data profiling as both a powerful weapon in the business of war as well as a business strategy for becoming "filthy rich." Profiling here is a matter of "hunting" for enemies in order to amass, not just more wealth, but the potential to grow even more wealth, in the form of "purchasing

contracts," for example. In other words, this is data profiling as part of warfare speculation[80].

The passage ends with the narrator rejoicing that "to partner in such ventures is to be invited to ride the great armor-plated, signal-jamming, depleted-uranium-firing helicopter gunship to wealth, and so it is only natural that you are at this moment considering clambering aboard" (161). Here, the punctuated features of this "helicopter gunship," effectively substitute for the personal attributes of the supposedly "self-made" entrepreneur. Meanwhile, the adjective "signal-jamming" speaks to the fact that surveillance and data profilers (both military and otherwise) demand the visibility of their "ever-present enemies" or targets while insuring that they remain, if not invisible, at least, unintelligible. As this chapter progresses, however, the novel imaginatively hijacks the signals of state surveillance and their power over the flow of information.

In addition to evidencing the consolidation of state and industrial power, Hamid's use of "curatorial" and "artists" suggests that the tactics and techniques of profiling are

---

[80] The speculative dimension of war that Hamid describes speaks to the distinctions between counterinsurgency and antiterrorism as outlined in *The Theory of the Drone*. According to the logic of antiterrorism, "the total body count and a list of hunting trophies take the place of a strategic evaluation of the political effects of armed violence. Successes become statistics. Their evaluation is totally disconnected from their real effects on the ground. . . . From this point of view, the objection that drone strikes are counterproductive because they allow the enemy, in a classic pattern of action and repression, to recruit more volunteers no longer applies. Never mind if the enemy ranks thicken, since it will always be possible to neutralize the new recruits as fast as they emerge. The cull will be repeated periodically, in a pattern of infinite eradication" (69).

not merely destructive and speculative but also *creative*[81]. Like artists and curators, the

security apparatuses transform "information"—organizing it, framing it, and ultimately

giving it meaning. This becomes a particularly crucial insight if we accept the novel's

statement that,

> We're all information, all of us, whether readers or writers, you or I. The DNA in
>
> our cells, the bioelectric currents in our nerves, the chemical emotions in our
>
> brains, the configurations of atoms within us and of subatomic particles within
>
> them, the galaxies and whirling constellations we perceive not only when looking
>
> outward but also when looking in, it's all, every last bit and byte of it,
>
> information. (159)

By combining the precision and authority of scientific and computational discourses,

these microscopic and telescopic gazes might seem, at first glance, democratizing or

equalizing. That is, if looked at closely enough, "all of us" are essentially reducible to the

same units. However, the narrator continues, "what we do know is that information is

power. And so information has become central to war, that most naked of our means by

which power is sought" (160). By supplanting the maxim, "knowledge is power" with the

notion that "information is power," Hamid captures the epistemological shift in the data

age, which posits that "every last bit and byte" of information is already, in and of itself,

valuable. Indeed, information or raw data takes on truth-power precisely because it is *just*

information, and it, therefore, seems neutral. This realization about info-power is now

---

[81] Clearly, the phrase "patronize the artists of war" is punning on the call for people to
"patronize the arts," a means toward a decidedly different form of riches, but one that
readers of this book are evidently pursuing.

"what we know"—this is new knowledge that must be understood and reckoned with in the data age.

Info-power is often produced through algorithmic, microscopic, and telescopic gazes, which the novel represents as out of proportion with human ways of seeing. These techniques exponentially stretch the proportions of something like Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, but they are still reflective of surveillance's fundamental lack of reciprocity. Hamid grounds the often-inconceivable scale and scope of data surveillance in the particular perspective and power structures of national security:

> From the perspective of the world's national security apparatuses you exist in several locations. You appear on property and income-tax registries, on passport and ID card databases. You show up on passenger manifests and telephone logs. You hum inside electromagnetically shielded military-intelligence servers and, deep below pristine fields and forbidding mountains, on their dedicated backups. You are fingertip swirls, facial ratios, dental records, voice patterns, spending trails, e-mail threads. (161)

From a distance, this might sound like a familiar fragmented, split-subject, but Hamid is clear that this is not just the postmodern condition. This is "You" according to the specific "perspective of the world's national security apparatuses[82]," embedded in state

