The Politics of Ethical Witnessing: The Participatory Networks of 9/11 Media Culture

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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September 2010

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Chapter One

Convergence, Interactivity, and an Ethics and Politics of Seeing Media

Part One

Rationale: Labor, Bodies, and Vision in Encounters with Media

In "The Gaze of Biocinema," Kiarina Kordela proposes an alternative model of cinematic spectatorship to account for current state of global capitalism. Applying Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's notions of immaterial and affective labor, Louis Althusser's model of ideology, and the concept of the gaze borrowed from Lacanian psychoanalysis[1], Kordela forwards the concept of biocinema. The biocinematic experience, she contends, occurs when spectators are interpellated as materializations of immaterial or affective labor power by the gaze of the Big Other, the capitalist means of production, which constitutes spectators as laboring-subjects under its gaze. Cinema, as a component of the culture industry in empire, captures spectators' feelings, affects and responses, thereby refiguring them as affective laborers who, through their interaction with a component of the culture industry, work on its behalf when they look at its spectacle. Through Kordela's account, the working of Empire through media appears as a seamless totality, fully functioning in its ability to produce laboring subjects in global capitalism. The possibility for escape, excess or resistance to this model seems unlikely, for

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[1] The gaze, according to Lacan, is that which looks at the subject from outside, the Big Other which forces the looked-upon to see their own lack, to experience oneself as a "blind spot" or gap within the symbolic order. In other words, I can never see you from the place that you see me, and the affect of this realization is profoundly terrifying and anxiety-inducing.

[T]he gaze always emerges not from the subject but from the object; yet in biopolitical production, the object in question becomes the means of production which, due to their universal (global) character, entail a gaze capable of seeing the totality of the world order (162).

In this model, the screen stands in as the gaze of global capitalism, and performs the biopolitical function of regulating, disciplining, and constructing a body, generating affect and re-territorializing it as affective labor. The cinematic apparatus, or technologies of production and image construction, serve as the "mechanisms of biopower" (153), which enable this process. There is, in Kordela's approach, only one type of gaze produced by this screen, that of global capitalism, and hence only one type of subject formation occurring, that of the emergence of the affective laborer. The outcome seems unavoidable, for, argues Kordela, biopolitical society, and the instantiation of biocinema, entails "collapse of the opposition inside-outside" and "collapse of the traditional dualism regarding power" (160). Kordela is referring to biopower/empire's erosion of any notion of the Cartesian cogito (existence as constituted through recognition of self-awareness), for, as she demonstrates, we come to "be" in global capitalism through processes that eclipse an inner sense of self. If inner spaces no longer exist as such, or have been wholly captured by the workings of biopower, then it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine encounters with media that entail any kind of affective experience beyond or in opposition to global capitalism's operations of working.

As a response to projects such as Kordela's this project revisits ethical theories of trauma grounded in the concept of witnessing. With an emphasis on media viewership and interactivity, I assess the ethics and politics of convergence culture. Returning to early formulations of the cinematic apparatus in the 1970s, which used Lacanian psychoanalysis as their starting point, I will trace the possibilities, and limitations, offered by the current landscape of media convergence. Some of the key questions that I will address in this project include: Are there alternative models for imagining a gaze, vision, and subject formation in the current moment of global capitalism? Should there be? Are there sites, spaces, and formations of media culture that allow or enable different sorts of approaches to mediated ethics of vision to emerge? Are there sites that foreclose upon such moments? How is media convergence implicated in the processes of ethical witnessing?

This project attempts to map constructions of mediated subjectivity and visual culture through structures of spectatorship, which now must be expanded to include interactive and participatory "new" media platforms. I begin with an application of Lacanian theories of viewing with Emmanuel Levinas' phenomenological ethics to discuss the ways in which the witnessing-subject, constructed as a product of mediated encounters, can be produced when confronted with the traumatic outside of the other's presence. I pay specific attention to the ways technologies of viewing and engaging/interacting with media work in tandem to structure and shape preferred modes of viewing/looking, and the ways that interactive platforms converging with film have ethical and political implications for the formation of subjects.

In this project, I use the concept of "participatory network" to analyze and examine a number of mediated genres dealing with or responding to the events of September 11th, 2001. I borrow the notion of network from Manuel Castells, who defines a network as "a set of interconnected nodes. A network has no center, just nodes. Nodes may be of varying relevance for network" (3). I value this definition, for it speaks to the sense in which discrete media texts, such as films, are increasingly intertwined and linked to other media, such as websites, fan videos, reviews and online articles, news broadcasts, and You Tube playlists. Connectivity, in this manner, builds a milieu of meaning and interactivity not limited to the textual politics and/or conditions of production that define a singular source. Moreover, the primary text's significance is modified through its involvement with other nodes, and these nodes may be of varying relevance when taking the network as a whole into account.

I chose the events of 9/11 as the historical/cultural moment organizing this dissertation for several reasons. First, the events of 9/11 perpetuated two ongoing global wars in the Middle East and profoundly influenced the increase of security and police power in the United States under the USA Patriot Act. Second, the aftermath of these events in terms of inter-subjective relations between the United States and the Middle East has been palpable.[2] Images of terrorist suspects, hijackers, and "9/11 masterminds" populate this news milieu as well.[3] Judith Butler has written about the ethical implications of these visual faces coming to personify evil in *Precarious Life*. An entire security industry, moreover, has cropped up around concerns of tracking, policing,

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[2] http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/11/bush.speech.text/index.html
[3] http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/14/us/14terror.html

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preventing, and capturing terrorists.[4] Kelly Gates has discussed the racial implications of

this industry's commitment to surveilling and catching the "faces of terror."[5] These issues

point to the importance of recognizing 9/11 as having serious implications for thinking

through human relations in a global world.

Third, the events of 9/11 experienced, and continue to experience, a highly

mediated existence. Footage of the towers falling is by now iconic, and can be seen in

news coverage, You Tube clips, and in documentary films. Popular films,

documentaries, and other media have variously responded to these events. Offerings

include Hollywood films (*Fahrenheit 9/11, World Trade Center, United 93, Cloverfield*),

"alternative" accounts (*Loose Change, 9/11: The Road to Tyranny*), special programs on

the History and Discovery Channels, and an Internet habitat teeming with analysis and

speculation regarding the catalyst of the attacks. There is even a forum,

scholarsfor9/11truth.org, devoted to giving academics a space to discuss and debate the

veracity of the 9/11 Truth Commission's analysis of the events. I use the notion of

participatory network to take into account the extra-textual features that have come to

define media content, and constitute important factors in the production, distribution and

exhibition-sites of these media, including interactive online opportunities, websites

supplying additional information, playlists. I explore these instantiations of the

participatory network through three genres of 9/11-themed media: the monster/disaster

movie *Cloverfield*, the so-called alternative account or "conspiracy theory" genre

exemplified in the work of independent filmmaker Alex Jones, and the documentary film

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[4] See Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*.

[5] Gates, Kelly. "Identifying the 9/11 'Faces of Terror': The Promise and Problem of Facial Recognition Technology," *Cultural Studies* vol. no. 20 issue no. 4/5 (2006): 417-440

Control Room, co-produced by U.S. and Egyptian production companies. Through each of these case studies, I analyze and map the ethical and political implications of spectatorship as a mode of witnessing, as well as participation and audience involvement in convergent media milieus. My primary concern throughout this project focuses on the implications of the 9/11 participatory network in the structuring of spectatorship and viewing experience with regards to experiencing difference.

Part Two

Situating a Theory of Viewing in Film Studies

1970s screen studies looked to psychoanalysis, primarily Lacanian concerns with the register of the imaginary qua-ego and subject formation, to discuss the ways in which the camera, theatre space, and other mechanisms and modes structuring the cinematic experience contributed to and shaped particular forms of subjectivity. Given the paradigms at play, this typically involved discussion of fetishism and objectification, which Laura Mulvey famously critiqued with regards to the male gaze and on-screen eroticization of the female body. In these early dialogues, early film technology was implicated in the (re) production and maintenance of neo-Hegelian subjects, trapped in the master/slave dialectic of (mis) recognition and identification, a process which, arguably, necessarily entails processes of dominance and subordination, capture and apprehension of the other qua-object. Moreover, the structural features of the cinematic apparatus were implicated for their production and maintenance of subjects-in-ideology. For early Lacanian film theorists working in the Imaginary, such as Christian Metz, Jacques Lacan's "Mirror Stage" essay was paramount, and "the reception of film was an

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imaginary experience that had the effect of binding the subject to its interpellation in the symbolic order" (McGowan 2004, xiii). This imaginary process of identification was used to argue that cinema functions as an auxiliary mechanism constituting and hailing subjects in ideology, by way of their imaginary misrecognition in film. Louis Althusser's notion of ideology, that "all ideology hails or interpellates individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject," largely informs these studies (Althusser 1971, 173). Thus, according to early Lacanian film theorists utilizing the role of the Imaginary, film creates ideological subject positions, and subsequently hails spectators as subjects-in-ideology through misrecognition. According to Jean-Louis Baudry, for example, cinema

> Constitutes the subject by the illusory determination of a central location-whether this be that of God or any other substitute. It is an apparatus designed to obtain a precise ideological effect, necessary to the dominant ideology: creating a fantasmization of the subject, it collaborates with a marked efficacy in the maintenance of idealism (Baudry 1985, 540).

Film, then, becomes ideology's accomplice, deceiving subjects into identifying with various subject positions. This approach leaves no room for resistance, and construes film as a wholly ideological machine, completely implicated and perfectly functioning, in the perpetuation of dominant culture. Early apparatus theorists such as Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean-Louis Baudry argue that the cinematic structure establishes a centered subject and privileges the eye and sight as modes of understanding. Baudry understands the spectator position inscribed by the text to constitute a permutation of

linear, singular perspective, which creates a centered viewing subject who constructs

unified meaning. The cinematic apparatus is patently ideological, he argues, in the sense

that it forms a hegemonic viewing subject. This mode of viewing allegedly privileges the

eye, understood by Baudry as interchangeable with a certain omniscient, omnipresent,

and disembodied gaze. As a "support and instrument for ideology," the cinematic

apparatus creates an ideological spectator through its positioning of:

> The illusory delimitation of a central location-whether this be that of a god or any
>
> other substitute. It is an apparatus destined to obtain a precise ideological effect,
>
> necessary to the dominant ideology creating a phantasmatization of the subject, it
>
> collaborates with marked efficacy in the maintenance of idealism (Baudry,
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> "Ideological Effects" 295).

The primary ideological work of cinema, for Baudry, lies in its ability to structure the

look, understood as an extension of the eye, in a way that produces a centered subject

capable of gaining mastery over the world through this look. Thus, by creating a world

which can supposedly be "known through the senses," the cinematic apparatus constructs

a stable, transparent reality conveyable through representations, as well as a stable,

rational subject capable of unambiguously understanding it (Baudry, "Apparatus" 305).

The camera, moreover, perpetuates "the dominant ideology" by equating "the real

with the visible," thus establishing hegemony of sight and transparent meaning of images.

The "real," in this account, becomes indistinguishable from imaginary identification as a

result of the cinematic apparatuses' ideological work. Further, this structured way of

looking allegedly produces "a blind confidence in the visible, the hegemony, gradually

acquired, of the eye over the other senses, the taste and need society has to put itself in spectacle" (Comolli 126). What Comolli's analysis makes apparent is that his conception of the cinematic apparatus' ability to structure a spectatorial experience is limited to the realm of the imaginary, or the function of images in their own right. No space is left for theorizing an excess of the image, an affect or experience of viewing-as-event, not limited to representation and its ideological contours. Christian Metz's analysis of cinematic language fundamentally understood the signifying semiotic system. Represented images in film, he explains, do not transparently reflect a stable reality. Rather, they construct a new state of affairs infused with an ideological dimension, as a result of being filtered through the structural apparatus. Even the most "realistic" cinema, he argues, does not show spectators real events, but rather those "refracted through an ideological point of view, entirely thought out, signifying from beginning to end. Meaning is not sufficient; there must also be signification" (37). Metz's analysis raises two important issues. First, he implies that meaning is not transferable on its own, it must attach itself to an inherently ideological, signifying system. Second, although the vehicle is necessary, the meaning nonetheless remains a separate entity.

Early film theorists supply useful insights in dealing with signifying structures of visual media. Although the structural components of their theories are, I argue, still useful, the manner in which they misread Lacan's notion of the gaze led to ideological arguments that should be challenged. Moreover, these theorists were dealing primarily with points of identification produced through encounters with narrative or "classical" Hollywood cinema, a genre that, owing to matters of technological and aesthetic

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specificity, perhaps indicate theoretical limits to a particular moment in history, insofar as

they address limited forms of aesthetic convention and narrative mode of enunciation and

address. Although ethical concerns regarding looking and the apparatus were certainly

relevant for this particular cross-section of media history, the insights provided do not

neatly map onto to contemporary forms of film/movie culture, in which new concerns

such as home viewing spaces, digital production and effects enhancement, and media

convergences, repurposing and interfacing pose significant developments which warrant

different critical foci and interventions. Some scholars, such as Barbara Klinger, have

come close to contending that proliferations of modes of viewing and experiencing

cinema have all but rendered "classical" or hegemonic modes of theorizing the cinematic

apparatus obsolete.[6] Conventional apparatus theory relies on the now challenged

understanding of the gaze as located in the register of the Lacanian imaginary, thereby

functioning as an attempt to gain mastery over the images, qua objects, on the screen.[7]

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[6] Klinger does mention matters of subjectivity with regards to the sort of technophile subject interpellated by advertisements for home theatres and other aspects of home viewing culture. The subject produced by this niche market is a sort of post-9/11 active viewer: white, monied, male, proficient in operating sophisticated forms of home technology, and harboring apprehension and wariness towards the public sphere, opting instead to "bunker the home" with an array of specialized, privatized devices that "domesticate" cinema culture for the individual consumer.

[7] In part, this project draws inspiration from work that has explored alternative conceptions of media, power, and subjectivity. Ronald W. Greene, for example, utilizes Michel Foucault's notion of pastoral power to discuss how techniques, protocols and practices of proper citizenship were tutored to viewers of early YMCA films, and the ways in which the portability and convenience of 16mm film, as well as accessibility of space, contributed to the feasibility and scope of this project. This analysis focuses on space and technology, and the role of facilitator narration, instead of solely on the content of the films. Scholars of media convergence, such as Henry Jenkins, Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, and Mark Andrejevic, also theorize ways in which subject positions, whether democratically empowered, tech-savvy consumer citizens, paranoid, suspiciously vigilant security-citizens doing unpaid work for the U.S. military, or fan laborers adding value to the culture industry, are formed through encounters with visual media. New media technologies and platforms, such as online interactivity, Photoshop, and You Tube, contribute to the formation of this process. The work of Michel Foucault occupies a prominent place in many of these accounts. The concept of governance at a distance, and regimes of self-governance, has proven particularly informative and helpful in theorizing the power dynamics involved in the ways in which viewers learn the techniques and practices for managing their lives, and performing the proper protocols and rituals of

As discussed by early film theorists such as Laura Mulvey, the objectification/oppression of women and maintenance of patriarchal gender roles partially stem from the mechanism of looking structured and encouraged through the aesthetic and technical apparatus of classical Hollywood cinema. Using Lacanian psychoanalysis as a cornerstone of her argument, Mulvey famously contended that film spectators were tutored to look-to "gaze"-in a manner predicated upon the hegemony of the ego, to subsume bodies onscreen as objects to be known, comprehended, and understood by the viewer.[8]

Responding to Mulvey and others' Lacanian analysis of spectatorship, which focused on the oppressive and subsuming nature of looking with regards to cinema, media scholars made pointed criticisms of the generic "spectator." Stuart Hall's "Encoding/Decoding" article ensued. Some recent studies, however, have made the case for a revival of Lacanian-inspired screen studies, on the grounds that early applications suffered from a crucial misreading. It is from this theoretical basis that my methodology

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citizenship, through their interactions and involvements with convergence culture. These analyses focus on the work that audiences do with interactive technologies as opposed to the nature of their messages. Foucault's work on governmentality has been indispensable in supplying a means to theorize operations of power in interactions with new media technologies, as have notions of immaterial and affective labor, and their functions in global capitalism, inspired in part by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*. Tiziana Terranova, for example, discusses the ways in which network culture contributes to a "social factory" predicated upon the postmodern, post-Fordist erosion of discrete spheres of activity, leading to expansion of labor time and the emergence of new forms of uncompensated labor (activities such as fans' blogging on film websites would fall into this category). These perspectives, when read alongside the thoughts of audience labor-scholars such as Shawn Shimpach, inform the manner in which what Shimpach calls "working-watching" is implicated in the immaterial or affective labor that viewing subjects perform in the process of citizen-subject identity formation, as well as the (arguably material) modes of labor undertaken through interactive interaction and participatory culture.

[8] This fundamental problem of vision is precisely the sort of recognition that has been critiqued as unethical by Levinasians such as Kelly Gates. This argument will be explored in more depth in upcoming pages.

in studying the participatory network of 9/11 media culture: Neo-Lacanian

psychoanalysis combined with its ethical counterparts in trauma studies and Levinasian

phenomenology. In other words, I will examine the ethics of looking, and their political

implications, through the relationship between the real/symbolic in contrast to the

imaginary/symbolic.

Slavoj Zizek argues that a dangerous error of totalitarian magnitude occurs when

the Real-the traumatic gap in the symbolic order-is reified into some concrete, positive,

tangible entity thought to be rich with absolute meaning. This process is dangerous, for

this fetish object is frequently rendered abject and labeled the root cause of all social ills,

leading to calls for its expulsion. Atrocities befall, of course, when groups of people

come to embody this "traumatic kernel" or abject remainder. It is precisely this type of

concern that screen studies' return to Lacan is dealing with: can we construct a theory of

spectatorship without oppressive, objectifying, or subsuming/Hegelian forms of

fetishism? If so, what are the stakes? Are questions of viewer positioning, looking and

spectatorship, and meaning still relevant or important in the wake of the audience (and

now, audience labor) turn in media studies?

In *The End of Dissatisfaction,* Todd McGowan argues that a cultural shift,

enabled by the comingling and co-constitutive rise postmodernism and plurality with

global capitalism, has contributed to the formation of a cynical society fixated on

enjoyment and stimulation, concerned only with surface meanings and appearances, and

subsequently hostile to interpreting or searching for greater meaning behind those (often

consumer/commodity-oriented) pleasures. McGowan's analysis if similar to Zizek's

critique of cynical enjoyment, the affect constitutive of a subject position he calls "homo sucker" (*Welcome to the Desert* 83). Homo sucker, he contends, has so deeply lost touch with any notion of meaning, causes or values that, as a defense mechanism of sorts, he partakes in all that dominant ideology offers up, while at the same time fantasizing that she is intellectually superior to it, and thus immune to its interpellation. McGowan proposes a return to psychoanalytic film theory influenced by Lacanian apparatus theory. McGowan argues that the initial postmodern break with Lacan was founded on suspicion of the imaginary and filmic images as ideological engines, the resulting postmodern era has, paradoxically, embraced the image-as-plentitude while dropping the interpretive codes allowing one to make sense and meaning of said images. He locates the rise of this subject in the postmodern away from big meta-narratives, in which growing disdain for film theory and preference for audience centric models germinated.

Rather than exemplifying a break with the imaginary, like the post-Lacanians wished to bring about, the turn to postmodernism has, ironically, resulted in overvaluation of the image. Moreover, the move away from big narratives and toward audience-centered modes of understanding media viewing and uses denies critics an interpretive framework that would allow sense to be made of the phenomenon. While subjects imagine themselves subversive through their ironic/cynical investment in the imaginary, they are actually compliant with the escapism that marks the underside of the symbolic order, with both parts of the dyad constituting an integrated ideological coin. Shawn Treat, for example, has used this theoretical framework to analyze the spate of post-9/11 superhero-themed popular movies, which he argues depend, for their success,

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upon the cultural normalization of cynical enjoyment. From a Foucauldian standpoint, Mark Andrejevic describes the process as "we are invited to participate in staging the scene of our own passive submission-and to view such participation as a form of power sharing" (15).

Identification in the imaginary, according to McGowan, weakens communicative and social bonds, for "we begin to believe on the basis of images we identify with rather than arguments we find convincing" (*Dissatisfaction* 64). Thus, we return to vulnerability in the face of ideological interpellation. "The image, much more than the word, inspires trust, and this trust is precisely what ideology hopes to engender" (*Dissatisfaction* 65). The situation is perhaps even more dire than in the modern age, when scholars such as Mulvey and Metz problematized the link between ideology and imagery, for now, in the postmodern age, we have abdicated the codes and frameworks allowing us to critique the power of the image. Thus, the ideological power of the image ceases to be circumscribed by interpretation, allowing it to metastasize and rein supreme, unchecked.

Attempts to revive Lacanian film theory hinge on displacing a focus on the imaginary, and returning to the Real. For Lacan, the Real represents a point of intrusion or disruption in the symbolic order, an intervention that cannot be made sense of with the preexisting symbolic codes. The Real, McGowan, argues, has been obfuscated by the postmodern turn to the image, which stresses its whole, complete meaning, leaving no possibility for the unknown, unfamiliar, or nonsensical to invade. Thus, the postmodern era forecloses on the possibility of The Real, and of interpretation, by positing that all

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meaning is always, already visually apparent. Lacan, further, asserts that the act of

interpretation involves trying to contextualize the Real and make sense of it. In *Seminar*

IX, for example, he explains that

> It is false to say…that interpretation is open to all meanings under the pretext that
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> it is a question only of the connection of signifier to signifier, and consequently of
>
> an uncontrollable connection. Interpretation is not open to any meaning. This
>
> would concede to those who rise up against the character of uncertainty in
>
> analytic interpretation that, in effect, all interpretations are possible, which is
>
> patently absurd. The fact that I have said that the effect of interpretation is to
>
> isolate the subject of a kernel, of non-sense, does not mean that the interpretation
>
> itself is nonsense (249-250).

For Lacan, a crucial mistake involves confusing the process of interpretation,

which involves dealing with the Real, a nonsensical notion vis-à-vis the symbolic order,

with taking the meaning of the interpretive process itself to be nonsense. This slippage,

for McGowan, has characterized the cynicism of the postmodern age and its rejection of

meaning. Ergo, a proper reading of Lacan, and uptake of the Real in spectatorship

studies, would reintroduce meaning and interpretation's value. McGowan understands

this radical Real to involve terror and ecstasy, fundamental challenges to the subject in

ideology. Ultimately, he posits, confronting this "ecstatic, often horrific Real" may

supply "new coordinates for the subject" that challenge current ideological subjectivities

in the symbolic order (xxvii-xxviii). The Real, a gap in the symbolic order, is thus a void

that is paradoxically rich with constitutive power, having the ability to reform and disrupt

the existing ideological order. Thus, confronting and acknowledging the Real has the potential to form new subjects.

The fact that ideology needs the reinforcement of film at all indicates that it possesses Real gaps, insofar as it is not closed and completely determined. Therefore, acknowledging and facing these Real gaps might allow us to tap into their rich constitutive and progressive potential. "If ideology works so well and if the subject is nothing but an ideology," McGowan stipulates, referencing classical film theory, "then we might ask why ideology requires the filmic experience to function as its imaginary supplement." It does, he asserts, because of the presence of empty spaces in ideology.

> [T]he fact that ideology needs help, that there are films at all…indicates the presence of a Real gap within ideology. That a film exists is thus even more important than what the film does (xviii).

Locating the Real, and thus the ability to utilize it constitutively, involves, for the new Lacanians, identifying it as a gap within the ideological subject. The Real is, then, the void or lack within the subject that ideology cannot fill, the space that ideology has not yet accessed. This is the space that must be reached. Slavoj Žižek explains that the "subject is the void, the hole in the Other" (*Sublime* 196). Subjects emerge, then, because the symbolic order is not seamlessly unified; there are points within it that cannot be made sense of. Imaginary constructs manifest to suture the gaps in the symbolic order, in an attempt to make it complete and integrated. However, these gaps keep emerging, and the process repeats ad infinitum.

In *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis*, Roger Silverstone

forwards a theory of media ethics and subjectivity, supplying possibilities of

contemporary spectatorship that look for the limits of global capitalism's mechanisms of

capture and subsumption. In this sense, the theoretical and ethical projects of Silverstone

and McGowan are aligned in their approach to limits, intrusions, and emergences.

Silverstone uses the category of the "mediapolis" to discuss the ways in which the

landscape of cross-platform media culture, and the extent to which it has permeated

everyday life, can create a virtual public sphere that enables ethical awareness,

responsibility and debate.

To return to the ethics of the Real, and it application to self/other relations with

regards to media, entails the uniting of a Levinasian ethics of the face, as elaborated on

by scholars like Oliver, with a Lacanian notion of the Real. There is an existing body of

work concerning the contemporary state of media culture and the ethical matters that it

entails. Scholars of media and ethics frequently work to address, and work through,

tensions that arise between visual representation and the Levinasian ethic which stresses

the need for a communicative dimension that is responsible to the other. Combining

these two perspectives into an ethics of spectatorship involves theorizing modes of

looking and experiencing media predicated on the sort of openness of boundaries (of both

self and system), response-ability to the un-recognizable and unknowable of the other,

rejection of a totalizing notion of the visual, and bearing witness to the "impossibility" of

trauma. With respect to stories of national trauma and destruction in the post-terrorism

era, especially insofar as it dovetails with the rise of an increasingly participatory,

interactive media apparatus, this approach seems even more important in forming an ethical theory of the media landscape. As Silverstone argues, part of the project of media ethics today entails discussing media involvement and interaction with languages that address different questions than those pertaining to the (albeit important) critique of the media landscape as indicative of the reign of global capitalism, mechanisms and technologies of biopolitics and biopower that serve it, and the sophisticated web of media's commodity chain.

Silverstone argues that a key characteristic of global media, particularly the rise of the Internet as a reliable and prevalent source of news and information, is the compression of time and space, phenomenon allowing for increased awareness of the presence of others around the world. This landscape of global(ized) media is what he refers to as the "mediapolis," which Silverstone defines as "a condition of media, and as both an empirical and a normative term, in which relations between self and other are to be conducted in a global public sphere" (22). Levinasian phenomenology and ethics are crucial to this formulation, for the existence of this interdependent, "global cosmopolitan culture" "involves increasing awareness of, and interaction with, the stranger" (13). To return briefly to Zizek and Levinas' terminology, Silverstone's theory of the mediapolis is inextricably linked to the encroachment of the neighbor-as face-which, as ethical witnesses, we are obligated to receive even, and especially, in the face of our own vulnerability and precarity as subjects.[9] The visual, mediated dimension of this interaction supplies an especially important angle, for Silverstone's argument provides

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[9] See Judith Butler's *Precarious Life* for a thoughtful discussion of these concerns of subjectivity, alterity, and humanity.

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possibilities for construing visual media, and the interactions with (virtual) others occasioned by it, as an ethical encounter with potential for escaping the logic of representation and visual recognition deemed so dangerous to the self/other relationship.

