

freakish of all the freaks, matching her profound villainy. Nevertheless, chicken-Cleo is categorically different than the freaks whom she despises. While these freaks are continually undergoing a process of becoming-imperceptible, chicken-Cleo is unable to follow suit. Instead, she is hyper-perceptible as an object of disgust, fear, disdain, and pity by spectators both within and outside of the film's diegesis. She is not a body without organs, despite her literal mutilation, but rather an organism that has been totally stratified, made visible, rendered perceptible as a subject, and closed off from rhizomatic processes of becoming. In this light, Cleo's punishment is not so much being made into a freak as it is being made a molar aggregate, a wholly stratified organism that cannot move imperceptibly and cannot proceed rhizomatically. Indeed, the hyper-perceptibility of chicken-Cleo's monstrosity demonstrates her to not be a freak at all. Thus, despite the superficial moralism of Cleo's fate, 'freak' as a formal classification remains imperceptible in *Freaks*, as the very absence or deterritorialization of the category to which it purports to refer.

Immobility & Imperceptibility

My own personal affective response to the film makes it difficult for me to perceive the freaks in this instance as cold-blooded killers; the terror this scene might incite is instead felt as a judicious thrill. As the freaks descend on Cleo and Hercules, I feel a swell of anticipatory satisfaction. But the peace that comes with the delivery of justice is troubled by the film's final scene, in which we see Hans—now retired and living in opulence—genuinely remorseful for his part in Cleo's demise. He stammers to his former lover Frieda, who has come to console him, "Please, go away. I can't see no one." Just as Cleo's punishment can be seen as not so much being made a freak as being rendered a molar aggregate, Hans' remorse pertains not so much to his hand in her mutilation as to his role in stratifying her, in making her an organism and robbing her once and for all of her chance of becoming assemblage, of becoming-imperceptible, of becoming *one of them*. Chicken-Cleo is hyper-perceptible, and Hans "can't see no one;" perhaps Hans' role in Cleo's stratification also robs him of his own freakishness, his own imperceptibility, rendering him unable to perceive the freaks' movement as anything other than the creation of monstrous, molar forms.

The freakishness of *Freaks*' is thus also imperceptible because it does not graft easily onto

the moral equation that it itself establishes, in which the simple inversion of exterior beauty and interior monstrosity can absolve the world of evil. The mutilation of Cleo is not merely retribution for her hoodwinking and poisoning of Hans, although a certain amount of justice is no doubt at play. More than this: Cleo is not made into a freak among freaks. She is not a freak like them; she is not accepted; she is not 'one of us.' Cleo does not become imperceptible, but on the contrary, she becomes resoundingly perceptible—becomes spectacle. Despite her seeming otherness, chicken-Cleo is not a dismantled body without organs. She is a subject, "nailed down as one" and bound by the great strata of significance and subjectification (Deleuze and Guattari 159). The freaks, in other words, have made Cleo an organism; they have folded her; they have stolen her body. As such, and despite the undoubted monstrosity of chicken-Cleo, she remains welded to the strata, unable to become-imperceptible despite her new freakish status. She is a stranger to the cosmic formula of imperceptibility and becoming—and everyone can see it.

Thus *Freaks/freaks*, both the film and the multitude, move imperceptibly down lines of deterritorialization. The film's disjointed, episodic structure—far from detracting from its overall aesthetic value—is a formal dismantling of film-artefact-as-organism, perhaps even the production of a filmic body without organs. This drive towards absolute deterritorialization destabilizes the main narrative's moralistic foundation, denying a simple inversion of monstrosity and instead enabling a proliferation of freakish difference. What becomes momentarily visible, intermezzo through the rain, lightning, and muddy caravan wheels, is a vacillating, rupturing, asignifying multiplicity of molecular freaks; a *freaking*, proliferating and picking up speed so as to undermine the great molar—and moral—powers at play.