---

[82] It is significant that Hamid refers to the "*world's* national security apparatuses" capturing the complicated cooperation and collusion between the U.S. and Pakistani governments in what has been dubbed the "drone war" during the Bush and Obama Presidencies. While the details are contested, it is incontrovertible that for at least some of the drone strikes, the U.S. operated in with the approval of Pakistan's ISI. Former Pakistani President, Pervez Mushaaraf, told *The New Yorker* in 2014, for example, that he allowed the CIA to operate drone strikes in exchange for helicopters and night-vision

departments, bureaus, and agencies in cooperation with telecommunications companies and airlines. If "information is power," then this information about "You" is not free-floating; it is consolidated on "dedicated backups" and protected as "military intelligence." In other words, your data profile is not scattered in the winds or floating in a cloud, but buried "deep below pristine fields and forbidding mountains." Ultimately, the novel reminds readers that the U.S. military stands atop the highest mountain in this range of consolidated data.

Finally, this recognition that "you exist in several locations" parallels the rhetorical stance of the novel, which posits you both before and on the page. This comparison and contrast between the narrator's story of "you" and your profile is suggestive. Ultimately, Hamid implies that profiling is not an exact science, but an art. Given that "desperate other contemporary narratives play out simultaneously," there is an artistry to the way "You" become "You" in the eyes of the "world's national security apparatuses." And like the "co-creative project" of writing and reading it is full of creative narrations and interpretations impacted by the hegemonic discourses and assumptions of the historical present.

Discursive Machines

"Everything is simultaneously real, social, and narrated"—Bruno Latour

Filthy Rich exposes the machinery of discourse by adopting the self-help genre and second-person perspective as a kind of hack-able writing software; additionally, the

---

gear. My own references to government or military surveillance in this chapter are meant to include this mingling of military powers that Hamid portrays (Coll).

chapter, "Patronize the Artists of War," exposes the discursivity of profiling machines. Hamid activates the hidden infrastructures of surveillance, exposing and enlivening the hardware, software, and discreet operations of profiling. And so, like when the protagonist is in the hospital, caught in the web of medical machinery and city infrastructure, readers experience "the shock of an unseen network suddenly made physical, as a fly experiences a cobweb" (183). Moreover, like "You" ensnared in those "inanimate strands," the narration itself is tangled up with the perspectives of profiling. By directing the narrative structure, trajectory, and point of view, these surveillance technologies artfully piece together a story and set of characters. In other words, this key section of the novel explicitly depicts the infrastructure and surveillance-scape of the city as a narrative structure with the power to characterize and plot individuals and their stories.

Notably, the discreet techniques and technologies of profiling are integrated and connected through an information system that links email accounts, to laptops, to bank accounts, to flight registries, to drones. On a metafictional level, this infrastructure is simply the novel itself or the novel's narrator establishing the connections for the reader. However, Hamid stresses that this integration is neither metaphorical nor transcendent: rather, he writes, it is sustained by "a telecommunications center from which red and white masts soar mightily, towering above satellite dishes, like electromagnetic spars built to navigate the clouds" (203). Surprisingly, we are told that the pretty girl "bought her [townhouse] for its view" of this nautical image sailing through the sky. The towering

telecommunications center becomes positively associated with *having a view* and the

ability to "navigate" the world.

Of course, as this chapter of the novel makes clear, the pretty girl is also *in view*

of the telecommunications center. Hamid relates the allure of this structure with the fact

that power is a limited and unequally distributed commodity in the city: "parts of the

metropolis are in darkness, electricity shortages meaning that the illumination of entire

areas is turned off on a rotating basis, usually but not always on the hour, and in these

inky patches, at this late time, little can be seen, just the odd building with its own

generator" (173). In this context, where power is patchy, it perhaps makes sense that a

view of the telecommunication tower would be attractive. Furthermore, the phrase "inky

patches" casts the city as a page to be read or deciphered with more or less clarity, again

alluding to the ways in which the city is overseen and surveilled, almost as a condition to

having electrical power. This sets up a familiar bargain between having access to

necessary utilities and therefore becoming subject to surveillance, a bargain that

undercuts the empty advice to unplug or log-off if you don't want to be subject to

profiling.

