

Invisibility for the Hypervisible:
Hito Steyerl, Military Surveillance, and the Performance of Identity

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Table of Contents

Abstract / Résumé	2
Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	
Invisibility for the Hypervisible	4
Methodological Approaches: Media, Aesthetics, and Identity	11
Techniques of Visual Management	25
Mutating (Art) Histories	29
Chapter One	
Technologies of Visualization	32
Disappearing in the Poor Image	37
Bodies in the Age of the World Target	39
Chapter Two	
The Invisible Enemy	42
The Politics of Self-Objectification	50
Coda: Civil Contracts and Activism	57
Bibliography	65
Figures	70

Abstract

This thesis takes Hito Steyerl's satirical instructional video *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic .MOV File* (2013) and Jackie Goss's animated documentary *Stranger Comes to Town* (2007) as catalysts for discussion on state surveillance and the visibility and invisibility of people of color in the post-September 11, 2001 United States. While Goss's video uses the digital avatar as a mask to hide one's race and gender identity online, Steyerl's work is interested in the circulation of images of the body in an image-saturated world. This thesis examines these two video projects as they put forward misidentification and self-objectification as forms of resistance and will assess the effectiveness of these strategies for racialized bodies. By evaluating photography as a form of identity verification, I argue that for racialized people who are forced to recognizably perform their gender and ethnicity, masking the body, hiding within images, or becoming an image does not result in invisibility.

Résumé

Ce papier utilise la vidéo d'instruction satirique de Hito Steyerl "How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic .MOV File" (2013) et le documentaire animé "Stranger Comes to Town" (2007) de Jackie Goss comme catalyseur pour analyser la surveillance de l'État, la visibilité, et l'invisibilité, des personnes de couleur dans les États-Unis post 11 septembre 2001. Tandis que la vidéo de Goss utilise son avatar digital comme masque afin de camoufler sa race et son genre en ligne, l'œuvre de Steyerl favorise la participation au sein de l'image. Ce papier examinera ces deux projets considérant la misidentification et l'objectivation de soi en tant que forme de résistance, et évaluera également l'efficacité de ces stratégies pour les corps racialisés. Examinant la photographie comme médium permettant la vérification d'identité, je propose que les corps racialisés forcés à performer leurs genre et leur ethnicité en masquant leurs corps, en se dissimulant derrière des images, ou encore en devenant une image ne sont pas pour autant invisibilisés.

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Introduction

Invisibility for the Hypervisible

Two weeks after the bombings on the London underground, which killed fifty-two people and four suicide bombers, on the morning of July 22, 2005 a Brazilian electrician named Jean Charles de Menezes headed to work, trailed by Metropolitan Police. In the weeks following the terrorist attacks, de Menezes was misidentified by London's newly created branch of anti-terrorism police officers as a potential suspect in the bombings because his home address had been linked to a gym membership card found inside one of the unexploded bags used by the bombers.¹ Reports of the events on the morning of July 22 and the legal battles that followed have been carefully cataloged and archived by *The Guardian* newspaper. Journalist Vikram Dodd, for instance, explains that as the day unfolded, de Menezes made his way to work onto a bus, stopping at Brixton Station.² Finding the station closed due to security alerts, he re-boarded the bus and headed to another stop. The officers who tracked him claimed to have been unaware of the station closure and instead, interpreted de Menezes's behavior as a suspicious anti-surveillance tactic and were soon informed by senior officers to prevent de Menezes from boarding a train at Stockwell Tube Station.³

Running across the platform to catch the train, de Menezes was followed by three officers who restrained him on board and fired a total of eleven shots. De Menezes was shot by officers seven times in the head and shoulder at close range and died at the scene. In the days and weeks following the shooting, the Metropolitan Police admitted that de Menezes had not been carrying explosives nor was he connected to the London bombings.⁴ This case of the misidentification and

¹ Vikram Dodd, "Q&A: The day De Menezes died," *The Guardian*, December 12, 2008, accessed September 10, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/dec/12/de-menezes-police-shooting>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Jon Dennis, "Shot man was not bomber – police," *The Guardian*, July 23, 2005, accessed September 23, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/jul/23/july7.uksecurity11>; David Rose, "We were convinced we'd shot a terrorist," *The Guardian*, March 19, 2006, accessed September 23, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/mar/19/menezes.davidrose>; See also: Henry Portern and Afua Hirsch, "Should the

murder of Jean Charles de Menezes pivots on the culture of fear-mongering that emerged in the wake of terrorist attacks in the United States and United Kingdom in 2001 and 2005 respectively; the racialization of terror; and finally, the heightened use of surveillance mechanisms in the identification and visual management of marginalized populations. Nevertheless, throughout journalistic these reports, the factors played by racism, the performance of identity, and the increased surveillance of minority populations in de Menezes's murder go un-remarked upon. This thesis aims to examine contemporary art's engagement with the history of surveillance and the visual management of marginalized populations in order to investigate the problems of the misidentification, coercive identification, and dis-identification of people of color.

As media studies scholar Kelly Gates has argued, the political and cultural response to 9/11 was intimately related to a logistics of military perception. She writes that, "The practice of constructing a racialized image of a mythic enemy has long functioned as a way of solidifying and reinforcing national identity."⁵ In this way, the racialization of the enemy other has provided the basis for the cultural, political, and biological differentiation of the population.⁶ For example, Muna Mire has noted that the public perception of brown and black bodies—and particularly those read as Muslim bodies—post-9/11 has remained riddled with misconceptions, often with violent consequences. She writes that,

As recently as the white supremacist massacre at a Sikh gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, the conflation of Sikh men who wear turbans with Muslims has had deadly consequences. In 2013, Columbia Professor Prabhjot Singh, who studied hate crimes against Sikhs wrongly believed to be Muslim in the U.S. post-9/11, was himself the target for such violence... Public perceptions of Muslims as the bearded brown other post-9/11 functions as a shadowy parallel to Islamophobic state violence, the vigilante enforcer of racial categories of difference.

police ever shoot to kill?" *The Guardian*, May 13, 2009, accessed September 10, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/henryporter/2009/may/13/keith-richards-shoot-to-kill>; Helen Pidd, "No charges over De Menezes shooting," *The Guardian*, February 13, 2009, accessed September 10, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/feb/13/police-no-charges-de-menezes-shooting>.

⁵ Kelly A. Gates, *Our Biometric Future: Facial Recognition Technology and the Culture of Surveillance* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 106.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Islamophobia is a lived reality for everyone who is Muslim, including those who are seen as Muslim but are not.⁷

The visual targeting and misidentification of de Menezes, which ultimately led to his death, falls under the racialization of the faces and bodies of terrorism. Black and brown bodies that remain hypervisible to the state have been surveilled, detained, and harassed with alarming regularity in the years following these terrorist attacks, yet these derelict identities have been simultaneously disenfranchised by the state in forms of radical invisibility. Thus, taking up the intersections within media theory, performance studies, and critical race theory, this thesis traces a visual history of military surveillance stemming from the Cold War with the visual targeting of racialized bodies as a way to theorize politicized artistic attempts to explore the conditions of the hypervisibility and invisibility of people of color. Put simply, visual art occupies an important position of making visible these questions of hypervisibility and invisibility.

As Gates has argued elsewhere in her examination of the development of facial recognition technology, September 11, 2001 serves as a watershed moment for commercial and militarized tactics of visibility.⁸ Attempts to evade these forms of visual surveillance in person and online have characterized much of the digital and post-internet art of the last decade. The case study at the heart of this thesis is Berlin-based digital video artist Hito Steyerl's *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic .MOV File* (2013), a richly layered fourteen-minute satirical instructional video which offers viewers specialized techniques of disappearance, whether by cloaking or camouflaging the body to more political forms of invisibility such as being poor or an undocumented worker, a woman over fifty who owns an "anti-paparazzi handbag," or simply "being a dead pixel" on screen. A careful unpacking of Steyerl's video will allow for critical engagement with otherwise invisible forms of racialization and commercial and military surveillance.

⁷ Muna Mire, "Towards a Black Muslim Ontology of Resistance," *The New Inquiry*, April 29, 2015, accessed September 18, 2015, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/towards-a-black-muslim-ontology-of-resistance/>.

⁸ Gates, 99.

Steyerl is also a scholar and professor at the University of the Arts in Berlin and has written extensively on the politics of online surveillance systems and data collection. In fact, *How Not to Be Seen* was staged and filmed in a now-abandoned United States military site in a California desert. As the camera sweeps across the geometric patterns on the broken tarmac, Steyerl emphasizes both visually and textually the former photo calibration targets of spy-planes and satellites employed by military surveillance in order to focus their analog cameras in the 1950s and 1960s (Fig. 1). “U.S. Air Force drops glitter from stealth helicopter... Shoot this for real and fly away with drone!” the video proclaims in one sequence, as a green screen flashing images from music videos featuring animated women in hijabs and the African-American women’s vocal group The Three Degrees are superimposed on the tarmac’s target. The video draws together questions of the invisibility and hypervisibility of particular bodies with techniques of visualizing the world as a target of surveillance and of destruction. The military photographic targets of surveillance, as Steyerl repeatedly suggests, are inseparable from the targeted regulation and discipline of the bodies of marginalized populations, namely people of color, who remain almost comically hypervisible (Fig. 2) even as *How Not to Be Seen* continues to peddle its advice.

The key point of departure for this thesis is a sequence during which footage of the resolution target is projected onto the green screen and becomes increasingly pixilated as the image zooms out and the instructional voice-over dryly explains that, “Resolution measures the world as an image... The most important things want to remain invisible. Love is invisible. War is invisible. Capital is invisible... Resolution determines visibility. It calibrates the world as a picture.” Steyerl examines the invisible processes of war and capital through the use and manipulation of the camera. In fact, the Cold War spy-plane’s camera represents the long historical development of particular technologies of seeing that served to enclose the world as a knowable, visible target. I would like to suggest that Steyerl’s video and its simultaneously comic and deeply unsettling treatment of green

screens and digital imaging technologies must be unpacked via an examination of Martin Heidegger's argument that in the age of modern technology, the world has become a "world picture." As Heidegger argues in his essay, in the age of modern scientific research the process of "conceiving" or "grasping" the world has become inseparable from the act of seeing or picturing—that is, the visual objectification of the world.⁹ Pushing this notion further, the video explicitly suggests that in picturing the world via photographic modes of surveillance, the world is conceived of as a target and as an object to be destroyed.¹⁰ The Cold War and the aftermath of 9/11 are epistemic events for military perception and shifting modes of visibility. Surveillance technology—stemming from mid-century spy-plane and satellite photographs to contemporary biometric software—therefore, calibrate their images for maximum visibility by offering a panoramic picture of the world and detailed information about its inhabitants.

By attending to the forms of ubiquitous surveillance and the visual management of geographic boundaries and corporeal boundaries, *How Not to Be Seen* is deeply invested in techniques of war's visualization and tracing the lineage of technological developments from the Cold War into the post-September 11, 2001 world. In particular, Steyerl is interested in the possibilities afforded by the circulation of images of the body. As she has noted in interviews on her video projects, "This condition [of invisibility] opens up within and by means of an avalanche of digital images, which multiply and proliferate while real people disappear or are fixed, scanned and over-represented by an overbearing architecture of surveillance. How do people disappear in an age of total over-visibility? [...] Are people hidden by too many images? Do they go hide amongst other images? Do they become images?"¹¹ As Steyerl's questions suggest, this digital video work raises

⁹ Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), 129-130.

¹⁰ Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 31.

¹¹ Göksu Kunak, "Interview: Hito Steyerl: Zero Probability and the Age of Mass Art Production," *Berlin Art Link*, November 19, 2013, accessed April 8, 2015, <http://www.berlinartlink.com/2013/11/19/interview-hito-steyerl-zero->

important questions about the body's hypervisibility and its identification and *dis*-identification with the surveillance image.

That is, following performance theorist and visual culture studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz, this artwork provides a springboard for discussion on the political possibilities of a “tactical misrecognition” of the surveillance image of the self. As Muñoz argues, disidentification can be a disruptive survival strategy enacted by minority subjects in order to “negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship.”¹² Put another way, disidentification neither opts to assimilate within the dominant white supremacist structure, nor strictly opposes it. Rather, Muñoz suggests that,

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture.¹³

The performative act of disidentification (and later in Steyerl's reformulation, *de*-identification), therefore, is indebted to queer theorists and performance studies scholars such as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.¹⁴

For instance, Sedgwick's introduction to *The Epistemology of the Closet* argues that identification “always includes multiple processes of identifying with. It also involves identification as against; but even did it not, the relations implicit in identifying with are, as psychoanalysis

probability-and-the-age-of-mass-art-production/; See also: Marvin Jordan, “Hito Steyerl: Politics of Post-Representation,” *DIS Magazine*, June 2014, accessed April 8, 2015, <http://dismagazine.com/disillusioned-2/62143/hito-steyerl-politics-of-post-representation/>.

¹² José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

suggests, in themselves quite sufficiently fraught with intensities of incorporation, diminishment, inflation, threat, loss, reparation, and disavowal.”¹⁵ Extrapolating this, Muñoz notes that identification is not simply mimesis; rather, “identifying with an object, person, lifestyle, history, political ideology, religious orientation, and so on, means also simultaneously and partially counteridentifying, as well as only partially identifying, with different aspects of the social and psychic world.”¹⁶ Importantly, where scholars such as Butler have gestured towards disidentification as the failure of identification, Muñoz maintains that in these approaches, disidentification as a political strategy is foreclosed.¹⁷ In fact, he goes on to argue that these formulations continue to construct the subject as inside ideology, rather than working outside of and upon coercive modes of identification. As a result, he argues that the disidentificatory subject is neither on the side of the “‘Good Subject,’ who has an easy or magical identification with dominant culture, or the ‘Bad Subject,’ who imagines herself outside of ideology. Instead, they pave the way to an understanding of a ‘disidentificatory subject’ who tactically and simultaneously works on, with, and against a cultural form.”¹⁸

In order to evaluate whether a performative disidentification from the racialized codes of the surveillance image is possible as a strategy of empowerment for minority subjects, first it is necessary to trace the development of photography-based surveillance technology, such as the spy-plane and satellite. Attending to the genealogy of the resolution target and Cold War photographic apparatuses of surveillance will allow us to examine the growing conflation of the ability to comprehensively picture the world as the ability to target the world and particular racialized bodies within it for destruction. The use of photography as a mode of identity verification also demands

¹⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 61.

¹⁶ Muñoz, 8.

¹⁷ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (Routledge: New York, 1993), 219.

¹⁸ Muñoz, 12.

further examination into the organization, production, and circulation of visual knowledge in the decades since the Cold War. The following sections in this introduction—couched in performance studies, media theory, and critical race theory—will attempt to situate Steyerl’s video art within a set of images, terms, and maps to think through the conditions of the subjectivization, hypervisibility, and invisibility of people of color as central to the corporeal dimensions of state power.

Methodological Approaches: Media, Aesthetics, and Identity

In the last decade, the discourses that have loomed large in art history by scholars such as Hal Foster, David Joselit, Claire Bishop, David Balzer, and Kaegan Sparks have been tenuous, and oftentimes incensed, in their engagement with digital and post-internet art created in the wake of 9/11.¹⁹ A brief and selected literature review of recent scholarship on curationism and the archive betrays an unwillingness to expand the field of discussion to account for the histories and material frameworks of digital technologies and—by creating echo chambers for select voices of white scholars and artists—an inability to understand the ways in which artists, scholars, curators, and audiences of color may have different relationships to digital media and technologies of surveillance.