Through this account, Silverstone opens a space for visual mediation and technology to have a place within the system of Levinasian face-to-face ethics. Although he stresses that "seeing is not enough. And visibility is only just the beginning,"(26) Silverstone nonetheless posits an ethics of mediated vision, insofar as "appearance, mediated appearance, constitutes our worldliness, our capacity to be in the world" (26). The mode of cosmopolitanism offered by this mediated field calls for the sort of response-ability discussed by Kelly Oliver, the need to address the other, and not simply recognize and attempt to understand them. Moreover, Silverstone also forwards an alternative formulation of the technological apparatus that challenges the ethical and ideological contentions of early film scholars who, recall, argued the screen basically served as a boundary marker separating the spectator's ego from the objects in the visual field, and positioning her to capture and subsume them within the bounded field of his subjectivity. Silverstone reverses, or at least complicates this logic, haling us to:

> Consider the screen. A boundary par excellence. The screen is an interface, a
> window, a mask and a barrier. It is an interface and as such a space for
> inscription, the literal inscriptions of image and text, and the projected
> inscriptions of readers and audiences. As a frame it acts as a container, limiting
> what is seen and heard and marking the boundary between the experienced world
> and its representation. As a window it reveals. It reveals a world otherwise

beyond reach, a world of otherness in its supposed transparency…reinforced by immediacy and liveness. As a window it delivers the mimetic (21).

Considering the screen as a window configures it around different contours, ones defined by openness, receptiveness, and the unknown. Linking this perspective to McGowan's, this type of screen theory is conducive to Neo-Lacanian revivalism in film theory, which, recall, is predicated upon reformulating the screen as precisely the sort of window or doorway into otherness that Silverstone discusses. The window to the Real, moreover, literally opens possibilities for the emergence of others, of unknowns, and other traumatic shocks, which have the ability to challenge preexisting notions of ideological subjectivity, not merely reinforce it. It is through the workings of this process-this participatory, engaged apparatus-that subjects can emerge.

Envisioning the mediapolis is precisely the type of work that is important for this new vision of screen theory. Silverstone insists, after all, that a truly ethical mediapolis requires "our participation, [and]our engagement" (29). Moreover, I will further examine the extent to which the participatory apparatus, which Silverstone deems crucial to the rise of the mediapolis, is or is not doing the type of ethical work called for in the specific examples studied. For Silverstone, this participatory convergence seems crucial, for he understands mediapolis as "singular, nonwithstanding the manifest fragmentation of the delivery platforms, channels and the cultures of global media." Of equal importance, moreover, is "the invitation…to visualize the wholeness of media culture and then to interrogate it for both its weaknesses and possibilities" (31). This significant matter, evocative of Critchley's concern regarding the ethical-political deduction, hearkens to the

need for balancing larger theoretical claims with grounded, nuanced investigations of their particular applications.

Regarding existing studies of convergence in media studies, I build upon Roger Silverstone's on the mediapolis to discuss the participatory network of 9/11 media culture[10]. Thus, my primary concerns lie more with the ways in which patterns of convergence, interactive participation, and uses and applications of consumer technologies in the media-making process, are involved in matters of global media ethics, technology, possibilities of viewing and subjectivity. My hope is that addressing trauma studies will better help me situate some of these concerns.

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[10] Numerous theorists of media convergence, often working with Hardt and Negri's notion of Empire and immaterial labor and Michel Foucault's theory of biopolitics, suggest that emerging forms of media engagement further enable the hegemony of the "social factory," a post-Fordist regime of labor originally theorized by Italian Marxists, in which traditional boundaries of work space are eroded, allowing sites of labor to expand into the home and other domains formerly shielded from capital, such as leisure. Kiarina Kordela's work on bio-cinematic spectatorship, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, exemplifies an analysis of viewing re-theorized as an activity captured by capital and re-territorialized as labor-power. Tiziana Terranova, further, argues that numerous forms of digital culture and online interactivity contribute to a rising tide of free immaterial labor offered by participants. Shawn Shimpach, moreover, builds upon Dallas Smythe's notion of audience labor to argue that, beyond simply viewing commercials, today's audiences labor via various convergence-enabled processes such as gathering para and inter-textual information from various sources, blogging, contributing to forums, and participating in other interactive activities, and following narratives and storylines into which product advertisements and consumer behavior are intimately woven. In this sense, Shimpach contends, the entire process of forming oneself as a member of an audience, and the attendant activities and information-gathering protocols required to do so, constitutes labor. This shift is enabled in part by the changing culture and landscape of the media, particularly the rise of the Internet and interactivity, which, in a manner analogous to the erosion of boundary between leisure and labor in the post-Fordist climate, have blurred the boundaries between advertising and content, as well as activity and passivity of the media spectator, to an extent that Smythe's limited notion of audience labor must be interrogated and reworked. Henry Jenkins, finally, breaks with these perspectives to contend that interactivity signals an exciting new form of participatory democracy, in which tech savvy citizens are presented with new tools to contribute to and modify popular culture narratives, critique political figures, and otherwise utilize the emergent forum of the Internet to voice their dissent or consensus with the products of the culture industry.

Although previous work on media convergence has provided important contributions to continuing debates and conversations on power, resistance, and regimes of control within the context of Empire and global capitalism, this is not precisely the dialogue into which I am intervening. Although I will draw aspects of labor theory to discuss implications for interactivity in commercial instantiations of the participatory apparatus, my primary concern lies in applications of the ethical-political trajectory and structuring of the self-other engagement in the incarnations discussed, perspectives not adequately addressed by Foucauldian-based biopolitical approaches or less nuanced examinations/less critical celebrations of convergence and interactivity.

Part Three

Trauma Politics

In *Trauma Culture*, E. Ann Kaplan argues that media culture, particularly film, establishes fairly strict parameters for "translating" trauma and swiftly bringing traumatic and otherwise unintelligible events, such as the 9/11 attacks, back into some acceptable ideological fold. The manner of telling the story, the codes and symbolic structures involved in making sense of it, are central to this process. The typical ideological work, she posits, frequently involves emotionally charged individualization of events in ways conducive to forging imaginary identification with individual spectators.

> [W]e are shown trauma as a disassociation or 'splitting' on the national level, a
> phenomenon that allows sentimentality and a focus on individual suffering to
> stand in for an uncompromising look at national catastrophe and its political
> causes (21).

Lynn Spigel, in her discussion of the television program *The West Wing*, for example, has argued that one of the ideological sense-making apparatuses at work is the production of a sort of "infantile citizenship" through narrative construction of commercial media. This mode of subjectivity privileges and elevates certain simple, unexamined affects/emotions such as fear, confusion, and simple moral notions such as hate and evil to make sense of national trauma, so that the refrain of "why do they hate us?" becomes a legitimated form of coping, working through, and forming community cohesion and healing.

In order to avoid these dominant paradigms of symbolic reconstruction, of bringing the Real back into the existing parameters of the ideological symbolic order,

Kaplan suggests focusing on the communal possibilities of cinema and visual culture, and the extent to which it can, through the vicarious process of spectatorship and viewing, allow for a different manner of approaching and working through national trauma. This spectator resists the drive to impose intelligibility, to make sense, and to "recognize" the event through existing symbolic codes and structures. This spectator-witness, conversely, is positioned to acknowledge and hear the trauma, to experience it, yet not definitively define it. It remains open to a certain extent, unintelligible, not fully knowable. It remains Real, and thus remains traumatic. This process of "keeping the wound open," (135) Kaplan contends, is crucial for the ethical working through, the process that ultimately leads to healing, to take place. The ethics of witnessing in this sense, the keeping open in tension with the collective acknowledgement, can be channeled in certain visual constructions of film. A key component of this, Kaplan argues, is the distancing or denial of imaginary identification which privileges the construction of a single, bounded subject position in favor of more amorphous identification with the event itself.

> One of the main characteristics of the witnessing position…is the deliberate refusal of an identification with the specificity of individuals involved-a deliberate distancing from the subject to enable the inter-viewer to take in and respond to the traumatic *situation*. When a film constructs this sort of position for the spectator, it enables attention to the situation, as against attention merely to the subject's individual suffering, and this position thus opens the text out to larger social and political meanings (Kaplan 125, emphasis hers).

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This process, which Kaplan outlines in Maya Derren's film *Meshes of an Afternoon*, is predicated on the deferral of absolute meaning ascribed to events, privileging instead the openness of suggestion raised by the emotions presented. In the film *Night Cries*, which deals with the oppression and colonization of Aboriginal peoples, Kaplan similarly analyzes the images as "purely visual and emotional, as in traumatic attacks. No explanation or meaning is assigned to these images and emotions for the viewer…traumatic symptoms often float free of a specific event, becoming mixed with fantasies" (131). This commingling of traumatic event and the fantastic imagination seems indicative of a particular narrative structure surrounding national trauma, mourning, and unconscious fears. [11]

Kaplan uses the concept of vicarious trauma to argue how certain cinematic conventions, such as shot-compositions, which contain ambiguity and resist over-determination of meaning and symbolism, can construct a viewing experience of ethical witnessing. Involved in this process, Kaplan contends, is a form of cinematic construction which privileges identification with events or traumas in themselves as opposed to specific subjects. This process allows for the viewer to identify with broader cultural and collective traumas. Moreover, a text that resists closure "keeps the wound open" in a manner that allows for the sort of working-through process necessary to witnessing and dealing with a vicarious trauma ethically (135). Such a shift in identification, perhaps, allows the viewer to escape processes of misrecognition that early

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[11] Perhaps the spate of spectacle-oriented disaster films and other articulation of these fantasies represent a repetition of this traumatic suffering in the form of "cultural symptoms" (Kaplan 134) endlessly replayed as regimes of capital and consumerist popular media culture attempt to exploit the presence of unconscious or conscious national fear and trauma and absence of the working through, witnessing process necessary to heal it. Also see Zizek's *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*.

film scholars argued constituted, and brought about inherent ethical concerns with, the process of viewing film. In this sense, Kaplan's analysis reads similarly to Silverstone's who stresses the importance of understanding the screen as a window to the other, presented through the mediated event, in contrast to representation of a knowable entity projected onto the screen as boundary-limit and presented as a recognizable object available for the subject's apprehension.

Part Four

Levinasian Ethics and the Real

Excess is variously evoked in ethical phenomenology as well as theorizations and applications of trauma studies, and serves as a guidepost for analyzing the problems of totality, of closed systems, and the ways that they can proscribe or foreclose upon the Other's intervention into the totality, and demand for recognition. Tensions between excess and technological determinism (of which early apparatus and screen theories were perhaps guilty) are now making their way into certain aspects of film studies, and reflect concerns and desires for a new mapping of the relationships between technology, looking, and subjectivity. For Emanuel Levinas, the event that breaks the closed loop of totality-in the sense of the subject's bounded ego- is the face. The face is an object, visually identified by the viewing subject. Levinas' notion of the face contains an element of excess, a component that eludes total capture, recognition or understanding by the perceiving ego. The face, according to Levinas, "resists possession…resists my powers." For Levinas, ethics is rooted in one's encounter with The Face. The face is a

construct, a discursive visuality[12], which, figuratively, by revealing itself, "speaks," ethical obligation to the subject.

Levinas distinguishes the encounter with the face from typical visual experiences, asking "How does the epiphany as a face determine a relationship different from that which characterizes all our sensible experience?" (187). For Levinas, part of the difference lies in the face's impact on perception as something distinct from the conventional visual process of taking outside phenomena as objects. "It is uncontestable that objectification operates in the gaze in a privileged way;" he asserts, "it is not certain that its tendency to inform every experience is inscribed, and unequivocally so, in being" (188). Some sensory experiences, then, do not take parts of the outside world as objects. Something else occurs. The encounter unique in this respect is one with the face, for such an instance brings the consciousness of the perceiver into contact with the notion of absolute alterity, a concept which escapes the mind's attempt to take it as an object, which would render it something less than absolutely other. Or, in encountering alterity from outside, the subject cannot wholly represent it, ascribe it fixed and certain meaning, make it completely intelligible or sensible. There is a sense of unknowable, and this is necessary for an ethical encounter to occur. I cannot fully comprehend or understand what I see, and this element that escapes "my powers" is what I must respect.

Further, this meeting with the face carries a communicative dimension, and it is precisely this exchange that distinguishes the encounter from pure visual objectification. "The relation with the Other," Levinas explains, alone introduces a dimension of

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[12] This notion is important; one's encounter with the face is not merely defined by visual perception. There is a communicative dimension that occasions acknowledgement and pushes the interaction beyond the realm of objectification.

transcendence, and leads us to a relation totally different from experience in the sensible sense of the term, relative and egoist" (193). This is the infinity of which Levinas speaks, infinity of consciousness, as opposed to the totality of the subject's ego that manifests in the subsumption paradigm. Some element of the other's being escapes objectification in consciousness, rendering the other not completely graspable by the mind. "Speech proceeds from absolute difference" (194). Discourse, then, serves as a bridge that hails the other as a self, for "speech cuts across vision" to alter the relationship from the typical encounter between a mind and its object. For Levinas, this moment of encountering absolute alterity is a moment of transcendence.

> The relation with the face, with the other absolutely other which I cannot contain, the other in this sense infinite, is nonetheless my idea, a commerce…I do not struggle with a faceless god, but I respond to his expression, to his revelation (197).

Further, the ethics of this encounter also consists in forcing one to comprehend existence outside of one's own ego, an experience which entails a certain trauma in the form of vulnerability to subjectivity. This vulnerability in the face of excess is also what defines the jouissance of an encounter with Lacan's Real. "The relation with the Other is a relation with transcendence-the relation with the Other who puts into question the brutal spontaneity of one's immanent destiny-introduces into me what was not in me" (203). When the encounter with the face speaks otherness, it does so as an equal. What is communicated in this encounter is a being in solidarity with the perceiver, not one that becomes an object to be dominated in consciousness.

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[T]he epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity. The face in its nakedness as a face presents to me the destitution of the poor one and the stranger; but this poverty and exile which appeal to my powers, address me, do not deliver themselves over to these powers as givens, remain the expression of the face. The poor one, the stranger, presents himself as an equal (213).

Thus, the face's resistance to objectification, and evocation of absolute consciousness, introduces ethical responsibility and action on behalf of the myriad equal beings who call out from the face. This ethics, then, suggests negative liberties of the others, and asks that the subject remain sensitive to these others when acting, thereby regulating and remaining aware of the affects of his behaviors and actions. The alterity of the other speaks of fundamental interconnectedness and consequences. "[T]he relation with the Other, discourse, is not only the putting in question of my freedom, the appeal coming from the other is…sermon, exhortation, the prophetic word" (213).

The invading alterity which Levinas speaks of demands acknowledgement, but resists total understanding, interpretation, or objectification, thereby existing as an excess which poses some threat to the subject's comfort and security of its own boundaries. For an ethical encounter to occur, the subject must be at peace with this, and must not attempt to capture or subsume the alterity with some totalizing logic of representation, processes which would allow the subject to "manage" the alterity by incorporating it, thereby shoring up its own sense of stably bounded, fixed selfhood. The face, in this sense, is what is in excess of the subject's being, understanding, ego, comprehension. Mapping the excess of the other, and in particular the ways in which it could be located in the

study of media, involves parsing its relationships to particular systems implicated in the

production of subjectivity, such as the language of media and its modes of structured

looking. The line of thought recently taken up, of yoking excess to mediated forms of

looking, involves returning to Lacan's theories of the gaze and the real. I continue with

this perspective here, and further attempt to push this notion by situating one of this

project's major interventions as an ethics of spectatorship predicated upon a

phenomenological approach to Lacan's real gaze vis-à-vis encounters with visual media.

For new Lacanians, to encroach with the Real generates excess. The moment of

the real-of jouissance, then, comes when the subject imagines the gaze in the other not as

a secret fetish overdetermined with meaning, and fantasized as an obtainable possession,

but as true alterity, as incomprehensible beyond, as unsignifiable. Notions such as these

informed Levinasians such as Kelly Oliver and Ann Kaplan's thoughts on the ethics of

witnessing. Todd McGowan understands this excess as a potentially constitutive process

that can break previous subjects out of their ideological confines, and allow for new

coordinates and modes of subjectivity to emerge. In *Seminar XX*, Lacan theorized a

notion of excess, which he termed the Real. The experience of the real, a moment of

shock, terror, or ecstasy, is unsignafiable. For Lacan, the Real represents a point of

intrusion or disruption in the symbolic order, an intervention that cannot be made sense

of with the preexisting symbolic codes. "The Real," he explains, "can only be inscribed

on the basis of an impasse in formalization" (Lacan 1998, 93). However, with further

examination of Lacan's thoughts on the real, one begins to see the manner in which a

signifying system or structure can carry or occasion these moments, although they do not

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wholly define them. In an early formulation of the notion of the Real in *Seminar III*, which he names "the peace of the evening," Lacan forwards the idea that this moment of "the limit of the phenomenon's grip on us" can be construed as an instant where a radical break in discourse, an unsignifiable moment, is occasioned by discourse itself.

Neo-Lacanian cultural and film theorists have returned to Lacan's concept of the Real to begin to build upon the importance of excess, and articulate a way out of the previous problems of film spectatorship. In *Tarrying with the Negative,* Slavoj Žižek argues that the kernel of meaning that supposedly lies beyond representation is, paradoxically, always occasioned by the symbolic structure, it cannot exist without it. Moments of the Real occur in the context of ideological structures; they never exist independently of them. "This is what Lacan means when he says that the traumatic Real is encountered in dreams, this is the way ideology structures our experience of reality" (*Tarrying* 63). This notion of the Real manifesting in a dream-text is akin to Lacan's notion of the signifier in the Real. Advancing this theory, moreover, entails reconfiguring the relationship between the eye and the gaze. The original Lacanian film theorists and proponents of apparatus theory understood the gaze as an extension of the eye, with the camera serving as a cyborg-type prosthetic extending its, and the perceiving ego's, scope of power. However, aligning the gaze on the side of the Real involves separating it from the eye, thus creating a split subject, fracturing of the look, and removing the gaze from the domain of the sight organ. The gaze, then, is removed from the eye/ego, and reconfigured as alterity, a force from outside, much like Sartre understood it. This figuration is, according to Lacan, constitutive of subjectivity. "The

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split" that occurs in relation to an encounter with the Real, he explains, "enables us to understand the real, in its dialectical effects, as originally unwelcome" (*Seminar XI* 69).

The gaze, Lacan explains, constitutes the subject around a lack. "The gaze is presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency…as the thrust of our experience, namely, the lack that constitutes castration anxiety" (*Seminar XI* 73).[13] The gaze, which Lacan understands as a form of the *object a*, comes to "symbolize this central lack" (*Seminar XI* 77). Thus, according to Lacan, the gaze is best located on the register of the Real, and an encounter with it involves not a moment of mastery, but a profoundly traumatic, self-abnegating encounter with the other. This other, like Levinas' face, intrudes upon us, threatening our boundaries of self, as if from outside of them. Further, Lacan explains, an encounter with the gaze cannot simultaneously involve a sense of oneself as a subject; the gaze is ego-negating, and thus the two experiences are mutually exclusive.

> The gaze, as conceived by Sartre, is the gaze by which I am surprised-surprised insofar as it changes all the perspectives, the lines of my world, orders it, from the point of nothingness where I am…insofar as I am under the gaze…I no longer see the eye that looks at me and, if I see the eye, the gaze disappears (Seminar *XI*, 84).

The gaze is the face-and it occasions anxiety in its very elusive alterity, for I can never see it from the place that it sees me. This process of removal involves a sense of separation, the feeling that "we are not immediately identified with our look, but stand

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[13] The notion of "castration anxiety" evokes problematic gender politics. However, Lacan's notion of this concept should be distinguished from Freud's insofar as Lacan applied it to all subjects as a sense of loss resulting from the initial formation of the bounded ego, a lack which is expressed in the desire for wholeness and completion of the self, a desire which drives the ongoing search for the *object petit a*.

somewhere 'behind' it" (Žižek, *Tarrying* 64). Through this splitting event, the

spectators' illusions of mastery are disavowed, and "we become aware that there is

actually somebody hidden behind the eye and observing what is going on. The paradox

here is that the *gaze is concealed by an eye*, i.e. *by its very organ*" (Žižek, *Tarrying* 64).

Thus, the eye structures the gaze, but in a manner that immobilizes and paralyzes the

subject, denies her mastery, and renders him powerless and helpless. The experience is

fundamentally masochistic, involving an abnegation of subjectivity and ego, and

surrender to the gaze-as-other. Further, Lacan explains, images are vessels for the Real

gaze, although deliberate attempts to seek, apprehend, and master such an experience will

inevitably lead to a missed encounter. "The picture is simply what any picture is," he

explains, "a trap for the gaze. In any picture, it is precisely in seeking the gaze in each of

its points that you will see it disappear" (Seminar *XI*, 89). Crucially, affect is not seen-it

is felt-and attempts to capture it, represent it, or otherwise contain it in visual form will

prove futile. As vessels, though, as pointed out by Lacan and Metz, apparatuses of

viewing can structure and encounter with the traumatic Real. This line of analysis leads

to one of my fundamental questions: can different permutations of the participatory

network better structure this encounter than others? What happens when this mode of

structuring exists in tension with logics of representation, spectacle, and other discourses

if intelligibility to crucial to the function of late capitalism?

Part Five

Ethical Witnessing and Politics

The significance of refiguring the gaze around notions of ethical phenomenology and witnessing, and rearticulating it to cinema, lies in the importance of ascribing ethical and political valence to the act of spectatorship, a move which continues to disarticulate Lacanian film theory from its original, mistaken ideological applications, and reclaim it a more prescriptive and constitutive manner. Far from being merely an ego-driven process allowing pre-constituted subjects to gain mastery over the visual field, the ethical real is, conversely, a traumatic and constitutive process that allows for, when fully experienced, the recognition of a certain vacuous place at the heart of symbolic identity, awareness of alterity in the Levinasian sense, and the reconfiguration of identities and subjectivities around this awareness.

As Kelly Oliver argues, the look of ethical witnessing, in a Levinasian sense, involves a crucial distinction between recognition and openness. Recognition, rather than challenging or disrupting the subject's boundaries or sense-making systems, affirms them, and in the process allows them to pull the other into the established field of the already known. This process, which Oliver likens to the Hegelian, master-bondsman dialectic of subjectivity and identity formation, is fundamentally "deadly antagonistic,"(11) for it essentially subsumes the other's difference, neutralizing it with the force of the subject's ego boundaries.

> The notion of recognition becomes more problematic in models where what is recognized is always only something familiar to the subject. In this case, the subject and what is known to him and his experiences are once again privileged. Any real contact with difference or otherness becomes impossible because

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recognition requires the assimilation of difference into something familiar. When

recognition repeats the master-slave or subject-object hierarchy, then in it also

bound to assimilate difference back into sameness. Only when we begin to think

of the recognition of what is beyond recognition can we begin to think of the

recognition of difference (9).

What this analysis brings forth is that the ethical encounter, the Levinasian openness to

otherness, lives in the excess, that which is not captured. This is the space where

understanding and difference thrives. Recognition, on the other hand, is what happens

when this excess is subsumed or destroyed. Predicated upon a logic of the Same,

recognition operates in a similar manner to the Hegelian lord-bondsman model of subject

formation, where the "lord," the subject, acquires a sense of self by destroying the other,

and rendering their consciousness and object within the subject's ego. This mode of

recognition, then, allows the existing parameters of subjectivity and the known to remain

intact, unchallenged. Witnessing, however, implies a different mode of self-other

interaction, according to Oliver. A distinct power dynamic, often played out in material,

real-world patterns of domination and oppression, exists in recognition, whereby

"subjectivity is conferred by those in power and on those they deem powerless and

disempowered" (24).

Rather than relying on the hegemony of the subject/ego in its fixed boundaries,

witnessing is predicated on the presence of an addressee, of dialogue, of the Levinasian

notion of the "saying challeng[ing] the said" (87). Witnessing involves "seeing the

impossible" (1) insofar as it entails bearing witness to the other's testimony while

resisting and refusing to subsume them under a recognizing matrix, to fully represent and "see" them. In other words, this form of subjectivity entails revering the excess, that which escapes visual definition and full understanding. As Oliver writes, "witnessing means testifying to both something you have seen with your own eyes and something you cannot see" (86). The voice of the other constitutes the witness testimony, and it is the presence of the other, their bearing witness to me, that allows me to exits, and calls forth my inner witness. Contrary to the Hegelian model, this theory of subjectivity "is responsibility; it is the ability to respond and be responded to" (91). Some concept of witnessing is, what I believe, Levinas intended by the discursive dimension of the face-to-face encounter that exceeds a mere visual recognition. Witnessing must move beyond a logic of exclusion or abjection, and embrace some notion of respect for incomprehensibility and the incomprehensible.

> To recognize others requires acknowledging that their experiences are real, even though they may be incomprehensible to us; this means that we must recognize that not everything that is real is recognizable to us. We are obligated to respond to what is beyond our comprehension, beyond recognition, because ethics is possible only beyond recognition (106).

When theories of looking and its structures are situated alongside ethical phenomenology and trauma studies, bodies of thought which stress the ethical importance of acknowledging the outside/Other and resisting closure in the form of totality, the possibility emerges that spectatorship and apparatus theories of film could be revisited to

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account for an increasingly convergent and interactive media world-the participatory network.

Addressing the revival of Levinas, Simon Critchley stresses the importance of working through the so-called "ethical-political deduction," and contends that problematizing this move as a necessary step in the implementation of Levinas' ethics as first philosophy into a larger philosophical political schema. The primary gap that must not be ignored, he contends, is the move from the transcendental to the everyday, the universal to the particular. It is within this wide gulf or gap that the particularities of a system of belief/action must be worked out, for a myriad of dangers lie in the direct transposition of general ethical or moral maxims onto the field of political action. The importance of avoiding this deduction lies in the contingency of politics, the uncertainty and malleability that owes to its operation on the immanent plane. "[T]he political," he explains, "can be defined as the taking of a decision without any determinate transcendental guarantees" (178). The "problem of the relation of ethics to politics," moreover, lies in a disconnect between ethics' absolute principles and politics openness "to the dimension of the perhaps or maybe" (178).

Regarding Levinas' central ethical imperative to accept and remain open to the intrusion or interruption of the Other-The Face-Critchley contends that although the rule can and should function as a general governing principle, the responsible application of it involves precisely that which is not general, that which can only be ascertained through specific, particular situations and encounters. In other words, one must ask the questions "which Others?" "In which contexts?" These encounters are variously determined, and

complicated, by variables such as nation, ethnicity, power, class, space and place, and other operations of the political which complicate the ethical imperative. As Critchley explains, "each political decision is made experientially ex nihilo, as it were, and is not deduced or read off procedurally from a pre-given moral content, and yet it is not arbitrary. There is a rule that shapes the taking of that decision." Although the ethical/moral rule supplies the ground for the *activation* of political moves, "the specific form of political action and decision taking must be singular, situational, and context dependent" (180).

In Critchley's view, the strongest aspect of Levinas' ethic lies in its applicability and usefulness in contesting the legitimacy and tenability of borders, boundaries, and limits, particularly of the self/subject, state, and nation. The crucial role of ethics lies in its ability to guide and ground the political project, for according to Critchley, "following Levinas' logic, when politics is left to itself without the disturbance of ethics it risks becoming tyrannical" (182). Without guiding principles or values to supply the contours of politics, nothing exists to check it against totalitarianisms. In this sense, Levinas' ethics of openness seems particularly germane and necessary to political orientation. In order to remain contentious of this deduction and the need to avoid it, I will pay attention to the ways in which specific narrative articulations present political concerns which may exist in tension with the theoretical/ethical imperative.