It is true, as Angelia Poon argues in her article, "Helping the Novel," that Hamid

"appropriates the particular vantage points and perspectival positions made possible by

modern technology to undermine the sense of a self in complete control" (2). However,

the narration also undermines the dangerous myth that the technology itself is

autonomous and "in complete control." Paradoxically, this is also a commonplace of

profile epistemology meant to suggest that data is impartial and therefore trustworthy and

that as long as the technology is autonomous, no *body* is really watching. By having the

narrator and reader watch "you" from the perspective of surveillance technology, we are

reminded that there is also presumably an invisible "I" or eye watching as well, giving

the distinct impression that we are viewing alongside the "artists of war" in what is

actually a crowded field. It is true that "you" are not autonomous, but neither are

cameras, computers, or drones. It becomes clear that even the algorithms running this

surveillance have their own writers and readers, despite what profile epistemology

maintains. By artfully shifting between cameras, databases, and records, Hamid calls

attention to the very ways in which the self is narrated and constructed through deliberate

use of information technologies[83].

Appropriately, the narrator begins the extended "tracking shot" by explaining that

online, "you can be tracked, and indeed you are tracked, as are we all, as you proceed

through your e-mails, catch up on the news, perform a search, and wind up lingering,

incongruously, on the website of a furnishings boutique" (168). The protagonist visiting

the website for the "pretty girl's" boutique would only seem "incongruous" to someone

unaware of their life-stories and relationship, signaling that not only has the novel shifted

point of view, but this new perspective is limited and fallible. In *The Theory of the*

Drone, Chamayou clarifies that, "Contrary to what one might imagine, the main

objectives of these continuous surveillance devices is not so much to tail individuals

---

[83] To be sure, as the novel describes, the "artists of war" do in fact produce in depth
profiles, through "what officials describes as 'pattern of life analysis,' using evidence
collected by surveillance cameras on the unmanned aircraft and from other sources about
individuals and locations . . . As one Reaper drone operator explains, 'We can develop
those patterns of life, determine who the bad guys are, and then get the clearance and go
through the whole find, fix, track, target, attack cycle" (Chamayou 47).

already known, but rather to spot the emergence of suspect elements based on their unusual behavior . . . in other words, to describe them by behavior that reflects a particular profile" (42). To clarify, this intelligence gathering leads to two distinct types of drone strikes by the U.S.: "personal strikes" and "signature strikes." While "personal strikes" target named individuals whom the U.S. has positively identified as a terrorist threat, "signature strikes" target individuals who fit the *profile* of a terrorist, but whom the U.S. has not specifically identified.

It is therefore, fitting that the narrator routinely notes behavior that is inconsistent with the protagonist's profile, even if it is not *out of character.* For example, this website seems, "All in all, an odd spot in the ether to capture the attention of a water industrialist," another apparent misfitting, unless you know that he is in love with her (168). Now operating on multiple registers as the separate stories of "You" play out simultaneously, Hamid writes, "A log of your internet wanderings indicates you have not visited it before. Nor, subsequently, are you recorded visiting it again" (168). On the one hand, this information adds to our understanding of the romantic relationship between the protagonist and the "pretty girl" which is, by some accounts, the heart of the novel. On the other hand, this casually indicates that the protagonist is under constant surveillance, creating a separate record of his life wherein his interest in the pretty girl is regarded as somehow suspicious.

In a remarkable sequence, the point of view dexterously shifts from the protagonist's computer, to the "pretty girl's" website, into her laptop, through her webcam, and out into her bedroom. Moving from the protagonist to the pretty girl, Hamid

writes, "The website in question is registered in another city, to the residential address of

its owner, who like many, perhaps most, computer users has never concerned herself

overmuch with such matters as firewalls, system updates, or anti-malware utilities" (168).

In one sense, Hamid demonstrates the stealthy storytelling made possible by data fusion

between ubiquitous surveillance technologies. Still, there is another related and critical

story being told here. That is, the novel also invokes the implicit interests and aims

driving this surveillance, namely those of the "world's military apparatuses." If the

narrative conceit had been to make "You" "filthy rich," what is the unspoken project

behind this new technologically mediated point of view? In other words, why exactly is

this "website in question"? We are told that the pretty girl doesn't bother much with

cyber-security such firewalls, but ironically, through the laptop camera, "What can be

seen are the steel bars on her windows, heavy in gauge and narrowly spaced, and a square

motion sensor mounted high on her wall. Beneath it, near her front door, is a keypad

belonging to her home alarm system." (#). While the threats to her physical property are

broadcast and knowable, the subject surveilling and tracking her is self-effacing with an

interest in her too obscure to fully appreciate.