In many ways, the twinned issues of the archive and curation, as strategies of making visible current cultural conditions through the selective juxtaposition of discrete art works, strikes at the

¹⁹ Art writer Stephanie Bailey has noted that there is no global consensus on the capitalization of the word “internet,” as journals such as *Art Monthly*, *e-flux journal*, *WIRED*, and *Rhizome*, have converted to a lowercase spelling in recent years. Bailey’s brief, yet informative, historical tracing of the term reveals that the capitalization of the word had become standard by the 1990s in order to denote a singular entity called by this title—that is to say, the “Internet” was “a specific thing with a proper name,” initially referring to the U.S. Department of Defense’s creation of ARPAnet. Yet, as Jennifer Chan argues, the capitalization of the word “Internet” ultimately reflects “the standards put forth by organizations like IETF and W3C and later the commercialization hype of the internet around the dotcom bubble.” By rejecting conceptualizations of the internet as a collection of commercial entities (.coms) and recognizing its functioning as a diffuse network of computer networks that span the globe as well as new lexical standards, therefore, this thesis will use the lowercase “internet” and “post-internet” in keeping with these shifts; Stephanie Bailey, “A Note on Capitalization,” in *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (London: Cornerhouse and SPACE, 2014), 236-239.

heart of the field of art history. Yet, current art historical discourse on digital and post-internet art is often permeated with fear that contemporary artists are no longer creating new content in favor of aggregating and curating existing digital image archives. For instance, in *After Art* (2012), David Joselit posits that, increasingly, “Contemporary art marginalizes the production of content in favor of producing new formats for existing images... These manipulations are the aesthetic analogue to Google’s algorithms. Like such algorithms, art and architecture reformat existing streams of images and information. They practice both an epistemology and an aesthetics of the search engine.”²⁰ It is worth considering this issue in some detail because as Steryerl’s short essays have revealed, and as Chapter One will carefully unpack, the premise of *How Not to Be Seen* is fully in dialogue with the political possibilities of image aggregation and image circulation—particularly, the ability to hide within vast archives of digital images or, in fact, to transform the body into an image for aggregation and circulation.

In a 2012 article for *Artforum* titled “Digital Divide,” art historian Claire Bishop contends, “While many artists *use* digital technology, how many really confront the question of what it means to think, see, and filter affect through the digital? How many *thematize* this, or reflect deeply on how we experience, and are altered by, the digitization of our existence?”²¹ Bishop suggests that apart from a handful of examples, artistic practices in the last decade that take up digital media are incapable of reflecting on the changes digital media have enacted on perception, history, language, and social relations.²² Rather, she provocatively argues that, “Mainstream contemporary art simultaneously disavows and depends on the digital revolution, even—especially—when this art declines to speak overtly about the conditions of living in and through new media. But why is

²⁰ David Joselit, *After Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 58.

²¹ Claire Bishop, “Digital Divide: Claire Bishop on Contemporary Art and New Media,” *Artforum* (September 2012), 436.

²² Ibid.

contemporary art so reluctant to describe our experience of digitized life?”²³ In order to unpack and critique this argument, it is necessary to recognize that Bishop’s article is symptomatic of critical tendencies and recent concerns in the field, as she turns to the issue of the archive and shifts in curatorial strategies in order to make her case.

For example, both Bishop and Joselit examine image-aggregation projects—Susan Hiller’s *Dedicated to Unknown Artists* (1972-1976), Sherrie Levine’s *Postcard Collage #4, 1-24* (2000), and Zoe Leonard’s *You see I am here after all* (2008)—which all rest on a similar premise of collecting the same postcard (or postcards marketed with the same title such as “Rough Seas” in Hiller’s piece) and arranging the images in a grid.²⁴ In effect, these three works create particular image archives, where the process of art creation becomes focused on searching for and organizing content rather than creating new content. Bishop explains that Leonard’s *You see I am here after all* draws together four thousand postcards of Niagara Falls, dating from 1900 to 1950, largely sourced through eBay. She argues that Leonard’s piece “attests to the possibilities of Internet searchability,” while also bemoaning that searchability has shifted the format and presentation of art to emphasize the sheer excess of visual information in the digital age.²⁵

Bishop, therefore, curiously limits her examinations of digital archives to artistic practices that rely on digital technologies in order to aggregate their material but are often not digital in form or content. Without ever clarifying the ways in which the “conditions of living in and through new media” manifest themselves, Bishop’s despondent response to digital art and digital databases also betrays confusion amongst the long-time vanguard of art historians over what can be qualified as digital or new media art in the expanded field of contemporary art. (For instance, can Leonard’s postcard series, largely sourced through eBay, be considered digital in form or content?) Although

²³ Ibid., 440-441.

²⁴ Bishop, 440; Joselit, 32-39.

²⁵ Bishop, 440.

Bishop maintains over the course of her article that contemporary art is reluctant, or in fact incapable, of describing these conditions of living in and through new media, it is telling that the examples she draws upon—sculpture, installation, and even analog media such as celluloid film and VHS—are largely not digital in form or content, though as explained below, these works can be considered to belong to the genre of new media art.²⁶ Furthermore, Bishop and other art historians, journalists, and critics frequently interpret the impulse to aggregate images as a shift in curatorial strategies—what David Balzer has called “curationism.”²⁷ Indeed, many art historians continue to fall back on discourses of curation, archive, medium specificity, and objecthood in order to make sense of both artistic strategies engendered by digital art and means of deriving value from a unique work of art in the face of endlessly reproducible digital images.

For example, art historian and critic Hal Foster has suggested that given the “mega-archive of the Internet,” digital spaces are often considered the ideal medium for archival art.²⁸ Yet, apart from a few lines on the effects of the internet on archival art, Foster’s *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency* (2015) which purports to examine art after 1989, miraculously avoids discussing any examples of post-internet art or digital video art. By focusing exclusively on works by Thomas Hirschhorn, Tacita Dean, Joachim Koester, and Sam Durant, Foster sets aside digital media entirely in his analysis in order to draw a distinction between “archival art” and “database

²⁶ Ibid., 437-441.

²⁷ David Balzer, *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 8-9; Curationism, Balzer writes, is a matrix of value-making and labor, as the work of the traditional art curator becomes diffuse and oftentimes indistinct from the work of artists, audiences, and scholars. The diffusion of the labor of curatorial practice has become a new source of anxiety for art historians and critics, engendering new scholarship on the effects of neoliberalism in the art world. Curator and writer Omar Kholeif succinctly explains, given that “at curatorial school, we are taught that a professional curator grows out of specialist knowledge... The supposed democratization of curatorial practice through... virtual platforms threatens this traditional art historical approach to curating,” (84). In fact, it is important to note that the threat of erosion of specialist knowledge is key to understanding Joselit’s *After Art*, Foster’s *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency*, and Bishop’s monograph *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012), which all take up the issue of neoliberal government and business policies and their effects on art discourse, the art market, and the circulation of images; See also: Omar Kholeif, “The Curator’s New Museum,” in *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (London: Cornerhouse and SPACE, 2014), 78-85; Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2012).

²⁸ Hal Foster, *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2015), 99.

art” (that is to say, art created from digital image archives).²⁹ Foster’s concerns about the archive and curation are distinct from Bishop’s as he denies entirely the possibility of creating digital art that draws upon or responds to archival impulses. By creating this distinction, Foster’s examination of archival art allows him to continue to celebrate the singular art object that retains material and tactile forms as more valuable. He writes, “In most archival art, the actual means applied to these relational ends are far more direct and tactile than any Web interface. The archives at issue here are not databases in this sense: they tend to be funkily material and recalcitrantly fragmentary, and as such they call out for human interpretation, not machinic processing.”³⁰ Here, digital and machinic processing—what Joselit defines as the aesthetics of search engine practices—is denigrated in favor of analog forms of collecting and displaying image collages.

It is important to note, therefore, that Joselit’s reading of Sherrie Levine’s curated archive of postcards draws a different conclusion from Bishop and Foster’s understandings of the archive and the performance of curation. Rather, Joselit suggests that the aggregation of postcards as an image archive, while decidedly analog in form and content, nevertheless uncovers a series of digital networks within and underneath these images. He argues that,

In the case of Levine’s *Postcard Collage*, for instance, this would lead to two equally inadequate interpretations: either the patently ridiculous contention that the work is “about” the seascape that each postcard represents or the less absurd but still incorrect conclusion that it is “about” mechanical reproduction. Both of these misreadings... fail to recognize that the work’s power lies in its staging of a performative mode of looking through which the single image and the network are visible *at once*.³¹

In this way, Joselit gestures towards a new way of thinking through the digital and digital databases as material underpinnings of contemporary art, even for works of art which are not explicitly digital in form or content. This seems, to me, a more productive approach for contemporary art historical

²⁹ Ibid., 101.

³⁰ Ibid., 100.

³¹ Joselit, 37-39.

scholarship to account for digital art and media technologies. Although Joselit's notions of the "epistemology of search" and "image currencies" demand extensive critique,³² which cannot be accomplished fully within the constraints of this literature review, it seems necessary nevertheless, to recognize that Joselit's approach gestures towards a methodological strategy that acknowledges the internet as a medium or environment for creating links between images as a material form unto itself. This reformulation is crucial to the functioning of contemporary artistic production, dissemination, and presentation of images.

For instance, curator and media historian Michael Connor argues that while the term post-internet "was once used to describe artists who acted as participant-observers of internet culture, it now more typically evokes complete embeddedness in a ubiquitous network culture."³³ Put simply, contemporary art that does not speak overtly about the digital does not represent a disavowal of the experience of the digital in artistic production, as Bishop claims, but rather it represents a cultural and methodological shift that understands the ubiquity of networks and networked culture that undergirds new media art. As artist Jennifer Chan persuasively explains,

New media art is a larger genre that encompasses art practices taking place at the intersections of technology that were once considered "new"—from radio and analog video, to interactive installation and internet art. Internet art (or net art) employs the networked, decentralized structure of the internet as both a medium and environment. In the 1990s, its early practitioners commonly referred to it as "net-art." Post-internet is a term often ascribed to contemporary art and web-based work that appeared online after 2005—digital art that's "translated" into gallery spaces and informal exhibitions at bars, cafes, nightclubs, and other venues.³⁴

³² Joselit writes, for instance, "Art is never fully monetized... Images are not aimed at creating utopias; they have a diplomatic portfolio (and sometimes, as in embassies, they operate as infiltrators, as spies, as Trojan horses). In place of the avant-garde we have both monetized and nonmonetized forms of currency exchange. This is the *power* of connectivity under the Epistemology of Search" (84). Yet, it seems to me that politicized art such as *How Not to Be Seen* often gesture towards utopias or alternate forms of world-building practice as spaces of safety for people of color. Thinking of images as deriving their power largely through government and business initiatives—under the guise of globalization—severely limits analyses of digital art and its political motivations.

³³ Michael Connor, "Post-Internet: What It Is and What It Was," in *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (London: Cornerhouse and SPACE, 2014), 57.

³⁴ Jennifer Chan, "Notes on Post-Internet," in *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (London: Cornerhouse and SPACE, 2014), 107.

This thesis aims to shift away from the confused definitions of new media art as put forward by art historians such as Claire Bishop, which allow her to incongruously claim that new media art has failed to comment on the digital, in favor of a definition of post-internet art, which accounts for its indebted relationship to networked environments and the use of the structure of the internet as a medium for creation and display.

Nevertheless, it is also necessary to understand that synthesizing the practices of artists whose works exist online or deal with internet culture under the umbrella terms “post-internet art” or “digital art” remains a difficult task, given that there is often little aesthetic or political cohesion across their work.³⁵ For example, it is important to acknowledge that a new generation of young artists, curators, scholars, and activists such as Chan, who alongside Leah Schrager recently organized a virtual exhibit of feminist art titled *Body Anxiety*; queer video artist Ryan Trecartin; the collective behind *DIS Magazine*, which has been heralded and denigrated in equal terms as “a social network,” “a hub of content innovation,” “a cultural reparations racket,” and “a kind of twenty-first century end game of counterculture”; youth trend forecasting collective, K-HOLE; subRosa, a cyberfeminist organization interested in biotechnologies; artist Brad Troemel who rose to popularity thanks to his satirical microblogging Tumblr site *The Jogging*; the curatorial team behind the Toronto-based Younger Than Beyoncé gallery, aiming to show the work of artists under the age of thirty-four; and countless others represent a rethinking of discourses of image archives and practices of curation which have long preoccupied art history in order to introduce rapidly shifting ideas on digital art’s intersections with fashion, music, and social media.³⁶ Increasingly, the sites of

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See for example: Leah Sandals, “6 Lessons from Net-Art Talent Jennifer Chan,” *Canadian Art*, April 10, 2014, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://canadianart.ca/features/jennifer-chan/>; Ann Hirsch, “Artist Profile: Jennifer Chan,” *Rhizome*, December 18, 2014, accessed September 21, 2015, <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2014/dec/18/artist-profile-jennifer-chan/>; Charlotte Jansen, “Body Anxiety and a new wave of digifeminist art,” *Dazed*, May 6, 2015, accessed May 29, 2015, <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/23717/1/body-anxiety-and-a-new-wave-of-digifeminist-art>; Calvin Tomkins, “Experimental People: The exuberant world of a video-art visionary,” *The New*

production and display of post-internet art occupies a tenuous space between traditional art institutions such as museums and contemporary art fairs such as Art Basel or Documenta and DIY spaces, artist-run centers, apartment galleries, and virtual sites such as Facebook, Tumblr, and YouTube.³⁷ Furthermore, as Brad Troemel has noted, in the wake of social media, the post-internet artist gains authority and popularity through an accumulation of a “network of reblogs, links, and digital reproductions.”³⁸ Summing up the condition, then, Chan wonders, “Post-internet art can be ultimately interpreted as a philosophical translation of online culture and practices into the physical world... Why make art that looks like, and responds to, art that is over forty years old? Why not make art that responds to online things that matter to me now?”³⁹

In order to attend to these new sites and forms of the production of post-internet art, shifting the discourse of art history into media studies becomes an important methodological intervention. That is, media theory may serve as a crucial pivot point for pushing forward the discourse of art history in order to account for the internet as a medium and environment for artistic production and display. Furthermore, in the wake of 9/11, it is necessary to understand that the excess of visual information created by digital art is not simply a naturalized by-product of the digital mediums used by artists. Rather, vast image archives and other digital databases are also implicated in military technologies that serve to visually manage the bodies of people of color, altering one’s experience of living in and through digital media as coercive and oftentimes violent.

Yorker, March 24, 2014, accessed March 25, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/03/24/experimental-people>; Fan Zhong, “Totally DISsed: A post-internet art collective is out to remake the world in its own distorted image,” *W Magazine*, September 24, 2015, accessed September 25, 2015, <http://www.wmagazine.com/culture/art-and-design/2015/09/dis-art-collective/photos/>; Greg Fong, Sean Monahan, Emily Segal, Chris Sherron, and Dena Yago, “Youth Mode: A Report on Freedom,” *K-HOLE*, October 2013, accessed October 1, 2015, <http://khole.net/issues/youth-mode/>; subRosa, “About,” *Cyberfeminism*, no date, accessed October 3, 2015, <http://www.cyberfeminism.net/about.html>; Brad Troemel, *The Jogging*, no date, accessed October 3, 2015, <http://thejogging.tumblr.com/>.