Part Six

Going Forward

This project treats media architecture in a manner that borrows from elements of cinematic apparatus theory, network theory, and media convergence. I build off of previous work done in the terrain of media ethics. Borrowing from Levinas, Lacan, Zizek, and others, I examine the ethical dimensions and implications of 9/11 as a traumatic event figured in media culture. Dealing with media ethics in this manner necessitates an approach to theorizing the ways in which participation in visual media culture allows viewers to re-witness the Real of the event (in the Lacanian sense), and receive the Other (as figured in Levinas). The 9/11 moment, as Zizek argues, stands in as a powerful flash point that unites these two issues, for it, allegedly, constitutes a site of vulnerability and trauma with significant implications for political subjectivity. Thus, my theoretical commitments consist of a Levinasian ethic, which, when mobilized alongside a Lacanian-based methodology of spectatorship and viewing[14], will inform my approach to analyzing interactive, convergent media space. I believe that the importance of linking these two approaches lies in their similar analyses of boundaries, openness, and intrusion, especially to the extent that the injection of the other threatens the contours and limits of subjectivity. Sensitivity to Critchley's important call to heed the dangers of the deduction will inform selection of several different bundles of media, and the different implications and consequences raised by disparate genres' relationships to openness and alterity.

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[14] Lacan has already been utilized in new theorizations of spectatorship, and thus evoking him allows me to link issues of openness and alterity to work already being done contemporary in film studies.

My notion of participatory network makes the media genres available in a way that allows for thick analysis of the visual nature of this trauma and its existence in mediated form. Moreover, the diverse body of texts I examine enables analysis of the different ways that trauma can look-that it can be visualized-when articulated in different media forms. What does trauma look like in a commercial disaster movie, and how are we asked to form a relationship to it through participation in interactive media culture? How, if at all, do notions of visual spectacle complicate this look? Chapter Three will address these issues. What about when we-understood as Westerners-are asked to engage with and respond to mediations of trauma from the Arab world? Chapter Four answers this question. What do we make of the interactive apparatus' engagement with conspiracy, and the sense in which interactive architecture's linkages can encourage or disrupt this mode of engaging with 9/11? Chapter Two will examine this concern.

Using the events of September 11th, 2001 as a historical guidepost, I study different examples of film, and their interfaces/convergences with online platforms allowing for interactive participation, with the intent of further parsing relationships between subject formation, trauma, and the ethics of technologically mediated visual culture. With respect to technology, I am concerned with various senses in which technological apparatuses are implicated in viewers' invitation into an experience with mediated trauma. These apparatuses range from small consumer devices to Computer Generated Imagery and other forms of mainstream cinematic means of production, to the role of the Internet in enabling widespread distribution, creation, and circulation of amateur and mainstream content. Further, through exploring a range of different yet

intersecting media artifacts, I hope to ascertain the differences, if any, in the ethical

implications of looking occasioned by different modes of technological construction,

repurposing, convergence, and reception. How do interactive, convergent platforms

assist in the mobilization of these looks, and supply insight into how they are registering?

Thus, by combining Lacanian-Levinasian analysis of both texts and the practices and

processes involved in their production, circulation, distribution and exhibition, I forward

a reworking of spectatorship theory that seeks to revisit some conception of the viewing

landscape as an apparatus with implications for constructing and maintaining subject

positions involved in (un)ethical practices of perception, which also accounts for the

increasingly convergent nature of media.

This first chapter has concentrated on mapping relationships between

phenomenological/ethical discussions of looking and how these theoretical approaches,

which caution against recognition as an ego-capture of the other. To return to neo-

Lacanianism in emergent models of film studies, I have discussed the extent to which

these apparatuses can be understood as harboring potential to structure experiences of the

Real, understood as potentially analogous to Levinas' notion of the intrusion of the face

into the subject's visual field (this linkage, recall, supplies the stronger ethical component

to Lacanian methods of analyzing media spectatorship). I have re-positioned ethically

oriented, phenomenological projects on looking through literature which explicitly deals

with technology and ethics, frequently seen in early film theory, with the intention of

advancing towards a new phenomenological, ontological ethic of vision, technology and

mediated construction of viewing that takes into account the role of looking, watching

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and viewing as a factors involved in the process of contemporary, mediated subject formation.

Through this project, tensions and interplays among phenomenological/ethical concerns of looking, politics of conviction, technologies of vision and interactivity, subjectivity, and spectacle constitute important organizing concepts. I devote Chapter Two to so-called conspiracy theories, or alternative accounts of 9/11, which overwhelmingly consist of "amateur" endeavors. This chapter will focus on the film *9/11: The Road to Tyranny*, and the interactive environment, supported by You Tube, that it inhabits. This film was produced with consumer or "pro-sumer" grade equipment, and widely distributed online. Through hyperlinking and You Tube playlists, it interfaces with other material, such as the filmmaker's personal websites and additional films, other 9/11-conspiracy material, and news reports. Users can comment, and provide links to their own profiles, via You Tube's discussion board. To what extent do these types of texts, which are produced and circulated in different conditions than Hollywood accounts, construct a different sort of witnessing spectator-subject, and what sort of (politicized?) modes of affect do they invite?

Moreover, how do the technological conditions that they utilize, such as circulation via online platforms and exhibition on personal computers, work with the narrative accounts to construct a different sort of politicized subject? Existing outside the confines of Hollywood, and its channels of production, exhibition, and distribution, in these narratives utilize more "interactive" or "participatory" technologies which not only supply alternative conditions for their production and distribution (in terms of being shot

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on consumer grade digital camcorders, uploaded onto personal websites, You Tube, and Google Video), but exhibition as well (online viewing on a personal computer). Thus, my concern with integrating dialogues of technology and viewing ethics will bring in these forms of media, which seem to rater explicitly sit at the intersection of the two. This genre exists both as discursive others to mainstream 9/11 accounts, and situate viewing subjects as others/outsiders to the sort of acceptable, politically rational dissenting liberal subject. What are the implications of this in terms of the witnessing ethic? What sort of political sensibility do these networks encourage and mobilize? In examining You Tube playlists, I hope to get a sense of how this interactive technology interacts with the online film to build a discursive loop that routes viewers/users to additional content? What are the implications of this architecture to the ethic and politic of conspiratorial discourse? Studying a sample of the comment streams will further assist in providing an accurate and thorough assessment of how viewers are constructed and mobilized by this apparatus. My central claim in this chapter is that the participatory network of conspiracy, through its linking architecture and DIY media sensibility, fosters a sense of psychotic certainty and totality that forecloses upon possibilities of ethical witnessing.

Chapter Three will focus on the concerns that emerge through the allegorical presentation of 9/11 as caused by a monstrous antagonist, as presented in the popular *Cloverfield* (2008). What are the implications of unrepresentable trauma rendered intelligible-recognizable-via other technological processes such as the use of computer generated special effects-into a monstrous body? What is at stake when these special-

effects processes are used in the service of creating some spectacle of shocking destruction? How is the process of surveillance implicated in the look constructed by this type of allegorical presentation, and what is its relationship to witnessing? This chapter will address these issues. This chapter will also discuss the ways in which issues of alterity as made visually apparent in the technologically created, CGI spectacle of the monstrous body introduce new concerns into the conversation of mediated trauma and technology by complicating Oliver's contention that ethical looking involves conveying the unknown or unknowable, that which cannot be easily defined, categorized or fit into existing discursive frameworks. When "evil," destructive energies or affects are given (abject) body as an inhuman creature, how are possibilities of looking complicated? Do these sorts of popular forms, which also involve the sort of self-reflexive cinematic showing-off of technological novelty or innovation discussed by Hansen, subsume or reify the incomprehensible, unrepredsentable, unsignifiable shock of trauma into a concrete entity suitable for the spectacle-driven, consumer-friendly, and entertainment-based horror genre of mainstream Hollywood cinema? This chapter will, further, allow me to put discussions of technology, destruction and spectacle into historical context by discussing earlier examples of this genre, which used various forms of special effects and technological innovation to create a spectacle of 9/11. My central claim in this chapter is that the participatory network comingles audience interactivity and amateur media making, the spectacle of monstrosity, and tropes of terrorism discourse and imagery in a manner that mobilizes a surveilling gaze as means to capture and recognize traumatic alterity.

The movie *Cloverfiel*d included as auxiliary facets of the movie experience an interactive contest, and the actual film took on an amateur, realist aesthetic demonstrating these rituals of participation as part of its narrative. This 2008 film provides ample opportunity for discussing, through its narrative and technological components (CGI effects, digital video production), marketing campaigns and strategies, and relationships with interactivity, concerns that arise when mainstream commercial cinema places film in a network of participation. *Cloverfield* utilized fan labor in a contest inviting fans to recreate their own mini-versions of the film, which they uploaded onto a web page, were simultaneously linked to Paramount Pictures' "official" *Cloverfield* site, where visitors can buy movie-themed desktop wallpapers, Nokia (featured prominently in the movie) cell phone ringtones, and DVDs of the movie. These creations now circulate the Internet on Facebook (which now has several official and unofficial *Cloverfield* fan pages, where fans can purchase DVDs and other related commodities) and You Tube. Participants responded to the prompt "where were you when the monster hit?" and created 2-5 minute digital videos documenting their reactions and responses to an attack on their home city. It will also examine the film's interactive website, where fans were invited to make their own trailers for the film using only consumer recording technology. To what extent does such a scenario call upon audiences to prefigure their relationship to trauma through participating in the circulation of these popular fantasies? In making the videos, are fans positioning themselves as the same sort of witness constructed by the film, or are there important differences? How do their interactive practices figure into dynamics of witnessing?

Chapter Four examines the 2004 documentary film *Control Room*, as

U.S/Egyptian co-production that focuses on Al Jazeera and mainstream news coverage of

the Iraq was from Central Command headquarters in Qatar. The film also supports an

interactive website, which includes additional interviews, links to articles and news,

reviews, and volunteer opportunities. In this chapter, I examine the extent to which

dialogue and empathy are presented, through narrative and aesthetic, in ways that might

invite possibilities for understanding how film in an interactive landscape can encourage

spectatorship as ethical witnessing. I examine the extent to which these interactive

opportunities, moreover, may provide the physical architecture that allows users to

respond and act to what they have seen. Moreover, in analyzing the role of interactive

networks in this chapter, I return most explicitly to the problem of the ethical/political

deduction. If ethical witnessing as viewing involves a call to action, doesn't taking this

action involve making a choice or decision, a grounded political move? Doesn't a

political action, which implies closure, sit in a certain tension with the Levinasian ethic?

In examining these questions, this chapter interrogates whether a politics of conviction

ought to be understood as the next step in the process of ethical witnessing, and if the

tensions, depending on the politic, are best reconciled in certain instances. My central

claim in this chapter is that the participatory network is constructed to enable ethical

witnessing. However, I contend that notions of action and responsibility built into ethical

witnessing are best understood and conceptualized on the political register. Moreover,

although the move to the political necessitates some manner of closure, certain forms of it

align more closely to the ethical ideal than others, as is the case in this example.

I conclude this dissertation by discussing the tensions that have arisen between theorizing an ethics of vision, and visual interactive media, predicated on an understanding of alterity, and a politics of conviction. I return to cosmopolitanism and dialogue as possible concepts helpful in thinking through how to best form ethical and political understanding of encounters with media culture in a post-9/11, globalized world.

Chapter Two

A Conspiracy in the Participatory Network: Populism, Network Architecture, and Alex Jones' *9/11 The Road to Tyranny*

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the circulation of the September 11th, 2001 attacks in so-called "alternative accounts" or "conspiracy theories." I am concerned with the extent to which these accounts negotiate, or fail to negotiate, the tensions between ethical principles of openness and the launching of a political response around the response to a felt traumatic event. I focus on various elements associated with Alex Jones, a syndicated radio, Internet and television personality based out of Austin, Texas. I examine the ways in which his texts position viewers as conspiracy witnesses to 9/11. I examine the extent to which the witnessing subject of conspiracy media is constituted through a particular, often oppositional, relationship to politics and citizenship. To do so, I examine the sense in which conspiratorial sensibilities are implicated in notions of psychosis (as borrowed from psychoanalysis) and populism (using Zizek's concept). The conspiracy witness, I argue, is positioned to experience a manner of revelation predicated on ideological quilting.

Moreover, I argue that the channels of participation involved in conspiracy, such as encouragement of viewer agency, enables the mobilization of this witnessing position through interactive opportunities. Although these discourses are situated by larger cultural narratives as existing outside of acceptable mainstream accounts of the event, I am concerned with the extent to which participation in them becomes implicated in a sort

of totalitarian populism that forecloses upon possibilities for ethical witnessing. I focus

on three aspects of how conspiracy theories are produced by this participatory network.

First, the narrative flows of the documentaries themselves, and how they establish

important characters in the discourse, such as villains, heroes and victims. I will

primarily analyze one documentary: Alex Jones' *9/11: The Road to Tyranny*.[15] In order to

ascertain what these objects are saying and doing, I will examine their arguments, use of

editing and aesthetic technique, and technologies of manipulation, or special effects. I

argue that if we can understand how these texts function in a narrative sense, and how

they frame key players and characters, we can likewise understand how they produce and

situate a particular witness-viewer and call this viewer to action. I advance that

conspiratorial textual forms engage in two primary strategies to produce a conspiracy:

ascribing intentions to actors and adhering to absolute notions of good and evil as integral

to the development of various characters and actors. The sense in which the film's

narrative flow, and its relationship to populism, is established in these forms is crucial to

understanding the genre in the context of an ethical-political framework.

The second facet of conspiracy theories as a participatory network that I will

examine concerns their channels of distribution and exhibition, namely online formats

such as You Tube, its use of a "related videos" playlist, and practices of hyperlinking. I

argue that platforms of distribution such as these are crucial to analysis because they

allow relationships to be made to other material, thereby creating a bundle or loop of

discourse that links various nodes back to the film's auteur, supporting the original point

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[15] Not all aspects of 9/11 alternative accounts constitute conspiratorial culture. There are gradations, and degrees, a spectrum on which this dissent registers.

of view. Through examination of these platforms, they emerge as modes of participation enabled and allowed by interactive structures such as hyperlinks and the format of You Tube. The extent to which this participation pushes and challenges, or reaffirms and supports, Alex Jones' discourse of conspiracy is a key concern in this analysis. The apparatus of participation surrounding the conspiracy, I demonstrate, creates a closed loop that lends itself to a certain mode of populist certainty.

The final aspect of analysis in this chapter concerns the ways in which reception is produced and materialized in these platforms of participation. To study this, I will examine two aspects of You Tube's format that allows for a kind of community-building and dialogue around the content. The first element of this is the related playlists that accompany the video. You Tube uses an algorithm to ascertain what viewers of a video tend to also view, thereby supplying a useful insight into patters of reception and viewer preferences. Second, I examine a sample of commentary surrounding the videos, which will allow for a study of how viewers are reacting and responding to the material viewed. This investigation will lead to a greater understanding of the sort of witness produced and mobilized by 9/11 conspiracy culture, which speaks to the main question of the larger dissertation project: how are various convergent technologies and forms producing, capturing, and managing the 9/11 witness? These concerns are addressed in this chapter around notions of the conspiracy witness, which is actively involved, through interactive linking work, in the production of such a system. However, when such a witness is articulated to a subject position that is paranoid or populist, the ethical and political concerns in this project are evoked. Thus, to the extent that they assist in the construction

of building a closed discursive loop, or conversely provide the critical space to open it, technologies of participation are extremely important in the production of this 9/11 witness.

<div align="center">**Part One**</div>

Building a Conspiracy: Populism and the Witness of Global Evil

1. The Road to Tyranny?

It is difficult not to be struck by the sheer volume of 9/11 conspiracy-related output quickly and easily accessible online. Preliminary searches for "9/11 truth videos" and "9/11 conspiracy theories" reveal a veritable spate of material; a deluge of online documentaries, video segments of larger films, remixed videos, weblogs, and other material. It is almost as if one is confronted with a demand for acknowledgment by those claiming an oppositional voice. Although the amount of content available under the auspice of 9/11 conspiracy culture is copious, I will focus on one film, Alex Jones' *9/11: Road to Tyranny.* Alex Jones is an extremely prolific documentary filmmaker and radio talk show host who manages a large and expanding media empire, including two websites, a streaming talk radio show available as both audio and video feeds, and numerous documentary films available online and for purchase on DVD. Jones seems perpetually interested in garnering as much visibility as possible, engaging in high-profile civil disobedience activities such as donning clown makeup in the spirit of Heath Ledger's Joker character in the recent film *The Dark Knight* and heckling police officers about what he sees as excessive police powers. He has also worn this makeup on his radio show while delivering screeds against the alleged tyranny of the Obama

administration. Jones' politics can be complicated. At times, for example, he espouses

leftist positions such as criticism of free trade and the increased surveillance and the

extension of the Patriot Act. At times, these statements are uttered literally in the same

breath as far-right and/or Libertarian standpoints advocating gun rights, denouncing

health care reform, and denying global warning. The timeliness of these performances, in

addition to their extreme visibility, lends a sense of urgency to studying the ways in the

9/11 witness is produced and mobilized in "conspiracy culture." The clown makeup, for

example, has been associated with protest signs carried by the Tea Party Movement, a

right-wing organization opposed to the Obama Administration, sometimes going as far as

to question Obama's citizenship and the legitimacy of his presidency.[16]

In the summer of 2009, the Tea Partiers made headlines for carrying signs

depicting President Obama in the Joker makeup, sometimes accompanied by the label

"socialist" or "fascist," terms which are famously confounded in their arguments.[17] The

Tea Party movement is known for its use of inflammatory rhetoric, has directed

homophobic and racial slurs at U.S. Senators, and even directly and indirectly called for

the Assassination of President Barack Obama.[18] They frequently make reference to the

American Revolution and suggest using so-called revolutionary violence to fight

tyranny.[19] Similar tropes and arguments can be found in Jones' film, and the online

environment in which it inhabits rhetorically links 9/11 truth discourse to those of the Tea

Party Movement, Glenn Beck's program, and other outposts of Right-Wing extremism.

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[16] http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2010/01/26/83026/tea-party-birthers-movements-somewhat.html
[17] http://www.slate.com/id/2251669
[18] http://www.examiner.com/x-15870-Populist-Examiner~y2010m3d21-Tea-Party-protesters-shout-nigger-and-spit-on-lawmaker,
[19] http://thinkprogress.org/2010/03/20/code-red-gun/

Jones is also a public persona who has garnered a good deal of visibility and notoriety over the past few years. A recent Huffington Post blog entry on Right-Wing extremism and talk radio, for example, compares Jones to Glenn Beck, suggesting that both possess an appeal and charm reminiscent of the televangelist.[20] Jones has also captured the attention of British documentary filmmaker Jon Ronson, author of *The Men Who Stare at Goats,* a nonfictional account of government mind control and psychic warfare operations, which has since been made into a Hollywood film. Ronson has appeared on Jones' Internet-televised radio program, and considers himself a skeptic intent on exposing the absurdity and paranoid excess of so-called conspiracy theorists. Jones has appeared frequently on the late-night radio talk program Coast to Coast A.M., and his films are often at the top of You Tube's related video playlists that appear when perusing "9/11 truth" related material.

The basic premise of *9/11: The Road to Tyranny* is that the events of September 11th were staged by the George W. Bush administration and the bin Laden family to provide a rationale for increasing security and police powers in the United States, and promoting the expansion of security industries and laws. Jones argues that, rather than being an anomalous or precedent-setting event, the alleged 9/11 plot was one in a long chain of government-sponsored acts of terrorism, designed to increase governmental power with the ultimate goal of achieving world government. Jones takes us through various historical episodes. He begins with Nero's burning Rome and "blaming it on the Christians," and moves through Adolph Hitler's alleged burning of the Reichstag to create mass hysteria and public outcry for more security measures, creating support for

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[20] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bob-cesca/exposing-glenn-beck-as-a_b_528966.html

his abolition of the chancellery and appointing himself Fuhrer. Other "false flag"

operations, all in the United States, include Pearl Harbor, "Operation Northwoods," the

1993 World Trade Center Bombing, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, and finally 9/11.

Agendas behind these alleged state-sponsored terrorist events vary somewhat, but

generally involve organizing a pretext to increase federal (and ultimately world)

government powers, such as the inception of the United Nations (Pearl Harbor), stricter

gun control legislation and "socialized medicine" (Oklahoma City) and the opportunity to

"sic a homeland security system on the American people" (1993 WTC bombing).

According to Jones, the 1993 attempt was ineffectual, thanks to a rogue CIA stooge who

became apprehensive about the plan at the last minute, and parked the truck 12 feet away

from the intended cite, thus denying "the Feds" the "massive death toll they needed."

9/11, he argues, was the Federal Government's push to "finish the job."

The second half of the film is intended to provide evidence of excessive police

activity in the United States, both pre and post-9/11. Jones points his cameras and

megaphones at what he deems examples of the militarized consequences of domestic

terrorist events and subsequent security ventures. Jones heckles police officers at an

Austin, Texas traffic checkpoint, attempts to disrupt local news coverage of a biological

attack/nuclear spill drill (allegedly a "staged" event intended as 'psychic warfare" against

citizens), and lambasts post-Columbine SWAT Team "terrorist" drills in public schools.

Other screeds are directed against FEMA camps, military drills in urban areas, U.S.

military catalogues advertising sonic and low-frequency devices (to break up

"demonstrations" and other forms of "unrest"), the environmentalism movement,

biometric recognition technologies, and an interview where Prince Phillip confesses a fantasy of "coming back as a virus" to "solve" overpopulation. All of this information is used as evidence of the endgame of the "global elite," understood as an extension of the U.S. Federal Government. This agenda consists of enslaving the public in camp-like enclosures, surveilling and controlling them with sophisticated technology, while hoarding "life extension technologies" for themselves. This "nightmare police state" is presented as the inevitable consequence of terrorist attacks, allegedly staged by governments themselves to increase their own power. As the grainy, highlighted documents and footage whiz by, it becomes evident that a wide band of activities, groups, and technologies are involved in this process, intended to prove the existence of the project, or as evidence of its success. Images include ATMs, vending machines, children's cartoons featuring retina scans, blurry United Nations position papers suggesting that the earth should house no more than 700,000 people, and other documents referencing environmental issues. The film ends with another 6-minute direct address, which Jones explicitly labels a "call to arms." He implores viewers "never to turn in your firearms" and ensures that world leaders are a cabal of "bloodthirsty, evil tyrants" whose "pleasure [and] enjoyment is feeding off of populations." He concludes by assuring that "although we are trying to fix this peacefully, we have rights," and encouraging viewers to "get the facts out, get the word out" by disseminating his message and content in as many venues and across as many platforms as possible.

2. A Conspiracy Defined

Before analyzing *9/11 The Road to Tyranny* and its multi-platform permutations, I will spend some time defining characteristics of a conspiracy. I will then move to analyze the narrative components of the film, its relationship to You Tube as a distribution platform, and the manner in which reception is involved in this platform.

By presenting the trauma of national destruction in a manner counter to the "official" story, conspiracy genres dis-articualte the events of September 11th from the symbolic order, the sense making narrative structure of "official sources" like the 9/11 Commission. By first re-establishing the event as an uncomfortable interruption, by virtue of "debunking" the sense-making system used to frame it, a moment of real trauma with regards to the 9/11 shock is re-created and re-occasioned by Jones' accounts.

In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Slavoj Zizek discusses the 9/11 moment and resulting "war on terror" discourses in the context of Levinasian ethics and Alain Badiou's formulation of the exigent "Act," which serves as a disruptive intrusion into the stasis of ideological complacency. For Zizek, the Real moment of 9/11 destruction, had, been preemptively constructed in fantasy narratives that have long traversed the popular imagination through the Hollywood film industry. Although this disaster narrative had long been circulating within the imaginary register, Zizek argues that its actual/Real manifestation constituted an Act or Event that launched new regimes of U.S. state power, and laid the foundations for the implementation of a permanent state of exception anchored in a new mode of U.S. state sovereignty. Far from being obsolete or irrelevant, U.S. state power enjoyed a revival post-9/11, and along with that, new rhetorical forms of

othering and enemy-making. For Zizek, the "terrorist" has become the new face of monstrosity. Akin to the function of the Jews in Nazi Germany, Zizek posits that Muslims/Arabs or "Islamic Fundamentalists" are now the symbolic order's radically evil outside, replacing the "Communist." The signifier is somewhat slippery, however, and, especially under the Patriot Act, various activities of demonstration and protest can earn this label. This new enemy, the "quilting point of our ideological space" fuels reactionary community formation and nationalist revivalism (111). In this sense, ideological negotiation of 9/11 involves the process of establishing villains, who will return as important characters crucial to analysis of *9/11 The Road to Tyranny*. For Zizek, the crucial ethical-political move is to specify the particular dynamic of the Levinasian ethic in the global post-9/11 world: The Other-qua face must, for the ethical principle of openness to translate into progressive political ends, apply to the radical alterity. In other words, no other can be automatically foreclosed upon or designated as inherently evil. For the intrusion of the face as an ethic to have a tenable political function, it must serve as an intrusion into the bounded totality of state and subject that defines the existing hegemonic ideological order. Post-9/11, he contends, these boundaries are defined by neo-U.S. nationalism against the stealthy, amorphous, subterfuge-oriented terrorist. Zizek positions the externalized enemy-other as the product-the remainder-of totalitarian system building which necessitates a threatening "rogue element" to be identified and expunged. This construct, he argues, shifts its shape to conform to various totalitarian projects and nationalistic attempts, and has taken form

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in ethnic groups and populations ranging from Jews to Muslims to whichever immigrant group is perceived as the largest threat to the social order.

Zizek's theoretical framework supplies a useful backdrop to situating how conspiracy theories have circulated in popular discourse. Understanding how these discourses have come to function as outsiders themselves supplies insight into how their architects, such as Jones, use their outsider status to construct their own quilting points. Jack Bratich defines "conspiracy theory" as a political discourse, and by extension the subjects constructed by it, as the radical outside to "proper" and "rational" political discourse. The conspiracy theory/theorist exists surreptitiously within, and by its very presence threatens to undermine and destroy the entire system itself. In *Conspiracy Panics*, Bratich locates this anxiety in a sort of liberal, elitist discomfort with populism itself.

The "paranoid style" and its followers are paradoxical: they are both wholly other from legitimate political discourses and constructions of citizenship and simultaneously encroaching upon them, threatening the stability of the order with an anomalous presence, refusing to disappear while stubbornly resisting incorporation or assimilation. However, Zizek makes a key distinction between populist movements and those based in class struggle (exhibiting a clear political preference for the latter). Populism, he argues, is driven by a more general desire for hegemony, in opposition to the traditional Marxian notion of working-class struggle. Populism directs antagonism against persons or groups, as opposed to structural class inequalities.

Populism, for Zizek, is fundamentally predicated upon the fetishization and maligning of some external enemy, a "positive ontological entity whose annihilation would restore balance and justice," (278) whereas class struggle forwards a structural critique which posits this injustice and imbalance as systemic. A fatal misstep in the populist cause involves the movement's confound of the Real (negativity, the event in itself) with a fetish construed as a

> [T]raumatic kernel, a fundamental antagonism the inhabitants of the village were unable to symbolize, to account for, to 'internalize,' to come to terms with, an imbalance in social relations that prevented the community from stabilizing itself into a harmonious whole (287).

The populist, conversely, attempts to solidify the gap left by trauma (especially national trauma) into some corporeal entity to be managed and dealt with accordingly. This problem with populism stems, Zizek argues, from a flawed desire to apprehend the gaze.