Zooming in on the mechanisms of surveillance, Hamid begins to develop this

unseen point of view and the specific interests operating it:

> her laptop, sleek and high-end machine though it is, is simply teeming with digital
>
> fauna, much in the same manner as its keyboard is teeming with unseen bacteria
>
> and microorganisms, except that among its uninvited coded squatters is a military
>
> program that allows the machine's built-in camera and microphone to be activated

and monitored remotely, something no single-celled protozoan could likely pull

off, transforming the laptop, in effect, into a covert surveillance device or,

depending on the intent of the administrator of its monitoring software, into an

originator of voyeuristic striptease and porn. (169)

Through the lively language in this passage, the invisible observer directing our gaze

begins to take shape as a peeping, scopophilic military or national intelligence

"administrator"[84]. While this "covert" figure seems initially interested in the "water

industrialist," it also apparently has widespread access, affecting or infecting his contacts

as well. In fact, the narration hinges on these moments of contact, suggesting the

exponential scope of this surveillance. Indeed, the imagery here alludes to systems within

systems, programs within programs, and microorganisms within organisms, implicitly

likening the ways "the machines built-in camera and microphone" are "activated and

monitored" to the mastery of microscopes. Meanwhile, the embedded "military program"

is camouflaged by the "digital fauna" in this dense surveillance ecology. Still, the novel,

running its own "monitoring software," indirectly makes this camouflaged agent visible

to the reader.

Next, the point of view leaps from the laptop into her bedroom where, we are told,

"nothing so titillating seems to be in the offing. The computer sits open on a counter and

---

[84] Again, Hamid might be referring to the Pakistani military here, but given the NSA's extensive surveillance abroad, the reference is appropriately ambiguous. For example, the NSA uses a plug-in called GUMFISH to seize control over laptop cameras and another called CAPTIVATEAUDIENCE to take over computer microphones (Gallagher). Meanwhile, "using the NSA's XKEYSCORE software, analysts can see 'nearly everything a user does on the Internet,' including emails, social media posts, web sites you visit, addresses typed into Google Maps, files sent, and more" (Stray).

through its camera a woman can be seen by herself at a low table, finishing off a meal and bottle of red wine." Slowly the scene comes into focus as "The pretty girl sits attentively, not looking at her hands or her food, but music is audible, and then conversation, and then a rainstorm, until it becomes obvious that she is watching a film" (169). Setting this seemingly romantic scene only to reveal that the rainfall, music playing, and conversation are coming from a movie, reintroduces the questions of genre, with which Hamid began the novel. Is this still a self-help book, a love story between the protagonist and the pretty girl, a piece of pornography, a romantic movie, a spy thriller, or is it an all too boring intelligence briefing? This embroiling of various genres is not just a matter of style or aesthetics: these represent distinct ways of *knowing* her and making meaning based on different investments in her character or profile. By including surveillance profiling as one among many genres effectively destabilizes its epistemological truth-value and supposed objectivity.

As this sequence continues, the surveillant perspective moves from the laptop through the phone records to the email account, simulating a kind of omniscience by combining information piecemeal from various forms of data surveillance. Through the laptop microphone, the narrator overhears a phone call between the pretty girl and her assistant, who is "easily identified" given that "the mobile she uses is linked to an email account with messages chronicling her activities for the pretty girl's store." In a readerly way, the narrator suggests that "a recording of their conversation reveals a tone of warmth, these two clearly being not just colleagues but friends" (170). However, this insight is overshadowed by the disturbing implication that the pretty girl's conversations

are being recorded. Again and again, this kind of casual disclosure leaks through the text and hints at a more troubling story about the largely invisible forces impacting their lives.

Likewise, when we learn, for example, that "her assistant has capped signing authority on the boutique's account," the narrator suggests that this is "indicative of a rare level of trust"; however, on a separate register, is also indicative of an intense level of surveillance with the capacity to link bank account data with emails, browser histories, and telephone records. Exemplifying the ways data profiling works to construct a narrative of the self, Hamid explains,

> Her assistant's monthly payments of home utilities, and of rent, coupled with a complete absence of expenditure on children's schooling, suggests she too may live alone, or perhaps with elderly parents, for her credit card also shows frequent medical costs, charges from a variety of doctors and diagnostic centers and hospitals, charges at times exceeding her wages, yet on a regular basis paid off in full by the pretty girl, with a direct transfer of the required amount from her personal account to that of her assistant. (172)

Regardless of whether or not the inferences are persuasive, the fact that Hamid can construct a personal story about the relationships between characters through data profiling speaks to its epistemological power. Moreover, by appealing to what is revealed, suggested, shown, indicated, visible, and audible, the narrator lays bare the operations of transforming data into a plausible and meaningful narrative, as oppose to the commonplace that it simply "speaks for itself."