³⁷ Chan, 112.

³⁸ Brad Troemel, “Art After Social Media,” in *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (London: Cornerhouse and SPACE, 2014), 39.

³⁹ Chan, 108-109.

Attempts to evade and critique these forms of visual surveillance online and in person have characterized much of the digital art of the last decade by artists such as Zach Blas, Laura Kurgan, Laura Poitras, Trevor Paglen, Sang Mun, Tyler Coburn, Jesse Darling, Andrew Norman Wilson, Metahaven, Dmytri Kleiner, and many others.⁴⁰ For instance, artist Zach Blas's *Facial Weaponization Suite* (2011-2014) is a work composed of a series of masks aimed at subverting biometric facial recognition technologies by creating digital aggregates of minoritarian faces. The *Fag Face Mask* (Fig. 3), for example, is generated through the aggregate facial data collected from the faces of dozens of queer men, transforming the face into a mutated mask that is unrecognizable as a face. Similarly, a mask that compiles the faces of black men mutates the face and deliberately conceals markers of racial difference. Blas's work, therefore, draws together both the issues of image aggregation and visual signifiers of identity in order to raise a series of questions about the ability of queer and/or racialized subjects to negotiate regimes of surveillance and hypervisibility in the face of visual technologies.⁴¹

Artist Laura Kurgan, meanwhile, purchases images from commercial satellites and drones and prints the high-resolution images as photographs. Kurgan writes,

High-resolution satellite images are one of our most powerful metaphors for the new condition of universality: an all-seeing image, potentially of any point on Earth, available to almost anyone, rich in data that can be used for purposes we cannot predict. It offers precision, time-stamped evidence from an authoritative witness.⁴²

⁴⁰ Hito Steyerl, "Zach Blas," *ArtReview*, March 2014, accessed October 6, 2015, http://artreview.com/features/2014_futuregreats_zach_blas/; See also: Jonah Weiner, "Prying Eyes: Trevor Paglen makes art out of government secrets," *The New Yorker*, October 22, 2012, accessed October 6, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/10/22/prying-eyes>; Kyle Vanhemert, "An NSA Whiz Designs 4 Fonts to Foil Google's All-Seeing Eye," *WIRED*, September 24, 2013, accessed October 6, 2015, <http://www.wired.com/2013/09/you-can-read-these-4-fonts-but-your-computer-cant/>; Michael Connor, "Tyler Coburn's Performances for Data Centers," *Rhizome*, June 13, 2013, accessed October 6, 2015, <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/jun/13/interview-tyler-coburn/>; Giampaolo Bianconi, "An Interview with Metahaven," *Rhizome*, February 20, 2013, accessed October 6, 2015, <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/feb/20/metahaven-interview/>; Ellen Mara De Wachter, "In Focus: Jesse Darling," *Freize*, May 2015, accessed October 6, 2015, <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/in-focus-jesse-darling/>.

⁴¹ Ben Valentine, "Weaponizing Our Faces: An Interview with Zach Blas," *Vice*, July 11, 2014, accessed October 6, 2015, http://www.vice.com/en_ca/read/weaponizing-our-faces-an-interview-with-zach-blas-715.

⁴² Laura Kurgan, *Close Up at a Distance: Mapping, Technology, and Politics* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2013), 131.

Kurgan largely focuses on—what she terms—landscapes of conflict in order to explore the ethics of digital mapping technologies and the visualization of data. For example, *New York, September 11, 2001, Four Days Later* (2001) (Fig. 4) compiles a series of images purchased from the Ikonos satellite and attempts to visually trace the rapid changes in the city’s landscape in the days following the attack.⁴³ Thus, both Blas and Kurgan’s projects turn to image aggregation as a tactic for appropriating, visualizing, and critiquing overbearing architectures of state surveillance. By drawing together the fields of art history and media studies and bringing attention to the histories of media technologies such as the internet and technologies of surveillance with militarized uses such as photography and video, therefore, the study of digital visual culture is gainfully situated in making visible questions of hypervisibility, invisibility, and the visual targeting of racialized bodies.

Nevertheless, as a relatively young discipline, media studies has remained a fairly amorphous, loosely gathered set of approaches, rather than a field united in political or aesthetic concerns.⁴⁴ As art historian W.J.T. Mitchell and media studies scholar Mark B.N. Hansen have noted, “*Media* names an ontological condition of humanization—the constitutive operation of exteriorization and invention.”⁴⁵ As a result, Mitchell and Hansen convincingly argue that media studies, despite being considered a singular field, frequently fails to communicate “across the borders that divide the technophiles, the aesthetes, and the sociopolitical theorists.”⁴⁶ By drawing together media studies with the aesthetic and visual concerns of the field of art history, it may be possible to gesture towards a methodological approach that attends to both the image content and the materiality and networked structures of media platforms in digital art production.

⁴³ Ibid., 129-137.

⁴⁴ W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen, “Introduction,” in *Critical Terms in Media Studies*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), vii.

⁴⁵ Ibid., xiii.

⁴⁶ Ibid., xxi.

In order to briefly put this approach into practice, therefore, it is worth considering that *How Not to Be Seen* first and foremost retains its status and value as an art object. In fact, editions of Steyerl's video work have been collected and exhibited by major art institutions and galleries such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London as well as Artists Space in New York, which mounted the first retrospective of Steyerl's work in March 2015. Furthermore, MoMA, which acquired *How Not to Be Seen* for its permanent collection in 2014, and other museums and galleries with authenticated editions of Steyerl's work, tightly control access to screenings of her videos.⁴⁷ In this way, as film studies scholar Erika Balsom has noted, "Film and video art is now collected like painting and central to this artificial imposition of scarcity effected by editioning. The widespread espousal of the limited-edition model represents a reining in of the inherent reproducibility of moving-image media and its wholesale recuperation into the symbolic economy it once compromised, that of the unique work of art."⁴⁸ Brad Troemel has added that, "Museums and galleries still cling dearly to the sanctity of all that appears inside those buildings as being art and all that occurs outside of them as being part of everyday life. Even artwork not found within institutions carries with it the formal and conceptual codes created by those institutions."⁴⁹ Thus, the material constraints artificially imposed on Steyerl's digital videos—otherwise potentially endlessly reproducible—belongs to a deep-rooted tradition of art historical discourse that attempts to reify digital media as singular cultural objects in order to successfully generate cultural and economic capital for the artwork, the artist, and the art institution.

For instance, currently viewers can access online a four-minute excerpt of *How Not to Be Seen* on the *Dazed and Confused Magazine* website, a London-based fashion and culture

⁴⁷ Leora Morinis, "Collections and Exhibitions: Hito Steyerl's *HOW NOT TO BE SEEN: A F**king Didactic Educational .MOV File*," *Inside/Out: A MoMA/MoMA PSI Blog*, June 18, 2014, accessed April 13, 2015, http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2014/06/18/hito-steyerls-how-not-to-be-seen-a-fucking-didactic-educational-mov-file.

⁴⁸ Erika Balsom, "Original Copies: How Film and Video Became Art Objects," *Cinema Journal*, 53.1 (Fall 2013), 99.

⁴⁹ Troemel, 38.

publication, which premiered the video in March 2014 in collaboration with screenings of Steyerl's work at the ICA. Given that the video embedded on *Dazed and Confused* is hosted on YouTube, the excerpt and a handful of identical copies of the video uploaded by non-commercial users is available on the video-sharing website as well. The complete fourteen-minute long video, however, is unavailable for streaming or download in high-definition beyond a user-uploaded video on Vimeo, where *How Not to Be Seen* plays in the background while a shadowy figure walks in circles in the gallery space (Fig. 5).

These user-uploaded reproductions and illicit copies of Steyerl's work circulate within an image economy, which unwittingly challenge institutional attempts to control the circulation of digital moving image media. As Steyerl has argued in her writing on what she calls the politics of the poor image,

The economy of poor images is about more than just downloads: you can keep the files, watch them again, even reedit or improve them if you think it necessary. And the results circulate. Blurred AVI files of half-forgotten masterpieces are exchanged on semi-secret P2P platforms. Clandestine cell-phone videos smuggled out of museums are broadcast on YouTube. DVDs of artists' viewing copies are bartered. Many works of avant-garde, essayistic, and non-commercial cinema have been resurrected as poor images. Whether they like it or not.⁵⁰

The formats and platforms of viewing images, whether they are gallery spaces, cell phones, or computer screens therefore become integral to the experience of the work and its ability to circulate and generate new meanings within and outside of institutional contexts. The user-uploaded video on Vimeo, for instance, participates directly in the economy of the poor image: the video was filmed covertly in the gallery space, offering viewers blurry, distorted images and echoing sound, while a silhouette of the gallery visitor/bootlegger appears, regularly blocking views of the projected image. In fact, explicitly naming *How Not to Be Seen* in the full title as a .MOV file, an easily shareable and reproducible multimedia container format for audio, visual, and text tracks, proves to be vital to

⁵⁰ Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," *e-flux Journal* 10 (November 2009), accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>.

the creation, reception, and circulation of the work within institutional networks as well as underground networks of the economy of the poor image. It could be argued that the media format of the .MOV file opens up the video and its message to these forms of illicit circulation and viewing on YouTube, Vimeo, and other platforms, despite the artificially constructed material constraints of scarcity imposed on the work by art institutions and the art market.

Yet, art historical scholarship remains reluctant to consider the technological formats of digital video. Unsurprisingly, there are currently no scholarly articles, interviews, art journalism or criticism publications on *How Not to Be Seen* that discuss the implication of media platforms and formats such as the .MOV file in order to draw attention to the material constraints of digital video art. For example, Kaegan Sparks for *MOMUS*, a Canadian art criticism website, has offered a competent and fairly comprehensive lesson-by-lesson reading of *How Not to Be Seen*, in which she draws together numerous publications from art historians such as David Joselit and media theorist Alexander Galloway as well as Steyerl's own work to evaluate the image content of the video. Sparks attempts to situate the political and media content of Steyerl's work within the touchscreen maneuvers of cutting, swiping, and pinching (to shrink or enlarge images), which are performed repeatedly in *How Not to Be Seen*.⁵¹ While content analyses are useful and examinations of Steyerl's video by scholars such as Sparks have diligently traced her representations and appropriations of the behavior of touchscreen technology, they have done so without examining the materiality of the technologies referred to such as the computer screen, cell phone screen, or video camera and other photographic technologies of surveillance.

Thus, these analyses tend to consider the reflection or re-presentation of these technologies in art without any consideration of how technological frameworks participate within and outside of

⁵¹ Kaegan Sparks, "To Cut and to Swipe: Understanding Hito Steyerl through 'How Not to Be Seen,'" *Momus*, May 12, 2015, accessed May 13, 2015, <http://momus.ca/to-cut-and-to-swipe-understanding-hito-steyerl-through-how-not-to-be-seen/>.

the work's creation. Attention to the technological materiality of digital video art, therefore, allows for an understanding not only of the ways in which formats such as the .MOV file participate in the subversion of the art market and capital generated by art institutions, but also the points of slippage that uncover the framework of art's technological production. Although an examination of the technical supports of digital video cannot be comprehensively explored within the theoretical and methodological constraints of this paper, it is worth arguing that in future work, analysis of the media platforms and technologies of work such as *How Not to Be Seen* may help reorient contemporary art history's relationship to the content and form of the camera in digital video art and raise important questions about visual art's imbrication in militarized (and by extension, racialized) technologies of seeing.

Thus, Sparks and the many other (white) critics and scholars who have mined the image content of Steyerl's video for parallels to contemporary technology and the behaviors they engender ultimately proffer critical visual analyses which fail to address the technological materiality of digital video art as well as the relationship digital video art has to Western hegemonic structures that use racialization and racist discourses as a means for maintaining control and making visually marginalized populations vulnerable to state power. For instance, artist Jennifer Chan has maintained that, "The art world is a white frat house, and most post-internet discussion has been between the academically clustered internet art communities in North America and Western Europe. With emphasis on post-isms come ideas of post-race and post-gender—equitable visions that use of the internet hasn't achieved just yet."⁵² As Chan's comments make clear, there is a great deal of work to be done in questioning, de-centering, and deconstructing the dominant white Euro-American discourses in contemporary art, which continue to create canons and primitivize the position of artists, scholars, and curators of color in the art world.

⁵² Chan, 120.

By examining militarized and racialized modes of perception, as Steyerl's *How Not to Be Seen* does, the intervention at the heart of this thesis is, in part, to rethink art history's current conceptualizations of modes of creating, distributing, and screening digital video art as well as modes of participating in digital media after 9/11. It seems to me that the work of artists who have turned to digital mediums such as video art for critiquing technologies of surveillance offers one way to debunk many of the assumptions surrounding digital media couched in the work of scholars such as Bishop, Foster, Sparks, and others. As stated previously and as Steyerl's artistic and scholarly work suggest, the excess of visual information created by digital art is not simply a naturalized by-product of the digital mediums used by artists. Rather, these image archives have deep roots in the creation and implementation of military technologies. Ultimately, Steyerl's project of making the body invisible by hiding and circulating amongst digital image archives within a larger architecture of surveillance suggests that for people of color living in and through digital media, image aggregation, the creation of specialized image archives, and the organization and curation of these images can, in fact, become a politicized tactic for survival within coercive forms of visual management of racialized bodies.

Techniques of Visual Management

By setting aside a comprehensive examination of the materiality of these videos in favor of reading Steyerl's work as a text through a critical race theory lens, therefore, this thesis aims to discern the technological frameworks of new media and post-internet art by prioritizing the issue of the performance and perception of identity. Central to this argument is the understanding that the hypervisibility of racialized bodies and their on-going marginalization (socio-political invisibility) are linked insofar as the targeted criminalization of black and brown bodies contributes to their systemic disenfranchisement. It is important to note that although marginality and marginalization

are spatial metaphors that imply invisibility in political, economic, and social life rather than excessive visibility, modes of making the body hypervisible are often predicated on attention to difference, which leads to exclusion, rejection, or expulsion via racial profiling, racial stereotyping, and coercive mimeticism. Importantly, the marginalization, criminalization, and the regulation of racialized bodies are tied to the biopolitical management of life. The issue of biopower is crucial to the modern understanding of racism. Given that racism and the visual management of minoritarian bodies informs the politicized artistic attempts by artists such as Steyerl to engage with and expose the means by which these bodies are managed and surveilled, at this juncture, it is necessary to briefly discuss the concept of state biopower.

As French theorist Michel Foucault has argued, state biopower understands humans not as individuals, but as a species. Biopower intends to optimize life by “making live and letting die” particular bodies; for instance, by giving or denying access to security mechanisms such as pensions, birth control, and other social welfare services of the twentieth century.⁵³ He explains, “This is a technology which aims to establish a sort of homeostasis, not by training individuals, but by achieving an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole from internal dangers.”⁵⁴ Biopolitics, therefore, is constituted alongside necropolitics, or modes of legitimized killing by the state. Within this project of preserving and producing life, Foucault suggests that it is racism that intervenes at the level of separating the groups that exist within a population into two: those who are made to live and those who are let to die.⁵⁵ He writes, “Racism justifies the death-function in the economy of biopower by appealing to the principle that the death of others makes one biologically stronger insofar as one is a member of a race or population, insofar as one is an element in a unitary

⁵³ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador Press, 2003), 245-246.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 249.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 254.

living plurality.”⁵⁶ Thus, although the language of biology structures this discourse, racism in modern society is the caesura in the population, within man-as-species, and becomes the justification of letting die or eliminating particular biological threats to the species as a whole.