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Aaron Tucker

Against the Deterministic Moving Images of Facial Recognition Software

The moving images of facial recognition technologies (FRTs) is a biopolitical tactic that targets the bodily site of the face, operating as a mode of deterministic control by translating moving images of the face into calculable material that are adapted into contemporary governmentality.¹ While much of the current critiques of FRT are focused on privacy and surveillance, in particular as they relate to ubiquitous State and corporate big data practices, FRT's most effective form of biopolitical control is as a gatekeeper to the resources of citizenship wherein the moving images generated by FRT acts to identify, verify, and sort access to a hierarchy of resources such as wealth, health care, and education (to name only three).² As an example, *The New York Times* article "How It Feels When Software Watches You Take Tests" details the use of FRT to identify and track individu-

als within virtual testing environments. Such a case showcases how FRT operates as a moving image technology: the camera records the face within the testing environment; the software then slices that recording into still digital images which are then individually processed by the detection mechanisms of the software, which allows for the more basic facial tracking described in the article; if there are "abnormalities" the recorded moving images are then watched for suspicious behavior under the rationales of academic integrity. However, in the example of Sergine Beaubrun's experiences, her dark-skinned face was unable to be detected by the software; without a detected face, an FRT cannot progress to the identification and verification stages and hence she was unable to be "recognized" by the technology. As the article exemplifies, the test-monitoring versions of the technology struggles when operating on individuals with darker skin and/or disabilities, thereby locking entire populations by labelling such faces as abnormal or simply unrecognizable (Patil and Bromwich, 2020). Similar issues have been found when FRT is used to monitor public housing, advise on loans and mortgages, assist in job interviews, and medically diagnose skin conditions.³

The reporting from *The New York Times* adds to the abundance of research showing the varied and widespread problematics of FRT. Yet, the "errors" and lapses in recognition and malfunctioning of FRT

1. I am using the definition that the authors of the white paper "Face Technologies in the Wild" do in defining what an FRT is: "we use the term 'facial recognition technologies' as a catch all phrase to describe a set of technologies that process imaging data to perform a range of tasks on human faces, including detecting a face, identifying a unique individual, and estimating demographic attributes" (3). Erik Learned-Miller, Vicente Ordóñez, Jamie Morgenstern, and Joy Buolamwini. "Face Technologies in the Wild." Algorithmic Justice League. May 29, 2020.
2. My understanding of the concept of citizenship resources is formed in conversation with Btihaj Ajana who argues that the notion includes actual resources, such as wealth, health care, and education, but must also incorporate the fact that citizenship is "more about issues of access to resources, services, spaces and privileges" (12). In this way, biopolitical tactics like FRT can be deployed to restrict individuals and populations from even being considered for resources, to say nothing of direct access to the resources themselves. Btihaj Ajana. *Governing Through Biometrics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

3. Ginia Bellafante. "The Landlord Wants Facial Recognition in Its Rent-Stabilized Buildings. Why?" *New York Times*. March 28, 2019; "What Your Face May Tell Lenders About Whether You're Creditworthy." *The Wall Street Journal*. June 10, 2019; Charles Hymas. "AI used for first time in job interviews in UK to find best applicants." *The Telegraph*. September 27, 2019; Rimmer, Abi. "Presenting Clinical Features on Darker Skin: Five Minutes with ... Malone Mukwende." *Bmj*, vol. 369, 2020, pp. 2578.

biopolitically target many of the same marginalized individuals and populations as when the technology functions perfectly: while various reporting makes clear that the wide and undeniably invasive surveillant net of digital technologies within China is not the Orwellian nightmare it appears to be on the surface, it is certain that the haphazard linking of regional and national big data-driven tactics have normalized an ever-present digital infrastructure that is used to track, reward, and punish its citizens (Mozur, 2018). What is more alarming is how these daily acts of algorithmic governance have been heightened into necropolitical and biopolitical applications of the same technologies within the networked infrastructure used to target the Uighur Muslim minority within China (Mozur and Pelroth, 2020). Such tactics and strategies are not limited to China: I have recently written on how the United States utilizes FRT within policies such as the Biometric Air Exit to control access to citizenship resources (Tucker, 2020), which fits within the larger American increase of interwoven big data-biometric apparatuses deployed under national security that also includes ICE's enforcement of its immigration laws (Edmondson, 2019); in Ontario, Canada, the provincial police force was found to be using FRT that was connected to the controversial, massive, and extremely opaque Clearview AI dataset, without any initial oversight or auditing (Gillis and Allen, 2020).