The surveillant narrative then zooms out and contextualizes our characters according to statistical and demographic information. The gaze moves to the streets outside the pretty girl's apartment where "a phone call reporting gunfire is being made to a police station," linking our characters to information about "crime statistics," which "confirm that a significant number of prosperous residents are presently in the process of being burgled or robbed"; although "even in this most unequal city, the vast majority of tonight's violence will be inflicted upon neighborhoods whose residents are reliably poor" (171). Hamid' choice of the word "reliably" along with the use of the future tense to predict "tonight's violence" suggests that not only does the city expect and tolerate violence in poor areas, it *relies* upon it. Indeed,

> Paramilitary forces are deployed to prevent such battles from spilling over too easily into areas deemed vital to national security, the port, for example, or upscale housing enclaves, or those premier commercial avenues from which rise headquarters of major corporations and banks. Indeed a paramilitary checkpoint is, at this moment, in operation a stone's throw from the towering headquarters of the bank that holds the accounts of the pretty girl, her boutique, and her assistant. (172)

The profiling perspective here is emphatically the perspective of "paramilitary forces" invested in protecting not only the safety of citizens, but the economic security of the ruling class. That is, the narrator plainly conflates "national security" and the "reliable" flow of capital, not only in and out of ports, but also in and out of gated "upscale housing enclaves." The flow of crime, therefore, is not something to be eliminated, but rather

managed to best support the current flow of capital upstream. This, again, reframes the use of surveillance and profiling—even by police and paramilitary forces—from merely techniques of securitization and crime prevention to strategies for economic growth.

An "Unblinking Eye"

Eventually the novel enters the point of view an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) or drone, following this figure of military surveillance to its apex. Since 2004, the U.S. has conducted thousands of drone strikes in Pakistan, averaging one strike every one days. In fact, currently, in the U.S. more drone operators are trained than all of the pilots for bombers and fighter planes combined (Chamayou 12). While exact numbers are difficult to come by, it is estimated that between 2004 and 2012 the U.S. drones killed between 2,640 and 3,474 people in Pakistan. Former director of the CIA Leon Panetta made the common argument that an armed drone "is very precise and it is very limited in terms of collateral damage" (Chamayou 140). Some critics have counter-argued that there is a difference between hitting your target and hitting only your target. This actually contains two points. First, the killing radius for a Predator drone is fifteen meters, so any number of innocent people might be killed. Second—and this is the point that the novel seems to take up—targets are at times misidentified. People live and die by their "pattern of life" files established by the CIA. In this regard, drones are not only salient symbols for the dangers of omnipresent surveillance; they, in fact, produce of enormous amounts of data and surveillance footage: "in the course of 2009 alone, American drones generated the equivalent of twenty-four years' worth of video recording. And the new

179

ARGUS-IS wide-area surveillance system promises 'to generate several terabytes [of data] per minute" (Chamayou 40).

The surveillant gaze sees that the pretty girl and her assistant are "registered passengers" on a jetliner, which "is picked up by the radar of a warship in international waters, identified as a commercial flight posing no immediate threat, and then for the most part ignored, the naval vessel using its antennae to continue to sniff the pheromone-like emissions of electrons wafting from coastal military installations instead." However, incidentally, "at roughly the same altitude, albeit far inland, an experimental unmanned aerial vehicle cruises in the opposite direction" (173). Given the ongoing aerial drone strikes and surveillance in Pakistan, even the most casual reference to a chance encounter with an UAV is loaded and weighty. Moreover, the juxtaposition between the commercial flight and the military vehicle flying at "roughly the same altitude" but in different directions signifies the two narratives of consumer profiling and military profiling flying in the same field, especially given that readers are accustomed to thinking about air-travel as an exceptional site of cooperation between commercial and state security. The consumer jetliner with its "registered passengers" typically poses "no immediate threat," but it is still understandably on the radar of national security with its flight logs serving multiple interests. Concurrently, the UAV is conducting its own surveillance to create profiles of people. That is, what seems like coincidence as the narrator moves from one technology to another is actually indicative of a larger constellation of data collection. Furthermore, the cooperation here is naturalized through the imagery of insects using their "antennae" to "sniff" one another's pheromones. This