Moreover, it is important to emphasize that biopower establishes a positive relation to racism and the state’s right-to-kill. As critical race scholar Rey Chow notes, “Killing off certain groups of people en masse is now transformed (by the process of epistemic abstraction) into a productive, *generative* activity undertaken *for* the life of the entire human species. Massacres are, literally, vital events.”⁵⁷ For example, returning to the misidentification and murder of Jean Charles de Menezes, the state’s biopolitical response to the event and its aftermath becomes clear, as they routinely denied the possibility of a jury verdict of unlawful killing; pushed a case that emphasized the officers’ belief that de Menezes presented an immediate threat to their lives; and finally, refused to press charges on these officers, instead allowing them to return to active duty a year after de Menezes’s death.⁵⁸ The surveillance, (mis)identification, and murder of de Menezes as a probable terrorist—although wrong—thus becomes a generative event for the state, allowing his death to directly correlate with improving the health and security of the white population as a whole. Thus threats are managed by the biopolitical state through physical death or other indirect forms of murder such as increasing the risk of exposure to death, expulsion, and rejection by foreclosing access to social welfare, political enfranchisement, and economic power.⁵⁹ Working at the level of species or population management, biopower is at the heart of the political, social, economic, and visual management of the bodies of people of color and queer people of color.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 258.

⁵⁷ Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 9.

⁵⁸ Vikram Dodd, “Jean Charles de Menezes’ family settles for £100,000 Met payout,” *The Guardian*, November 23, 2009, accessed September 10, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/nov/23/jean-charles-de-menezes-settlement>.

⁵⁹ Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 256.

As Giorgio Agamben has noted in his close reading of Foucault's work, there are two distinct political models that are drawn together in the concept of biopower:

On the one hand, the study of the *political techniques* (such as the science of the police) with which the State assumes and integrates the care of the natural life of individuals into its very center; on the other hand, the examination of the *technologies of the self* by which processes of subjectivization bring the individual to bind himself to his own identity and consciousness and, at the same time, to an external power.⁶⁰

Agamben's theoretical project is to elucidate the convergence of techniques of individualization and state totalization: what is termed a political "double bind" by Foucault. Agamben explains that, "Although the existence of such a line of thinking seems to be logically implicit in Foucault's work, it remains a blind spot to the eye of the researcher, or rather something like a vanishing point that the different perspectival lines of Foucault's inquiry (and, more generally, of the entire Western reflection on power) converge toward without reaching."⁶¹ My argument, therefore, takes up this desire to pinpoint the convergence of these two political techniques through a reading of visual culture. The argument hinges on the notion that these two faces of power—the simultaneous subjectivization of the individual and the totalization of state power—are joined together in photographic surveillance mechanisms couched in identity verification and coercive performances of gender and ethnicity. When read through this framework of the biopolitical management of the racialized population, the work of artists such as Steyerl offer a way to examine state racism through the processes of subjectivization (and the body's potential for objectification), as she hides the body within an image-saturated world by transforming the body into an image itself. Understanding the epistemological shifts in visual knowledge production, therefore, becomes crucial for evaluating tactics of survival for disenfranchised minoritarian populations in the present day.

⁶⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 5.

⁶¹ Ibid., 6.

Mutating (Art) Histories

At this juncture, it is important to clarify the words “race” and “ethnicity,” which are used throughout this thesis. Although race and ethnicity are not identical concepts, Rey Chow has persuasively argued that the two terms are mutually implicated.⁶² It is worth citing her argument at some length; Chow writes that,

If “ethnic” appears to be given a more prominent place... it is not because I fail to grasp the significance of racism but rather because the term “ethnic” as such avoids replicating the residual biologism that is inerascably embedded in the term “race,” situates the problems at hand within culture and representation, marks discrimination entrenched in dominant ways of thinking and talking about so-called minorities, and allows, finally, for an analysis of the discrimination against “ethnics” that is found within ethnic communities themselves.⁶³

In this way, the term ethnic becomes useful for this paper in order to maintain awareness of the ways in which the function of racism in biopower works in culturally invasive and coercive ways, especially in the face of seemingly progressive and inclusive forms of white liberalism. That is to say, a careful association made between the terms “race” and “ethnic” draws out the ways in which white liberalist discourses of multiculturalism, ethnic diversity, and benevolent tolerance serves as an alibi for on-going systemic racism.⁶⁴ Considering racial violence as a systemic function that manifests itself in the differentiation and discrimination of the population through ethnicity and ethnic difference, therefore, allows the present discussion to acknowledge that ethnicity continues to be a source of oppression and liability to those who are branded as “ethnics” (that is, physically and culturally non-white) in Western society.⁶⁵

Finally, this thesis will also use the umbrella terms “people of color” and “women of color,” oftentimes to encompass black and indigenous bodies in the United States, while maintaining a clear understanding of the fact that using and laying claim to these identities does not assume that

⁶² Chow, *Protestant Ethnic*, 23.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 13-15.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

non-black and non-indigenous women of color have the same struggles, pain, or hopes for futurity as black women and indigenous women. As black activist Loretta Ross has explained, the term “women of color” was created for the National Women’s Conference in Houston, Texas in 1977 in order to broaden the scope of the Black Women’s Agenda to account for other “minority” women of color. She clarifies that, “[These women] didn’t see it as a biological designation—you’re born Asian, you’re born Black, you’re born African-American, whatever—but it is a solidarity definition, a commitment to work in collaboration with other oppressed women of color who have been minoritized.”⁶⁶ Thus, the terms “people of color” and “women of color” are indebted to the work of black feminist writers and activists; these terms have been historically used as a political designation, rather than a biological or genetic one, for creating solidarity and for recognizing that although women of color do not have the same feelings, lives, or bodies, we do live on common ground. By using these terms, this paper intends to acknowledge these debts and to offer methodological interventions within the field of art history as well as participate in a political project of solidarity—drawing together those who are racially, economically, and politically marginalized by phobic white supremacist and heteropatriarchal institutions.

With an overarching (and perhaps immodest) goal of shifting the politics of the field of art history and pushing critical discourse and scholarship on digital and post-internet art, chapter one traces the development of photographic technologies of surveillance in the United States in the decades since the Cold War, as visibility becomes a key feature in warfare and the accumulation of state power and control. I will argue that cameras not only altered the visual rules and boundaries of war but—drawing on the work of Martin Heidegger and Rey Chow—led to the visual objectification of the world as well. That is, in the age of atomic warfare, picturing the world necessarily corresponds to targeting the world for destruction. In the age of the world target where

⁶⁶ Lisa Wade, “Loretta Ross on the Phrase ‘Women of Color,’” *Sociological Images*, March 26, 2011, accessed August 3, 2015, <http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2011/03/26/loreta-ross-on-the-phrase-women-of-color/>.

racialized bodies become hypervisible targets for surveillance and destruction, chapter one will conclude with a critical analysis of Hito Steyerl's *How Not to Be Seen*, suggesting that in spaces of maximal visibility, it may be possible to achieve invisibility. Steyerl extrapolates and critiques Muñoz's notions in order to suggest that tactical *de*-identification and participation within the image—that is, willful self-objectification, which transforms the body into an image—in an image-saturated world can become a politicized strategy of disappearance from within the pervasive structures of state biopower as well as from the processes of global capital.

Following an examination of photographic surveillance and image circulation, chapter two will build on the relationship between visibility and destruction by briefly turning to a case study of artist Jackie Goss's *Stranger Comes to Town* (2007) in order to discuss the development and implementation of computer-based facial recognition technology in the wake of September 11, 2001. Goss's animated documentary offers anonymous interviews of a group of men and women at various stages of the U.S. immigration and naturalization processes. The focus of her work examines the various methods of identity verification, which attempt to bind the face, fingerprints, signatures, and other visual and textual documents to an embodied subject. In so doing, Goss turns to the online role-playing game, *World of Warcraft*, in order to fashion digital avatars for her interviewees, effectively severing the guarantee of the photographic index from the body. The second chapter will conclude by assessing the political efficacy of subverting surveillance in favor of invisibility as put forward by Steyerl and Goss. Ultimately, it is necessary to offer a critique of these works couched in critical race theory, which is also often set aside by mainstream art historical discourse. By reevaluating the subject formation of people of color via interpellation as a violent and coercive mode of identity verification, I argue that both masking identity behind the avatar and *de*-identification through the self-objectification of the body may not be viable strategies of resistance for racialized minorities.

Overall, *Stranger Comes to Town* (2007) and *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic .MOV File* (2013) present two shifting moments in the landscape of digital art production and popular social media platforms as well as the expansion of military surveillance technology into daily life. That is, Goss and Steyerl present two different politicized strategies of survival in a phobic environment that sees racialized bodies as threats to the larger (white) population and relies on their exclusion and disempowerment. It is worth putting their work into dialogue with one another because although they represent two separate responses to the technologies developed in the aftermath of 9/11 as well as two separate moments in the creation and dissemination of internet-based art, both Goss and Steyerl's digital video art pieces engage with the same question of the performance of identity. The work of these two artists gestures towards the possibilities afforded by the invisible racialized body, which threatens to disrupt the indexical guarantee of the photographic image. Ultimately, it must be interrogated whether masking the body, hiding amongst images, or becoming an image correlates with invisibility within the architecture of state surveillance for racialized people who are coerced to consistently and recognizably perform their gender and ethnicity.

Chapter One

Technologies of Visualization

In 1950, political tensions in the United States were high as the U.S.S.R. successfully tested its first nuclear weapons. Not only that, but the Chinese Revolution brought a Communist government to power and the anti-communist accusations by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the State Department and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)'s interrogations into the lives and behaviors of politicians, celebrities, and civil servants wholeheartedly began. Scrambling to physically and ideologically contain the threat of communism, President Harry Truman

established the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and National Security Agency (NSA).⁶⁷ The Cold War arms race and space race were first and foremost imbricated within tactics of visibility and visibility. As Rey Chow argues, “Warring in virtuality meant competing with the enemy for the stockpiling, rather than actual use, of preclusively horrifying weaponry. To terrorize the other, one specializes in representation, in the means of display and exhibition.”⁶⁸ As the nuclear arms race escalated at mid-century, the consolidation of political power and influence was inseparable from the visual spectacle of stockpiling nuclear weapons. Visibility, therefore, was integral to the accumulation of knowledge, power, and control over the enemy other.

In fact, as war zones became preoccupied with the logistics of perception, cultural theorist Paul Virilio has argued that, “Aerial observation... stopped being episodic from the beginning of war; it was not a matter of images now, but of an uninterrupted stream of images, millions of negatives madly trying to embrace on a daily basis the statistical trends of the first great military-industrial conflict.”⁶⁹ Thanks to this stream of images and information and the creation of vast curated image archives, the secret to military victory had become the capacity for what Virilio calls predictive capability: “the high-powered performance in reading and deciphering negatives and films.”⁷⁰ In order to maintain this flood of visual information and their rapid interpretation as forms of power and control over the enemy, by the Second World War, U.S. military surveillance had become effectively indistinguishable from cultural uses of photography and filmmaking. He writes that, “The Americans prepared future operations in the Pacific by sending in filmmakers who were supposed to look as though they were on a location-finding mission, taking aerial views for future film production... From on board a freighter [filmmakers] meticulously filmed the approaches and

⁶⁷ John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Early Cold War Spies: The Espionage Trials that Shaped American Politics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9-10.

⁶⁸ Chow, *The Age of the World Target*, 33.

⁶⁹ Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, trans. Julie Rose (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 48.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

defenses of all the major Eastern ports.”⁷¹ By turning to aerial photographic surveillance and other covert techniques of visual information gathering during the Cold War, maximal visibility of the enemy was the logical obverse side of maximal potential for destruction. To remain hidden or to disappear, however, threatens to disrupt this system of the accumulation of power and knowledge through photographic visibility.

Power and knowledge, as Michel Foucault has suggested, are deeply rooted within one another; the exercise of power continuously creates new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information.⁷² Early visual culture historians such as Allan Sekula, Jonathan Finn, and John Tagg have extensively argued that techniques of visual knowledge production—namely photography—are complicit in spreading networks of existing structures of gendered and racialized power and control.⁷³ As Tagg has noted, since the mid-nineteenth century photographs have historically been used as an objective technology of identification and criminalization. He argues,

Photography had its role to play in the workings of the factory, the hospital, the asylum, the reformatory and the school, as it did in the army, the family and the press... The links of the chain are truth, knowledge, observation, description, representation, record. The value of the camera was extolled because the optical and chemical processes of photography were taken to designate a scientifically exploited but ‘natural’ mechanism producing ‘natural’ images whose truth was guaranteed.⁷⁴

The conventions of portrait photographs, criminal mug shots, journalistic photographs, and surveillance images are linked through their reliance on the chemical-mechanical photographic image’s indexical guarantee of the presence of the image’s subject at particular points in time.

Furthermore, as film theorist André Bazin contended in the early twentieth century, “For the first

⁷¹ Ibid., 49.

⁷² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 100-101.

⁷³ For further information see: Jonathan Finn, *Capturing the Criminal Image: From Mug Shot to Surveillance Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 3-64.

⁷⁴ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 77-78.

time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent. For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man.”⁷⁵ By purporting to erase human bias in the image’s creation, the analog cameras of Cold War surveillance spy-planes and satellites participate in this imbrication of power and knowledge through the theoretically “natural” and mechanically objective photograph.

Cameras were therefore crucial for altering the visual rules and boundaries of war. The Corona satellites, for instance, which were launched by the United States to great fanfare, were active between 1960 and 1972 and collected hundreds of thousands of intelligence photos. These satellites, as visual culture studies scholars such as Laura Kurgan have noted, were particularly important for producing high-resolution images of the U.S.S.R. for intelligence and mapping purposes.⁷⁶ The predictive capability of deciphering uninterrupted streams of images during the Second World War, which Virilio discusses, is reenacted exponentially with the development of satellite technology. The Corona cameras were tasked to certain locations and its image archive is heavily weighted towards China, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Bloc countries, producing enormous photographs of contiguous areas in a single frame of film, with a ground resolution of five to seven feet.⁷⁷ In fact, within the first week of the satellite’s launch in August 1960, its cameras photographed 1.5 million square miles of the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries and newly identified 64 Soviet airfields and 26 surface-to-air missile sites. Later images captured by Corona included photographs of the Kremlin and strategic military bases, long-range aviation airfields, as well as geographical points of interest such as the surrounding seas and volcanoes.⁷⁸ Satellites and spy-planes, therefore, worked together to enclose the world by privileging high-resolution visual

⁷⁵ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, CT: Leete’s Island Books, 1980), 241.

⁷⁶ Kurgan, 97.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 99.