These examples illustrate that one of the greatest tensions in a contemporary governmentality is between a desire for deterministic systems built from stable data, often supported by apparatuses like FRT, versus the affective indeterminate bodies and populations that cannot be formed into the sort of recognizable and stable categories that the State can more easily control. Reconstructing and analyzing the moving images of FRT makes clear that contemporary governmentality very often leverages the power that big data collection and processing produces; this is possible, as this paper will explain, because data is not objective but, rather, shaped by the various forces and methodologies that gather, store, and process it. In this way, it is not simply the wielding of an FRT in the examples above that showcase the technologies' problematics; FRTs' dangers are also inscribed by the infrastructures that support its development and deployment, including data practices that value uniformity and standardization in deterministic systems.

FRT Under Biopolitical Governmentality

In a basic way, Michel Foucault, within his lecture *The Birth of Biopolitics*, argues that governmentality is conservative and serves its own continued existence and power above all else (1979; 2004). In his 2010 second edition of *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, Mitchell Dean contends that although contemporary governmentality is more globally-centered than that of a 19th-century nation-state, the basic mechanisms and desires of governmentality remain: the art of governing still targets, above all, the preservation of the state by way of a "preservation of a relation of forces" (231). The boundaries of an individual's freedoms and a State's interventions set the limits for the state's practices and application of governmentality. For FRT, these limits take place at the site of the face, where the technology attempts to match each face to one that fits within a predetermined category of citizenship while labelling some as threats/risks; for those with "unrecognizable" faces, the barriers to access to citizenship resources grow even taller. My own article "Meta-Watching: Towards an Ontology of Facial Recognition Technologies" explains how the specific moving images generated and processed with FRT produce a double-watching mechanism that makes the technology especially vulnerable to biopolitical tactics.⁴ As exemplified by FRT, nation-states are deeply invested in probabilistic deterministic systems of social sorting, stable categorization, and low variance, as a means to generate control, but also as a general political principle by which to run a conservative State acting always towards its own self-preservation.

The moving images of FRT are a contemporary example of such a self-preserving tactic, one that has been made much more complex and opaque by the last decade's integration of big data, artificial intelligence (AI), and machine learning into the technology. FRT exemplifies the utilization of a narrow AI that can turn extracted data into bureaucratized materials: in their essay "The Nooscope Manifested" Matteo Pasquinelli and Vladan Joler describe contemporary big data apparatuses as fueled by a computational assembly line of brute force computing that strives for a stable model that can statically replicate different aspects of the world; this stable model is built from three

4. "Meta-Watching: Towards an Ontology of Facial Recognition Technologies" won the 2019 Student Film Studies Association of Canada award and has been submitted for forthcoming publication.

modalities, "training, classification and prediction," that aim to render the world a series of patterns that can be extracted, recognized, and generated (7). Such models are built for speed and efficiency, a process of optimization that is, by its nature, reductive; further, because machine learning and AI is built entirely on what the model already knows, it struggles to recognize and process any new element, ignoring any new element by not recognizing it, or manipulating it so that it fits the pre-existing model in some form. Given that these probabilistic models give the illusion of objectivity, it is obvious why they are eagerly included in the computational architecture of tactics such as FRT. As scholars like Meredith Broussard (2018), Safiye Umoja Noble (2018), and Cathy O'Neill (2016) have compellingly argued, these models are very often biased towards intersectional-disadvantaged populations and individuals, increasing those individuals' and populations' barriers to the resources of citizenship. Likewise, media scholars like Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2013), Orit Halpern (2015), and Lorna Roth (2019) have looked at the ways in which technologies like FRT are folded into media ecologies that leverage previous biopolitically-motivated image-making and image-circulation practices to generate deterministic and data-driven moving and still images for bureaucratic management under governmentality.