The gaze, according to Lacan, is the fetish object par exellance, the *object a*, the Thing in itself that is fantasized to supply a plentitude of absolute meaning. However, Lacan contends that this plentitude does not exist, it is constituted by a void or lack, and, consequently, apprehensions of the gaze result in profound shock or terror-trauma-not the satisfaction of finally accessing some supreme fetish object. Populism, crucially, fails to grasp this absence or gap, and clings to the fantasy of The Thing, projecting it onto some externalized enemy/other thought to embody social antagonism itself (as exemplified in the Nazi scapegoating of the Jews). This is precisely what Lacan means by the empty or absent nature of the phallus/master signifier, the presence that is really a lack. The Thing,

the non-object of fantasy and desire, stands as the quilting point of the entire symbolic, ideological order. As Zizek contends, "every Symbolic field needs a signifier of lack to structure itself," a "symbolic lack," for "the Real remains immanent to the Symbolic, its inherent traumatic core: there is no Real without the Symbolic, it is the emergence of the Symbolic which introduces into reality the gap of the Real" (319).

The lack of the Real, moreover, is the gulf that separates symbolization from lived reality, that which is in excess of the symbolization system, has no positive value within it. Populism, according to Zizek's account of Lacan, anxiously attempts to close this gap by attributing an over-determined positive value to some empty signifier that "engenders the mysterious *X*" (318). Wherever this construct can be found, what we really have identified is the "signifier of lack, the lack in the Other" (319). Thus, for Zizek, populism reproduces this reification of the Real, and "remains a version of the politics of fear: it mobilizes the fear of the crowd by evoking the fear of the corrupt intruder" (304).

As a mode of dissent, conspiracy narratives risk enacting some of the totalitarian dangers (fantasy of complete social harmony, abjection and exclusion) that Zizek identifies. In identifying the object-cause of their antagonism in some group, populists fantasize that they have apprehended the gaze. My examination of the 9/11 conspiracy in this chapter distinguishes the textual narratives, and the remainders they may produce discursively, from their function, and the manner in which their creation, circulation, and exhibition is defined by certain relationships with structures of viewing. I am concerned with the extent to which conspiracy witnessing is aligned with a populist process that attempts to suture an entire field by designating an abject remainder, and the extent to

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which technologies of production and interactivity might be implicated in this process. Studying elements of the reception process is essential to understanding this process, for it gives a sense of the ways in which a media climate predicated on interactivity and networked connectivity contribute to the construction of the conspiracy orbit. The interaction and interplay between these aspects supplies key insights into understanding conspiracy culture's relationship with populism, witnessing, and technology.

Some have raised concerns surrounding the academic left's tendency to fetishize or hastily celebrate the advent of participatory technology while failing to sufficiently interrogate the nature of the content circulating in this space. Jodi Dean, in *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* charges left academics and critics with conceding important political ground by applauding these media structures which, she argues, actually support and reinforce the hegemony of "communicative capitalism," a moment which privileges and applauds the circulation of information and messages for its own sake, regardless of the content and absent some schema to put these disparate voices into conversation with one another and rationally interrogate their claims. This phenomenon, she argues, effectively supports the advent of neoliberal ideology insofar as it upholds the values of the information/immaterial economy while disavowing notions such as rational debate, which would provide the ability to analyze the credibility and politics of the spate of messages circulating online. This notion, she argues, privileges the circulation of images and electronic messages while refusing to interrogate the content in its own political right. [21]

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[21] Neoliberalism is reinforced in a manner similar to how Hardt and Negri characterize the predominance of immaterial labor in the economy of *Empire*: capital now functions globally by annexing affective and

Dean's call for renewed emphasis of meaning, content, and the substantive

evaluation and debate of messages hearkens to Todd McGowan's critique of the

postmodern image discussed in Chapter 1, that demeans the importance of a hermeneutic

framework to analyze imagery. The idea that "everyone is entitled to her opinion,"

according to Dean, is situated in this ideological milieu by upholding the core tenets of

late capitalism, but lacks a substantive approach to dealing with the information produced

within it. Like McGowan, Dean maintains that pluralism and relativism serve

postmodern capitalism well insofar as they dismiss the significance of sense-making

interpretive devices. Individualism, as a key value of neoliberal ideology, intersects with

the pluralistic notion that all opinions, voices and perspectives-regardless of their politics

and epistemologies-are equally deserving of airtime.

Dean's approach to online conspiracy documentaries is provocative. On the one

hand, she remains wary of reducing the analysis to a celebration of the participatory

technologies involved, skeptical of the notion that "radical left politics are somehow built

into the technology" (149). What distinguishes the conspiracy narrative, she argues, is not

the technological milieu, but the manner in which these accounts resist the allegedly

ineffectual, hysterical mode of address that defines today's democracy. According to

Dean the master-hysteric relationship, as advanced by Lacan, is predicated on a

questioning; asking the master "are you really who you say I am?" This type of

immaterial energies previously limited to "private" or leisure domains/spheres and tapping into them for
value-added to capital. When we add to the output of participatory content, Dean contends, we are
enacting and performing the techniques and protocols indicative of the current state of capitalism.
Kordela's theory of the biopolitics of the gaze, somewhat similarly, understood relationships with culture
industry output and technologies in terms of value-added to capital in the form of pleasure and other
affective energies produced by these encounters.

relationship, she explains, is typically what defines the manner in which the left activist, when acting under the auspices of democratic participation, engages in protest activity. She explains that:

> The discourse of the hysteric can thus be understood as providing the basic form of democratic discourse. Like the hysteric, democracy challenges claims coming from a master. It is motivated by desire, a desire enabled by the very law that seems to block its fulfillment (149).

The Law, in this sense, is the principle of sovereignty. Dean is highly skeptical of "hysterical" participation and activism, charging that it is tolerated and even encouraged under conditions of communicative capitalism precisely because of its ineffectuality and failure to constitute any substantive threat. "[T]his desire to reveal is a trap," she contends, for "it remains caught in a pseudo-activity that reduces politics to a single operation-revelation" (149). What is being revealed in these processes and modes of participation are 'truths' about the functioning of power, such as fraudulent practices in the 2000 and 2004 Presidential elections, for example. The revelation, if it acts as the limit of political activity, is insufficient and fails to threaten the master's power, for it essentially remains conducive to the appearance centric, surface based ideology of postmodern, late capitalist image culture. This is due in large part to the privileging of consumption in this system. When merely absorbing the messages, consuming the content that one prefers, becomes the limit of political activity, a certain passivity is the result.

Conspiracy discourse, however, allegedly operates on a different register. Although it at times ostensibly adopts the language of the hysteric in its admonitions to "ask questions" and "find out for yourself" the narrative structures of conspiracy indicate an entirely different discourse. The role of certainty in these accounts-present in their unwavering insistence on irrefutable facts-changes "the mode of injunction." "It now indicates," she explains, "less the openness of desire, a desire to know, than the closed circuit of drive. The facts are already there, we can be certain of that. There's no need to accept anything on the basis of belief" (149). This distinction, according to Dean, is manifested by the structural and formal features of the text, which generate a particular sort of jouissance. This enjoyment derives from the pleasurable affect produced through use of repetition, certain types of hypnotic musical score, and depiction of declassified documents selectively marked up and highlighted by digital graphics. The gestalt of these aesthetic and technical choices, argues Dean, serves as an attempt to suture the symbolic gap produced by the traumatic loss that September 11th designates. This closure is produced by the pleasure occasioned by the linking work itself-this desire, this will to wholeness, completion, closure and suturing is what makes 9/11 conspiracy texts enjoyable.

Although it offers a cogent argument concerning the psychological dimensions of conspiracy building, I would like to add to it a discussion of the structures and apparatuses that enable or allow for these discourses link up, and the implications of them being so heavily immersed in a linked atmosphere. Some of this apprehension likely arises from Dean's hesitancy towards lauding communicative technologies, especially

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after having so deftly demonstrated how these media are intimately complicit in the functioning of communicative capitalism. However a formal, textual approach to conspiracy documentaries, limited to detailed analysis of aesthetic components such as sound and shot composition, ignores the ways in which these texts came to be, are allowed to and continue to have a space to exist, precisely because of these technological structures. I agree with Dean that narrative components are important in the production, disruption, and maintenance of certain types of subjectivity. However, the technologies that construct these narrative events are inseparable, on a basic level, from the affects and jouissance they produce. These technologies: digital camcorders, personal computers, editing software, are complicit in regimes of communicative capitalism insofar as they are commodities that exploit participation activities as information production and message circulation, and thereby circulate as fetish objects. However, in addition to the psychic pleasure gained from linking and connecting aspects of the conspiracy (constructing the closed loop of certainty) physical aspects of technology, such as suggested playlists and embedded links, literally allow for these links to be made, encouraging viewers to follow a particular logical path while following protocols of Internet architecture. The psychotic subject-as exemplified in the linking work of the conspiracy witness-links not only in her mind when putting together information, but in how she navigates the conspiracy world through hyperlinks and playlists, allowing her to move from one site and video to the next.

Participant/audience labor is involved in the use of and involvement with these devices. However, there seems to be another dimension significant to the analysis of the

role of technological devices and apparatus in the production of conspiracy narratives. By rejecting the hegemonic master signifier, and producing certainty in another, participants in conspiracy culture do not simply add to the output of communicative capitalism. Although the ethics of their discourse, and veracity of their witnessing, should be interrogated, on some level their practices appear to challenge the limits of communicative capitalism and the aforementioned circulation of messages and information that lacks any real ability to influence hegemonic cultural narratives or inspire substantive debate and deliberation. Perhaps, as Dean outlines, the psychotic circuit of drive is fundamentally incompatible with that of late capitalism and hegemonic ideology. To this end, I interrogate the possibilities of conspiracy theories, as discourses productive of psychotic conspiracy witnesses, as supplying an inroad to discuss ethical and political possibilities of a politics of conviction.

Psychotic subjects, according to Dean, are hyper-invested in circulations and investments in meaning. To an extent, they are defined against the postmodern subject of communicative/neoliberal capitalism, who subscribes to the belief in the imaginary's plentitude and rejects any notion of interpretation, meaning making, and debate/contestation over meaning. Psychotic witnesses of conspiracy, conversely, operate from an extreme fidelity to codes of meaning, codes that, in this paradigm are ostensibly defined by a will to investigate yet assume from the outset the falsity of hegemonic, naturalized codes of meaning. Dean is astute to point out how what is often referred to as vibrant, multitudinous democracy-an excess of opinion and participation-frequently serves as a ruse to shore up for the workings of capitalism. She is, unlike

Bratich, highly critical of this approach to participation and engagement, insofar as it precludes the undertaking of more effective methods of organization and activism. Psychosis, for Dean, departs from this logic by introducing a principle of certainty. The certainty, in this case comes in the form of fidelity to an alternative master signifier. For Bratich, this might be categorized as itself a manifestation of radical alterity resisting capture, of difference. My concern in this chapter involves interrogating the ethical parameters of psychotic certainty along the lines of conspiratorial populism as a mode of witnessing. Although certainty in principle may be a promising inroad to challenging the hegemony of postmodern communicative capitalism, what are the specific ethical, and political, dimensions of this certainty? This is the sense in which Alex Jones' brand of conspiracy populism supplies a useful inroad into examining these tensions.

3. Constructing A Conspiracy Witness: *9/11 The Road to Tyranny's* **Aesthetic, Narrative, and Mode of Address.**

In this section, I analyze the narrative, textual components of *9/11: The Road to Tyranny*, with an eye toward the ways in which specific technical and aesthetic choices are utilized in the service of building psychotic certainty; of encouraging conspiratorial witnessing through the affective pleasures of certainty and linking. I parse this film in order to ascertain the kind of 9/11 witness that Jones is situating, and the ways in which his narrative establishes key characters (heroes, villains, and victims) in ways that raise concerns of totalizing reconstruction and ideological suturing; that attempt to close the gaps that the traumatic re-investigation of 9/11 reopens. In order to analyze the film in this manner, I will analyze the way in which it uses specific modes of aesthetic

construction (such as montage and direct address) as well as technical aspects such as

cuts, repetition, digital manipulation and effects, and use (and alteration) of other material

such as online news content and stock footage.

9/11: The Road to Tyranny opens with a frenetic montage that seems to invite

affects of shock and trauma. Without words or context, the film begins with rapid-fire,

ostensibly disparate footage and clips, including a digital fingerprint being blown up on a

computer screen, former Attorney General Janet Reno ordering the siege on the Waco,

Texas Branch Davidian compound, children receiving vaccinations, a nuclear bomb

exploding, security cameras on public streets, a SWAT team formation, stock news and

amateur footage of the twin towers being hit and collapsing, and even a decomposing

human skull. The 9/11 clips are shown the most frequently. Repetitive violin score

accompanies the images, and both speed up to a frenetic crescendo. Following this

montage, Jones breaks the fourth wall to directly address the viewer. He explains that he

will produce evidence demonstrating that 9/11 was a U.S supported and executed project.

In a segment that lasts nearly six minutes, Jones states that world leaders constitute a

group of "megalomaniacal Satanists sworn to tyranny" and "absolutely ruthless

individuals." With unwavering certainty and a bombastic, emphatic tone, Jones tells

viewers that the upcoming film will supply "conclusive evidence" of the orchestrated

nature of 9/11, an argument achieved through voice-over narration and the repetition of

imagery. Barely 5 minutes into the (over 150 minute) film Jones informs us of, rather

than demonstrating to us, the "conclusive" evidence. Immediately, the film's aura of

certainty is established, and delivered in a confident and completely assured tone. No

measured call to look at the facts and find out for yourself is made; Jones simply states

the thesis of the film, and its conclusion, during this direct address. The fast montage in

the beginning reinforces this sense of certainty as well. Speed-which will manifest as a

defining trope throughout the entire film-is mobilized to close the gap between image and

affect, the distance where critical engagement and deliberation could exist. The rapid fire

sequencing of images, accompanied by the repetitive music (which itself builds to a

frenzied crescendo) creates an urgent tone, which emphasizes the shocking connection

between the disturbing images.

A few minutes into the film, the villains are clearly defined as current and former

U.S. Presidents, anyone affiliated with the United Nations, and most government officials

in general. By referring to these actors as simultaneously Satanic and completely in

control, Jones sets a tone of nefarious, absolute power. Jones interpellates the audience

into his own sense of certainty through this manner of address, using the pronoun "we" to

describe what is already "known" about the global elites: That they are "absolutely

ruthless individuals," who desire "tyranny," "world population reduction," "life extension

technology" and all-around world domination. As a child of the 1980s, I couldn't help

but think of the monstrous cartoon villains such as He-Man's Skeletor, a demonic

creature whose goals entailed the wholly sinister-yet somewhat vague-agenda of world

domination.[22] From the outset, it is abundantly clear that this is the register upon which

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[22] These were also the tropes used by former President George W. Bush to address the U.S. public when explaining the actions of September 11th, although in this instance the evil monsters were, of course, those in the Arab world whom the Bush Administration subsequently attacked. Lynne Spigel has argued that this discursive style contributes to the formation of a certain "infantile citizenship" comforted by the certainty that simplistic binaries such as good/evil and love/hate provide. Infantile citizens, moreover, enjoy a strength of conviction and immediacy of affect that might be foreclosed upon by modes of citizenship that

Jones will be engaging his audience. Calling out various world leaders as "megalomaniacal Satanists…sworn to tyranny" informs us, unwaveringly, that we are dealing with absolute notions of good and evil, that the traumatic wound of 9/11 will be sutured by designating a new monstrous fetish, an abject ideological quilting point whose very humanity is called into question. In this case, the monsters are world leaders. Jones informs us, before the film begins, that "this is the evidence, and it is conclusive." Certainty, at this point, has been established, and the villains designated. The rest of the film spends its time, then, repeating what is already "known."

The rest of the film consists of historical footage, digital news archives, interviews conducted by Jones, and news footage. Voice over narration is an almost constant presence, and speed is an organizing principle throughout. Marching through historical documents, news footage, and other archival material related to Pearl Harbor and the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrow building in Oklahoma City, Jones states that September 11th was one in a series of U.S. -sponsored terror campaigns, executed for the purpose of shoring up military, governmental, and financial power, such as providing a pretext for war and launching massive domestic surveillance initiatives. The pace at which this material is presented is so frenetic that it tempts the viewer to succumb to its pleasurable certainty, which feels in competition with the amount of work required to follow the arguments and evidence presented. Names, dates, acronyms, agencies, pictures, symbols, and highlighted portions of various documents fly by at a breakneck speed. Following all of this-processing everything- requires rewinding the finder bar

encourage more complex, rigorous analyses into the workings of globalization, foreign policy, politics, and economics. Perhaps this mode of infantilism is feeding the pleasure of conspiratorial certainty as well.

several times just to have the opportunity to absorb the material. If consumed on its own

terms, the affect of viewing this film is the intellectual equivalent of drinking Red Bull,

as Jones, talking a mile a minute, hurls at the viewer a spate of information underscored

by frenetic violin score.

Jones also has a predilection for direct address and repetitive, insistent language,

frequently repeating keywords such as "false flag," "criminal," "expose," and "power,"

words, when strung together and repeated, call for a sense of indignation, outrage, and

urgency. For example, when Jones introduces the events of 9/11 (following a 45 minute

contextualization within a historical backdrop of various national traumas and attacks),

Jones utilizes familiar tropes of the conspiracy form: repetitive images of the building

hits and collapses from news and amateur footage, along with looped screams and music.

He juxtaposes these sounds and images with archival footage of George H.W. Bush

giving a speech promising the advent of a "New World Order," a phrase usually

understood in the conspiracy genre as indicative of an emerging global power

arrangement. Bush's utterance of the phrase "New World Order" is repeated several

times; sometimes Jones pauses the frame to inform us that this phrase is an admission of

the nefarious agenda of global takeover being launched.

When he moves into the events of September 11th, the film is operating at an even

faster pace than in the introductory portions. Jones visualizes news articles from various

online sources that are included as evidence proving the United States' involvement in

the September 11th attacks. The documents only appear on the screen for a few seconds

each, sometimes with selected portions highlighted, but Jones' narration always informs

us what we should be taking away from them. For example, Jones includes two articles

from BBC.com that allegedly stipulate various levels of involvement in 9/11, such as bin

Laden being treated in a CIA hospital and Bush ordering the CIA not to prosecute al

Qaeda suspects in Pakistan. He calls this piece of evidence "the biggest smoking gun of

them all." Rather than paying attention to each individual article, pausing on it, or

scrolling through its contents, Jones flashes it on the screen, quickly zooming in on a

selected or highlighted portion then zooming out just as quickly, foregrounding a

photograph of Bush over the article. Once Bush's face is placed in the foreground Jones

turns his vitriol to the former president; the aforementioned aesthetic and technical

choices having already (within the logic of the film) established the certainty of his

pernicious involvement. Stating that "George Bush is a mass murderer," Jones

implements another effects program, probably Photoshop. Jones tints Bush's face green

and gives his eyes a demonic red glow.

To drive the argument home, he then cuts to a post-9/11 speech where Bush

espouses his views on "conspiracy theories." This segment, where Bush urges "let us

never tolerate outrageous conspiracy theories" about 9/11 inspires special indignation

from Jones, who stops the feed, narrating "I guess it's un-American to investigate the

facts" before slowing Bush's voice down to a crawl, and repeating the phrase "conspiracy

theories" several times. He then provides another post-9/11 clip where Bush allegedly

"throws it in you face about dark cults of evil." In this clip, Bush states that "evil has

found a willing servant" in the hijackers, and that "behind them is a dark cult of evil."

Jones utilizes his preferred filmmaking techniques to significantly re-code and redefine

the meaning of Bush's words here. Pausing the frame to narrate, and slowing and repeating Bush's voice allows Jones to link this speech back to his main points about the nefarious, Satanic nature of world leaders. Although, in context, Bush is maligning the "terrorists" as the dark cults of evil, Jones manipulates the frame, and bundles it with other denunciations of Bush, in a manner that re-signifies the evil as the former president himself.

The movement in this manner is achieved through editing technologies such as Final Cut Pro and Photoshop, fairly user-friendly programs that allow for various sorts of digital image manipulation and basic effects. Through usage of these technologies, and the way that they allow Jones to re-signify the dark cult of evil onto Bush himself, Jones situates the viewer of his film as a psychotic, conspiracy witness, someone who is made privy to the absolute truth of a shocking trauma, laid bare before them. 9/11 was far more sinister than they had ever imagined; the villains behind it even more evil. The spirit of psychotic certainty is constructed through these technological manipulations here as well, as the witness is invited to dis-articulate any previously held sense of evil and responsibility from its former objects (terrorist hijackers, al Qaeda) and form a new master signifier, a new quilting point for the emerging ideological space. The climate of certainty here, created through voice-over narration, speed, and digital manipulation, clearly places Bush and other world leaders at its center, and therefore builds the space of psychotic certainty around this new quilting point.

Through its situation of the villains, *9/11 The Road to Tyranny* uses various digital, user-friendly filmmaking technologies to build a conspiracy. Notably, the

apparatuses of production are still concealed, which allows for a certain mystery to be preserved in the viewing of the film; the pleasurable trance remains uninterrupted by the jarring presence of the means of production intruding into the frame. However, the low-production value look of the film, the way in which it uses amateur technologies, seems to add to its subversive or alternative affect, the sense in which it lies outside of establishment material or mainstream hegemonic stories produced in sophisticated studios. Jones' rough aesthetic suggests activist media, something untainted by the industry and its association with mainstream news and entertainment media (whom Jones despises). As Dean points out, there is something about the outsider status built into the aesthetic of conspiracy material itself. "Their books, their sites aren't slick" she explains "with slick denoting a mindset and aesthetic overattuned to the deceptions of the mainstream." (155).

Jones' use of consumer-friendly production equipment, then, establishes him as part of the 9/11 truth community and distinguishes him from mainstream filmmakers (Michael Moore, perhaps) who might engender more suspicion as belonging to the "establishment." All of this, then, works together to bolster the sense of certainty, of absolute conviction in the nature of the villains involved and the ways in which they have enacted their plots. The shock of this "discovery," crucially, is quickly sewn up with new monsters, providing a populist closure that distinguishes this type of witnessing form the ethical witness of trauma. We are not invited to feel the trauma of the event, we are admonished to identify-with conviction-against an established set of monstrous villains. Closure, then, is achieved through suturing the wounds re-opened by 9/11 re-

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investigation with a new quilting point. Certain technologies of production, such as quick-cuts and zooms of documents, digital manipulation of imagery, as well as narrative modes of construction and address, including montage and narration, are integral to this process.

In addition to the villains, Jones' world is populated by a new cohort of victims and heroes of 9/11, also crucial to the construction of witnessing involved here. As part of his argument for government involvement in 9/11 Jones interviews David Schippers, Chief Investigative Council for the House Judiciary. The aspect of Schippers' resume made most salient in Jones' documentary was his involvement in a Committee on the Impeachment hearing of former President William Clinton, although Schippers quickly adds that he also "brought down the mob in Chicago." The Schippers interview segment consists of a radio broadcast with Jones, which is overlaid with 9/11 stock footage and Schippers' picture. Schippers expounds on the alleged Bush-FBI coverup about 9/11, and lauds Jones and other "people like [him]" for trying to "get the truth out" by presenting information that challenges the official story of 9/11. One example Schippers gives is actress Geena Davis, whom Schippers claims attempted to bring some materials to the FBI concerning the Oklahoma City bombing, but was turned away. At this point, Jones interrupts, stating "for trying to protect their country, the heroes get crucified." Schippers agrees, stating that he is "still trying to get people to listen to [his] witnesses." At this point, the URL for one of Jones' websites, infowars.com, pops onto the screen over Schippers' photo and the 9/11 footage.

This segment of the film supplies insight into who the heroes of Jones' alternative 9/11 account are. Opposing the official account is the crucial first step. The heroes, such as Davis and Jones himself, are construed as those who engage in independent fact-finding missions and, crucially, adopt a sense of expertise surrounding their activities, leading them to a sense of confidence about their own findings. Professionalization is clearly not a prerequisite for being a 9/11 hero in this sense. Indeed, the amateurish approach, the standpoint of the concerned and activated, outraged citizen, is, within this universe, a more credible ethos than a professional journalist, for involvement with the mass media automatically implicates one in the workings of the global conspiracy. In this sense, certainty is factored back into the equation of heroism, for remaining stalwart in one's (and Jones') account of 9/11 acts as a defense against any possible doubt or uncertainty about one's professional qualifications or knowledge base that would lend credibility to these sorts of investigations and fact-finding missions. Credentials, expertise, titles and the like are, after all, the stuff of the elites. This is another sense in which cultures of 9/11 conspiracy are built around shoring up the legitimacy of their own sources, experts and evidence. This is a closed loop, and any information that counters or challenges it is probably implicated in the New World Order's global plot.

Christianity, at many points, also figured in to the construction of the 9/11 hero, which also allows for a strong tone of righteous, martyred indignation to figure in to the hero's quest. Christianity was evoked in the very beginning of the film, when Nero's burning Rome to scapegoat the Christians was offered up as the first historically documented "false flag." Jones makes reference to American citizens being "crucified on

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the altar of globalization," and suggests that various environmental movements are neo-pagan entities inherently opposed to Christians, whom they charge with destroying the earth. And, of course, during the Schippers interview, Jones asserts that the "heroes" "get crucified for trying to protect their country." This narrative of Christian religious backlash becomes intertwined with American nationalism to underscore the alleged insidiousness of any entity involved in globalization or global governance, charging that the main agenda of these initiatives is to "destroy American sovereignty" and render U.S. citizens "sacrificed on the altar of globalization."

This mode of address speaks to David Harvey's analysis of the emergence of white, nationalist religious backlash in the face of globalization. Harvey argues that feeling oppressed, and ignored by social welfare programs, working class (often southern) whites sometimes turn to an oppositional siege mentality vis-à-vis the federal government. Harvey contends that these sentiments are the direct result of the paradoxical relationship that neoliberalism constructs between nation and state, in that "neoliberal theory does not look with favor on the nation even though it supports the idea of a strong state. The umbilical cord that tied together state and nation under embedded liberalism had to be cut if neoliberalism was to flourish" (84). In Harvey's analysis, this cord had to be severed to ease the global flows of capital: deregulation of industry, free trade, and other such policies prevent the nationalization of resources from hindering offshore capital investments and the globalization of corporations. National wage and labor safety laws limit international business from exploiting foreign currency and labor markets. The idea of nation-particularly in a developmentalist sense-is incompatible with

neoliberal capitalism's push to globalize. Police, surveillance, and military power must, however, flourish to prevent and quell the dissent created by the poverty and unemployment that often results from lower wages, loss of benefits and "flexible" or insecure employment contracts resulting from deregulation of labor laws. These aspects of governance become collapsed under the sign of state.

Right wing movements, such as Reverend Jerry Falwell's 1978 "moral majority" campaign, Harvey argues, sought to capitalize on the disaffection brought about by a sense of loss of community felt by the decline of nationalism, in order to galvanize a previously untapped base of conservative voters. These moments helped to produce the rise of reactionary, white working class religious nationalism in the wake of neoliberal restructuring, for they

> Appealed to the cultural nationalism of white working classes and their besieged
> sense of moral righteousness (besieged because this class lived under conditions
> of chronic economic insecurity and felt excluded from many benefits that were
> being distributed through affirmative action and other state programs). The
> problem was not capitalism and the neoliberalization of culture, but the 'liberals'
> who had used excessive state power to provide for special groups (50).