organic imagery also highlights the fact that the commercial plane is packed with passengers while the UAV by definition has no passengers or bodies on board. Whether the presumably large and imposing warship or the small and flighty drone, these species of military vehicles seem to be scanning, communicating, and operating by their own devices, with humans conspicuously absent. While from the U.S. perspective the unmanned aspect of drones is their chief advantage, from the perspective of Pakistani citizens living inside the "hostile environment" the apparent autonomy of the machines has the effect of erasing their own humanity. In fact, the statistical justifications of drone strikes that get it *mostly right* and are *relatively precise* is designed to discount the locals as mostly or relatively human.

Within the context of this "self-help" book which advises "patronizing the artists of war," it is unsurprising that the narrator then callously performs a cost-benefit-analysis of the drone, conspicuously neglecting the environmental or human costs: "It is small and limited in range. Its chief advantages are its low cost, allowing it to be procured in large numbers, and its comparative quietness, permitting it to function unobtrusively. There are high hopes for its success in the export market, in particular among police forces and cash-strapped armies engaged in urban operations" (174). The omissions and vagueries here mirror the deliberate confusion surrounding drones, based on unclear targeting criteria and opaque strike results. We learn, for example, that the drone can "function unobstructively," without being told what its "function" is. We learn that it could be used in "urban operations," without being told what the "operations" are. Moreover, the "high

181

hopes" for this drones profitability once again derisively frames military surveillance and the consequent killings as opportunities for economic growth and "success."

Given the staggering death toll from U.S. drone strikes, is both fitting and chilling that the drone flies over the funeral of the protagonist's brother to see "a crowd gathering at a graveyard" (174). Even though "this drone is today [only] validating its performance parameters" and not executing a strike, the symbolism exposes the necro-politics behind the neoliberal rhetoric of "performance," which can turn a data profile into a "death warrant" (Chamayou 49). It's also appropriate that the drone is testing its "parameters" or limits over the funeral, given that the graveyard is indeed the frontier of paramilitary profiling when it is pushed to its final conclusion.

Moreover, this scene evokes the ever-present threat of drones mistakenly targeting large gatherings or assemblies of innocent civilians in Pakistan. For instance, in 2011 there was an American strike on a group of men meeting in Datta Khel, Pakistan, which killed between nineteen and thirty civilians who were meeting in a traditional assembly to "resolve a disagreement in the local community" but were "predefined as resembling terrorist behavior" since, "seen from the sky, a village meeting looks just like a gathering in the local community" (50). Similarly, a drone strike in Yemen in 2014 killed fourteen people returning from wedding, whose vehicles were mistaken for Al Qaeda militants (Almasmari). Hamid alludes to precisely this problem when the narrator witnesses "a pair of male figures in suits, a man in his sixties and a slender, teenage body," and misidentifies the younger man as "perhaps his grandson" when readers know that this is actually the protagonist and his son. This is, of course, an innocent mistake,

but in this context it is intensified by the fact that the primary task of antiterrorism is no longer to contain or immobilize the enemy, but rather to identify and track down targets.

Hazardous Material

One major justification for drone strikes is that they provide a long enough lever to safely remove solders from the danger zone. In fact, this is part of a greater common logic is that with advanced technology it is no longer necessary to expose workers to "physical danger in order to earn a living." In other words, "There is no hazardous task performed by men today that cannot, in principle, be performed by remotely controlled machines'" (Chamayou 23). Yet, Hamid indirectly critiques the underlying assumptions and hierarchies behind this logic when the drone flies over the funeral. After all, the protagonist is at the funeral for his brother, a commercial spray painter, who died from prolonged exposure to fumes. The novel here reveals the gulf between what might be true in "principle" or for the very rich, but what is certainly not the case for the world's poor. The brother was exposed to "physical danger in order to earn a living." His job certainly was "hazardous." Hamid describes his work as "in some senses like being an astronaut, or slightly more prosaically, a scuba diver. It too involves the hiss of air, the feeling of weightlessness, the sudden pressure headaches and nausea, the precariousness that results when an organic being and a machine are fused together." He does not operate the machinery from a safe distance with a remote control; rather, he becomes the machinery, remotely controlled by his employer. Furthermore, "an astronaut or aquanaut sees

unimaginable new worlds, whereas your brother sees only a monocolor haze of varying

intensities" (31). From his vantage point, the world is not so unimaginably new.