The statistical thinking central to the moving images of FRT can be enacted via big data apparatuses that not only operate under the rationales of security but also, as Judith Butler argues in *Prearious Life*, becomes means by which to produce precarity: as the examples from this essay's introduction demonstrate, contemporary biopolitical tactics and governmentality produce precarity to the point of erasure for some individuals and populations in order to generate and maintain life for other individuals and populations (xv-xx). Butler's "injurability" and precarity are expanded further by Jasbir Puar in *The Right to Maim* and the notion of "debility". Puar identifies the "right to maim," via technologies of security, that aim to debilitate, disable, and injure populations so that those populations can be deterministically measured, controlled, and folded into other parts of a biopolitical economy and system, and, echoing Butler, making them vulnerable to maiming, framing its governmental rationales within "risk, prognosis, life chances...a practice of rendering populations available for statistically likely injury" (xvii-xviii). Looking again at the example of FRT's use within testing environments, mortgage applications and health care, the moving images of FRT replies upon data that is massively ex-

tracted at the site of the body and processed through AI-driven computational models; the technology is then used to disable and injure liminal individuals and populations by way of sorting those who deserve less or lesser resources, or by ignoring, thus erasing individuals and populations altogether. Injury and debility do not have to be physical; as the current global Covid-19 pandemic has underlined, the hampering of the generational accumulation of health, wealth, and resources is another mode to make certain populations "available for statistically likely injury."

Targeting the Face

As a media technology, the face is essential to FRT's image-making within deterministic governmentality: the face is both unique enough to provide the materials needed for automation of the identification and authentication of unique identities; however, from a biopolitical perspective, the face is also generic enough to be a template such that the object of the face can be *datafied* and incorporated into large scale tactics and strategies. As Tom Gunning (1997) and others have argued, such logics underlie image-making practices dating back to the 19th-century work into eugenics by Francis Galton and signaletics by Alphonse Bertillon, continuing through into later cinematic treatments of the face.⁵ However, earlier versions of physiognomy have been made more complex by advances in computational biometrics, generating what Pugliese calls "biotypologies" which operate under "somatechnics" which he defines as "the indissociable way in which the body of a subject is always already technologized and mediated by cultural inscriptions" (322). Anna Munster, in conversation with Deleuze and Guattari, names the specific somatechnics at the site of the face as facialization, "a system of codifying bodies according to a centralized conception of subjectivity and agency in which the face, literally or metaphorically, is the conduit for signifying, expressing and organizing the entire body" (122). As Munster argues, however, such a system leaves little space for the unique combinations of machine and human interaction wherein affect is "a process of composition that is sustained through a relation between body and expression, representation, map and knowledge" (139).

5. I have a forthcoming chapter on this topic titled "Photogénie and Facial Recognition Software" in *Face Forward: New Approaches to the Face on Screen*. Ed. Alice Maurice. Edinburgh University Press, 2022.