This formulation certainly hearkens back to Zizek's understanding of totalitarian populism. Jones mobilizes some of the concepts from this movement to situate Christians, gun owners, and "patriots" as besieged groups. However, he also assails "big government" in the form of militarism and police-state powers, collapsing both social welfare programs (particularly universal health care or "socialized medicine") and

neoconservative hawkishness under the same insidious umbrella of "big government"

malfeasance. His formulation, then borrows elements of both white nationalist backlash

and anti-globalization rhetoric typically seen in leftist discourse. The result, then, is a

paranoid, psychotic subject suspicious of all forms of state intervention and involvement.

Jones' obsession with liberty, "freedom" and individual rights hearkens to the dangers

Harvey identifies in fetishizing individualism as a response to neoliberal oppression, for

such a vocabulary is easily incorporated and situated within the very fabric of neoliberal

discourse itself. Jones' style, involving the linking of seemingly disparate elements, is

deft at producing traumatic affect and traumatized subjects in response to power. These

witnesses are primed to see various events and domestic and global issues in a new way,

to adopt Jones' code system and see connection, similarity, and sinister intent. This

witness is paranoid and psychotic insofar as a discourse of simplicity supplies the

jouissance: participants in this sense-making apparatus are pulling back a veil of ideology

to see things as they really are-to uncover the truth. This certainty in mistrust leaves no

room for questioning.

Part Two

1. Links and Loops: Building Linking Witnesses of Conspiracy Culture

Although *9/11: The Road to Tyranny*, as well as Jones' other documentaries, are

available for purchase on DVD (through his website) they are easily and readily available

on free, online video hosting sites such as You Tube and Google video. In this section, I

explore the extent to which the Internet, as the platform primarily involved in distributing

and exhibiting this content, plays a part in structuring the sort of viewing experience

involved; the ways in which witnessing, in this system is built through practices of linking and connecting. Moreover, I explore the ways in which the manner of linking and connecting built by You Tube and Google video plays a part in constructing-or rupturing-the closed circuit of certainty that lends itself to the paranoid, psychotic witness of the conspiracy. In order to analyze this aspect of conspiracy culture, I examine two aspects of online distribution and the types of networked connectivity involved: You Tube's use of related playlists, an algorithmic system that points viewers in the direction of similar, popular content, and users' use of hyperlinks in their posting of videos. Through these two aspects of video hosting sites as a means of distribution, I examine the extent to which ability to link, bundle and connect pieces of content, as enabled by the platforms on which it appears, contributes to the formation of a system of certainty.

Specific You Tube videos are selected by searching for the title of the video and/or artist associated with it. As the user enters the search terms, You Tube offers, in the search bar, a list of suggestions that correlate with the keywords entered by the participant. Once the desired video is selected, it appears in the center of the interface. On the right hand side of the frame You Tube offers a list of related videos. These videos are selected via an algorithm that determines similarity of content.[23] The related videos also feature the number of views, as does the main video. At the top of the list is a "featured video" selected by the user who posted the original video. The interface of You Tube, through the way in which the platform seems to organize, route, and channel viewing experiences, and guide users through particular videos and "channels," encourages a sort of linking experience that groups various pieces of content together

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[23] See Baluja, et.al. for explanation of this process.

through similarity and popularity. I argue that this interface contributes to, and assists in the maintenance of, the prefigured certainty already an integral component of the conspiracy witness.

9/11: The Road to Tyranny features a playlist almost exclusively comprised of 9/11 truth material. Related videos in the playlist included *Loose Change*, another popular conspiracy video espousing an argument similar to Jones', amateur documentaries on the Skull and Bones secret society (often stipulated as having involvement in the NWO conspiracy), other Alex Jones documentaries, and a video about the Oklahoma City bombing. None of the content appeared to provide a perspective that challenged the conspiracy standpoint. In this sense, the algorithmic selection of related videos demonstrates how the You Tube format can effectively keep interested parties in the closed conspiracy loop. By navigating the links, and accessing content that affirms the original conspiracy, one encounters a deluge of information that shores up the perspective offered by Jones. Essentially, by physically navigating these links, a user is performing the heroic actions of the 9/11 witness hailed by Jones: finding out the facts, engaging in independent investigation, but in ways that affirm the original argument. You Tube's selection process provides a format where this type of "heroic" activity is possible, where viewers can become "witnesses" to the "9/11 truth."

While following these links, it became apparent that You Tube's interface is involved in constructing this orbit of certainty around the conspiracy of 9/11. At the top of the suggested playlist accompanying both parts one and two of Jones' 9/11 film (searched for separately) the "featured video" was another Jones documentary titled *The*

Obama Deception. This film, in line with Jones' basic thesis in most of his content,

argues that Obama is a puppet president and "front man" for the New World Order.

Hopping over to the *Obama Deception* documentary, I was presented with a number of

videos in the playlist column. Many of these were user-mashup style projects that edited

together, with FCP and Photoshop, stock footage, various images, and altered

photographs. The content of these short videos compared Obama to Adolph Hitler,

featured Obama in Joker makeup, and offered Photoshopped images of Obama altered to

resemble a horned demon. During one of these linking expeditions, I encountered a

video featuring Jones donning the Joker makeup that was Photoshopped onto Obama's

face and presented in "Tea Party" protest signs. It turns out that Jones delivered an anti-

Obama themed radio show dressed in this makeup, and has engaged in videotaped stunts

harassing police officers in the makeup. One video of these antics, posted by

TheAlexJonesChannel's profile, also contained a hotlink to Jones' website infowars.com,

where I learned about a contest that Jones held in August of 2009.

In the summer of 2009, Jones held a contest offering a $1000 cash prize to his

listeners/viewers. Fans were invited to make homemade videos where they plastered

signs of Obama in the joker makeup (sometimes with the label "fascist" or "socialist"

below the photo) onto various public, commercial and municipal buildings, such as

banks, courthouses, police stations, and hospitals. Entrants also prompted passersby to

answer questions such as "what's worse, smoking ten vials of crack per day or Obama's

healthcare plan?" (posed to a black man) and agree to statements such as "even snorting

glue is better than Obamacare" (two homeless youth). Respondents appeared reluctant

and embarrassed, suggesting that they were pressured and/or paid to answer the way that the filmmaker wanted them to. All of the contest entries are available on You Tube, as well as Jones website. Getting here exposes the user to a range of Obama joker material, including a CNN story on the phenomenon, Jones' broadcast, viewer videos using the Obama Joker trope, and some anti-Jones material criticizing his views. CNN, local news, and Fox News stories on Jones' contest, and the Obama Joker phenomenon in general, appear on some of the lists as well. There is also a clip form Glenn Beck's program that mentions *The Obama Deception* in the title, although Beck does not mention this film. Its presence does, however, bring Beck into the Jones orbit through the playlist feature. *The Obama Deception* film, moreover, appears at the top of many of these playlists as a featured video.

Two significant matters deserve comment. First, the organizational arrangement of the playlists, use of the "featured video" function, and links to Jones' website supply the tools to stay in the conspiracy loop. One could easily follow a particular trajectory: consume more Jones content, end up on his website, watch Glenn Beck, watch viewer videos praising the Jones Joker contest, peruse various other conspiracy documentaries such as *Loose Change*, and maybe even end up at the Tea Party Patriots' website. In this sense, the organization of You Tube playlists, and preference toward certain videos, bundles content in a way that creates a loop and reinforces the certainty of conspiracy culture, and returns surfers to Jones' viewpoint again and again. Through the sign of the Obama Joker, an image of the President of the United States literally rendered into a monstrous demonic creature seems to circulate, link up with other movements and

communities (such as the Tea Party) and travel through the cultural imagination as an image powerfully overdetermined with abject meaning.

The Obama Joker picture, coupled with conspiracy culture's discourse of certainty, seems to hearken back to precisely what Todd McGowan warned about regarding image culture. The lack of an interpretive framework is literally, visually apparent (ironically) on the Obama poster, as signs interchange the terms fascist, socialist and communist, confounding them and failing to offer any meaningful or accurate explanation as to what these terms mean. This failure of understanding can be found at virtually any Tea Party protest, where symbols productive of powerful, patriotic affect (The Constitution, guns, Obama Joker) circulate, but lack a clear, cohesive, context. Many of these symbols, and the vague notion of "patriot" populate Jones' universe as well. The linking work that Jones' witnesses, the pseudo-investigative citizen-journalists cum-9/11 heroes, do can easily shore up a tightly sealed paranoid universe where everything means something, and the evidence appears overwhelming, but critical distance and in-depth understanding of the images seems lacking. The image of President Barack Obama, the nation's first African-American to hold the office, moreover, sits at the monstrous quilting point, literally rendered into a Hollywood monster.

On the other hand, You Tube's platform is set up, to an extent, to offer responses in the forms of videos and comment streams, a genre of You Tube material that seems to offer opportunity to rupture the closed circuit of conspiracy enabled by You Tube's platform. I will examine a sample of these responses in the following section, which

examines user input and the extent to which conspiracy culture online may be ruptured by

a manner of witnessing not produced and encouraged by Jones.

Part Three

1. Testify? Viewer Responses and You Tube's Interface

Manuel Castells has argued that lines of flight exist within network. Borrowing from

the theories of Gilles Deleuze, Castells posits that network architecture is enabled,

through its linking structure, to open possibilities of resistance and modes of organization

that counter the hegemonic application of the platform. Although thorough analysis of

this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this project, perhaps the ways in which

protesters of the June 2009 Iranian election used Twitter jargon and Facebook groups to

organize protests and demonstrations serves as an example of such a mode of counter-

power. Aaron Hess, however, is more skeptical of the potential of You Tube to support

any sort of robust deliberative democratic public sphere, and points to conventions of the

platform that seems counter to its ability to offer potential for serious deliberation and

debate.

> You Tube does not offer a concrete and fully deliberative environment largely due
>
> to overwhelming structure and use for entertainment. Select You Tubers respond
>
> fervently to the anti-drug campaign, but such discourse is lost in a mix of jokes,
>
> pseudonyms, and user flaming (412).

Hess argues that the vernacular of You Tube constitutes a serious structural

limitation undermining its "ability to function as an effective medium for social change"

(426). He also suggests that such a platform and vernacular community creates a false

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sense of agency, leading to a surfeit of chatter that fails to constitute any sort of resistance, and, conversely, is perfectly compatible with the rhythms of communicative capitalism. I saw Hess' point when I encountered usernames such as "vilemonkey" and "Choad666" while researching this chapter. The user who posted *9/11: The Road to Tyranny,* TheStraight9/11Truth, also has a video posted of himself cursing and shouting at the Nintendo video game "Super Mario Brothers," which appears on the playlist. There is certainly a sense in which the vernacular aspect of You Tube, predilection for spreading silly viral videos of cats flushing toilets, and its culture of what my undergraduate students call "randomness," can foster a sense of triviality. However, I think that such an outright dismissal is dangerous. Although some of the user names are goofy or crude, and there certainly flaming and ad hominem attacks exist as a staple of the format, I see no evidence that this is a *structural* limitation of the platform, that somehow frivolousness or stupidity is somehow built into, or even encouraged by, You Tube's architecture.

Perhaps, on the other hand, You Tube as a space of deliberation should be taken seriously not because the comments and activity have substance or foster a climate of informed, rational intellectualism, but precisely because they *do not*. Conspiracy culture operates with an entirely different set of rules than rational debate and deliberation, however these rules are not totally subsumed under the sign of communicative capitalism. The organizing principle here, to return to Dean, is psychosis: absolute, unwavering certainty and belief in a different master signifier than the hegemonic one. In this world, flaming, name-calling, ad hominem attacks, and other sorts of abuse seem to

have found a willing servant. However, this does not mean that the material should be laughed at or dismissed. The linking work that these psychotic witnesses to 9/11 are invited to do, and the sense of certainty with which they are encouraged to do it, has manifested in a far-Right counter-public organized around the sign of Obama in Joker makeup. Given the sometimes violent and incendiary rhetoric present at Tea Party gatherings[24] (the main milieu, besides the Jones-verse, where the Obama Joker manifests) perhaps the consequences of You Tube's linking culture, and its implications in supporting the certainty of the psychotic conspiracy community, are great. In the following section, I examine some print and video comments pulled from the conspiracy links discussed in section two. I analyze the comments with an eye towards their complicity or resistance to the conspiracy orbit and notion of 9/11 witness produced by Jones.

- waterchildtera i know he is telling the truth
i know
for sure
the truth
its not all of them but they are on both sides
clinton bush all presidents since Kennedy
you did pick them
maybe ross p. in 93"
so you got change?
look around same evil behind the seen 1 month ago

- waterchildtera don't fight amongst yourselves
they have more reason to then not to
but watch next time on whats portrayed
as a terrorist attack
911 defy s all physics

[24] See http://www.facebook.com/cuentame for examples of Tea Partiers hinting at the assassination of President Barack Obama.

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many came forward and where killed
they wanted the homeland act ,Patriot act give them so much power
to do anything to any one and the media will follow with the story !!! as told not to
question anything 1 month ago

The comments of waterchildtera exhibit exactly the sorts of characteristics of the type of heroic 9/11 witness encouraged by Jones. Two words of the free-verse poem, "I know," are repeated in the second line. Waterchildtera does not explain of provide evidence as to how s/he knows that Jones is "telling the truth," for this is not a required element of the process. Jones has already assured viewers of the absolute veracity and certainty of his claims, and waterchildtera is enacting the next step by reiterating this conviction, and spreading it. The rest of the two verses consist of vague references to elements of Jones' films (they are on both sides Clinton Bush all presidents) and, crucially, the witness testimony. Calls to "open your eyes," "wake up," "see the truth," and other visual metaphors for revelation are common in the testimony of the conspiratorial witness. Jones, through his content, has called for his witnesses to take the leap of faith and *see* the new master signifier. The conspiracy witness has felt the gaze through affective spectatorship, and this revelation is demonstrated by testimonials asserting the realization of the "truth" of evil; the gaze is grasped by viewing various presidents and world leaders as monsters. This visual revelation culminated in a contest paying witnesses to plaster various buildings and public places with the image of the Obama Joker. This was how Jones' witness was mobilized. To return to waterchildtera, this person plays a part in the process of conspiracy formation insofar as they testify-spread the word. Obedient to Jones' call, this person displays the sense of certainty crucial to the formation of the conspiracy system, and hails new witnesses to "see" it to.

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- [absolutetruthzero](#) This guy is as much a part of any conspiracy as the right wing industrialists. He is NOT genuine.... he is telling a narrative which takes facts and links them together in a way that means that anyone who genuinely wants to find out what is really going on comes up with a similar theory and which can thus be discounted. ALEX JONES IS THE BLACK FLAG: ALEX JONES IS DISCREDITING ALL PEOPLE WHO KNOW THAT 9-11 DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE because the world we live in is chaotic and no one is in control. 2 weeks ago

Calling out Alex Jones, this person, however, also claims to be in possession of absolute knowledge regarding the events of 9/11, yet subscribes to a nihilistic theory of chaos and meaninglessness, rejecting the master signifier offered by Jones. This user has a fairly developed "channel" or profile. Their profile picture of Neda, a young woman killed in the June 2009 Iranian election demonstrations. Their channel features a music video tribute to the Iranian people and anyone else who "lives in fear that their loved ones may be killed by their government." "The people in Iran are suffering," writes absolutetruthzero on his/her You Tube profile, "and we need to show solidarity with them so that, although they are oppressed, their hopes and dreams stay alive with them through these impossibly difficult times." His/her comment was a protest/response to Alex Jones, and leads to a space demonstrating a critique of power that lacks the conspiratorial element. Although the original comment suggests that 9/11 "doesn't make any sense," absolutetruthzero's comments on Iran suggest that they have an at least basic understanding of geopolitical conflicts and events. Rejecting the signifier of conspiracy theory in favor of a more traditional left critique of government oppression, absolutetruthzero introduces the possibility for intelligent debate and discussion of

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political issues on You Tube. By asserting that the events don't make sense, however,

this user stops short of offering a left politics of conviction to counter Jones. This seems

to limit their critique to the realm of hysteria.

- anddihier The fact that there is too much evidence proving they didn't do it. Loose change told us who wired the Demolition of the Bldgs. It told whee the planes really went and were evacuated (Cleveland,Oh.). We know the bldgs. couldn't fall like that (free fall) unless Demo'd. We see and know it is for global elitist power and gain via the UN who controls the whole world. US held out for a long time but they've allowed them more and more gain into our affairs--as I hear Jones saying I speak...simple 1 month ago

   In this comment, the Biblical, Armageddon element of Jones' conspiracy is

revealed. Anddihier's profile contains a number of Bible passages and a six-minute

documentary about Armageddon and the fulfillment of Bible prophecies. The statement,

much like waterchildtera's testifies how s/he "sees and know[s]" the truth of the global

power elite. This person, moreover, seems to literally hear Jones' voice in his/her head,

as if they are speaking in tongues the word of the Lord: "US held out for a long time but

they've allowed them more and more gain into out affairs—*as I hear Jones saying I*

speak…simple (emphasis mine)." The implications of this comment evidence that Jones'

mobilization of his witnesses has worked almost too well. This individual has taken their

testimony to the next level, beyond merely spreading the truth. Jones, as this testimonial

demonstrates, has been elevated to the level of a prophet or deity whom his follower

channels. Glenn Beck has been compared to a cross between Alex Jones and a

televangelist.[25]

- RoguexSnypr US_ Government,,, Masters of Manipulation. Americans are brainwashed every day,, manipulated to believe whatever they say. And if we dont agree,,

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[25] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bob-cesca/exposing-glenn-beck-as-a_b_528966.html

then we're not patriotic... brainwashing,,, and some of you reading this are going to disagree,, and have something to say that disproves what i just said,, thats understandable,, because you're brainwashed. 15 4 months ago

This comment demonstrates the circular reasoning important in the construction of conspiratorial certainty. If you refuse to "see," to witness the advent of the new master signifier, you are probably brainwashed and/or part of the conspiracy. This mode of witnessing is an all or nothing, faith-based process, and RoguexSnypr demonstrates how adherents to conspiracy theories have absolutely dismissed the value of debate, deliberation and discussion. There is no room for disagreement in this system, for true inclusion entails seeing the truth-apprehending the gaze, and seeing it in the form of a reified fetish (our leaders as monsters)-is the only option. Also, it is worth taking note of the user name. Contrary to Hess' assertion that You Tube usernames foster an atmosphere of silliness, I find this one to be gravely serious, as RoguexSnypr essentially outs him/herself as a potential murderer/assassin.

- LemUUU Are you seriously saying there is some ludicrous supernatural religious plot behind the corruption in the worlds government? That praying to a man who lived 2000 years ago is going to change what happens to you... that is exponentially more far-fetched than any of the conspiracy_ theories I have ever heard 3 months ago

Dave72 Says:
April 23rd, 2010 at 1:18 pm
On the other hand you got their land. This whole 'illegal immigration' nonsense is self-defeating. These are millions of people who are against imperialism and many of whom would probably join on to the 9/11 truth movement and unite with us, but instead the majority of truther reject and denounce the working class and support the position of the Limbaughs and Hannitys on this, same people who are our arch-enemy and call us nuts. What the f--- is a border, it's an invisible line that doesn't even exist. Millions of these people potentially could be with us in the 9/11 truth movement, the ATZLAN group even believes 9/11 truth, instead you appeal to the 'tea party' Sarah Palin supporters. The elites must be laughing their asses off.

These two comments, conversely, indicate that the forum of You Tube can foster a sense of debate that tackles issues in a deliberative manner, without resorting to flaming, cursing, and ad hominem attacks. The first comment, by LemUUU, argues a particular absurdity in conspiracy culture of faith in Jesus, and helps to bring to bear the religious undertones often present in the discourse (especially Jones). The second, by Dave72, was gleaned from Jones' infowars.com, in response to an article about Arizona's recent passage of SB-1070, the harshest anti-immigration bill in the nation's history. The majority of users were celebrating the bill,[26] however Dave72 posited an interesting counter-point (resulting in various flaming responses, including being called a "F*CKING COMMIE"). Dave72's comment demonstrates the extent to which the 9/11 Truth Movement can, and should, be disarticulated from the most extreme manifestations of conspiracy culture, such as Jones. He points out the unfortunate losses that occur when the two are inextricably united, such as they ways in which it effectively precludes solidarity across various groups opposed to imperialism and lack of government transparency. Although they exceed the scope and theoretical directives of this chapter, it is worthwhile to point out that there are aspects of the 9/11 Truth Movement that do not include conspiracy theory, such as scholarsfor9/11 truth.org. Dave72 argues, compellingly to me, that calls for a reinvestigation of 9/11 need not go hand in hand with psychotic right wing extremism.

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[26] I have always found the anti-immigration stance somewhat difficult to square in conspiracy culture. On the one hand, it fits with the trope of angry white nationalist backlash. On the other, however, strict immigration laws such as Arizona's almost always entail more police powers and bigger government, which they despise.

You Tube is also set up to host video responses to various videos. One of the videos, titled Alex Jones vs. Reality, attempts to call into question the veracity of Jones claims through rebroadcasting a clip of one of his radio programs allegedly presenting some of his most outrageous claims, repackaged with a new title. The user, identified as dsglop, films himself searching websites and narrating his fact-checking of Jones' claims in an effort to critique Jones' factuality and reasoning process. The video intersperses shots from Jones' televised radio broadcast with Jon Ronson with shots of the user demonstrating his own counteracting findings. This respondent also critiques Jones' bombastic style and ad hominem attacks, and rhetoric that appears to incite violence against the "elites." Although many of the subsequent comments defended Jones with conspiratorial reasoning, some, such as the following, offered a similar critique as dsglop:

[christo930](#) One of the worst parts of the truther movement is that they can't see that they are in a thinking trap. Anyone who doesn't agree with them is a shill or a sheep, which completely closes their mind to any information that contradicts any of the information they think is absolutely true. Truth is, the truther movement is led by people who lie, have confirmation bias, jump to conclusions without any supporting evidence... And they ALWAYS have a dvd or book to sell.

A video response to Alex Jones vs. Reality, titled Alex Jones is Dangerous, also criticized Jones' inflammatory rhetoric, insinuations of a call for violence, and dubious fact checking. This user, tooltime9901, models the mode of address used by Jones at the beginning and end of Road to Tyranny, directly addressing the camera in front of a black background. Tooltime9901 cautions against accepting Jones' "conspiratorial thinking," and calls for "revolutionary violence" against the state, and the fact that Jones' "nebulous" notion of conspiracy opens the door for interpreting the targets of this violence broadly, placing large and varied groups of people in danger. "Pretty much

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anyone with any degree of power," he warns, "could be targeted in these sorts of purges."

He argues, moreover, that Jones' legions of revolutionaries would engage in exactly the

sorts of "Stalinist purges" that Jones allegedly despises, and suggests a dangerously open-

ended form of radical violence. Referencing the violence that occurred in Pol Pot's

Cambodia, tooltime9901 warns of violence against intellectuals, atheists, and others who

may be suspected by the Jones militia as part of the NWO ruling class, and hence

radically evil. Although his reasoning can appear dubious at times-tooltime9901 has a

very rudimentary understanding of Communism limited to the regimes of Stalin and Pol

Pot-he nonetheless forwards a critique of Jones' conspiracy rhetoric that highlights the

tremendous ethical problems involved in mobilizing absolute categories of good and evil,

and ascribing these categories to various groups allegedly involved in the conspiracy.

    And finally:

[UltimateWarrior65](#) (uploader) [@March1921](#) , nobody gets into a high position of power
by countering the Jews...on the contrary, one can only get to a high position of power_ by
way of the Jews. hence, Jones can only be where he is by conversion to Judaism or at
least a Noahide goy.

    I decided to end with this comment, an example of how the circular reasoning of

conspiracy theory can fold back on itself in the most bizarre, and disturbing, of ways.

Here, UltimateWarrior65 exhibits an interesting and ironic manifestation of the psychotic

loop of certainty involved in the conspiracy process. Suspicious of Jones' fame and

success, UltimateWarrior65 suggests that Jones is, in actuality, part of some overarching

Zionist plot, and is himself a New World Order shill. I encountered other rumblings of

this on the Internet as well. The virulent anti-Semitism is of course problematic, yet, on

the other hand, a comment such as this demonstrates a sense in which, paradoxically, the conspiracy discourse can foster and construct suspicion and paranoia that challenges the hegemonic testimony validating Jones' demagogue status. The majority of comments that I encountered in this search did seem to validate of affirm the conspiracy standpoint. However, I encountered a few remarks that proved encouraging with respect to You Tube's ability to serve as a platform encouraging informed deliberation, debate, and discussion, thereby supplying insight into the ruptures and breaks in conspiracy theory's loop of certainty. Perhaps, given the Internet's hyperlinked structure, and therefore ease at which this totality could be constructed, these ruptures are all the more encouraging.

Conclusion

Conspiracy Consequences, Certainty, and Conviction: From Ethos to Affect

In the New York Times bestseller *The Shock Doctrine*, investigative journalist Naomi Klein lambastes the usual Bush Administration suspects and numerous corporate interests for the profits they accrued from 9/11 and its resulting wars, arguing that this disastrous event created security and homeland security bubbles, carving out a market niche in the fields of surveillance, security, policing, and other terrorism-related industries. Companies like former Vice President Richard Cheney's Halliburton, and the private mercenary film Blackwater, for example, were positioned to reap handsome profits engaging in activities such as rebuilding war-ravaged areas and moving around enemy combatant prisoners, and thus their profits became dependant upon a permanent state of war and climate of fear. In response to what she deems the "disaster economy,"

Klein calls for a greater, more engaged structural critique of the forces, laws, and concentrations of power that give rise to such a milieu:

> What passes for debate is restricted to individual cases of war profiteering and corruption scandals, as well as the usual hand-wringing about the failure of government to adequately oversee private contactors-rarely about the much broader and deeper phenomenon of what it means to be engaged in a fully privatized war built to have no end (387).

Klein, although pointed in her critique, refuses to explicitly assign culpability to these entities as direct catalysts responsible for actually planning, orchestrating and executing the 9/11 attacks. This designation of a monstrous remainder is precisely what Jones' *9/11: Road to Tyranny* is willing to do, which sets apart the populist, psychotic drive of such a film from the more nuanced, complex (and measured) structural analysis supplied by Klein. Calling out the quilting point, and calling for identification against it, is what distinguishes conspiracy theory from structural critique. Ethically, Klein's approach seems preferable: as demonstrated by Butler, Zizek, and others, the creation of such a remainder, and mapping it onto persons or groups, is a process that can and does lead to persecution, abuse, and oppression. As we saw in analysis of Jones' film, the material linked to it, and various user comments, the propensity for racism, hatred, and calls to indiscriminate violence in the wake of this notion of abjection and monstrosity-consequences of designating a "quilting point" of ideological space-is apparent. When the gaze is apprehended in this manner with absolute certainty, the fervent affect that results seems to know no bounds.

Yet, the measured approach seems in line with an ongoing rhetorical failure on the left, which is exemplified in Dean's account of hysterical protesting. Klein's analysis is careful in a manner so to keep her account out of conspiracy theory territory. To paraphrase Dean, this manner of caution is, perhaps, no longer effective. Hysteria creeps in, and conviction seems lacking. By structuring powerful affect around this reminder- and by designating distinct agents of neoliberal/neoconservative abuse, Jones does supply something to rally for, something tangible-workings of global capitalism-against whom the left could potentially galvanize. In a sense, this discursive formulation is not disparate from the dialectical antagonism present in orthodox Marxian concepts of class struggle.