⁷⁸ Kevin Conley Ruffner, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, and the U.S. Center for the Study of Intelligence, *Corona: America’s First Satellite Program* (Washington, D.C.: History Staff, Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, 1995), 27.

knowledge production and the creation of image archives. As historian Paul N. Edwards has argued, despite the techno-optimism in popular cultural discourse of the space race as a new frontier, the technological management of the Cold War in research and defense operations and the pervasive threat of nuclear war meant that, “A heavy irony lay behind the discursive *décalage* between the frontier imagery and the Cold War competition: most of the swarming satellites and spaceships were sent up only to look *down*. With every launch another orbiting object drew its circle around the planet, marking the enclosure of the world within the God’s-eye view from the void.”⁷⁹ The technologies of visualization such as spy-plane and satellite photographs embodied the political discourse of the containment of communism through technological closure and the creation of an information panopticon—what Edwards calls “closed world politics” of the Cold War.⁸⁰

By circling the planet with photographic apparatuses, the aim of increased visibility, Hito Steyerl suggests, calibrates the world as a picture. Thus, in order to bring surveillance imaging together with the issues of visibility and invisibility explored in Steyerl’s video, it is worth turning to Martin Heidegger’s argument in “The Age of the World Picture” (1938), in which he suggests that in the modern age of scientific research, the study and visual objectification of the world has become inseparable from picturing the world. He reasons,

Where the world becomes picture, what is, in its entirety, is juxtaposed as that for which man is prepared and which, correspondingly, he therefore intends to bring before himself and have before himself, and consequently intends in a decisive sense to set in place before himself. Hence world picture, when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as a picture.⁸¹

The world picture, therefore, alters the position of man as the subject (*subiectum*), rather than the object of scientific analysis. The interweaving of the world picture and man as *subiectum*,

⁷⁹ Paul N. Edwards, *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 135.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁸¹ Heidegger, 129.

Heidegger adds, positions man as the relational center for discourse and political power. As Heidegger argues, “As soon as the world becomes picture, the position of man is conceived as a world view.”⁸² Crucially, in order to maintain particular world pictures (world views), “man brings into play his unlimited power for the calculating, planning, and molding of all things.”⁸³ It must be argued that pervasive high-resolution photographic surveillance during the Cold War intended to maintain the American world picture and the U.S. as the relational center for discourse. In the figuring of the U.S. as *subiectum*, photographic apparatuses such as spy-planes, satellites, and their calibration targets technologically and ideologically excised the threat of communism from the American world view.

Disappearing in the Poor Image

In *How Not to Be Seen*, Steyerl offers viewers advice in four related sections: invisibility in front of a camera (whether by hiding or going off screen); invisibility in plain sight (scrolling down or wiping screen interfaces clear or by shrinking); invisibility by becoming a picture (camouflage, mimicry, or disguise); and finally, invisibility by disappearing (for instance, by being an undocumented worker or living in a gated community). Emphasized repeatedly are the resolution targets, which as the video explains, were painted by the U.S. Air Force and functioned along the lines of an optometrist’s eye chart, allowing aerial photographers to test, calibrate, and focus their cameras traveling at various speeds and altitudes. The same targets could be used to calibrate satellites as well. Halfway through the video, a portable model resolution target that Steyerl carries with her is transformed into a green screen on top of the green screen (Fig. 6). The footage on the calibration target quickly zooms out into a model of the Earth as a blue marble floating in space, successfully circumscribing and containing the world as a picture, as the voice-over argues that,

⁸² Ibid., 134.

⁸³ Ibid., 135.

“Resolution determines visibility.” As the video progresses, however, the resolution target blurs and becomes pixilated, suggesting that the low-resolution image is a possible site of slippage and space of invisibility.

Through appropriating, pixilating, blurring, and overlapping images, *How Not to Be Seen* returns to a number of issues raised in an essay published in 2009 in which Steyerl examines the “poor image.” Poor images have been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, reedited, and bootlegged so repeatedly that the image has become degraded. She argues,

The poor image is an illicit fifth-generation bastard of an original image. Its genealogy is dubious. Its filenames are deliberately misspelled. It often defies patrimony, national culture, or indeed copyright. It is passed on as a lure, a decoy, an index, or as a reminder of its former visual self. It mocks the promises of digital technology. Not only is it often degraded to the point of being just a hurried blur, one even doubts whether it could be called an image at all. Only digital technology could produce such a dilapidated image in the first place.⁸⁴

Steyerl goes on to suggest that image resolution, especially the desire for high-resolution images, becomes both a commodity fetish and sexual fetish. In fact, *How Not to Be Seen* underscores the fetish value of high-resolution surveillance imagery, as the narration explains to viewers that in the year 2000, pixel resolutions for mapping and surveillance programs were accurate up to twelve meters per pixel; in 2013, the resolution is accurate within one foot per pixel. The extremely high-resolution ground imaging of the Cold War Corona satellites also underscore that reliable, indexical visibility of the world picture is predicated on the high-resolution image.

By contrast, the low-resolution image’s power lies in its ambivalent status and its global networks, which following Walter Benjamin’s argument on mechanical reproduction, Steyerl argues generates its own aura: “The poor image... creates a shared history. It builds alliances as it travels, provokes translation and mistranslation, and creates new publics and debates. By losing its visual substance it recovers some of its political punch and creates a new aura around it. This aura is

⁸⁴ Steyerl, “In Defense of the Poor Image.”

no longer based on the permanence of the ‘original,’ but on the transience of the copy.”⁸⁵ The political potential of the low-resolution image—the trash or debris of audiovisual production—therefore, is within its ability to widely circulate, yet remain autonomous, resistant to privatization, and invisible to global capital. Put simply, the low-resolution image is a site of latent invisibility. Steyerl’s suggestions of shrinking the body into the size of a pixel or, in fact, to “become a dead pixel” (Fig. 7) allows *How Not to Be Seen* to return to the potential for futurity through invisibility in the degraded low-resolution image. I will discuss later the implications of the politics of the poor image as a tactic of invisibility and disidentification in greater detail.

Bodies in the Age of the World Target

As the tarmac warps and becomes increasingly blurred and pixilated at the end of the video (Fig. 8), there is a repeated demand to “shoot this for real!” This command draws the line between the calibration target as both the focus of the camera that “shoots” a picture, which has a relationship to indexical reality as well as the weapon that shoots a physical target for destruction. Therefore, it is necessary to push Heidegger’s argument further in order to suggest that not only did these swarming satellites and spy-planes work to maintain an American world picture they also transformed the world into a target of potential destruction. As theorist Rey Chow has argued in her examination of the epistemological shift following the dropping of the atomic bombs and the virtualization of war, Heidegger’s notions must be supplemented and altered in the atomic age. Knowledge of the world through photographic apparatuses and through the spectacle of nuclear stockpiling, transform the world picture into a world target. For example, in the midst of the Cold War, William James Perry, the former U.S. Under Secretary of State of Defense noted, “If I had to sum up current thinking on precision missiles and saturation weaponry in a single sentence, I’d put

⁸⁵ Ibid.

it like this: once you can see the target, you can expect to destroy it.”⁸⁶ Based on this sentiment, Chow argues that,

Increasingly, war would mean the production of maximal visibility and illumination for the purpose of maximal destruction. It follows that the superior method of guaranteeing efficient destruction by visibility during the Second World War was aerial bombing, which the United States continued even after Japan had made a conditional surrender... With the transformation of the skies into war zones from which to attack, war was no longer a matter simply of armament or of competing projectile weaponry; rather it became redefined as a matter of the logistics of perception, with seeing as its foremost function, its foremost means of preemptive combat.⁸⁷

For the work of Cold War photographic technologies of surveillance, such as the satellite or spy-plane, to grasp the world picture is inseparable from their ability to transform the image into a target of destruction. It is within this blurring of the image as target that the politics of camouflaging in front of the camera or disidentifying with the photographic image entirely becomes critical.

As a result, it is important to note that in the second and third sequences of *How Not to Be Seen*, Steyerl uses her own body in order to explore the possibilities of achieving invisibility by hiding in plain sight or by becoming a picture. There are seven ways to hide in plain sight, Steyerl’s video argues, including pretending that you are not there; by hiding, scrolling, wiping, or erasing; shrinking; and finally, curiously enough, by taking a photo. As the voice-over reads out these suggestions, Steyerl performs a corresponding action in front of an image of the calibration target. Each imperative is accompanied by animated text that sweeps across the screen and covers her face, reading for example, “PRETEND YOU ARE NOT THERE” and “I AM COMPLETELY INVISIBLE.” The comic effect of Steyerl’s attempts to perform tactics of disappearance while her body continues to remain hypervisible raises the question of whether a performative disidentification from the photographic image is a reliable tactic for marginalized subjects. The two moments in *How Not to Be Seen* in which Steyerl successfully evades the camera’s eye are first,

⁸⁶ Quoted in Chow, *The Age of the World Target*, 31.

⁸⁷ Chow, *The Age of the World Target*, 30-31.

when she physically moves off screen—though the camera zooms out to show her standing just outside of the boundaries of the green screen (Fig. 9)—and second, when Steyerl smears green paint on her face, allowing her body to slowly dissolve into the flashing colors of the green screen behind her (Fig. 10). In both instances, the body is only invisible insofar as it is physically erased from within the boundaries of the picture plane.

How Not to Be Seen makes clear through its comic treatment of Steyerl's hypervisible body that by visualizing the human body using photographic apparatuses, the body also becomes a target for control, knowledge, and destruction. In fact, the targeted destruction of the human body was of particular concern in the wartime development of mathematical models for antisubmarine and antiaircraft predictors. The development of the closed-world politics of Cold War research and defense was supported largely by military think tanks such as the Rand Corporation and their extensive work on computers and programming. For instance, as early as the Second World War, a combination of surveillance imagery and operations research proved to be crucial for antisubmarine warfare. British and American scientists and mathematicians analyzed visual data on German U-boat driving patterns in order to plot optimum patterns of attack and fuse settings for charges. Paul Edwards notes that mathematically determined adjustments raised the effectiveness of attacks on U-boats by a factor of three—so much so that German commanders came to believe that the Allies had invented a new, powerful explosive.⁸⁸

Developed concurrently to the algorithmic antisubmarine attacks, Peter Galison has written on the establishment of electronic antiaircraft predictors by scientists such as Norbert Wiener. Wiener's work in cybernetics mapped mathematical models and tested computer-based simulations of the antiaircraft technology with human pilots. The purpose of this technology and the use of digital flight simulators was to anticipate the flight patterns of enemy aircraft and shoot them down

⁸⁸ Edwards, 115.

within seconds. Anticipating the “future behavior of the bomber-organism,” argues Galison, was significant for drawing a direct line between human intentionality and the self-regulating (thinking) machine.⁸⁹ Virtual image simulations based on surveillance information gathered by these spy-planes and satellites were at the heart of these military operations research projects of gathering knowledge and power over the enemy other. By correctly predicting the human behavior of enemy submarine operators or aircraft pilots using mathematical models and visual information, the body and its behavior could be visually and technologically controlled and classified. The translation of mathematical strategies into visual images used by these military projects underscore the desire to comprehensively collect information on both geographical and corporeal bodies. Thus, what the Cold War’s visual, technological, and ideological strategies of military defense highlight repeatedly is the ability to make the enemy subject of surveillance knowable and controllable.⁹⁰

Chapter Two

The Invisible Enemy

The enemy that is *unknowable*, *invisible*, or difficult to see, however, serves as the point of transition from the Cold War’s identification of potential national security threats to the twenty-first

⁸⁹ Peter Galison, “The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision,” *Critical Inquiry* 21.1 (Autumn 1994), 244.

⁹⁰ It is also worth noting at this point that this paper relies on a human viewer as the spectator to these images and behaviors. Media studies scholar Carrie Rentschler has astutely pointed out that automated, non-human or technological spectators, such as the drone camera or aerial satellites, are distinct from individual human spectators. Nevertheless, there has been a fair amount of scholarship to suggest that technological spectators are still subject to algorithmic programming, filtering, and calibrated modes of seeing that continue to replicate sexism, racism, and white supremacy. Put simply, technological spectators are not neutral spectators. For instance, Kelly A. Gates has persuasively argued that the creation of terrorist databases dovetails with state biopower and racism. She writes, “While the database might appear to provide an empirical and technically neutral means of classifying and organizing information, in reality every system of classification is itself a process of social construction that involves particular choices and ways of defining and differentiating classes of objects that do not exist *as such* prior to the development of that system.” I thank Carrie Rentschler for her insight and provocation on this issue; See: Kelly A. Gates, “Finding the Face of Terror in Data,” in *Our Biometric Future: Facial Recognition Technology and the Culture of Surveillance* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 97-124; Colin Koopman, “The Algorithm and the Watchtower,” *The New Inquiry*, September 29, 2015, accessed December 8, 2015, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/the-algorithm-and-the-watchtower/>; Brian Barrett, “Google Maps is racist because the internet is racist,” *WIRED*, May 23, 2015, accessed December 8, 2015, <http://www.wired.com/2015/05/google-maps-racist/>.

century “War on Terror.” The invisible enemy serves as the basis for the enormous political potential of the invisibility of minoritarian populations in the artistic work of Steyerl’s *How Not to Be Seen* and Jackie Goss’s *Stranger Comes to Town*. For example, in 2002, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) established the widely criticized Total Information Awareness (TIA) program in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks. The program’s aims, as its title indicates, was the creation of a mass surveillance system, as DARPA and a number of related agencies pumped money into TIA for creating databases for the large-scale collection of personal information, phone calls, emails, and other communications of the American population as well as developing biometric surveillance technologies such as optical fingerprinting and computer-based facial recognition and iris recognition.

In 2002, then deputy director of the TIA, Dr. Robert L. Popp, gave the keynote lecture at the Biometrics Consortium Conference. In the accompanying informational video that was released to military and defense staff, Cold War images of Soviet soldiers were juxtaposed against mug shots of terrorist suspects such as Osama bin Laden and other Arab men.⁹¹ The voice-over narration argued that these two periods of national defense presented an “asymmetric threat.” As media scholar Kelly A. Gates has argued in her careful unpacking of this instructional video, by providing a linear narrative of the transition from the Cold War to the War on Terror, the TIA video contrasted this new “asymmetric threat” of militant Islam with the Cold War conflict and the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union. Gates argues that,

The text invoked a nostalgic longing for the predictability and consistency of the Cold War, when the enemy was ostensibly well-defined and *identifiable*, combining it with an almost gleeful futurism about the promise of new digital technologies to save the West from its uncivilized Other. The idea of an “unidentifiable” enemy presented a new form of national vulnerability—“America” was now “vulnerable” precisely because it could not identify its enemy.⁹²

⁹¹ Gates, 97.

⁹² Ibid., 98.

The difficulty of identifying the enemy provided the justification of the development of increasingly sophisticated biometric programs as well as the racialization of the face of terrorism in the post-9/11 United States. At this moment of widespread cultural and political anxiety over U.S. national security, visibility became a method of combating the uncertainties of the post-9/11 world and the potential threats to health, patriotism, and good citizenship that racialized people seemed to disproportionately present. In the face of the “unidentifiable” and the drive towards the securitization of identity, racist logics of particular demonized facial types defined the technological development of systems of surveillance. For example, the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) program was designed to racially target Muslim men living in the United States on valid visas; the effects of this racially-determined criminalization of brown bodies is discussed in greater detail below. Furthermore, as Gates has argued, biometric technologies developed since 2001 have pivoted on their claims to correctly identify a so-called terrorist facial type: “In its reference to a representative terrorist face, the trope could not help but resuscitate assumptions from the antiquated science of physiognomy about the existence of relationships between facial features and individuals’ essential qualities, including alleged inherent propensities for criminal or other deviant behaviors,” she argues.⁹³

Under the logic of these systems of surveillance, therefore, racialized bodies and faces—and particularly those perceived as Muslim—are consistently read for criminality and deviant behavior. For instance, Steyerl’s inclusion of the animated hijabi women as well as the African-American women of the pop music group The Three Degrees who sing and dance on the Cold War calibration target in the closing sequence of *How Not to Be Seen* create a visual equivalence between the photographic target and the targeted biological control and surveillance of the bodies of women of color. The footage of these women is interspersed with digitally animated architectural renderings

⁹³ Ibid., 107.

of gated communities, where ghostly figures walk through the space and off the green screen onto the calibration target. In this way, the boundaries of spaces of safety become increasingly fluid and subject to potential attack by foreign bodies.