This lack is especially apparent in biopolitical applications of FRT, wherein the computational models that enact FRT's vision completely eradicate the affective face so that it, and the body it represents, can be more easily deterministically rendered and controlled. Further, drawing from Levinas, Butler explains "[t]o respond to the face, to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life, or, rather the precariousness of life itself...It has to be an understanding of the precariousness of the Other" (134). The tension in confronting another's face is that it also recalls one's own precarity, which biopolitical imaging of the face leverages as the fearful rationales needed to implement strategies of security that utilize FRT. Yet, as discussed in the introduction to this essay, representations and circulations of faces are also essential to an individual or population being recognized and given access to the resources of citizenship: if a face is more able to be seen, it is more likely to be accepted as human, and therefore have value within biopolitics (141-2). This paradox of visibility as it relates to the face is core to the problematics within the moving images of FRT: the presence or absence of faces within the datasets used in machine learning to train the technology greatly influences how "visible" a face is within an FRT; yet, making one's self visible to such an apparatus, via enrollment in a data system and/or making oneself available to an FRT-enabled camera, also means making one's self a potential Other who can be biopolitically targeted and sorted. In this way, the moving images of FRT perfectly illustrate the crux of contemporary governmentality: the flux between insecurity and security, stable and chaotic, which pits governmentality's rationales towards determinism against indeterminate systems of bodily affect. Biopolitics within governmentality acts at the thresholds of sites of local indeterminacy, particularly affect; big data apparatuses, like FRT, attempt to contain that indeterminacy so that it can be made logical within governmentality.

Disruptive Relationality & Bodily Affect

René Dietrich proposes an alternative to this system which she calls "disruptive relationality," defined as "centering principles of relationality [so that those principles] exceed what officially gets to count as political in settler colonial contexts" (68). Such an approach utilizes the so-called chaos marked as dangerous within governmentality so that such zones resist creating hierarchies of life, and instead

examines who or what is given the power to define and reinforce "life" and "how" that power is enacted. This thinking is expanded by Indigenous AI's position paper which articulates "a multiplicity of Indigenous knowledge systems and technological practices that can and should be brought to bear on the 'question of AI'" (Lewis, Jason Edward et al, 4). When confronting FRT, this does not mean making more diverse data sets or programming teams: disruptive relationality leverages the chaotic and unstable elements of life to generate an entirely new conception of systems beyond governmentality, such that the indeterminacy of bodies is allowed and encouraged to exist in complex and affective relation to other bodies, species, and the land completely outside of the prior models and data-body relationships. Such disruptive relationality surfaces in the 'Ōlelo Programming initiative, a project translating the English within programming language into indigenous Hawaiian languages (Muzyka, 2018), as well as the futurity-driven work of digital artist and filmmaker Skawennati.⁶ While not directly grappling with FRT, these examples show how Indigenous epistemologies aligned with disruptive relationality can produce novel spaces to engage with current technologies as well as imagine alternate uses and futures outside of biopolitical governmentality.

Further initial materials for resistance to biopolitical applications of FRT can be found in the works of Lisa Gitelman, Virginia Jackson, and Yanni Loukissas. In their introduction to the collection *Raw Data is an Oxymoron*, Gitelman and Jackson stress that one of the first steps to such resistance is recognizing that data is always "cooked" by the productions of knowledge that generate its existence; data does not emerge from the world, but rather is gathered by various operations and methodologies that themselves are structured by normative powers that may well be invested in a larger governmentality. It is therefore essential to look at the big data biometrics, its models, and its "conditions of inquiry, conditions that are at once material, social, and ethical" (4). Gitelman, Jackson, and Loukissas all go to lengths to underline that data are not singular but are pluralistic by nature, and that the contempo-

6. Skawennati's work is wide-ranging but I am thinking specifically here of her co-establishing of AbTeC with Jason Edward Lewis: "Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace is an Aboriginally determined research-creation network whose goal is to ensure Indigenous presence in the web pages, online environments, video games, and virtual worlds that comprise cyberspace." (<http://abtec.org/#about>. Accessed January 6, 2021).

rary combination of technological and biological material present in big data are also potential spaces of intervention: Loukissas, specifically, insists that if big data biometrics like FRT aims to collect everything on a subject to operationalize it, that data also contain local and situated matter and knowledge that is unique and specific to the subject. While biopolitical applications of FRTs are invested in principles of reduction and simplification, a focus on the locality of data, in particular at the site of the affective face, demands a high allowance for indeterminacy in order to better reflect and respect the lived experiences of those bodies and populations within big data apparatuses.