To elaborate, Jones' apparatus invites a manner of participation not limited simply to right-wing anti-government nationalism. By breaking the link of articulation connecting "terrorist" to, say, the Islamic Fundamentalist and rearticulating it to parties implicated in the production and maintenance of neoliberal and neoconservative regimes (such as Bush, the IMF, and the Federal Reserve) Jones opens the possibility of a certain type of populist critique of sovereignty. This critique is populist insofar as it identifies an abject remainder as the traumatic kernel to be ejected so that harmony can flourish. Jones implicates various technological regimes of surveillance and monitoring, including biometric recognition technology, security cameras, and other monitoring devices as basically producing a global camp, or what Jones calls "compact cities" and "control grids." Perhaps if left politics could tap into this type of certainty, and articulate it to ethical conviction, more agency would be enabled. If the designation of a remainder

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resisted the impetus to dehumanize, perhaps a new mode of populism, or politics of

conviction, could be advanced.

Jones' response to globalization evokes critical conversations regarding the

interplay between neoliberal economics, militarism, and the designation of global

reminders. Leerom Medavoi, for example, argues that globalization has effectively re-

territorialized the earth as an unbounded flat plane, and with this process instituted new

methods of enemy designation, for

> collapse of internal and external threat is itself a consequence of precisely
>
> what globalization and the war on terror share: the unbounded surface of the
>
> earth as their territorial frame of reference (53).

With this shift, Medavoi argues, a new mode of biopolitical population

management emerges. The global order lacks a clear and defined outside-or rather there

is no longer a material outside-and this redrawing of territory requires new modes of

policing and governance of populations. "Everyone who threatens the globe's civil order

is, at this point, conceived as internal to it but simultaneously also as fair game for the

open warfare formerly declared only against external enemies" (55). As Zizek contends,

the absence of an outside to the regime redefines "terrorist" as a slippery signifier, one

which all members of the global order, now defined through the acts and practices they

undertake within this order, have the possibility of becoming.

Jones' style hearkens to some of these anxieties and concerns. The paranoid

subject, the psychotic conspiracy witness, is one defined and constructed through

witnessing the horrific trauma of globalization, which Jones literally renders monstrous

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through his blitz of footage of black-clad special forces, the destruction of 9/11, and other

events deemed as manifestations of "domestic terrorism." Although lacking a nuanced

genealogy of the apparatuses of globalization, Jones uses the media in which he works to

turn its ideology on its head, taking advantage of the loosening of the signifier of

terrorism and affixing it to the regime itself. The monster, in Jones' formulation, is-or

could be- the regime itself, the use of state power to regulate, camp, and police U.S.

citizens as part of an emerging global order. This potential is squandered by recent Jones

gimmicks which further reify this monster as Barack Obama. A model of sovereignty is

overtly at play here as well, for according to Jones the method of population management

involves, literally, "world population reduction" as its endgame, allegedly the ultimate

teleos of redefining the citizen as terrorist.[27]

Sovereignty here is resisted through the evocation of the race war, which as

Medavoi explains takes on a more amorphous dimension in a global context. For Alex

Jones, the human race as a whole is camped; monitored by sophisticated technology on

the one hand (biopolitical management) and, if dissent becomes unruly, subjected to the

full force of police power (sovereignty). Jones evokes the global race war in this sense,

the idea that "with the global condemnation of racial ideology that accompanied the

defeat of fascism and high imperialism, the racial dimension of anticommunism gave

way to a struggle articulated instead as a war between systems, ideas, or ways of life"

(Medavoi 63). The ways of life under assault by the global sovereign in Jones' account is

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[27] According to Foucault, This difference between biopolitical management and sovereignty can be summed up as "while the king decides either to kill or let live, biopolitics determines instead whether to 'foster life or disallow it to the point of death,' deciding thereby when and where to weed out certain forms of life so that life worth living can flourish" (57).

U.S. nationalism.[28] This notion of permanent global war is evoked, and Jones attempts to mobilize American viewers as in opposition to this mode of sovereignty by evoking its monstrosity, and assaulting viewers with the trauma of this revelation.

Witnesses are invited to see the gaze-the complex and far-reaching system of surveillance and control victimizing them and orchestrated by the NWO Satanic fiends. A spectator confronted with this trauma, constructed in the sequencing of images depicting digital recognition technologies and police actions, is invited to see themselves as a potential victim of intrusive and often brutal protocols of surveillance and regulation of life. Jones spectator is formed through the trauma of seeing the regimes and protocols that designate the victim of today's global society-and invited to slot oneself into this system as a potential abject-a terrorist or enemy of global society whose life is to be regulated and extinguished. In this sense, Jones' move is interesting. He evokes dialectical oppositionality and invites his spectator to see the gaze of monstrosity and identify as its victim. This process involves an antagonism not limited to resistance to capitalism as a system, however, and in this process a number of "elites" are identified as the monsters to act against. The system itself-global capitalism-is given abject, monstrous body in the form of those deemed agents and actors on its behalf. Of course, when President Obama is given as an example of one of these monsters, a whole host of other issues emerges, and Jones' rhetoric loses whatever promising ethical and political potential it may have once had.

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[28] The United States Constitution is frequently cited and referenced in Jones' films, sometimes presented as a graphic backdrop faded over images of military and police formations and raids. In one of his later films, with higher production values, the digital graphic of the Constitution is burned with the help of a side-wipe graphic that transitions into the subsequent footage.

Jones' film, especially in conjunction with the other material linked to it, works to produce a tightly constructed paranoid universe, Dean's notion of the conspiracy narrative as a psychotic closed circuit of drive.   Although this formulation, in its own right, fails to heed the ethical call to openness, Jones' process of subject and enemy making nonetheless departs from hegemonic discourse of 9/11 demonstrated by Bush administration rhetoric and certain mainstream narrative films and documentaries, such as *Fahrenheit 9/11*'s insipid-by-comparison call to write protest letters to one's senators and representatives demanding more governmental accountability and transparency. These sorts of pleas to the master revert back to ineffectual hysteria. This allure of transgression and discourse of resistance palpable in Jones' discourse makes it appealing and alluring. Participating in the pleasure of conspiracy produced by Jones calls forth the excitement of agency and activism, the belonging of citizenship, and the quasi-erotic thrill of anti-authoritarian, violent rebellion all at once. Here lies the left's rhetorical failure. Jones' rants and tirades, his deliverance of a radio program in clown makeup, his screaming accusations hurled at various confused public figures, are memorable, bizarre, outrageous, and above all else *fun*. These antics, which, as in the case of Joker makeup, are ripe for Internet meme-dom, speak to community, solidarity, and action in a way that is exciting, as demonstrated by his followers in various comment streams.

The image of President Barack Obama in full Joker makeup continues to circulate the web, and crop up in protest signs hoisted by outraged participants in the Tea Party movement. The stubborn ubiquity of the Tea Party movement, moreover, constitutes another curious, and disturbing, manifestation of this Jones' affect realized. Certain

symbols and signifiers-the Gadsden Flag, the American flag, guns, the U.S. Constitution, appear in both Tea Party protests and Jones' world. An analysis of the Tea Party movement needs to be undertaken, but exceeds the scope of this project. However, I think it is safe to say that, at present, this movement is a serious cultural phenomenon, and one that, crucially, the Left does not have a strong counterpart to, nor does it have a Jones. The Tea Party movement speaks to the importance to studying and analyzing conspiracy culture, the affect and the mode of witnessing that it invites, and the ways in which its circularity of certainly is built through linking architecture such as You Tube, and produced by the participatory network. Glenn Beck's program and Tea Party symbols such as the Obama Joker exist in the same linked universe as Jones. Jones' psychotic conspiracy witness, thus, does not only link conspiracy content, they link in far-Right extremism, with the Obama Joker functioning as the suturing point of this ideological space.

Watching an interview with Tea Baggers conducted by New Left Media gives a sense of the consequences of unwavering certainty-of absolute psychotic conviction, and also of the painfulness of the left's failure to strongly counter it. When confronted with staggering evidence that ought to completely dissolve their claims, Tea Baggers respond with simple, one or two refutations, such as "no" and "you're wrong." Sometimes the conversation degenerates into threats, name calling, and other verbal abuse.[29] They are unmoved by rational deliberation, unable to be persuaded by empirical evidence, and, above all, unwavering in their conviction. New Left Media does not have a particularly

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[29] See http://newleftmedia.com/ and http://www.facebook.com/cuentame?v=app_11007063052 for exmaples.

strong response to these narratives, adopting instead a tone of condescending amusement. The Tea Baggers do come across looking painfully stupid, yet the irony is that mocking the Tea Baggers and 9/11 Conspirators simply feeds and reinforces their primary belief: they are plain old folks, simple, wholesome patriots with traditional Christian values, crushed under the weight of Big Government Socialists and their snooty, liberal elite lackeys. Embracing ignorance, in this respect, speaks to the sense in which conspiracy culture has reveled in its maligned, "outsider" status.

Perhaps, although pointing out how conspiracy's difference has been aggressively policed by mainstream media is certainly a legitimate point of analysis, left critics should resist the temptation to accept and tolerate it on its own terms. This conviction can be grounded in ethical norms, as exemplified in the Tea Party's often violent standpoints, as opposed to dismissing its circulation as an instance of communicative capitalism. The Tea Baggers, like their heroes of the Revolutionary War, rise up, strike back, like the snake of the Gadsden Flag, and fight for their freedoms, refusing to let the bureaucrats take their country away and give it the undeserving, who appear as lazy welfare recipients and opportunistic immigrants demanding universal health care. All of this is mobilized through over-determined images of old-school patriotic pride, which throws the scent off of the not-so-latent racism and anti Semitism lurking about. Crucially, this standpoint, this sense of heroic, underdog (yet entitled) everyman pride, is exactly the sensibility that Alex Jones' media empire is structured to excite. Tea Baggers are truly psychotic witnesses, and one can see, without much stretching, their similarity to the witness called forth by Alex Jones. The Tea Bagger is Alex Jones' post-9/11 victim-

cum-heroic witness in action, and speaks to the urgency and necessity of left scholarship to deal with the ways that these affects and affiliations are formed, mobilized, and crystallized into communities and organized activities.

Chapter 3

Witnessing, Alterity, and Surveillance: *Cloverfield*'s Participatory Spectacle

Introduction

Witnessing and Surveillance

This chapter examines the visual economy of, and witnessing position produced by, the 2008 film *Cloverfield* and its interactive website. The movie is set in New York City, and features, through a realist, faux-amateur aesthetic, several young college students witnessing, and recording, a raging monster destroying the city. The movie was shot using hand-held camcorders affixed to the bodies of an actor and his stunt doubles to give the movie a "realistic" feel. The website accompanying the movie included an interactive contest where fans responded to the prompt question "where were you when the monster hit?" with their own mini-movies, which were subsequently posted online, judged by fan voters, with the top three forwarded to the director, who selected a winner.

I argue that the witnessing position produced by this film, which aesthetically resembles amateur 9/11 footage, and contains numerous references to the event, is that of a surveilling witness. Surveillance, technology, and consumer behavior have been the focus of much scholarship in media studies, often focusing on the ways in which technological innovation and neoliberal/post-Fordist labor dynamics have led to the normalization of surveillance culture as an aspect of new media citizenship.[30] Previous work along these lines has utilized the scholarship of Michel Foucault to argue that the ways in which media culture predicated on audience activity supported by convergent

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[30] See Mark Andrejevic, *iSpy,* Shimpach's *Working Watching*, and Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living through Reality T.V.*

interactive platforms constitutes a new regime of governance. In light of this project's

theoretical commitments, this chapter speaks most directly to current media studies

scholarship on surveillance, interactivity, and technology. I am concerned with the ways

in which surveillance practices attempt to capture the gaze, and the other, and the sense in

which this logic is played out in an allegorical film concerning the events of 9/11. The

witnesses of this film are tutored to testify to the reification of alterity as something that

can be apprehended, recorded, and captured through diligent security practices.

Structuring a visual space of control, in this sense, attempts to close and suture the field

of trauma opened by 9/11. I argue that surveillance, performed as a mode of vision

assisted by recording technology, disciplines the excessive alterity of trauma by rendering

it into recognizable monstrous form.

Part One

Monsters and Witnessing

Film and media studies scholarship has offered several key perspectives on

monstrosity and trauma. Psychoanalytic approaches, influenced by fundamental

Freudian concepts such as castration anxiety, traditionally sutured the horror and trauma

of monstrosity in film to the abjection of sexual difference. A visual encounter with the

monster was akin to the shock of witnessing this alterity. Barbara Creed, for example,

borrowed from the work of Julia Kristeva to argue that the horror of monstrosity

articulates to the shock of seeing sexual difference. This traumatic shock is the definitive

principle categorizing what is horrific about horror. Grant (1996) and Clover (1992) also

contend that horror and monstrosity, as generic forms, articulate to anxieties and

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ambivalence around sexual difference, castration, and abjection. Visually confronting this difference, a radical form of alterity, forces the subject to face the abyss of the other, an experience capable of destroying the viewing subject. The subject's ego is in tension with this radical difference, and stands in a precarious position, able to be annihilated by it.

Other scholars, such as Wartenburg (2006) and Jensen (2008) argue that monsters express and reify cultural fears of racial difference and miscegenation. Characters such as King Kong and the voracious plant from *Little Shop of Horrors*, for example, attest to (white) cultural anxieties regarding difference. Scholars analyzing the cultural significance of monsters and horror in media culture have also interrogated the role of historical and national trauma, and its relationship to embodied difference and the grotesque. Lowenstein (2005), for example, argues that horror films provide a language, through characters exemplifying radical abject difference, to speak the ineffable traumas of events such as the Vietnam War. Tsutsui (2004) presents a historical account of *Godzilla*, arguing that the monster embodies not only the traumatic shock of the atomic bomb, but subsequent anxieties over war, cultural conflict, and national identity. David Skal (1993), moreover, argues in his cultural history of horror, that monsters always function as allegories for moral panics and social problems, whether they be teen drug use and gangs (*The Lost Boys*), "reproductive horror" such as childhood birth defects, pesticides, and reproductive medicine (*Village of the Damned, Rosemary's Baby*, *The Brood, Alien*), and AIDS (various vampire films). Although my perspective is neither defined by traditional Freudian psychoanalysis or socio-cultural historical analysis, I

adopt the argument from previous work that stories of monstrosity function allegorically. Thus, I treat *Cloverfield* as an allegorical film about the events of 9/11, and analyze the role of the monster from the angles of security, alterity, and the witnessing ethics of mediated vision.

Scholarly writing on monstrosity has been organized around two key principles: spectatorship/vision and trauma. Monsters, when visually apprehended, produce distress, fear, shock, and other disturbing, visceral affects. In this chapter, using the backdrop of witnessing and new Lacanian theories of spectatorship, I interrogate the ways in which *Cloverfield*, and its interactive content, produce a viewing subject with a certain relationship to difference, the trauma of 9/11, and technology. I analyze the film with an eye towards how the viewing position it produces inculcates spectators in a mode of surveillance witnessing, and the implications of this witnessing position for possibilities of encouraging ethical witnessing. To do so, I look at technical and aesthetic components of the film text, such as camera work (including the film's use of lower-grade, handheld "prosumer" cameras to shoot), use of special effects technology, and aesthetic inspiration of amateur 9/11 footage.

The second component of the *Cloverfield* experience that I examine is its interactive contest. In this section, I study a random sample of contest entries (including the winner) to focus on the fan activities of becoming-witness involved in this contest, and how it mirrors, or departs from, the mode of witnessing tutored by the viewing position offered in the film. To study the fan videos, I focus on similar aesthetic elements, such as camera work, recording technology, dialogue, and special effects. I am

concerned with two facets of this contest. First, how fans of the film became witnesses themselves through the contest; how they put their viewing lessons from the film into practice, and materially demonstrated the lessons of the film with the products that they produced and distributed online. Using an approach similar to that involved in examining Alex Jones content, I am interested in the extent to which, as online modes of distribution and exhibition, participatory networks are involved in the production of post-9/11 witnessing.

Further, I am concerned with the extent to which a milieu of media convergence, participation, and interactivity plays a role in producing witnesses of 9/11. An environment of media interactivity, a climate of "do-it-yourself" media culture, not only builds the brand of a commercial, Hollywood monster blockbuster, but also it invites viewers to build and contribute to the cultural story of the trauma of 9/11. In the spirit of this project as a whole, I examine trauma, alterity, and viewing in a manner that differs from classical psychoanalytic perspectives on spectatorship and trauma. In analyzing this film and its interactive accompaniment, I investigate the extent to which interactivity and participatory media, when paired with an amateur aesthetic derived from 9/11 footage, and the spectacle of monstrosity, produce witnesses that respond to trauma and difference in (un)ethical ways. My key question concerning the technologies of production in both the main film, and the fan film is: to what extent do these technologies exist in a relationship with difference that seeks to maintain, contain, capture and manage it through the use of recording technologies? Is this witness, who literally sees trauma

through the lens of a miniature camera, tutored in protocols of surveillance as a means to survive the trauma of difference?

Thus, given the extent to which the witnessing position produced by the film and fan contest exists in a certain relationship with security and surveillance, I call the witnessing subject that exists in this environment the surveilling witness. The surveilling witness embodies several key characteristics. S/he is adept with technology, especially small consumer recording technologies such as cell phone cameras and digital camcorders. He carries and uses these devices often, and understands them as having a crucial role in recording terrorist events, as well as producing an understanding of what constitutes terrorism. The surveilling witness, moreover, values the process of recording and capturing itself as a way to make sense of, understand, and recognize trauma. For the surveilling witness, structuring a sensible visual field is a definitive component of reconciling a traumatic event such as 9/11. Interrogating the sense in which the surveilling witness can be an ethical one lies in the tension between technological surveillance and its relationship to the gaze, and the way in which ethical witnessing understands this visual relationship. The following paragraphs further explicate this theoretical tension.

Kelly Oliver's analysis of witnessing and recognition supplies insights helpful in explicating the tension between surveillance culture and possibilities for ethical witnessing. Becoming-subject through vision involves locating objects and others in the field of vision, creating the illusion of mastery and separation of the self from others. This process is productive of ideological subjectivity, and was the basis of psychoanalytic

film theory's analyses of how cinematic technology, particularly the camera, objectifies and separates the subject from the world through the eye. The subject misrecognizes itself in the imaginary, and fantasizes that it has apprehended the gaze by mastering objects in the visual field.[31] In Oliver's terminology, this ideological process is defined by recognition of the other as something else, a process that precludes the possibility of engaging in a relationship with the other defined by ethical witnessing. "Vision becomes an alienating sense," she explains. "Control and mastery are bought at the price of relationships" (172). Subject formation based on recognition, according to Oliver, contains components of "suspicion and guilt" (177). These elements seem to coincide with the manner in which surveillance and technology, as regimes of vision, have been theorized. Andrejevic, for example, argues that modes of governance organized around principles of security have a criminalizing function, as the population becomes something to be tracked, scrutinized, checked, monitored; practices that imply that there is always something nefarious or antagonistic at play, that can be "caught" if surveillance is comprehensive and fastidious enough. Kelly Gates' (2006) analysis of airport recognition technology illuminated the sense in which post-9/11 paranoia about terrorism has exacerbated these fears, as well as added a racial dimension to the way in which practices of securitization mark their others.

This chapter argues that *Cloverfield* expresses how surveillance functions as a mode of viewing that is fantasized to ameliorate and close the traumatic rupture of 9/11. As Oliver points out, anxiety surrounding the gaze from outside involves that resulting

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[31] See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Christian Metz's *The Imaginary Signifier* and *Film Language*.

form knowledge of being constantly watched from points the subject cannot see from. The "universal evil eye," she explains "comes to define the eye in relation to the gaze. In this paranoid universe the subject 'operates by remote control' in response to the evil eye of the gaze" (188). The process of surveillance, and the practices and behaviors associated with it, constitute an attempt to construct a closed visual field that apprehends the gaze and captures the other. If the gaze is understood as the infinite points that look at me from outside, surveillance behavior is indicative of an attempt to witness the gaze in action, to apprehend it through visual recording technologies. The question of the surveillance witness, then, concerns the relationship of the eye to the gaze. The surveillance witness operates under the fantasy that the gap separating the two can be sutured, and the recording/monitoring devices are the apparatuses that can achieve this closure. A desire for visual recognition defines the surveillance witness, for the notion persists that what is captured on camera is the very gulf separating the self from the other. Difference itself, in other words, is fantasized as something that can be visually identified, marked, and "caught" on camera. Technologies of surveillance serve as the tools that assist in the fantasy that vision can suture the gap between eye and gaze, supplying mastery over the field.

One of my concerns with this chapter involves the ways in which surveillance witnessing is not only produced in the film itself, but performed through the interactive contest. When audiences actively participate in practices of surveillance, they are making the regime itself, not simply being interpellated into it. Studies of surveillance culture and governmentality through media supply the insights that this facet of the analysis

builds off of. The conspiracy witness, on some level, understands herself as being

victimized by and immersed in the surveilling gaze, and responds with an oppositional,

neo-patriot populist identity politic intent on smashing the monsters responsible for

building it. The surveillance witness exemplified in the interactive contest adopts a much

more active and "empowered" role with regards to the process. I am interested in the

extent to which this witness is invested in producing the regime of surveillance itself, as a

mode of visually apprehending difference, with the goal of containing, managing, and

recognizing difference within the visual field of surveillance that he himself has made

through his activities.

In the *Cloverfield* case study, I investigate the ways in which the movie positions

viewers, and the contest mobilizes them, to take control of the trauma of 9/11 by adopting

surveillance practices. Rather than focusing on technology and interactivity as indicative

of a *process* of surveillance and regime of governance, this chapter will analyze the sense

in which this film, and its interactive website, tutors uses and applications of consumer

recording technology in a manner that normalizes surveillance-witnessing as a mode of

seeing, and recognizing, trauma and difference. The surveilling witness, through an

intimate relationship with personal technologies, stands on guard to monitor and record.

Post-9/11 analyses on contemporary relationships with recording technologies have

emphasized the security aspects; the sense in which diffused regimes of governance

produce subjects who are perpetually concerned with, and on the lookout for,

"suspicious" terrorist activity and persons suspected of engaging in it.[32] Rather than

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[32] See Grewal's (2006) analysis of "security moms" and Andrejevic's (2007) discussion of interactive media in *iSpy*.

focusing specifically on how consumer recording technologies are articulated to diffused

regimens of governance, I interrogate the ways in which patterns of behavior surrounding

consumer recording devices do, or do not, allow for the possibility of producing an

ethical witness, an encounter with the face, through the practices of recording involved in

uses of these devices. As Kaplan pointed out, ethical witnessing cannot involve

identification with and against characters; traumatic events should stand on their own as

moments.

I chose a post-9/11, allegorical monster movie for this inquiry precisely because it

brings to the forefront the tension discussed by Zizek in the above paragraph: can an

ethical encounter with the face involve facing the neighbor, the abyss of alterity? To deal

with these concerns, I use the *Cloverfield* movie and its interactive website. The first

section focuses on the mode of witnessing tutored by the film's narrative, while the

second deals with the sense in which audiences participated in building a surveilling

witnessing subject through their involvement in the interactive contest.

Part Two

Cloverfield and the 9/11 Surveillance Witness

Cloverfield, which was shot entirely on lower-grade "prosumer" camera

equipment, concerns a group of college graduates in New York City who witness a

catastrophic attack while documenting a friend's going away party. The film begins with

a Department of Defense catalogue number, to build into the narrative that the film is

actually leaked "found footage." The first shots of the film involve the main character,

Robert, making a home movie of a weekend vacation to Coney Island with his then

girlfriend Beth. He takes video testimonials from her, and records the cityscape from her apartment window, as well as her nude sleeping body and various photos and personal effects. Robert takes much intimate footage of Beth despite protests that the tape "will end up on the Internet." She also insists on taping Robert in his underwear, responding to his requests to dress by quipping that "no one will pay for that online." This candid footage was supposed to be recorded over with the going away party/disaster documentation, and cuts in throughout the movie. The next setting takes place at Robert's going away party. Robert has solicited another friend, Hudson, to "get testimonials from everyone," overcoming Hudson's initial hesitation. The testimonial becomes the focal point of the film, as Hudson aggressively and insistently pursues interviews from those in attendance, including Beth, who pleads unsuccessfully that she "didn't want to [say goodbye] on camera." Hudson also spies on the activities of a woman with whom he is romantically interested, scans the body of a passed out woman on a couch, and silently tapes numerous conversations, arguments, and gossip. "I'm not here, just documenting," he insists, attempting to prove his impartiality.

When Robert enters the room, Hudson documents, at length, various friends taking video and pictures on digital cameras and cellular phones. Two of these devices linger in the center of the frame for several seconds. Sometimes Hudson places the camera at his hip or lays it sideways on a table, allowing for a detached, disengaged look. During this time he is largely silent, avoiding narration or commentary. These introductory shots of the film allow for the showcasing of various small recording

technologies, as well as the sense in which the film is centered around themes of documenting, witnessing, and testimonial.

After a series of jarring loud noises and earthquake-like tremors, the friends realize that something unusual is transpiring. Hudson immediately points his camera at a plasma screen television in the living room, where initial images of the disaster, such as burning buildings, capsized boats in the Hudson River, and pillars of smoke, flash across the local news. "Do you think its another terrorist attack?" a woman screams before several of the guests run outside to get a better look. The words "terrorist attack" are repeated several times during this sequence. "People need to see this, its going to be important," announces Hudson who captures not only images of the attack, but shots of other witnesses documenting the events on their cell phones and digital camcorders. Numerous partygoers congregate on the balcony, capturing footage on their cell phones and little digital cameras. After witnessing the attack-no creature has been revealed at this point-the onlookers run down the stairs and onto the street, where chaos is ensuing. People are screaming and running, covered in dust, and burning ashes and other debris fly through the streets. A building collapses. One shot during this sequence captures a pillar of smoke shooting down a street, a common image of 9/11 footage. At the end of this sequence, the decapitated head of the Statue of Liberty flies through the air, landing in the middle of the road at the characters' feet. Dialogue mostly consists of terrified cries and screams: "what is happening," "Oh my God," etc. Hudson is much more calm and focused, although enthusiastic about his role in the process. "I have it on tape!" he proclaims, after the statue's head hits the ground. "Did you see it?" he shouts excitedly.

Hudson responds to protests to stop filming by insisting that "people are gonna want to know how it all went down." Telling the story will not suffice; he insists that "people will want to see this."

Robert, after observing and recording chaos, runs into an electronics store to loot cell phone batteries and disposable phones to attempt to call Beth. The camera lingers in the electronics store, capturing more footage of the attack on the Panasonic plasma screen televisions that the store is well-stocked with. "New York Under Attack" is the headline on the news. Hudson's camera, and hence the viewer's perspective, are focused on the television news reporting. Television footage reveals a shot of an enormous, scaly foot, the color of pinkish skin, disappearing behind a building, as well as the military's response. T.V. news footage, through Hudson's camera, also reveals smaller creatures popping off of the monster's limbs and aggressively attacking military personnel. The main monster, by contrast, is indiscriminate and chaotic in its attack, smashing everything around it. "There is some horrific shit in Midtown," proclaims Hudson, as he films the military striking the creature with heavy-duty weapons. Lighting is sepia-toned and smoke fills the frame, giving the look of urban warfare footage in Baghdad, Iraq. The reminder of the film consists of the characters attempting to escape the attack as Hudson documents the events. The monster's body is revealed in snippets and fragments-always through quick cuts and shaky camera footage, providing a discombobulated feel. The creature's body seems fluid and amorphous; shots reveal a tail, then a foot, arm and head, with cuts following in quick succession, creating the appearance of a body moving quickly and spanning a seemingly large area. It is as if the

creature can crop up anywhere at any time, its body pliable and flexible, chaotically fluid.