As film scholar Tess Takahashi argues, “Anxiety at national boundaries intersects with anxiety at intermedial boundaries. National borders, airports, gated communities, and websites through which money changes hands all constitute vulnerable borders. At these border sites, guards seek to guarantee physical identity through a variety of legitimated images and signs.”⁹⁴ Thus, as the language of “homeland security” and the protection of the population is mobilized to talk about the threat of terrorist attacks, invasive border crossings, and the infiltration of the government by racialized bodies, anxiety, uncertainty, and security at vulnerable boundaries become bound together with visibility. In fact, several of the suggestions for disappearance in *How Not to Be Seen* include scenarios such as living in a gated community; living in a military zone; being in an airport, factory, or museum; owning an anti-paparazzi handbag; being fitted with an invisibility cloak; being a superhero; being female and over fifty; surfing the dark web; being a dead pixel; being a Wi-Fi signal moving through human bodies; being undocumented or poor; being spam caught by a filter; being a disappeared person as an enemy of the state. These suggestions offer disappearance, often at the expense of intensified hypervisibility of the body. That is, at physical and intermedial boundaries and sites of potential border crossing through spaces of safety such as airports, factories, museums, military zones, gated communities, Wi-Fi signals, and spam filters, bodies are policed and made to legitimize their physical identities through visual techniques that bind signatures, fingerprints, and photographs of body parts such as the eyes and face to the body as a whole.

Offering an alternative to Steyerl’s methods of photographic invisibility and the hypervisibility of racialized bodies at vulnerable boundaries, video artist Jackie Goss’s twenty-nine-

⁹⁴ Tess Takahashi, “Experiments in Documentary Animation: Anxious Borders, Speculative Media,” *Animation* 6.3 (2011), 233.

minute animated documentary *Stranger Comes to Town* relies on the interface of the massively-multiplayer online role-playing game, *World of Warcraft*, in order to create fictional avatars that stand in for the human body. As a game, *World of Warcraft* is an interesting metaphor for border crossing and immigration. As Takahashi has argued, the virtual world of *World of Warcraft* relies on the player's constant negotiation of border spaces such as city walls, gates, and entrances to buildings.⁹⁵ In fact, Goss makes this parallel explicit at one point, as two night-elves meet at dusk near a building entrance. The guard asks, "Who goes there?" but is given no response. Over the next several seconds, the alarm between the two characters grow, characterized by the exclamation points that glow above their heads, as neither is able to move forward at this fictional border.

In *Stranger Comes to Town*, Goss anonymously interviews individuals who discuss their experience with the U.S. immigration and naturalization process, the biometric tests their bodies are subject to as they cross borders, and the repeated demands to verify their identities, through photographs, iris scans, and optical fingerprints. Goss uses a combination of game machinima, digital images from a mapping software such as Google Earth, her own hand-drawn two-dimensional animations of her characters, and a crude reproduction of an instructional video from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security on the US-VISIT program. US-VISIT, as the voice-over explains, was instituted in the years following 9/11 and collects fingerprints and photographs of all travelers through the U.S., who are neither citizens nor permanent residents. The voice-over reassures viewers that, "Data is used to assist the officer to determine admittance into the country and it protects privacy while enhancing our immigration system." The visual track, meanwhile, presents an animated sequence of a faceless officer looking at a computer screen of the *World of Warcraft* interface, where players can select the appearance and name of their character (Fig. 11). Goss's logic suggests that by allowing players to choose and repeatedly change their appearance on

⁹⁵ Ibid., 239.

the *World of Warcraft* interface, technologies of surveillance that serve to verify embodied identity can be undermined. In fact, before turning to the interview of a woman identified as Mugalka, viewers see a variety of height, weight, clothes, hairstyles, and skin color options cycled through by an invisible player (presumably Goss or Mugalka herself) before the character's appearance is finalized.

A text sequence later on argues that the only useful information one can provide is not verbally, but comes directly from the body (Fig. 12). In fact, one anonymous speaker points to this biological and racialized process of identity verification, as she suggests that, "If there is a flight from a country that [border officials] are more suspicious of, or if it's late at night... Usually you can calculate who will stop the line because he or she looks a certain way." Another speaker, who identifies himself as a man from Egypt, explains the institution of the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) and its special registration program for all men, ages sixteen and older from countries with large Muslim populations such as Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and elsewhere living in the United States on valid visas starting in June 2002. Historian Jonathan Finn has noted that, "Where US-VISIT collects fingerprint and other identification data from nearly all non-U.S. citizens, the collection of data in NSEERS was focused on Middle Eastern men... The collection of data in NSEERS reflects and reinforces categories of suspicion based on race, gender, and religious belief."⁹⁶ The heightened surveillance of particular racialized bodies, moreover, positions these bodies as always potentially criminal. By turning to the animated avatars of brightly colored orcs, trolls, night-elves, humans, dwarves, and gnomes, who become the surrogate bodies for the audio track of her interviewees, Goss presents one tactic of invisibility by shattering the body's relationship to the photographic index (Fig. 13). Goss's animated documentary opens with the first interviewed subject confirming, "This is

⁹⁶ Jonathan Finn, "Photographing Fingerprints: Data Collection and State Surveillance," *Surveillance & Society* 3.1 (2005), 40.

anonymous, right?” In this way, the avatar becomes a visual tactic of hiding one’s racialized and gendered identity online.

Nevertheless, the audio track for Goss’s video unwittingly reveals that the avatar does not ultimately free an individual from embodied racial and gendered difference. That is, despite the avatar’s potential to visually camouflage the body, the interviews in *Stranger Comes to Town* repeatedly reveal an acute awareness of bodily difference, as medical records, vaccination information, photographs, and fingerprints make their way into the U.S. Homeland Security databases. For example, the speaker identified by her avatar as Mugalka explains that included within the bureaucratic processes of naturalization and citizenship, an immigration doctor subjected her to a check on her genitals, perhaps, she argues, to confirm that she is actually a woman. Although the story is narrated with humor, Mugalka makes clear that one’s embodied identity must continuously and coercively be guaranteed. One’s embodied identity is distinct from the avatar that purports to mask it.

As media studies scholar Lisa Nakamura has contended, despite the use of avatars, the *World of Warcraft* platform continues to gender and racialize players. In particular, Nakamura has analyzed the racialized derision and exclusion of certain behaviors such as “gold farming,” which is characterized by fellow players as a specifically “Asian” behavior. Notwithstanding the actual ethnicity of the player involved in gold farming, nor the anonymity seemingly guaranteed by the avatar, behaviors such as the activity of gold farming signify “Asianness” and breed anti-Asian racism in the space of the game. Nakamura suggests that, “The privilege of avatarial self-possession is, like capital itself, unevenly distributed across geopolitical borders.”⁹⁷ The avatar’s claims to good citizenship and correct “American” behavior, therefore, continue to fall on racialized, gendered, and geopolitical lines.

⁹⁷ Lisa Nakamura, “Don’t Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26.2 (April 2009), 141.

Furthermore, the on-going racialization of the avatar through speech and behavior undermine any utopian hailing of the avatar as a space of potentially fluid raced, gendered, and classed experimentation. Nakamura has argued elsewhere that,

While everyone in cyberspace is disoriented, people of color in cyberspace come to the medium already in this state, already marginalized, fragmented, and imbricated within systems of signification that frame them in multiple and often contradictory ways. The celebration of the “fluid self” that simultaneously lauds postmodernity as a potentially liberatory sort of worldview tends to overlook the more disturbing aspects of the fluid, marginalized selves that already exist offline in the form of actual marginalized peoples, which is not nearly so romantic a formulation.⁹⁸

It is worth noting that the avatars Goss chooses to represent her subjects align in gender identification: marked by breasts and the skimpy clothing her female interviewees sport, whereas male interviewees hold weapons and are often shown to have heavy, muscular frames. As a result, Goss’s experiments with the animated avatar are limited to masking race behind fictional characters that appear in a variety of bright skin colors such as yellow, green, and purple. Insofar as the avatars are theoretically unraced, subjects such as the purple-skinned night-elf, who self-identifies as an Egyptian man who was subject to NSEERS regulations, undermine the avatar’s desire to erase raced identity. As Nakamura forcefully argues, people of color whose identities and behaviors are marginalized offline, remain marginalized and fragmented behind the avatar. Similarly, Mugalka’s story of having her genitalia checked at the immigration doctor’s reaffirms the embodiment of her gendered and sexual difference. The avatar, therefore, is unable to offer racially fluid or gender fluid characters as liberation from embodied difference. Furthermore, behavior and speech continue to confirm the offline identifications of Goss’s interviewed subjects, whether by their accented English or by their own admission. Most importantly, behavior and speech continue to interpellate her subjects as gendered and raced in particular ways and furthermore, coercively demand from them recognizable performances of their gender and ethnicity.

⁹⁸ Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xvi.

The Politics of Self-Objectification

Where Hito Steyerl relies on her own body to examine the efficacy of her strategies for achieving invisibility in the age of the world picture/world target by moving off screen or concealing her face with green paint, Goss turns to the digitally animated avatar to test the potential of camouflaging or masking the bodies of her interviewed subjects. Therefore, it is worth asking, rather than masking or hiding the body, whether a tactical misrecognition of the image of the self can be a meaningful strategy of survival in the face of ubiquitous coercive surveillance. This misrecognition or disidentification, José Esteban Muñoz has demonstrated, is distinct from counter-identification or partial-identification with a majoritarian public sphere that is characterized by white supremacy and misogyny. In this way, disidentification, Muñoz argues, is a strategy of survival for marginalized subjects.⁹⁹ Through a careful unpacking of Muñoz's argument as well as Steyerl's own conceptualizations of the body's *de*-identification with the image, these political tactics that claim to empower racialized minorities must be called into question. By way of conclusion, it is worth turning to Rey Chow's notion of coercive performances of ethnicity and ethnic subjectivity in order to understand the multi-layered politics of survival for those who inhabit hypervisible, racialized bodies.

At the heart of Muñoz's theorizing is a concept extrapolated from Marxist theorist Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970), which aimed to articulate the role of ideology in subject formation. For Althusser, ideology is the realm within which subjects are called—"hailed"—into being in a process he calls interpellation. Muñoz takes Althusser's notions as a point of departure to suggest that, whereas a "good subject" acquiesces to the ideological hailing and the "bad subject" actively resists or rejects identification, disidentification presents a third mode of dealing with the interpellation of identity—identifying insofar as to alter ideology's

⁹⁹ Muñoz, 18.

codes from within.¹⁰⁰ Crucially the political power of this strategy of tactical misrecognition, especially for minoritarian subjects such as young women, people of color, and queer people, are the slippages in the ideological hailing of the subject. Muñoz suggests that, “Queers [of color] are not always ‘properly’ interpellated by the dominant public sphere’s heterosexist mandates because desire for a bad object offsets that process of reactionary ideological indoctrination... We thus disidentify with the white ideal. We desire it but desire it with a difference. The negotiations between desire, identification, and ideology are a part of the important work of disidentification.”¹⁰¹ Accordingly, a tactical misrecognition of the image of the self by a person of color can be understood as a form of identification, but with a difference since in Muñoz’s reading, Althusser’s interpellation always presumes a white body as the subject to hail. Put another way, for Muñoz, the “correct” or “proper” interpellation of any subject must interpellate that subject as white.

As a result, in these slippages of “proper” interpellation, marginalized subjects such as people of color could successfully disidentify with the white ideal and tactically misrecognize the image of themselves. Steyerl’s comic performances of invisibility, such as hiding behind animated text or shrinking down to the size of a pixel—which simply involves wearing a black box over one’s head—can be read as negotiating the ideological hailing of identity within the hypervisible body of a woman of color. Identity is not rejected in these instances, but by offering techniques of invisibility that comically fail to mask the body entirely, its pervasive ideological processes embedded in white male heterosexism are exposed.

Just as the low-resolution image autonomously circulates while dodging the eye of global capital, a tactical misrecognition of the image does not mean that one ceases to identify with the image, but rather opens up the image as a site of participation and critique. In her lectures and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 15.

essays on the aesthetic paradigm of “post-representation,” Steyerl has argued for a form of *de*-identification with the image that favors the materialist circulation of images. She writes,

To participate in an image—rather than merely identify with it—could perhaps abolish this relation [between truth and representation]. This would mean participating in the material of the image as well as in the desires and forces it accumulates. How about acknowledging that this image is not some ideological misconception, but a thing simultaneously couched in affect and availability, a fetish made of crystals and electricity, animated by our wishes and fears—a perfect embodiment of its own conditions of existence? [...] [The image] doesn’t represent reality. It is a fragment of the real world. It is a thing just like any other—a thing like you and me... If we are to acknowledge that subjectivity is no longer a privileged site for emancipation, we might as well just face it and get on with it.¹⁰²

To participate in the image, Steyerl concludes, is to turn the image and the body into objects. In advocating this embrace of self-objectification, “thingification,” she argues, allows for the active interrogation of the image and the body’s indexical relationship to reality. Not only is the truth guarantee of the image and body thrown into question, but a tactical misrecognition from one’s biometric profile and from the codes of the high-resolution surveillance image proposes to expose the dominant structures of ideology in subject formation. For Steyerl, the image is not an ideological misconception—that is, falsely identifying with the image rather than the body. Rather, her formulation of *de*-identification (rather than *dis*identification) involves both an adaptation of Muñoz’s theorizations as well as an implicit critique of his suggestion that improperly identifying with the interpellation or with the image of the body can enact an empowering performance of alternate identities. Unlike willful non-participation or Muñoz’s calls for an active tactical misrecognition, in Steyerl’s imagining, *de*-identification with the image and active participation *within* the image entails a forfeiture of subjectivity “as a privileged site for emancipation.”¹⁰³ Steyerl’s thingification, therefore, is not an active and successful misrecognition of the self, but

¹⁰² Hito Steyerl, “A Thing Like You and Me,” *e-flux Journal* 15 (April 2010), accessed April 11, 2015, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/a-thing-like-you-and-me/>.

¹⁰³ Sparks, “To Cut and to Swipe.”

rather, a rejection of subjectivity entirely in favor of voluntary objectification. Once the self becomes an image, it becomes an object of circulation; Steyerl's earlier arguments on the poor image can be joined together at this time and pushed further in order to suggest that as the self-as-image circulates and aggregated into image archives where it is repeatedly copied, edited, and reformatted, it degrades into a poor (low-resolution) image capable of remaining autonomous, invisible to capital, and increasingly blurred from a clear indexical referent in reality. As a result, the call for voluntary self-objectification is a provocative one, yet such a political tactic must be called into question, especially as it applies to the objectification and subjectivity of racialized bodies.