Such thinking can be combined with Dietrich's "disruptive relationally" as well as further writing from David Mitchell and S. Synder's work in 2019 *The Matter of Disability*. The authors re-situate Butler and Puar's writing on precarity and debility in conversation with Karen Barad (2007) and the understanding that matter is forever in a "complex, interactive role in the configuration of knowledge and the world" (16) wherein matter is forever interactive and iteratively relational to all other matter, defined by "intra-agential encounters" (16). Like Barad, the authors focus on the specific agency of disabled bodies that is rooted in the indeterminacy of matter and the chaos of inter-material relations that are opposed to the human attempts to deterministically control the world and its bodies/matter/material. Further, such bodies are also a corporeal framework that are themselves rich with networked and affective materials in resistance, localities that make the datasets within FRT and its training team with potential narratives and relations. Focusing on the body, and the face specifically, captured within the moving images of FRT, reverses the dynamics within Munster's understanding of facialization and allows the face to be emblematic of an individual's lived materiality; the system of codifying bodies within FRT is re-engineered such that the face is a conduit for the body's indeterminacy and affect. Recognizing the interconnected chaos of affective bodies means following the principles laid out in work such as Sasha Costanza-Chock's *Design Justice* which advocates resisting how "larger systems—including norms, values, and assumptions—are encoded in and reproduced through the design of sociotechnical systems" (20); this thinking is expanded further by the Design Justice Network, whose principles resist the end products of deterministic systems and instead demand focus on the impact of technologies, such as FRT, on communities and the individual bodies they are ap-

plied to.⁷

Such a view also demands that we integrate the ways in which AI models are cooked and disrupt our understandings of technologies like FRT by way of unearthing the localities within. In a straightforward way, it means reclaiming the faces rendered data within FRT, pulling them from the black-box mechanics of its training and deployments, and seeing them as individual entities; for "unrecognizable" faces, it means offering systems that do not template and reduce faces under the rationales of automation, speed, and efficiency. Doing so means grappling with the individual differences that each complex body and system of affect creates, alongside the biopolitical manipulation of affects at the level of population as a form of both understanding and resisting biopolitics and governmentality. It is at these sites of quantum indeterminacy, which network in relationally and specific corporeal (potentially alternate) frameworks, where we might begin to establish possible strategies and tactics that, within the flux and game of governmentality itself, grant tools and resistance against the damaging aspects of biopolitical and necropolitical acts. When confronting a biopolitical tactic like FRT, a high tolerance for locality and indeterminacy allows a potential break beyond the predictive control of biopolitical regimes while also providing future resistive paths that also point beyond governmentality to imagine life beyond nonhuman species in relation with the land and the integration of technologies into human life. This tolerance resists neoliberal calls for diversity and instead insists on equity, and forms of resistance and care that are in direct opposition to the vast majority of FRT's deployments.

Conclusion

Initial resistive tools and strategies against FRT take the form of wider public knowledge of the moving images the technology generates, leading to effective and transparent policy and regulation; they may take on more individual actions like data pollution and data camouflage, overflowing the systems with an excess of information, mirroring affect, such that big data algorithms are unable to make the bodies under its vision clear and knowable. In further opposition to big data apparatuses, this

7. The full list of the Design Justice Network Principles can be found at <https://designjustice.org/read-the-principles> (Accessed January 6, 2021).

tolerance of flow and locality jams the systems that rely on stable categories, making it so that no one category, or series of interlocking categories, is capable of any operative linear knowledge. There is already a sense of this emerging in IBM's discontinuing of its FRT development and Microsoft's halting of their FRT program, as well as American cities' whole-scale banning of such technologies (Hamilton, 2020); this can also be seen in actions like MIT moving its 80 Million Tiny Images database offline in the wake of criticism about its misogynistic and racist data categorizations (Quach, 2020).