This flexibility allows for the creature to wreak enormous havoc, and avoid apprehension

or containment. The military, although diligent and committed in their efforts, can never

locate its body in a single location for log enough to eradicate or contain it.

As the protagonists run through New York City looking for refuge and shelter, the

situation worsens. The monster continues to reproduce via parthenogenesis, and smaller

creatures that resemble a hybrid of bug and lizard sprout from its limbs and skin. This

situation causes a number of problems. Although the offspring are small, their

aggression is more focused than their parent, and they actively seek out and attack

everyone. The survivors have, at this point, fled to a subway tunnel, with Hudson

capturing the events via the camera's night-vision capacity. After becoming initially

disturbed at the sight of rats fleeing the tunnel, the group is horrified to witness a pack of

baby monsters pursuing them. They manage to fight off several of the creatures,

although one of the women is bitten on the neck. They possess a poisonous bite, her

condition deteriorates, and she begins to bleed and grow increasingly weak. The

survivors emerge from the tunnel and encounter Center for Disease Control personnel

clad in white biohazard suits, who have set up an ersatz quarantine camp. Upon seeing

Marlena's condition, the workers apprehend and execute her with a gunshot to the head.

At this point in the film, a sense of utter futility has set in. "We may have to

initiate a hammer down protocol," a soldier informs Hudson, "and level the whole

goddamned city." The camera work becomes shakier, and the de-saturated lighting

augments the smoke filled darkness of the streets and raging fires. More buildings are

destroyed as the monster rages on, bits of its head and body cropping up here and there in the frame and disappearing just as quickly. The remaining characters run into an apartment building to save Beth, whom, although alive, they discover has been impaled on an iron rod. Dialogue is mostly frantic crying and screaming, although Hudson insists on narrating the situation. "Maybe our own government made it," he tentatively suggests at one point during the rescue of Beth, and is promptly chastised and silenced by Robert. He grabs a few more shots of the monster's wrath through Beth's window. "What is it?" she asks. "It's a terrible thing," Hudson replies calmly and matter of factly, his camera still fixed on the creature.

They attempt to escape in a military helicopter, and Hudson records what initially appears to be a successful military strike on the monster. "Look, look, look," he exclaims, "are you guys seeing this shit? They hit it!" "Yea!" he shouts triumphantly. He has celebrated too soon, however, and the monster swats down the helicopter. Hudson's celebration turns to panic, and as the copter crashes, he cries, apologizes, and begs God for forgiveness. They survive the crash, and end up in Central Park. While running under a bridge for shelter, Robert screams. Hudson turns around, finding himself face to face with the creature, which towers over him, staring silently and directly into the camera. This is the first and only shot of the monster's visage. "Oh, no!" Hudson gasps. He loses his voice, reduced to only occasional gasping, although he keeps his camera pointed squarely at the creature's face. It opens its mouth and descends on the camera, consuming the visual field in darkness. The next shot is of the unmanned camera looking at Hudson's body, before Robert picks it up and flees to the tunnel with Beth. They

record a final testimonial into the camera, proclaiming that "something has attacked the city, I don't know what it is. It killed my brother, my best friend…the military has begun bombing the creature, and we are stuck in the middle." In the last few minutes, Beth and Robert confess their love for each other, the creature screams, and bombs pummel the city. The tunnel collapses, and the footage cuts to the vacation, with Beth giving a "final thought" to the camera, the declaration "I had a good day."

The *Cloverfield* movie uses several aesthetic and technical choices to position its viewer as a surveilling witness. The first is the movie's use of a faux-amateur aesthetic. The first twenty minutes of the film supply character set up prior to the attack. These scenes reveal a constant focus with documenting, recording, and surveilling. During the initial vacation sequence, Robert's camera is highly attuned to the details of Beth's apartment, snooping around and scanning her unconscious body. This scene has a quasi-pornographic feel, as the characters exemplify a preoccupation with recording their most intimate behaviors, including sexual encounters, which they openly discuss as possibly "ending up on the Internet." This establishing scene, to an extent, normalizes surveillance culture, as the presence of an active camera in the most intimate of situations is totally accepted and naturalized. The setting at the party builds upon this aspect, as Hudson's insistence on aggressively ferreting out information for his camera becomes a staple of the festivities. He demonstrates his aptitude at spying and surveilling, at times blending into the background and hiding his camera to help in garnering the most revealing and candid bits of gossip. Hudson is most successful at documenting when he is discreet. He uses the miniaturized camera to his advantage, and lurks quietly to grab candid moments.

His efforts are more fruitful, in other words, when he acts as a spy more than a reporter, taping people who don't know they are being watched. In this sense, *Cloverfield* works to build its look as one invested in protocols of surveillance.

After the disaster strikes, shots inspired by amateur 9/11 footage are coupled with the narration of the character recording the events.[33] The Hudson character's insistence on keeping his camera on despite situations of extreme peril and danger establish the presence of the documentarian as an urgent, necessary figure present in the event of a catastrophe. Protests to stop the filming are met with the declaration that "people are gonna want to *see* this," and "but I'm documenting!" Through his insistence, the Hudson character demonstrates that he understands his role as that of witness to trauma, and the process of documenting it, of producing visual evidence that can be seen, establishes the importance of visual recognition within this traumatic situation. Hudson's narration and contextualization of the events demonstrate the role of surveillance, of capturing the gaze of alterity, as a logic that this witness subscribes to. Hudson takes every opportunity possible to record the creature, from the city streets, through windows, and face to face. Seeing this "terrible thing" is knowing it, recognizing its monstrous presence as a threatening and dangerous alterity. Placing the monster in the same frame as explosions, pillars of smoke, and collapsing buildings, in a manner reminiscent of amateur footage, makes the 9/11 allusion apparent. By demonstrating a commitment to, and succeeding in, getting the traumatic alterity on video, the witnessing position of this film supplies an account of successful surveillance capturing the gaze. The trauma of 9/11 is not only reified into monstrous difference, this physical embodiment is captured on video in all of

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[33] Director Matt Reeves discusses this in the Special Features section of the DVD.

its unequivocal awfulness. To see the creature/events on video, as a result of the

surveillance witnesses' documenting activities, is to know and recognize it as an

undeniably "terrible thing."

     Cloverfield also positions surveillance witnesses of 9/11 by assuming the veracity

of television news. In addition to capturing the events directly, Hudson frequently points

the camera at television screens displaying news coverage of the attack. Camera work, in

this sense, serves a meta-recording function by serving as testimony to the legitimacy of

mainstream news coverage of the events. Seeing the news coverage, complete with the

headline "New York Under Attack" By allowing visual access to the "something's"

besieging of the city, *Cloverfield*'s surveilling witness mobilizes the amateur camera as a

device integral in the separation of subject and alterity, a visual mechanism allowing for

recognition of, and mastery over, the difference embodied in the monstrous quilting

point. Difference itself, embodied in the monster, is literally "something" that vision can

speak the truth of. Recording technology, as part of a surveillance regime, closes the gap

of difference between viewing subject and alterity.   Images of news footage, moreover,

reveal attacks on military personnel and other destructive activities, which further

contextualize these events with ideological discourse. Although the viewing subject

behind the camera is annihilated in the face to face encounter with the other, the record is

preserved. Video, then, stands on its own in its tenacious ability to reveal, giving it a

status, in this case, of quasi-omnipotent and surpassing the powers of the human eye

itself. Recording technology, surviving its operator's demise by radical difference,

nonetheless possesses an intrepid power to capture and contain the gaze.

Another element that this movie uses to produce a surveilling witness is special effects technologies. This movie uses computer-generated imagery to create the "creature effects," which in this case end up being spectacles of radical difference. Once the presence of a monstrous body, a discernable abject other to be recognized, is established, *Cloverfield*'s narrative demonstrates how technology can be used to capture, record, know, and recognize it. The camera establishes difference, and the witness is positioned against the monster at all times. Although eradicating it and surviving it are not guaranteed, the film nonetheless establishes this as a desirable outcome, achieved through the documentation and narrative celebration of the military's strike. Military personnel are also captured on camera as helpful and ultimately concerned with securing human survival, another narrative aspect that positions humanity against the radical difference in this film. When coupled with the activities of the surveillance witness, the CGI spectacle of horrific otherness positions this witness as against something-"a terrible thing"-that is assumed completely impossible to relate to. Indeed, both the main monster and its spawn seem to lack any language or familiar characteristics whatsoever, having the appearance of pinkish insects with birdlike beaks and scaly skin. Their verbalizations consist of squeaks, screeches and chitters. The surveillance witness sees the invasion of the monstrous other from outside, and works to contain its difference on the visual record. If the camera cannot serve as a literal weapon to destroy the difference, at least it can function as an extension of the eye, allowing for the subject to understand and recognize it.

A surveilling witness is incompatible with a notion of ethical witnessing, for the process involves identifying boundaries that need to be protected, defended, guarded by the outside. The process always involves situating the self *against* something or some group deemed too abject or threatening to have a place in the secured orbit; they are a contagion. This movie, through special effects, functions as an allegorical tale of this tension between inside and outside, security and invasion. By depicting a grotesque, radically evil entity as allegory for these films, *Cloverfield* affirms and literally reifies anxieties over security, national stability and otherness through hyperbolic allegory. By bringing the events of 9/11 into the monster genre's orbit, *Cloverfield* produces an ideological discourse and subject in accord with this logic. The 9/11 events become a horror story, condensed and naturalized in a monstrous body. Trauma is reified, becomes the horror story, and ethical witnessing is supplanted by the hail to identify with the heroes (young, terrorized new Yorkers) and against the villain (a monster). By drawing from You Tube, amateur 9/11 footage as aesthetic inspiration for the film, *Cloverfield* links up with a particular narrative of 9/11, that which situates the events as being a product of radical evil and utter monstrosity. In this film, efforts to survive through surveillance are unsuccessful, yet the narrative still supplies an account of the steps one ought to take when faced with a terrifying/terrorist event. The "need to see," the urgency of seeing as productive of important knowledge and understanding, produces a mode of technologically enhanced vision that prioritized recognition of alterity, and apprehension of the gaze, through the use of recording technologies. In a sense, the torch of securing

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through surveillance witnessing is passed to the viewers, which is the importance of the interactive contest, which will be examined in an upcoming section.

The relationship of the viewer to a position of surveillance witnessing is immediately established from the beginning of the film. This initial framing immediately establishes the film's viewer as a voyeur, privy to some secret event that is supposedly now traveling in an unintended circuit. The aesthetic of secrecy serves to produce a spectator of trauma-one who is promised visual access to-and intelligible recognition of-the traumatic kernel of the real. Immediately, then, any sense of mystery, confusion, or impossibility surrounding the attack is precluded-*some-thing* has found us-proclaims the tagline of the film. This framing of the events-the exposure of a classified file, the designation of "something" that has "found" "us" establishes clear parameters of subjectivity and difference, a horrific antagonism that is reified into a tangible, discernable "something" through computer generated special effects technologies.

Witnesses, at this point of encounter with the movie, are already dealing with certainty, which overlaps with a particular notion of recognition. Narrative framing of the film positions viewers, from the outset, as having access to truth and a secret-the object a-through visual record. The film's aesthetic also works to shore up the witnessing position supplied by the film, which comingles the intelligibility of abjection with the shock of trauma. The use of a realist aesthetic conveys a particular sort of self-reflexivity with regards to the process of documentation and filming. The characterization of two cameramen committed to the project literally to the death produces a sense of exigency and importance-something is going on that can be filmed, that needs to be recorded and

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represented. Once the presence of a monster is revealed, getting it on camera-capturing it-becomes the central focus of the documentarians. In this sense, the impossibility of what is being witnessed being negated by the possibility of capture. The creature becomes real when it is recorded on video, the horror of the Real captured and rendered into an framework of intelligibility. Something now exists, it is horrible, and it needs to be seen.

As a media text that is productive of post-9/11 sensibilities and behaviors, *Cloverfield* positions surveillance witnesses in the protocols of dealing with terrorism through technology. *Cloverfield's* shaky-cam aesthetic can be articulated to the anxieties and stresses of being hailed as a surveillance witness: one must remain on perennial high alert, in a state of agitation and nervous, twitchy readiness: always on guard and ready to capture and throw oneself into the midst of an extreme event. As Tania Modleski has suggested, formalist constructions of spectator positionality have, in more traditional forms of viewership, coincided with rhythms of labor present in a larger social context. The *Cloverfield* spectator follows a shaking, highly active camera as it gradually searches for and unveils snippets of the monster/attack bit by bit, creating a discombobulated, anxious viewing experience. Moreover, the involvement of specific products in particular ways, and the demonstration of appropriate protocols of their use, establishes the active, self-governing nature of the surveilling witness. This surveillance witness, further, cannot be an ethical witness. Cinematic witnessing entails identification with a traumatic event over individual characters and subject positions, the trauma must remain, in some sense, ineffable, unintelligible, and open. By quickly re-inscribing traumatic

events into the fold of terrorism, and the presence of villains, the *Cloverfield* story forecloses upon this possibility.

The film's showcasing of products and protocols involved in the video performance all play a role in this film's positioning of a surveilling witness. Small consumer recording devices are showcased constantly, and play a key role in the narrative from the beginning. Even after the final character is dead, we have access to a view of the monster through the unmanned camera, which intrepidly manages to persist and end up in DOD archives. The "amateur" footage, for which several lives were sacrificed, takes on a highly charged character, persisting death and providing visual access to absolute truths of otherness. Perhaps this narrative is, on some level, functioning as an allegory for the excess of trauma surrounding 9/11. The creature itself conveys a certain excessive quality, sprawling and expansive, with a voracious, gaping mouth. It is inchoate and infantile, screeching and wailing as it demolishes everything in its path. These features suggest the excesses possible by the undisciplined, ungoverned body, driven by drives. The suicide bomber, a key figure in the story of terrorism, has been suggested as a construct embodying and reflecting these anxieties.[34] Although the true horror of this body is not abolished by surveillance practices, according to the narrative logic of the film, it can be seen, understood, known, and recognized in its abject radical difference.

Cloverfield's witness does more than labor under the gaze of this spectacle, producing value with their attention and entertainment. This process, to an extent, is apropos of all mainstream commercial films. However, when the work of attention is

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[34] See Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*

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done in the contest of a 9/11 spectacle film, the implications are different. The fun of

engaging in the attention economy of 9/11 horror spectacles such as *Cloverfield* involves

not only the masochistic pleasure of being terrified and traumatized by the horror, but in

fixing one's attention upon the behaviors, techniques, and practices involved in dealing

with it. Witness-viewers of *Cloverfield*, in other words, are getting a tutorial in how to

deal with terrorism, understood in a specific, image-based ideological sense. When the

excessive trauma of horror is "spectacle-ized," and excess is given abject body. Horror

becomes the horror story, visually identifiable through a the villain that quilts it,

launching a panoply of techniques and practices of managing it into play. Anxieties over

the excessive nature of terrorism-its unpredictability, unwillingness to conform to liberal

laws and codes of war, are collapsed under the sign of the beast. In the previous chapter

this overdetermined image was the Obama Joker, here it is the *Cloverfield* monster.

Whereas Alex Jones' films invited viewers to galvanize against the alleged architects of

9/11 and other traumatic events by "exposing" Obama's allegiances to the New World

Order, *Cloverfield* teaches us what to do at ground zero, how to conceptualize and

respond to the attack itself. Both, however, organize their witnesses around, and against,

the sign of the monster, the recognizable face of evil, and do so through various aesthetic

and technical strategies. Interactive methods of distribution and promotion also

contribute to this process, of which the unique applicability to *Cloverfield* will be

examined in the following section.

     If evil is that which lies outside of, is in excess of modern regulatory structures, a

raging monster is the ideal physical manifestation of these characteristics. Although it

cannot be disciplined, it can at least be known and recognized through surveillance practices. Thanks to Paramount's much larger budget, the monster can be much more striking and sophisticated in nature than Jones' digitally manipulated image of Bush or circulation of Obama's visage in Joker makeup. Witnesses to *Cloverfield*'s 9/11, then are produced in a manner that *sees* the excesses of terrorism as something inhuman, totally lacking empathy and non-linguistic in its difference, and governed only by destructive drives. This witness is constructed as the main subject position of the movie, and is invited to make the linkage between terrorism and essential, radical evil by collapsing the two under the visual sign of a grotesque, quasi-humanoid but radically other, creature. Visual recording devices produce and reveal these truths, surviving the deaths of the human eyes attached to them and remaining as access to the secret. Surveillance, in this sense, has worked: although ineffectual as a means of survival, it achieved the end of capturing the gaze and revealing its difference. This monster, captured on tape via diligent surveillance activity, quilts the ideological space of 9/11 as an act of terrorist evil.

Part Three

Interactivity, Surveillance and Witnessing *Cloverfield*

Cloverfield's interactive campaigns supply a case study exemplifying another instance of how surveillance witnessing is captured and mobilized as part of the participatory network. Examining this contest, moreover, gives a sense of not only how spectators are positioned as witnesses by film, but how, enabled by networked, interactive content, they enact witnessing positions through the content they produce and

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distribute. The attendant, interactive online material associated with *Cloverfield* gives a

sense of how participants in a convergent media landscape can participate in the cultural

story of 9/11 by witnessing. The extra-textual online material gives active viewers

opportunities to put their lessons into practice, and supplies some insight into how

audience practices exemplify a sense in which the viewing position of the film interfaces

with interactive media platforms. This section explores several facets of this online

contest. First, how contest entrants drew inspiration from amateur 9/11 footage, both as

it circulates online and how it was used as an aesthetic of the movie. The existence of

9/11 footage, its production and circulation on You Tube, was made possible through

actual witnesses' use of small consumer devices to record the attacks, and ability to

utilize online protocols of distribution and exhibition such as You Tube. The presence of

this footage online allowed for it to constitute an aspect of the witnessing position

produced by the movie, as well as influence the contest directly. As a result, the narrative

circulation of witnessing produced by this film became involved in an expansive,

interconnected environment. In a manner similar to analysis of Alex Jones' immersion in

an interactive, networked landscape, this section examines the ramifications of 9/11

witnessing, articulated to both an allegorical monster film and amateur footage,

circulating broadly online. The second component of the contest that I turn an eye

toward concerns entrants' use of effects technology and amateur recording devices. In

contrast to the computer-generated spectacle produced by the film, I examine the

implications for witnessing produced by fan projects that lack a special effects budget on

par with a Hollywood studio's.

The interface between You Tube, the *Cloverfield* movie, and fan/amateur footage, created an interactive, networked feedback loop productive of a bundle of 9/11 discourse, in a manner similar to the environment inhabited by Jones' conspiracy content. In March of 2008, Paramount Pictures, which produced and distributed the movie, announced the "When *Cloverfield* Hit" online contest. To participate, interested parties were instructed to first log on to the website (www.whencloverfieldhit.com) between April 4th and April 21st, and upload a 5 minute video clip responding to the prompt "where were you when the monster hit?" Footage had to be shot on consumer grade cameras and was not allowed to contain a music score or other copyrighted material. Entrants also waived any claims to ownership over their footage, and ceded to Paramount permission to use the clips in any manner whatsoever. The rules also stipulated that footage could not contain any corporate logos or other advertisements/promotions deemed "unacceptable" by Paramount.[35]

On April 22nd, the second leg of contest began: visitors to the website logged on and voted for their favorite videos. The top-three finalists were then forwarded to Reeves, who selected his favorite. The grand prizewinner claimed $4500 in cash and a "Paramount DVD prize package" allegedly worth an additional $4600. The rules and procedure of the contest illustrate a number of issues pertinent to interactivity, vision, and witnessing produced by an interactive, networked media environment. With regards to this particular genre, the content produced by the fans also indicated ways in which spectators of the 9/11 monster movie, when mobilized as surveillance witnesses, produce

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[35] http://www.whencloverfieldhit.com/info/terms

discourses of trauma in ways that implicate issues of ideological quilting and the capture of the gaze.

The uploaded videos are organized on the page according to two categories: most watched and most voted on, thereby making the most popular submissions the easiest to access and view. There were over 1,000 videos on the page when I viewed it, and many have since migrated to Facebook fan pages, where they can presently be viewed. The clips that I watched display a relatively representative sample of U.S. citizens and locations. For example, one of the top selections features a self-identified, young white "businessman form Chicago" documenting the attack taking place in the aforementioned city while on his way home from work, and subsequently hiding behind a park bench and setting up the camera to record a personal confessional of how afraid he is of the repercussions of the "attack." This contest entrant displays responses to the attack similar to the main character in the film. He immediately begins recording following the first explosion, and subsequently delivers a testimonial confessing his fear and uncertainty. Why he would be carrying a camcorder on a regular workday is not made explicitly clear, and therefore such a practice of surveillance is totally normalized. No monster or signifier of its presence was attempted by this video, yet the participant automatically assumed that this was precisely what he was dealing with.

Another top-rated clip features two Latino, young male teenagers in what appears to be southern California or the American southwest (signified by palm trees) "accidentally" capturing the attack while in the midst of concocting a prank to play on a friend, which they intend to videotape. This clip attempted to signify the presence of the

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attack with sounds, flashing lights, and fire in the distance. Another submission, which

has migrated to You Tube, featured two middle-aged white women videotaping the event

while spending the day strolling at a lake. The winning video aesthetically resembles the

perspective of a security camera, complete with time code, and is reminiscent of 9/11

footage documenting the inside of the World Trade Center Complex.[36] Nothing much

happens in this video. There is no sound, and the footage consists of different shots from

a security camera in a dorm or student union. As the film progresses, onlookers run in

front of the camera and cluster around windows. The winning video is linked to various

other amateur *Cloverfield* movies via You Tube's related playlist feature. One of these,

titled *Chaos in California*, features three young male tourists taping the strike while

vacationing in Hollywood. They record several windows of a tall building "popping out"

with smoke and fire, an image very similar to footage of the twin towers. A flaming

piece of building also falls into a busy street. The smoke and fore effects appear to be

made by After Effects, or a similar software program. The tourists turn on their car radio

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[36] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3eRwGw_RUdc and
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URpC6C3FRbk

for information, where they hear a special message from the Department of Defense that "the beast" is moving across the nation. They retreat to the top of a hill, from where they witness various buildings, and the Hollywood sign, smoking and exploding. At the end, there is a load roar, followed by screaming and the camera cutting to black. Presumably, the characters were killed by the creature.

These amateur videos, by depicting a relatively large swath of the U.S. population, effectively naturalize and generalize the use, implementation, and presence of surveillance technology across regional, racial, gender, and class lines. Different parts of the national geography are signified by landmarks and identification from the contest participants. As a holistic experience, then, viewing the videos extends the scope of surveillance witnessing beyond the white, upper middle class youth demographic represented in the movie itself, mobilizing the entire home front as a nation of surveilling witnesses, always on guard and ready to capture-to recognize-a terrorist event, and to immediately recognize and identify and name its evil and monstrosity. The language of the prompt, referring to the monster's appearance as a "hit" suggests a bombing or strike in itself. The *Cloverfield* amateur videos are basically mini faux-documentaries about a nationwide terrorist attack, loosely articulated in their narratives to the *Cloverfield* movie. The "where were you" prompt of the contest simultaneously allows the moviemakers to personalize the attack and extends the scope of the catastrophe beyond the borders of New York and to the nation as a whole. The spatial extension of the film's narrative underpins the story with a nationalist feel, as the localized target of one city expands into a nationwide siege against the United States. Use of aesthetic inspired by amateur 9/11

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footage in these videos, when made to signify a nationwide terrorist attack, extends the narrative circulation of the film's surveillance-witnessing, as an attempt to recognize the threat abject difference and capture its gaze, by extending the witnessing position produced by this logic across another platform.

The video clips themselves simultaneously extend the scope and reach of the *Cloverfield* setting and articulate it to larger discourses of terrorism, national security, and fears of a totalizing national catastrophe. None of the amateur clips that I viewed, moreover, attempt to replicate the actual monster, and instead represent it's attack with explosions, smoke, general chaos, flashing lights, and allusions to 9/11 footage. The physical, allegorical embodiment of the attack in a monster is lost, however the videos, in extending the logic of monstrosity to a terrorist attack in general, allows for an inroad to examining the ways the surveillance witness is enacted as a viewing position through their practices, with a certain relationship to alterity and trauma, and how they perform that subjectivity in interactive venues. Monstrosity, and hence some notion of radical evil, is what circulates, unuttered, in these videos, which evoke the film's narrative despite visible absence of its monster. The chain of signification, constructed and produced by these participants, links monstrosity to terror to 9/11. The labor of surveilling witnesses is precisely what allowed this articulation to manifest, and appear in the domain of spectacle; viewers who watched the films and witnessed the reification of the attack then, through their work, subtracted the literal abject (creature) from the equation, in turn abject-ifying the events of 9/11 themselves. These events, in turn, become what is recognized as the monstrous, captured by the gaze of amateur recording.

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In this sense, surveillance functions as a technology of securitization not in the sense of protecting and policing per se. Indeed, many of the characters in these films appear helpless and terrified, and some are even killed. Surveillance functions as a mechanism of securitization and capture in a visual sense. By functioning as a device allowing the recorders to understand and recognize monstrous evil and capture it, to document, record, and identify, the securitization has to do with producing a sense of intelligibility of September 11th. The iteration here strengthens the link articulating the events to a notion of radical evil, which is achieved through references to "the beast," coupled with its conspicuous absence and replacement with other images evocative of 9/11 footage. Subtracting the monster from the visual field, then, is the gesture that sutures it.

The opportunities supplied by the participatory network contributed to this process in several key ways. First, as the primary means of distribution and exhibition of amateur 9/11 footage, it supplied cheap and easily accessible aesthetic inspiration for the *Cloverfield* movie in a manner that links it explicitly to 9/11 in the cultural imagination. This link was also formed by the director's interview on the DVD special features and online blogs and news articles discussing *Cloverfield* as 9/11 allegory. Googling "*Cloverfield*," and "*Cloverfield* 9/11," for example, makes this network of nodes apparent. The second sense was the online, viral marketing initiative used to promote the movie. Prior to the film's release, vague videos cropped up on fan sites, featuring faux-news footage covering attacks on New York City.[37] These viral videos inhabit the same space, linked through You Tube playlists, as the fan videos, and as a result create a milieu of allusion and realism further uniting *Cloverfield* with the 9/11 events. The realism of

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[37] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfKqIMX8nMM

the environment has, for some You Tube participants, created reasonable doubt in some users regarding fiction and reality. "Is this real?!??!!" asks user ij1X0 in response to *Chaos in California*. "Yes or no, this was a great film!!!" Comments such as these reveal the sense in which the linked, interactive milieu provided by the participatory network constructs a space that blurs the line between fantasy and reality. As was the case with the conspiracy environment, following the links reveals the quilting point. Here, in a space that brings together 9/11 footage, news coverage, and a horror movie, the point that quilts the space is the monstrous other of radical evil, linked to 9/11. Fan use of small consumer recording devices constitutes, in this orbit, a practice of surveillance able to recognize, verify, and reify this otherness.