Before turning to an interrogation of this tactic of invisibility via willful self-objectification, it is important to note Steyerl and Goss's continued overlap with Muñoz's project. Through these video art projects on the political possibilities of invisibility, Steyerl and Goss attempt to maintain a kernel of utopian possibility for the survival of racially marginalized subjects in visual regimes that control and target bodies by coercively picturing the body and binding identity to the face. In fact, to return to the second sequence in *How Not to Be Seen*, which examines tactics of invisibility in plain sight, one of Steyerl's seven suggestions for "pretending you are not there" include taking a picture. It remains unclear in the video whether Steyerl takes a photo of the world and thereby adds to the objectification of Heidegger's world picture or whether taking a self-portrait is, in fact, a method of self-objectification and hiding in an image-saturated world. Read alongside the above-quoted essay, Steyerl continuously suggests that willful participation in self-objectification is the logical alternative to subjectivity within a visual regime that objectifies both bodies and the world as a picture.

Ultimately, this line of reasoning does not convince me. It seems to me that a hypervisible, image-saturated world does not guarantee the safety of a hypervisible minoritarian body. Therefore,

at this juncture it is necessary to provide a critique of disidentification (or “de-identification” as Steyerl puts it) via self-objectification as a possible site of access and empowerment for racially marginalized subjects in phobic majoritarian (white supremacist) spheres. By turning to the notion of coercive mimeticism, this critique will interrogate both Steyerl and Muñoz’s suggestions on the practice of disidentification. The ideological hailing of racialized subjects is deeply rooted in, what Rey Chow has called, a mimetic performance of ethnicity. Chow examines three overlapping forms of mimeticism enacted by the racialized subject within postcolonial discourse in order to draw an alternate conclusion from Althusser’s notions of identity and ideology.

The ethnic minority, Chow argues, is kept in a double bind because she is judged by her ability to mimic whiteness: “Her language and her culture are... relegated to the position of the inferior, improper copy. The values involved are hierarchically determined and tend to work in one direction only: the original, so to speak, exists as the sole, primary standard by which the copy is judged, but not vice versa; the white man, and the white man alone, is authentic.”¹⁰⁴ Although postcolonial scholars such as Homi Bhabha have complicated this formulation by suggesting that the subaltern subject is a divided subject, Chow pushes this logic to suggest that ultimately, the ethnic minority is also expected to resemble what is recognizably ethnic; that is, the ethnic subject is no longer simply replicating whiteness but “rather an image, a stereotyped view of the ethnic.”¹⁰⁵ This third level of mimeticism is what she determines as a socially endorsed, coercive mimeticism, “which stipulates that the thing to imitate, resemble, and become is none other than the ethnic or sexual minority herself. When minority individuals think that, by referring to themselves, they are liberating themselves from the powers that subordinate them, they may actually be allowing such

¹⁰⁴ Chow, *Protestant Ethnic*, 104.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

powers to work in the most intimate fashion.”¹⁰⁶ The coercive mimeticism of the image of ethnicity allows Chow to reconsider the ideological function of identity and the interpellation of the subject.

Interpellation, Chow concludes, allows the ethnic subject to internalize the performance of ethnicity in a conscious exhibition of self-mimicry. Crucially, if the ethnic is not and cannot be a perfect imitation of the white man, neither can she be a perfect imitation of herself. It is in this space of failure that the ethnic subject remains an inferior representation of both whiteness and herself. Chow writes that, “However conscientiously [ethnic subjects] attempt to authenticate themselves—and especially when they attempt conscientiously—they will continue to come across as inferior imitations, copies that are permanently out of focus.”¹⁰⁷ Here, transforming the ethnic body into a poor image is not a strategy for gaining autonomy. Self-objectification (image-as-object and body-as-object) through willful participation in the an image-saturated world, heralded by Steyerl’s “A Thing Like You and Me” and put into practice in *How Not to Be Seen*, must take into account the conscious mimicry of ethnicity-as-object. Despite Steyerl’s claims to the contrary, self-objectification cannot be a position willfully occupied by racially marginalized subjects, particularly within North America and decolonized and neo-imperial geopolitical contexts.

Rather, I would argue that even as the ethnic blurs and becomes a poor image of herself, the self-objectification of ethnicity maintains the hypervisibility of her body—that is, the visible signs of ethnic difference. Furthermore, the coercive internalization of ethnic interpellation seems to preclude the third mode of identification that Muñoz proposes as the strategic space for disidentification. Put another way, even if the ethnic subject is not “properly” hailed as white, as Muñoz suggests, the force of coercive mimeticism ideologically imposes a position upon the ethnic subject from whites as well as fellow ethnics. Rather than internally splintering the codes of interpellation for positive change, the failure of “proper” hailing sets up the ethnic as a target for

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 115.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 127.

attack for being unable to convincingly and authentically mimic ethnicity. Interpellation of the ethnic subject, therefore, does not present a productive slippage of identification and mis-identification from the white subject; rather, both white and fellow ethnic interpellators reify the performance of ethnicity by the ethnic subject. Chow contends,

Ethnicity can be used as a means of attacking others, of shaming, belittling, and reducing them to the condition of inauthenticity, disloyalty, and deceit, despite the fact that this historically charged, alienating situation is a collectively experienced one. Such attacks are, moreover, frequently issued by ethnics themselves against fellow ethnics, that is, the people who are closed to, who are most *like* them ethnically in this fraught trajectory of coercive mimeticism.¹⁰⁸

Even as Steyerl photographs herself and attempts to blur the line between the boundaries of her body and of the images behind her in *How Not to Be Seen*, for any visibly racialized subject, voluntary self-objectification of the body-as-poor-image does not preclude the coercive performance of what is recognizably ethnic. On the resolution targets, despite the digital manipulation of the image, the bodies of women of color—Steyerl, The Three Degrees, and the animated hijabi women—continue to bear their signifiers of racial difference for viewers and, as a result, continue to perform their ethnicity as well. The coercive self-objectification of ethnics from fellow ethnics as well as from whites offers one important methodological approach to take into consideration the unequal conditions of the politics of invisibility.

Given the points of failure to entirely mask the racialized and gendered body within Goss's digitally animated avatar as well as within Steyerl's comic suggestions for invisibility, the key question now becomes: who has the privilege of invisibility within the world picture's architecture of surveillance? It is necessary to evaluate Goss and Steyerl's strategies for those targeted and marginalized by both white supremacist socio-politics and the coercive objectification of ethnicity. It is worth recalling that Steyerl's two successful methods of erasing her body from the picture plane involved either using green paint to dissolve into the screen or physically stepping outside of

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 124.

the boundaries of the screen. Nonetheless, as the camera zooms out to reveal Steyerl standing next to the green screen, what she achieves is not so much invisibility in front of the camera, but a momentary reprieve from the camera's constantly moving gaze. The potential for the autonomy, anonymity, and invisibility of the racialized and gendered body in the face of ubiquitous photographic surveillance, therefore, is dependent on the degree to which these bodies are allowed to willfully negotiate the visibility and invisibility of their bodies in a culturally white majoritarian world.

Coda

Civil Contracts and Activism

In a 2012 essay titled "The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation," Steyerl writes that, "As we register at cash tills, ATMs, and other checkpoints—as our cell phones reveal our slightest movements and our snapshots are tagged with GPS coordinates—we end up not exactly amused to death but represented to pieces. This is why many people by now walk away from visual representation."¹⁰⁹ In this sphere of over-visibility and over-representation, she turns to Ariella Azoulay in order to conclude, "If photography was a civil contract between the people who participate in it, then the current withdrawal from representation is the breaking of a social contract, having promised participation but delivered gossip, surveillance, evidence, serial narcissism, as well as occasional uprisings."¹¹⁰ This statement raises two important and related points that are worth considering: first, the conflation of citizenship with photography or visual representation (put another way, a citizenry of photography) and second, the suggestion that by withdrawing from representation entirely—that is, a form of invisibility—it is possible to breach photography's civil

¹⁰⁹ Hito Steyerl, "The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation," *e-flux Journal* 32 (February 2012), accessed June 20, 2015, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-spam-of-the-earth/>.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

contract and refuse citizenship. As I argue over the course of the previous chapter, walking away or withdrawing from representation entirely is not available to people of color due to the insidious ways in which coercive mimeticism functions and the demands imposed on the ethnic subject to recognizably perform their ethnicity. Put simply, for the same reasons why invisibility from structures of surveillance is unavailable for hypervisible populations, photography's civil contract similarly cannot be breached by withdrawing from representation.

Yet, the issue of refusing invisibility raises an alternate set of questions. If all participants of photography (willful or otherwise) constitute a citizenry, then the brown and black bodies of citizens who coercively perform their ethnicity and whose representations are politically marginalized and brutalized is one that constitutes a state of exception. That is, particular racialized bodies constitute a citizenship that is akin to what theorist Giorgio Agamben has called the zone of indistinction.¹¹¹ Agamben has argued that the state of exception is a particular form of citizenship that belongs to the state through suspension from law; that is, thanks to the political processes of biopower and the bestialization of humans-as-species, an opposition is created between bare life and good life as some bodies are not protected in the same manner nor do they enjoy the same privileges of citizenship as others.¹¹² Crucially, the state relies on the paradoxical inclusion/exclusion of these rejected bodies in order to derive and maintain its power. He writes that, "In the 'politicization' of bare life—the metaphysical task *par excellence*—the humanity of living man is decided... At once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested."¹¹³ Put simply, Agamben concludes that, "Bare life remains included in politics in the form

¹¹¹ Agamben, 5-7.

¹¹² Ibid., 7.

¹¹³ Ibid., 7-8.

of exception, that is, as something that is included solely through an exclusion.”¹¹⁴ In the same way, the inclusion of brown and black citizens within the state architecture of surveillance guarantees the protection and safety of white bodies while maintaining their own systemic exclusion and dehumanization.

Therefore, to return to the question posed earlier, who has the privilege of invisibility within the world picture’s architecture of surveillance? As close readings of the tactics offered to viewers in *How Not to Be Seen* and *Stranger Comes to Town* suggest, invisibility is not a viable solution for escaping socio-political disenfranchisement for people of color. The hypervisibility of racialized bodies manifests itself in forms of racial profiling and stereotyping such as the NSEERS program as well as within coercive mimetic performances of ethnicity and gender in the visual representation of people of color. Steyerl’s arguments for willful self-objectification within spheres of over-visibility may only be a tactic available to white bodies, insofar as whiteness is inherently invisible and not recognized as a racialized identity. Nevertheless, it is worth wondering, whether by rejecting these tactics of invisibility that have been discussed throughout this paper, there can be critical shift in thinking about hypervisibility as position from which to derive collective power and resistance.

That is, it is necessary for a methodological intervention that calls for those racially, economically, and politically marginalized to maintain a state of productive antagonism towards forms of photographic citizenship that rely on the inclusion/exclusion of bare life as well as forms of withdrawal and invisibility, which are couched in systems of governance that already foreclose their access and participation. For example, in her academic and political work, Indigenous (Kahnawà:ke Mohawk) scholar and activist Audra Simpson has called for a politics of refusal: she asks, “What happens when we refuse what all (presumably) ‘sensible’ people perceive as good

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 11.

things? What does this refusal do to politics, to sense, to reason?”¹¹⁵ To add to her series of questions, for subjects of the biopolitical state’s violence, what might living in a state of productive antagonism look like? In Simpson’s reformulation, the colonizing nation constitutes the continuous state of exception, rather than its colonized subpopulation. As a result, refusing to accept Canadian or American citizenship, refusing to pay taxes, and refusing to vote become crucial political tactics for the preservation of Indigenous identity, community, and self-determination as well as a means by which to expose the illegitimacy of a colonial state.¹¹⁶ A political stance of refusal, including the refusal of invisibility in favor of hypervisibility and collective action, therefore, is intimately bound with survival and the refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of the state’s disciplinary and regulatory powers.

The biopolitical state joins together two forms of power: the subjectivization of the individual (technologies of the self) alongside the totalization of state power (political techniques) in order to bind an individual’s identity to an external power.¹¹⁷ The act of refusal in the face of photographic surveillance, identity verification, as well as the coercive and recognizable performance of gender and ethnicity, therefore, allows for a rethinking of both subjectivity and state power. As Michel Foucault has suggested in his discussions on power and subject formation, it is necessary to create a new economy of power relations and new methodological approaches for understanding the political management of society. He suggests that this may manifest itself by:

Taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. To use another metaphor, it consists of using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used... In order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 1.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹⁷ Agamben, 5.

¹¹⁸ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry* 8.4 (Summer 1982), 780.

Refusal, therefore, becomes a position from which to critique economic and ideological state violence and a tactic for creating collective identification. Foucault argues, for instance, that struggles against the state involve questioning the privileges of knowledge, the rejection of institutions of power that rely on scientific and administrative determinations of who one is, and finally, questioning the status of the individual.¹¹⁹ He concludes that, “Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are.... The political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state and from the state’s institutions but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.”¹²⁰ A rejection of invisibility by hypervisible minoritarian subjects and a rejection of integration into these systems of governance, therefore, may allow for re-imagining subjectivity. An embrace of hypervisibility in these re-imaginings is a political position from which to enact a permanent provocation to particular relationships of power.

It is important to note, then, that a rejection of invisibility and a call for productive, thoughtful antagonism is not a politics of negation, misrecognition/un-recognition/de-identification, or what queer theorist Judith (Jack) Halberstam has called, radical passivity. For example, Halberstam has argued that, “A feminism grounded in negation, refusal, passivity, absence, and silence, offers spaces and modes of unknowing, failing and forgetting as part of an alternative feminist project, a shadow feminism which has nestled in more positivist accounts and unraveled their logics from within.”¹²¹ Radical passivity in Halberstam’s understanding, therefore, is a shadow feminism that is inherently anti-social, masochistic, and advocates unbeing, unbecoming, and self-

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 781.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 785.

¹²¹ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 124.

destruction.¹²² Turning to artistic production by women of color such as Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964) and Kara Walker's hand-cut silhouettes and collages, he suggests that it is possible to inhabit "a feminism that does not resist through an active war on colonialism, but a mode of femininity that self-destructs and in doing so brings the edifice of colonial rule down one brick at a time."¹²³

While this is a political tactic that ultimately demands masochism as feminism, it seems that for women of color and trans women of color who have been historically, violently excluded from white cisgender feminist projects and have created and participated in their own forms of shadow feminism as a means for survival, radical passivity or willful refusals to act cannot be a meaningful political stance for those with bodies regularly threatened with violence. In fact, Jackie Wang has convincingly critiqued Halberstam's notions, arguing that, "A purely oppositional or negative politics has major limitations, no matter how radical. Negative feminism and queer theory challenges the idea that participation is the *only option*. But it doesn't acknowledge that negative politics is still inscribed within the same framework. Negation isn't a form of escape."¹²⁴ Negation in the form of radical passivity is a rejection of participation without concrete political goals for changing white supremacist and heterosexist frameworks.

While the interrelated issues of radical passivity, refusal, and withdrawal from the social contract of photography are linked insofar as they all respond to this problematic, it must be argued that by insisting on the visibility of marginalized populations, a politics couched in hypervisibility as a strategy of resistance aims to challenge and ultimately dismantle socio-political hierarchies. For example, Steyerl has noted that the inspiration for *How Not to Be Seen* came from stories about tactics used by rebel fighters in the Middle East during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq to

¹²² Ibid., 129.

¹²³ Ibid., 133.