Moreover, in another sense, the "new world" on the horizon, in absolute terms, *is*

increasingly becoming this "haze of varying intensities." Indeed, the novel portrays the

environment itself as an inescapable hazard zone with undrinkable water and polluted air.

Even the pristine gated communities sit under "dust and pollution suspended over the city

like a dome, transforming the sky to copper and the clouds to irradiated bronze" (188).

That the pollution looks like "copper" and "bronze" speaks to the fact that profit and

pollution are so often byproducts of the same enterprises. Hamid emphasizes this

connection "As you drive off, under a beautiful, orange, polluted sky, riding high in your

SUV above lesser hatchbacks and motorcycles" (145). It's because pollution and climate

change effect populations disproportionately with the greatest contributors being the least

vulnerable, that the sight of the filthy, polluted sky can be "beautiful" to our filthy rich

protagonist. He is, after all, a water industrialist profiting from "the ever-dropping

aquifer, punctuated by thousands upon thousands of greedily sipping machine-powered

steel straws" (155).

In the complicated image of a military drone flying in the polluted sky overhead

the funeral for a man who died from prolonged exposure to contaminants, Hamid raises

the question of what is considered a hazardous material and who is most vulnerable to the

effects. After all, the polluted sky here is doubly threatening. Ultimately, the orange haze

and the frequent buzz of propellers both signal the threat of imminent death. Indeed, the

combination of these images is profound, given that the threats of global warming and

military activity are intimately related. It is worth noting here that, "militarization is the number one cause of environmental damage in the world," and that the "U.S. military is "the largest, single polluter on the planet." In fact, "The U.S. Department of Defense consumes more oil than any other entity on the planet" and "the Pentagon uses 75% of the oil bought by the Department of Defense (DOD) for its jets, bombers, tanks, Humvees, and drones" (McClintock). To complicate matters, not only did the brother die from exposure to hazards on the job, but there are people, hovering overhead his funeral (albeit remotely) whose very job is to expose other people to deathly machines. In a shocking reversal, "it is the enemy who is treated as a dangerous material" in drone warfare (Chamayou 24). By introducing the drone over the brother's funeral, the novel smartly relates the radical asymmetry of drone warfare[85] with the asymmetry of globalization and neoliberal capitalism—the asymmetry of the filthy rich and the dirty poor.

Finally, seeing the drone, the protagonist "looks up to the heavens. The drone circles a few times, its high-powered eye unblinking, and flies observantly on" (174). This poignant moment reminds readers that the surveillant gaze we have been embodying is indifferent to its own impact or the affects it produces. As "high-powered" as its eye may be, it remains unblinking and unflinching when the protagonist looks back. In other words, the drone, unlike a solider for example, is indifferent to the others' gaze[86]. A *New*

[85] As it is said, "Of course people would still die, but only on one side" (Chamayou 24).

[86] In fact, with operators stationed across the globe, drone warfare strategically "ensures that the operator will never see his victim seeing him doing what he does to him" (#).

York Times journalist, David Rohde, was kidnapped in 2008 and held in Waziristan for seven months, and described the psychological effects of this "lethal continuous surveillance" as a terrifying and terrorizing "hell on earth" (Chamayou 44). And, yet, the novel crucially helps readers see the *blinking* eye behind this "unblinking eye"— represented in the novel as the military "administrator" directing the narration and, in effect, telling the story[87]. In that sense, the novel also embeds the slow blinking eyes of the readers as witnesses to this crucial story.