However, the ultimate solution, in following a disruptive relationality rooted in affect alongside quantum indeterminacy, is a whole-scale shift away from prior forms of governmentality and its self-preserving forms of power. Again, this requires a foregrounding of equity and abolishment of tactics and strategies that bring violence and/or gatekeeping on the resources attached to citizenship. The seeds for this can be seen in the recent calls to defund and abolish police departments across North America and reallocate those funds to local and intra-agential areas of life that have as great an impact on public safety and potential "injury," according to Butler (public education, mental health, food scarcity, affordable housing), as security-driven apparatuses. Not coincidentally, law enforcement apparatuses have long been incredible consumers of FRT, at the forefront of their use in asymmetrical application on the populations they have been tasked to protect (Electronic Frontier Foundation, 2017). While abolishment of FRT is the most clear-cut and effective solution, the first steps towards this are diverting capital and authority from those power centres that are rationalized and operationalized against perceived threats and behaviours, thereby rearranging and replacing the dominant logics of determinate categorization and hierarchization that have been in place far too long.

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Works Cited continued on page 61

Dany Jacob

Meme-ing Jay Gatsby or Dandyism à l'Américaine: Cultural Declination of *The Great Gatsby*



"If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him."

— F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (4)

The character of Jay Gatsby fascinates beyond his century and era of creation. The recent film production of *The Great Gatsby* by Baz Luhrmann (2013) indicates a renewed interest in F. Scott Fitzgerald's glamorous illustration of America's Roaring Twenties. The allure resides in Jay Gatsby's personae and tragic fate of a dandy, a distinction often

misconstrued to identify a pompous man who pays excessive attention to his attire. Luhrmann's *Great Gatsby* recontextualizes this traditional depiction of dandyism as a caricature of masculinity through Leonardo DiCaprio's play, revitalizing the philosophical and aesthetic qualities upon which dandyism is built and reiterating its cultural importance in our

Conclusion

I wish to emphasize how much proxy poetics invoke the spectator and their relation to the “server.” If I am to argue this convincingly, I must offer my particular experience of the piece and, in doing so, admit my coordinates, my positions, my memories, and my experience. I had no direct contact with the 2006 bombings in Beirut. I was studying in Manhattan when the September 11 attacks occurred but experienced the event predominantly through the media. With its performance of watching a hyper-media event, Cherri’s piece invoked me through my own sense memories of absent-presence and present-absence. Cherri’s inclusion of the 9/11 attacks with the 2006 war, announced at a distance through the radio and the open window, synchronizes his video with a global time of impending, vampiric crises.

Though located only 7.5 miles north, I heard of the strike from a chorus of news reports. These blasted from the cathode-tube televisions in the common spaces located at opposite corners of the donut-shaped building and were joined by private TVs and radios intermingling in the building’s shaft. My sense memory reveals that the import of the event was not as immediately cognizable or disturbing as the synchronization and affective consensus of confused and uncertain voices over the same few images on loop. The texture of voices resonated in contrast to the dampened, muted sounds of carpeted chambers and passages of an otherwise quiet, still morning. I seem to remember a window with a languorous curtain very much like that in the video bringing breezes from elsewhere. The synchronized media time established then seems to have held both globally and as a moment of history in which time does not move forward. Endeavors to strike hopeful peace deals in the Middle East have sorely stalled if not been completely abandoned. The living ones remain so only with a revolutionary consciousness of the dead; life feels like the gift given into the care of proxies tasked with hospitality and care in the present.

In this essay, I argue that documentary proxy poetics evoke neither empathy nor identification, those common values attributed to fiction, as primary concerns. Cherri’s video performs exactly how identification and presence have limits. Instead, coordinates and correspondences that evidence the positionality of the viewer allow for a differentiated and complex understanding of one’s relation and complicity, bringing a panoply of viewing positions together without

compromising the multi-faceted and multi-valent social and geographic positions made local through the senses. The viewer’s invocation into an in many ways old-fashioned hall of mirrors on the contrary suggests an urgent ethical imperative of accountability and care for the other.

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