¹²⁴ Jackie Wang, "Negative feminism, anti-social queer theory and the politics of hope," *Ballerinas Dance With Machine Guns*, June 22, 2012, accessed June 20, 2015, <http://loneberry.tumblr.com/post/724635724/negative-feminism-anti-social-queer-theory-and>.

avoid detection by American drones. Given that the drone sees movement and body heat, these fighters would douse themselves in water to bring down their body temperatures and cover themselves in reflective plastic sheets. As Steyerl explains, “The paradox, of course, is that a landscape littered with bright plastic-sheet monochromes would be plainly visible to any human eye—but invisible to the drone’s computers.”¹²⁵ This distinction between human vision and computer vision suggests that it is possible for hypervisible minoritarian bodies to hide in one regime of visibility while insisting upon another in order to open both as potential spaces for survival. In refusing the civil contract of representation and, in fact, refusing the legitimacy of state-imposed subjectivization, visual power may be challenged.

Overall, this paper has attempted to trace a history of visualizing-as-targeting and the concerting targeting of the bodies of people of color in the post-9/11 United States. Although *Stranger Comes to Town* and *How Not to Be Seen* insist on the invisibility of the body as a challenge to state surveillance, Goss’s use of the avatar as a digital mask for embodied identity and Steyerl’s suggestion of turning the body into an image for circulation in an image-saturated world fail to enact meaningful transformations of asymmetrical power relations. Masking the body, hiding amongst images, or becoming an image does not correlate with invisibility within the architecture of state surveillance for racialized people who are coerced to consistently and recognizably perform their gender and ethnicity. A turn towards hypervisibility as a political strategy, therefore, must re-imagine state-imposed definitions of subjectivity and individuality, which allow for the surveillance of these bodies and their behavior. In this way, a methodological intervention that rejects invisibility and assimilation into neoliberal democratic ethics and citizenship and turns instead to hypervisibility as a practice of resistance to these forms of governance and visual representation

¹²⁵ Hito Steyerl and Laura Poitras, “Techniques of the Observer: Hito Steyerl and Laura Poitras in Conversation,” *Artforum*, May 2015, accessed May 14, 2015, <https://artforum.com/inprint/issue=201505&id=51563>.

may help open up a new set of questions for photography, surveillance, and art history's relationship to digital art.

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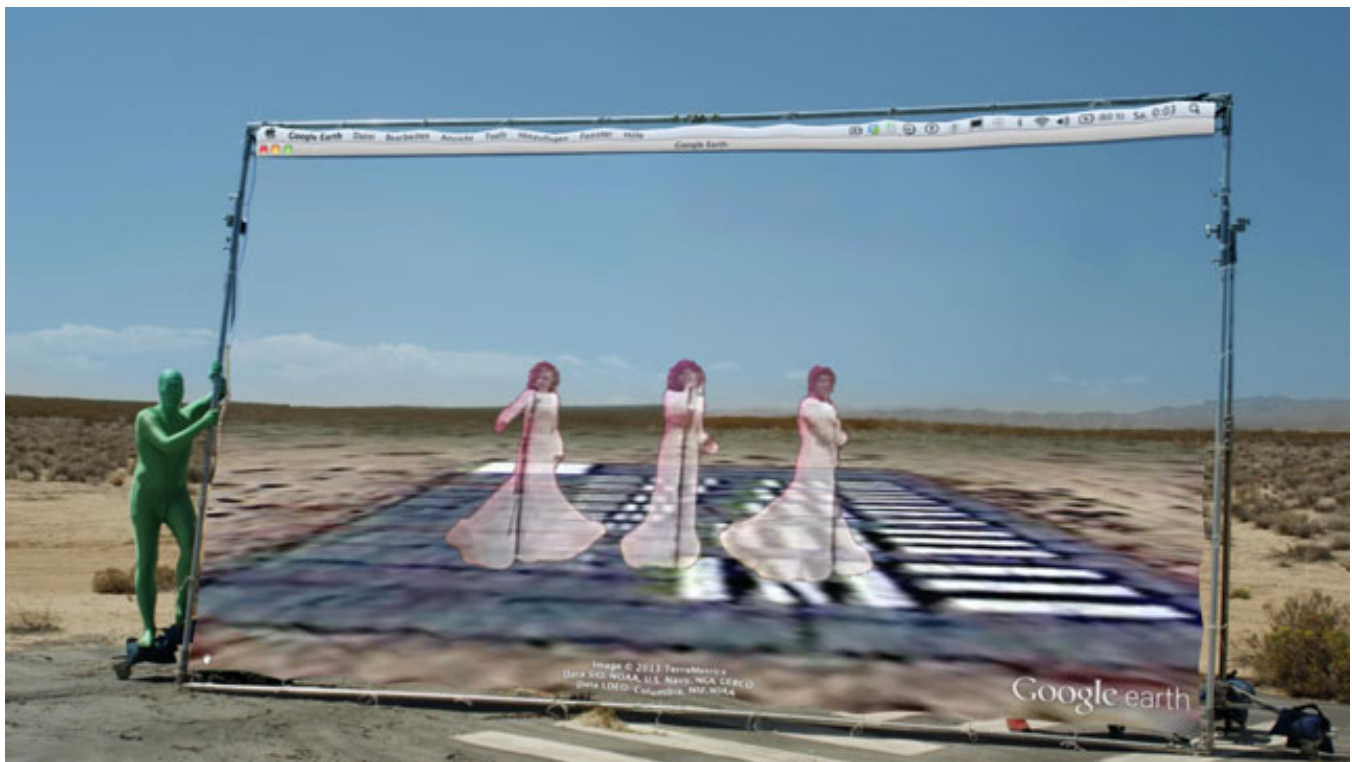


Fig 1. Dancers appear on the Cold War photo calibration target. Hito Steyerl, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, 2013. 1080p .mov file, single screen, 14 minutes.



Fig 2. Strategies for hiding in plain sight: “I AM COMPLETELY INVISIBLE.” Hito Steyerl, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, 2013. 1080p .mov file, single screen, 14 minutes.

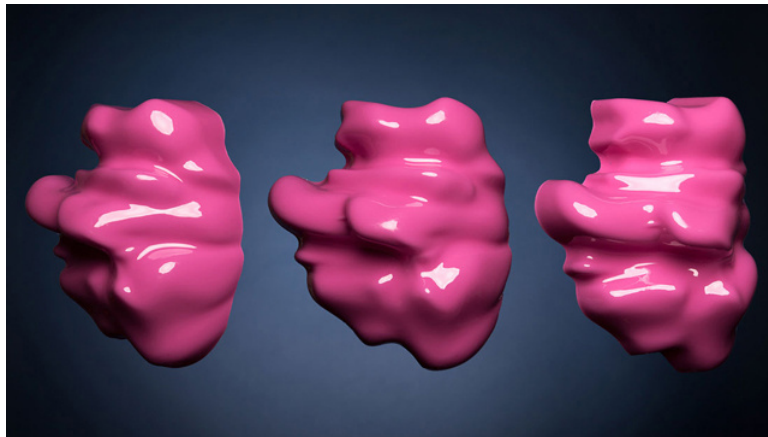


Fig 3. Zach Blas, *Facial Weaponization Suite: Fag Face Mask*, 2011-2014. Plastic, dimensions variable.



Fig 4. Laura Kurgan, *New York, September 11, 2001, Four Days Later*, 2001. Digital print from Ikonos satellite data of September 15, 2001 by Space Imaging. Scale: 1 pixel = 1 meter. Full printed image measured 17 x 6 meters.



Fig 5. The blurry opening title to Hito Steyerl's video filmed at the Venice Biennale by the user Nikolai Blau, which has been uploaded onto the video-sharing website Vimeo. Nikolai Blau, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic .HACK File*, 2014. HD video file, single screen, 12 minutes.

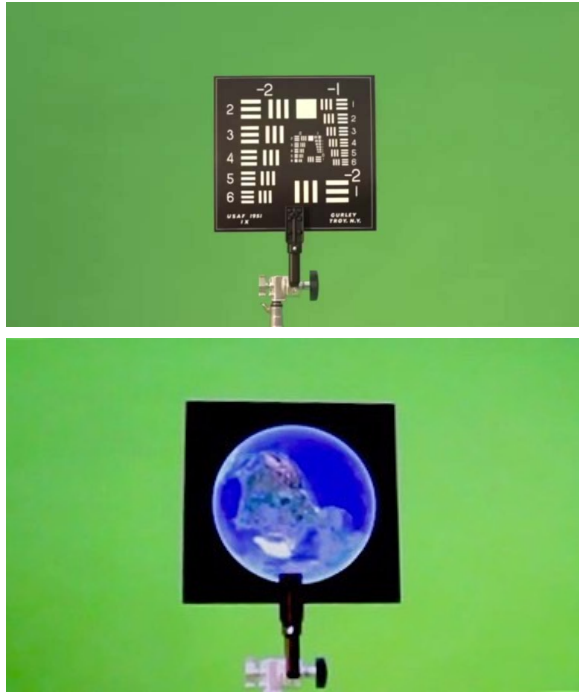


Fig 6. Visualizing closed-world politics on the portable calibration target. Hito Steyerl, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, 2013. 1080p .mov file, single screen, 14 minutes.

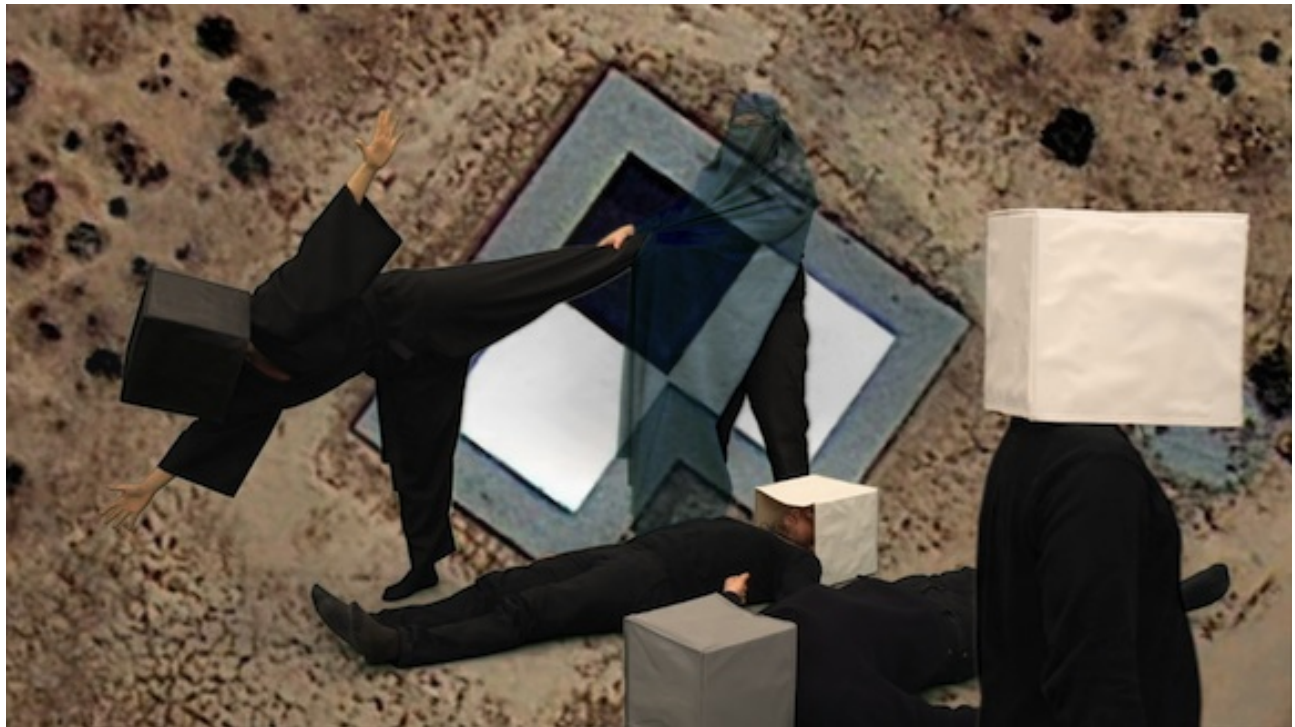


Fig 7. Shrinking down to the size of a pixel. Hito Steyerl, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, 2013. 1080p .mov file, single screen, 14 minutes.



Fig 8. The repeated demand to “shoot this for real!” at the end of the video. Hito Steyerl, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, 2013. 1080p .mov file, single screen, 14 minutes.



Fig 9. Stepping outside of the picture plane as a tactic of hiding from the camera’s gaze. Hito Steyerl, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, 2013. 1080p .mov file, single screen, 14 minutes.



Fig 10. Dissolving into the green screen through green face paint as another suggested tactic of invisibility. Hito Steyerl, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, 2013. 1080p .mov file, single screen, 14 minutes.



Fig 11. The *World of Warcraft* interface appears on the U.S. border official's computer. Jackie Goss, *Stranger Comes to Town*, 2007. HD video file, single screen, 29 minutes.

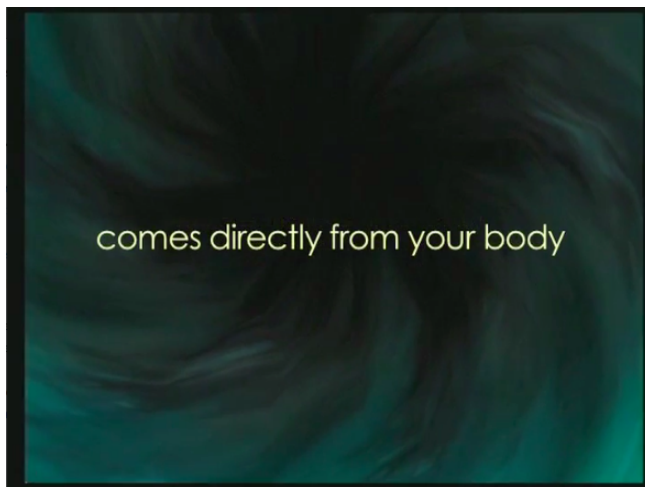
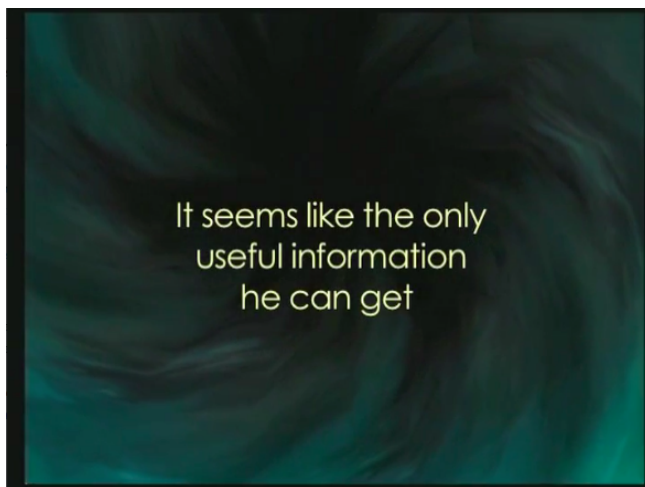


Fig 12. The video suggests that with the securitization of identity, the body becomes the most reliable source of information. Jackie Goss, *Stranger Comes to Town*, 2007. HD video file, single screen, 29 minutes.



Fig 13. A woman's avatar, identified as Mugalka, recounts her encounter with the immigration doctor. Jackie Goss, *Stranger Comes to Town*, 2007. HD video file, single screen, 29 minutes.