Drones have been understood as "telechric systems," wherein the machine stands in as an "alter ego" for the person operating it, in our case the observing "administrator" figure. Ostensibly, the consciousness of the operator is transferred to an "invulnerable mechanical body" while the operator's fleshy body remains safely removed from the "hostile environment" (21-22). As much as Hamid is satirizing the self-help genre, he is also writing a telechiric novel. We become "you"—as a kind of "alter ego"—and as much as we might transfer our consciousness and imagine that this is the case, our fleshy bodies sit safely at a distance holding our books. We are not vulnerable to the threats of "you." We don't have jaundice or feel like we might die. We aren't shot at. We are merely simulating these experiences in this "co-creative project." If in drone warfare, "space is divided into two: a hostile area and a safe one" (Chamayou 22), then the novel

---

[87] In fact, there are a host of blinking eyes behind each drone: "Among those invisible spectators are not only the pilot and sensor operators but also a mission intelligence coordinator, a safety observer, a team of video analysts, and a ground force commander, the last of whom will eventually give the go-ahead for an aerial strike. This network of eyes remains in constant communication with one another" (Chamayou 2).

also enacts this division between the diagetic world and our own, while underscoring the power-lines that divide characters, from gated communities to gender differences.

Ultimately, *Filthy Rich* illustrates that profiling and surveillance should be understood as forms of story-telling that attempt to make people's "life patterns" legible and intelligible. In the novel, Hamid portrays two intimately related genres of profiling traveling at roughly the same altitude, consumer profiling and paramilitary profiling, which together tell a kind of war-story through cost-benefit analysis. To the extent that self-help books run the same neoliberal software, the novels emphatically asks: who pays the costs and who benefits? After all, consumer and military surveillance share an investment in constructing profiles of people, which can then identify them as the *right* target, whether for an advertisement or a weapon. In this context, neoliberal discourses of "self-help" mean improving one's profile or overcoming the odds, but the field remains unchanged and at any moment a bomb could still drop. By adopting the lens of both the self-help genre and state surveillance, Hamid effectively flies readers overhead both discourses, providing the crucial perspective to watch the watchers.

Works Cited

Almasmari, Hakim. "Yemen says U.S. Drone Stuck a Wedding Convoy, Killed 14." *CNN*. 13 Dec. 2013. Web. 28 Mar. 2016. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/12/world/meast/yemen-u-s-drone-wedding/>.

Chamayou, Gregoire. *Theory of the Drone.* Paris: The New Press, 2015. Print.

Coll, Steve. "The Unblinking Stare." *The New Yorker.* 24 Nov. 2014. Web. 28 Mar. 2016. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/11/24/unblinking-stare.>

Gallagher, Roy and Glenn Greenwald. "How the NSA Plans to Infect 'Millions' of Computers with Malware." *The Intercept.* 12 Mar. 2014. Web. 28 Mar. 2016. <https://theintercept.com/2014/03/12/nsa-plans-infect-millions-computers-malware/.>

Massey, Doreen. "Neoliberalism Has Hijacked our Vocabulary." *The Guardian.* 11 June 2013. Web. 28 Mar. 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/11/neoliberalism-hijacked-vocabulary>.

Hamid, Moshin. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia.* New York: Riverhead Books, 2013. Print.

---. Interview. *Chicago Humanities Festival*. 11 Mar. 2015. Online Video. 28. Mar. 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EaIkSNAsWU>.

---. Interview. "In Sly Self-Help Novel, Selling Clean Water Gets You 'Filthy Rich.' *NPR Books.* 6 Mar. 2013. Online Audio Clip. 28 Mar. 2016. <http://www.npr.org/2013/03/06/173532406/in-sly-self-help-novel-selling-clean-water-gets-you-filthy-rich>.

Hayden, Michael. Interviewed by Glen Rush. "Gen. Michael Hayden: Hillary Clinton Second Choice on National Security" *Off Message.* 28 Mar. 2016. Podcast. <https://overcast.fm/+EjPDsYclU/13:38>.

International Monetary Fund Research Group. "Asia Rising: Patterns of Economic Development and Growth." *World Economic Outlook, September 2006: Financial Systems and Economic Cycles.* IMF Multimedia Services Division. Washington D.C. 2006. Print.

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

McClintock, Anne. "Slow Violence and the BP Oil Crisis in the Gulf of Mexico: Militarizing Environmental Catastrophe." *Hemispheric Institute E-Misferica*. 9.1-9.2. Summer 2012. Web. 28 Mar. 2016. <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-91/mcclintock>.

Poon, Angelia. "Helping the novel: Neoliberalism, Self-help, and the Narrating of the Self in Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. May 2015. Print.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Stray, Jonathan. "What You Need to Know About the NSA's Surveillance Programs." *Propublica*. 5 Aug. 2013. Web. 28 Mar. 2016. <https://www.propublica.org/article/nsa-data-collection-faq>.