Cloverfield, demonstrates the ways in which the production of monstrous imagery can produce modes of ideological quilting and preclude the process of ethical witnessing. The witness who produces the mini-movies is a surveilling witness similar of the one situated by the film. Terrorized and traumatized, these witnesses enact practices of self-securitization by demonstrating how to hide and protect oneself from, and capture the visual truth of, the intrusion of the terrible thing. In the movie, all of the characters ultimately died, sacrificing themselves for the sake of the footage. In the contest videos, the "where were you" prompt allows for entrants to enter this discursive, interactive space as *survivors* of the attack. Similarly operating form the ethos that seeing the footage is important, that it must be documented and exhibited, this space also suggests that survivors of the attack are the ones who demonstrated heroism and survivalism through their surveillance practices. The "businessman from Chicago," for example,

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immediately uses the terrain in the park as one would in an urban warfare situation, diving under a bench and filming from a safe vantage point. Surveillance is not only important as a means of capturing alterity, it is directly articulated to protocols of disaster survival.

Despite, and because of, the monster's absence, the logic of recognition, and terrorism as identifiable evil, remains the quilting point of this ideological space, uniting discourses of national security and terrorism with fan films and the primary movie. Recognition, moreover, underpins the function of spectacle in this sense, and reified evil comes to serve as the commodity in circulation, which can be purchased, viewed, and enjoyed. The entertainment produced constitutes a dimension of the visual labor involved, and in this sense the entertainment value is recognition of evil through monstrosity. The participants in this contest exemplify what Oliver suggests as a will to surveil. Subtracting the monster from the equation allows for insight into how these viewers, activated by the primary film as surveilling witnesses, produce the cultural narrative of 9/11 through their use of consumer recording equipment. Recording explosions, smoke, fire, and other aspects associated with the monster allows for the notion of alterity, as an absent presence, to signify the other elements of the attack. Participants demonstrate, through their surveillance activities, the sense in which they are quilting an ideological space by attempting to capture the gaze outside, by defining the borders of the United States against the "something" that must be attacking it.

In a manner that separates them form the witness of the film, contest entrants afford themselves a degree of agency denied to the film characters. In the *Cloverfield*

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narrative, everyone, including the situated viewer, was exterminated eventually. Protecting oneself and one's community was essentially futile, and those who got too close, and faced alterity directly, were eradicated. This sense of hopelessness was rejected by the contest's parameters and nature of the content presented. The prompt itself, inviting a response to the question "where were you when the monster hit" inherently suggests survival. In responding to the question, the videos on the website present accounts of successful avoidance of the attack. Eliminating the sense of despair present in the original film seems to reinforce the sense in which the trailers are implicated in the production of surveillance witnessing. In the movie, this mode of witnessing, although cast as heroic, was essentially ineffectual, and producing and preserving the record, getting the otherness on tape, became the endgame, for "people need[ed] to see this." The contest entrants, however, redeem the possibility of surveillance witnessing, as the parameters of the contest indicate that, within the narrative, their activities were related to their survival. In this sense, the interactive contest tightens, and makes explicit, the notion of surveillance witnessing as a response to the threat of difference that the *Cloverfield* movie advanced.

Conclusion

Cloverfield, as a film and interactive opportunity, demonstrates a sense in which the cultural narrative of 9/11 is produced and made through a participatory network offered through media convergence. This example, as an allegorical horror film interacting with a genre of fan video, shows how surveillance, as a set of practices involving a form of witnessing and relationship with technology, constitutes an important

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subject position in the cultural logic of 9/11. These qualities imbue upon it a

fundamentally different relationship to spectatorship, activity, and labor: no longer a

passive observer allowing a cinematic story to wash over them, *Cloverfield*'s spectator is

hailed as an active, laboring agent, working to tutor themselves in the proper rituals of

subject formation as a surveilling witness, working to build a trans-media, trans-

discursive bridge that extends the *Cloverfield* narrative by explicitly linking it to the 9/11

attack and responses to it, in addition to producing value for the original media product.

In this sense, the "buzz" and visibility surrounding the *Cloverfield* film served to situate

it, and the cultural logic of surveillance witnessing it produced, as a significant

component of the cultural narrative of 9/11.

Moreover, this film demonstrated how surveillance can be produced as a viewing

position as well as a logic of discipline, securitization, and governance. Producing value

and visibility for the original product not only creates vale added for capital, it broadens

the scope and visibility of this particular 9/11 story. The "where were you" contest

injects an element of 9/11 realism into *Cloverfield*, indicating the presence of a cross-

platform, multi-dimensional lesson plan in the instruction of the techniques and practices

of surveillance witnessing. In this sense, the hyper-visibility of this convergent media

product shows the processes through which particular modes of witnessing 9/11.

The ways in which *Cloverfield*'s participatory network produces and mobilizes

the witness of 9/11 also calls for fans to reproduce it via online activity. When

participants in the *Cloverfield* contest submitted their own video trailers, they lacked the

means of production to re-create a version of the monstrous body produced by the film.

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None of the entrants attempted to create such a body with models, puppets, or other rudimentary special effects technologies used to create monsters in early and mid 20th century films. Instead, they implicitly folded their renditions of the story back into the intelligible framework of the terrorist attack, supplying evidence that this is, in fact, the visual work that the monster is doing, the way that gazing upon this reified body of alterity produces witnesses who then respond by engaging in surveillance practices. These fans demonstrate, through participatory activities, the ways in which the visual dimension of the spectacle works through them, and activates their trauma by rendering it visible and recognizable online.

The interactive contest is enabled and allowed for by technologies of communicative capitalism, a process which is demonstrated through the ways in which all of this interactivity, on some level, functions as advertising for the original product. In addition to these dimensions, however, the participatory network supplies insight into one way in which surveillance witnessing, as an element of post-9/11 viewing, is produced, mobilized, and normalized. The interactive, networked media environment of today is uniquely positioned to produce witnessing subjects, and put them to work through protocols allowing for the enactment of this witnessing position via interactive platforms and consumer technologies. In this case, surveillance emerged as the concept definitive of this field, related to the way in which the monster story, allegorical to the events of 9/11, mined the amateur-footage aspect of the cultural story of 9/11 to build upon the notion of surveillance as a means of containing difference and ameliorating trauma through ideological quilting.

The implications of ethical processes as produced in the participatory network are discouraging. However mapping possibilities for technological interface and circulation, and ways in which audience affects are mobilized through interactive opportunities and their convergence with other texts and discourses, seems to offer some possibility for mapping and exploring the contemporary production and circulation of traumatic discourses situated beyond recognition and evocative of ethical witnessing as a mode of subjectivity. In the final chapter, I examine the 2004 documentary film *Control Room*, and its interactive website, to discuss another sense in which 9/11 witnessing is produced by networked, interactive, convergent media culture.

Chapter Four

Ethical Witnessing and Participation: *Control Room* & its Online Space

Introduction

Ethical Witnessing and Ideological Quilting

The previous chapters examined two types of witnesses produced and mobilized

by the participatory network of 9/11 media culture. The first was the conspiracy witness,

which, aided by an interactive, convergent media environment, is defined by psychotic

certainty and relationship with new, monstrous master signifiers, such as the Obama

Joker. These monsters of 9/11 conform to Zizek's notion of ideological populism and the

construction of an other that quilts a space closed following a traumatic rupture. In the

second chapter, I explored the extent to which a surveilling witness was cultivated

through participatory culture, in this case the spectacle-driven, popular culture 9/11 story

Cloverfield. The surveilling witness was hailed to record, recognize, document and

capture the abject face of evil. This witness was defined by a sense of agency and

interactivity, and implemented their savvy with convergent media culture as a producer

as well as a consumer. Getting too close to alterity was marked by death and engulfment,

but the subject's ego boundaries were maintained through use of recording technology to

recognize the other while retaining a safe distance from a traumatic encounter with the

other. These two positions, by returning to a notion of ideological quilting and closure,

foreclose upon possibilities for situating and mobilizing ethical witnesses.

In this chapter, I return to Kaplan's notion of the ethical witness to analyze the

2004 documentary film *Control Room*, and its interactive website. I also address John

Durham Peters' analysis of the relationship between witnessing and liberal subjectivity, and its applicability to the *Control Room* media space. This chapter examines two aspects of the participatory interactive environment that *Control Room* inhabits. First, the type of witness produced by this space. What type of witnessing subject is it? What are its characteristics? Second, I examine the sense in which this witness conforms to characteristics defined as belonging to the ethical witness with regards to mediated viewing. The first object used in this chapter is the film itself. In analyzing the film, I study various formal and textual devices, such as narration, editing, use of news footage, and camera work. In looking at these aspects of the film, I am concerned with the way in which it sets up a witnessing relationship between the viewer and the subjects and events in the Middle East following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. I examine the ways in which the film evokes aspects of liberal subjectivity, through elevating concepts such as journalistic objectivity, rationality, truth, need for balance and deliberation, and factuality, in its narrative form. From this starting point, I examine the manner in which the narrative attempts to move the viewer from this position of liberal subjectivity towards one more defined by the sense of agency involved in response-able witnessing. I argue that, in this film's participatory network, affects encouraging ethical witnessing are produced, and address the problems laid out in Zizek's critique of populism.

The second aspect of *Control Room* that I examine is it's website. In analyzing the extra-textual and interactive opportunities made available through this platform, I am concerned with the ways in which responsible participation is hailed regarding trauma and encounters with the other. As a form of action and agency, sometimes bundled

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together in Ann Kaplan's notion of the ethical witness, responsibility remains an important concept. I wish to separate the notion of responsibility from its intertwinement in the notion of ethical witnessing. I am interested in investigating the sense in which responsibility, as enabled by the participatory network of *Control Room*, could constitute the political component of, or next step in, the process of ethical witnessing. If ethical witnessing is an affective, empathetic experience, responsible acting entails the actualization of this in a politic. The participatory network, I argue, can supply the means to put this ethic into political.

The notion of witnessing that I use in this chapter to discuss the film is the response-able witness.[38] I use this concept to inquire into whether this film, through its technical, aesthetic, and narrative components, positions viewers in a manner that invites ethical response. When analyzing the website, I use the notion of responsible witness. Although the conspiracy witness and surveillance witnesses are also hailed to participate in interactive media spaces, I forward that the response-able and responsible witnesses maintain a more ethical relationship to media interactivity, technology, and difference. As a subject-spectator encouraged, through the documentary, to seek out and investigate news reporting from the "other side," I argue that these witnesses exists in a more open, inquisitive relationship with alterity. Moreover, drawing inspiration from network theory, I interrogate whether the responsible, participating witness, mobilized to follow links, and interrogate their own relationship to particular nodes in network, is defined by

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[38] Response-ability implies the extent to which an experience, encounter, or event is structured in a manner that invites or encourages active response. Responsibility, on the other hand, involves those opportunities that allow for the response to be activated; that provide opportunities for viewers to put their responses to work in a manner that holds them accountable to what they have seen.

a more ethical, multi-perspectival method of witnessing than offered by the previous two forms. If this ethic of openness involves making a decision or adopting a politics of conviction, however, to what extent are ethical witnessing and political action in tension? My argument is that political action, mobilized through participatory, networked technologies enabling one to take responsibility and act on what they have seen, can produce a way for ethics to translate into a politics of conviction.

Kaplan's ethical witness of media is enabled to respond to situations, events, and traumas, even if the witness has not personally experienced them directly. These sorts of viewing moments are able to encourage and cultivate empathetic response. For Kaplan, there is also an implicit political component to this process that motivates the witness to take action or respond to the vicarious trauma. This ethical witness is hailed as active, and their viewing experience prompts response and engagement. There is also a sense in which the ethical witness understands his relationship not merely to himself and her own healing, but to larger communities. The relationship extends beyond the self's individual therapeutic process. Kaplan explains that "there is…a need to mobilize the conscience of large communities, such as the nation state, in which people elect their leaders and vote for or against policies that affect people's daily lives" (123). This mode of witnessing "implies a larger ethical framework that has to do with public recognition of atrocities" (122).

Films that produce a subject potion encouraging the viewer to take responsibility, and hence action, for these traumas and atrocities are examples of how media can construct the witnessing subject. Kaplan, like Kelly Oliver, uses the concept of moving

beyond recognition to understand a crucial aspect of ethical witnessing. Here, that notion
is useful to understand regimes and mode of media viewership that are not limited to
passive watching or an experience with images limited to visual recognition and
understanding. The ethical witness watches, but as a result of this watching, is prompted
to act, move, respond. What needs to be pushed in this analysis, however, is the
confound between ethics and politics, between experiencing and acting. Kaplan
acknowledges that an ethical witnessing experience must entail action beyond simply
watching a film, yet she does not elaborate on what these actions might involve.
Moreover, Kaplan does not mention the word "politics," although this is what is implied
when discussing decisions, convictions, responses and actions. As discussed in Chapter
One, it is problematic to deduce the political from the ethical, for actually enacting ethical
principles requires negotiating and taking into account specifics and particularities in the
word. Political action, existing on the plane of immanence, is contingent and situational.
Acting, and making decisions, on this plane precludes the possibility of "determinate
transcendental guarantees" (Critchley 178) resulting from moving from the
transcendental to the everyday. Making this move, moreover, involves decisions, which
entails closure. Does this closure, in turn, violate the ethical principle of openness? Or,
are some forms of closure more aligned with the ethical, more preferable in this sense,
than others?

The political component of Kaplan's witnessing ethic needs to be extricated and
specifically discussed. The extent to which witnessing trauma can be an ethical viewing
experience involving a call to responsibility also involves the sense in which it constructs

its relationship to symbolization. Trauma is characterized, according to Kaplan, by "visuality (including sound) and absence or delay of symbolization" (126). Traditional psychoanalytic film theory has, from its inception, understood the medium of film as strongly defined by its relationship to symbolization,[39] so Kaplan's analysis poses a possibility for understanding the process of symbolization differently. Psychoanalytic approaches to symbolism and viewing also emphasize narcissistic ego identification on the imaginary-symbolic axis. This way of understanding viewing and imagery was critiqued by McGowan as celebrating fetishism and the overdetermination of imagery, encounters with visual culture antithetical to producing a transformative witnessing experience.

Kaplan's thoughts on cinematic ethics, however, seem conducive with an ethical, affective theory of spectatorship situated on the real-symbolic axis. Pushing her analysis, I would argue that it is not viewing and interpreting imagery per se that ought to be critiqued as ethically problematic, it is the extent to which encounters with imagery invite seeing as simply recognition. Moving beyond recognition, seeing as witnessing, involves response-ability and responsibility towards the other. The experience of ethical witnessing through viewing is the first step in this process, as analyzed by Kaplan. The second component concerns the triggers that push the witness to actualize responsibility. As I argue in a later section, the "tools" allowing for this can come in the form of the interactive network. For now, I will further explicate the notions of ethical witnessing and media viewership.

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[39] See Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*

Ethical witnessing concerns the way in which the viewer experiences characters, events, and emotions in the film. Ethical witnessing, for Kaplan, involves the extent to which the film "enables attention to the situation, as against attention merely to the subject's individual suffering, and this positioning thus opens the text to larger social and political meanings" (125). This mode of viewing, then, resists ego-centric identification, and shifts the register of response from ego-identification to a more affective and emotional manner of making sense of events. The ego/subject, manifesting on the register of the imaginary, is not what sutures the viewer into the film. Identification and empathy with a greater context, such as human suffering in general, performs this function. Using Maya Derren's film *Meshes of the Afternoon* as an example, Kaplan explains that "there are images and happenings in the film, but no causal sequence. There are strong emotions-fear, disgust and rage, but no specific meanings" (129). Elements that characterize this film as one conducive to producing ethical witnessing include its circular/non-linear narrative, emotionally charged and significant, but under-explained, symbolism of objects (e.g. mirrors, knives), and a sense of amorphous, consuming fear produced by the unexplained juxtaposition of various objects and jarring music, paired with discombobulating camera angles. The overall effect of this space creates an "affect aesthetic of trauma," defined in large part by its sense of uncertainty and mystery. The viewer is invited to respond to a vague but expansive sense of psychic trauma, loosely articulated to feminine trauma, but not to locate this trauma as "belonging" to a protagonist whom the viewer indentifies with. Although symbolization, I would contend, always invites some degree of closure, the sense in which symbolization

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is not narrativized in a clear manner creates a sense of mystery that resists over-determination or fetishization. Although meaning is not denied, a circumscribed, closed sense of it is not affixed to specific persons, objects, or events.

As the previous chapters demonstrated, films can produce viewing subjects as witnesses to trauma, and mobilize them to act, while still lacking the ethical dimension discussed by Kaplan. The relationship that the narratives construct to alterity plays a key role in this process. *9/11: The Road to Tyranny*, for example, formed new monstrous figures to quilt the space, giving meaning through a new master signifier, opened by the national trauma of 9/11. The film used various techniques of narration and digital manipulation to cast various world leaders as the Satanic/evil architects and antagonists of the event. The convergent media landscape that the film inhabits, moreover, hails viewers to link these figures up with the image of the Obama Joker, perhaps a definitive symbol of post-9/11 populist conspiracy culture. *Cloverfield*, moreover, used special effects and a realist/amateur aesthetic to convey the trauma of 9/11, this time quilted by a literal monster. The extent to which the surveillance witnesses of this space was mobilized was evident in the online interactive contest, where viewers made their connection between 9/11 trauma and the quilting point of monstrosity apparent. The trauma of 9/11, in these cases, is mobilized in the service of forming a national community organized against something. When trauma is collectively healed or reconciled by displacing antagonism onto some monstrous figure, and a new enemy is created, the possibilities of ethical witnessing are foreclosed. These monsters constitute the sort of fetishes that can be recognized, documented, captured, symbolized, destroyed.

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When events to be witnessed are narrativized around heroes and victims to identify with, and hence monstrous villains, there is no face to remain open to, no sense of atrocity without antagonist to contemplate or mourn. The quilting point, in the language of visual media, begins with an image over determined with meaning.

The problem of witnessing and recognition, with regards to visual media culture, concerns the sense in which a narrative produces, or dissolves, a sense of ego-identification. A film that invites ethical witnessing can not encourage us to identify *with* someone(s), for this implies a constitutive outside as well: we must in turn identify *against* someone(s). However, this principle seems limited to imaginary identification as misrecognition. The process of quilting as fetishization concerns the extent to which persons or groups come to stand in as the rogue element, or remainder, preventing social harmony. The process of quilting is a populist move that displaces dialectical antagonism by displacing it onto a third term. This issue speaks to larger frameworks and analyses of witnessing and the self/other relationship, which call for openness, response-ability, and the surrender of rigid ego boundaries that are easily challenged or threatened by encroaching others poised to take something from the self, be it enjoyment, or a way of life. Kaplan's analysis is useful, for it supplies a framework to understand how visual culture can resist the problematic of overdetermined, fetishistic symbolization and construct a more open and affective, and hence ethical, witnessing experience. However, what needs to be built upon is the nature of action and responsibility as a witnessing. These moves, which involve action and decision, imply closure through construction of responsibility to someone or something. What I wish to push in this chapter is the extent

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to which ethical witnessing is compatible with political action, which I contend is connoted by the notion of responsibility.

Of course spectatorship and viewing, and film's construction of viewing subject positions are not the only matters at hand here. The convergent, interactive media environment not only hails viewers to witness the trauma of 9/11 in various ways, it calls them forth to participate, to produce content, to respond to the films, to include themselves in the cultural narrative. This participation is key in understanding witnessing dynamics, for activity is the political extension of the ethical witness. This is achieved through the way in which the films used in this project inhabit a networked milieu. The possibilities of this environment are rather encouraging, for the ethical witness involves mobilization and activity; the ethical witness is hailed not just to watch and feel, but to do something, to respond by taking the next step. Responding and responsibility, in turn, can be supported, aided and facilitated by interactive participatory media. Convergent media platforms are well positioned to interact with films that produce ethical witnessing subjects, giving them a material opportunity to put their responses into action, to be response-able and responsible. There is a political possibility for interactive media platforms insofar as they constitute a politic of ethical witnessing.

Ethical witnessing, in turn, functions as the precursor to response-able witnessing, a notion which contains a component of political responsibility to act. As John Durham Peters discusses, witnessing is enabled by access to information and exposure, such as the kind that comes about by viewing suffering on the news. Seeing in

this way need not be merely understood as beholding a spectacle,[40] but as accessing the information necessary to take further action. "Exposure to suffering is an excellent test case for the notion, so central to the liberal project, that consorting with the dark can be ethically inspiring" (217). For the viewing of suffering to inspire ethical response, it must "bear a moral witness, not produce an aesthetic spectacle" (222). It must present information factually, and offer possibilities for closing the distance between observer and observed (Durham Peters 243). Ethical witnessing must force an encounter with the other and it must resist reifying them into a spectacle. It must inspire compassion. Whereas the aesthetic spectacle suggests a mode of viewing and experiencing limited to passive entertainment, the look that bears moral witness demands response and action.

I find Peter's analysis of moral witnessing useful. His notion of morality involves empathy and sensitivity to suffering as an event in itself, and resists the sort of symbolic-imaginary identification involved in the quilting process. By encouraging spectators to feel response around the event of human suffering, Peters' moral witness takes humanity in general as a point of identification. In this sense, there is a cosmopolitan or humanist component to his notion of moral witnessing that has been implicated in liberal subjectivity.[41] However, in pushing for an affective, pathos-based identification with suffering in general, Durham Peters' notion of witnessing seems to offer possibilities for crafting a notion of a global politics of peace or compassion. In

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[40] The possibilities offered by an analysis of seeing media as witnessing counter or challenge, on some level, assertions made by Jonathan Beller, Kordela, Guy DeBord, and others, who suggest that the look produced by commercial media constitutes a form of biocinematic labor mobilized under the gaze/screen of capital. Whereas the audience activity defined in these analyses is limited to labor, which exists in an inherently exploitative relationship with capital, the agency and activity produced by the witnessing look includes a moral dimension that is at least partially not captured by this system.

[41] See Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*.

advancing these concepts, I am concerned that he make a similar deduction as Kaplan.

Action seems bundled up in the notion of witnessing itself, although there is an

implication that a step must be taken beyond simply viewing. Peters, like Kaplan

however, does not attempt to unpack what this step might involve. The final section of

this chapter explores the interactive environment surrounding *Control Room* as a possible

site of this action. In the following section, I examine the 2004 documentary with an eye

towards the witnessing ethic produced by the film.

Part One

Control Room and Response-able Witnessing

Control Room (2004) is a documentary film directed by Egyptian-American

filmmaker Jehane Noujaim. *Control Room* is co-produced by the U.S. production

company Magnolia films and Noujaim's independent production company, Noujaim

films. *Control Room* is shot from U.S. Central Command headquarters in Qatar, the site

from which journalistic coverage of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan takes place. Al

Jazeera, the largest Arab-world news network, has an office at Central Command, as does

CNN, MSNBC, and the BBC. U.S. military personnel are a ubiquitous presence at the

headquarters as well. *Control Room* follows the goings on at Central Command,

interviews reporters for Al Jazeera and U.S. military personnel, covers press

announcements and documents reactions and responses in the newsroom to the bombings

in Iraq. *Control Room* is guided by questions including perceptions of Al Jazeera around

the world, possibilities and limitations of journalistic objectivity regarding the war in

Iraq, and Arab-world reactions to the U.S. led wars in the Middle East, September 11th,
and the coverage of these events by Western outlets.

     Control Room is notable for many textual features, and the senses in which these
textual components produce an ethical witness that invites response-ability. The first is
the complete absence of narration from Noujaim or anyone else. The establishing shots
of the film consist of panoramic long shots of the skyline in Baghdad, Iraq. Arabic music
accompanies the images. Cut in with these images are text, white lettering on a black
background, explaining that the film's context is March 2003, with "the U.S. and Iraq on
the brink of war." The next slate of text explains that "Al Jazeera will broadcast to 40
million viewers. And waits." The next shots consist of daily life, such as men playing
dominoes, women doing household chores, and reporters watching U.S. news from inside
Al Jazeera's studio. Viewers are offered subsequent shots of reporters reacting to George
W. Bush's declaration of war, men in coffee shops reacting to the news, and al Jazeera
personnel commenting on the situation. Samir Khader, Al Jazeera's Senior Producer,
attests that war cannot be waged without "propaganda," which he argues is the function
of U.S. news coverage of the war. Khader goes on to explain the mission of Al Jazeera,
which he attests is to cultivate "respect for the other opinion," a sensibility which he
states is crucial for the functioning of democracy. More text cuts in to explain that Bush
has called Al Jazeera "the mouthpiece of bin Laden." The next shot cuts to the inside of
Central Command headquarters, and features Al Jazeera reporters interacting with
Western reporters and U.S. military personnel, responding to the bombings, and
translating announcements from Bush and Donald Rumsfeld. Al Jazeera news coverage

is also frequently used, often with footage of bombings, death, and injuries juxtaposed against Bush Administration commentary about Al Jazeera.

The muteness of the narrator-in contrast to Jones-reveals the discrepancies and ethically dubious aspects of U.S. news coverage of Al Jazeera, 9/11, and the subsequent war in Iraq. As John Durham Peters states, "playing dumb can reveal the stupidity of those who presume to know best" (273). Performed passivity and naively, in this sense, can highlight idiocy or moral turpitude. Noujaim's silent presence, and observant, yet disengaged camera, are aesthetic strategies that situate the film, and by extension the viewing position offered by it, as an ethical witness primed to respond. Absence of narration resists closure by interpreting events, and thus supplies viewers with access to a scene, situation, or event. There is also a sense in which *Control Room*, in addition to absence of narration and juxtaposition, utilizes a disengaged or passive camera to situate its viewer as an ethical witness. For example, one scene features Khader and Rushing debating the question of Saddam Hussein's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction. The two men argue this point, although they maintain civility and mutual respect throughout the conversation despite their disagreement. "Try to put yourself in the place of an average Arab viewer, in a coffee shop," implores Khader, attempting to explain the region's rising tide of hostility towards the United States in the wake of the bombings. On the topic of the Bush Administration's denunciation of Al Jazeera as the "mouthpiece of bin Laden," Rushing is depicted conceding that it is understandable that these sorts of claims could foster Arab resentment. "I could see how it could be perceived that way," he acquiesces, "you are not talking about facts, but about

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perceptions." The men's discussion is cut short by other pressing commitments, and they make dinner plans to resume their conversation.

This exchange is filmed as a single shot, without pans, tilts, cuts, or any other engaged camera work. The camera also appears to be at a slight angle and positioned on its side, as if it had been laid down on a table. The aesthetic choice here further serves to construct the response-able witness as viewing position. As a mute, disengaged observer, the camera ostensibly does not interpret or manipulate the facts, it simply observes them. The positioning, when coupled with the lack of camera work and narration, obfuscates the extent to which this choice conveys a meaning in and of itself. Like *Cloverfield*'s camera, the "look" of this piece of footage conveys an accidental, random quality, as if the device just happened to be sitting on the table, maybe left on by mistake. This semiotic element, through conveying a disengaged look, dis-articulates the recording device from the interpretive choices and actions of a filmmaker. In doing so, viewers are hailed to understand the events recorded as preexisting the selection and deflection that journalism and documentation engages in, creating an appearance of an objective reality. In arranging the shot in this manner, Noujaim produces the look of the detached witness, seeing just the facts from a neutral standpoint, not prefigured with any agenda, from which they can determine morality for themselves. Framing the information in this manner cultivates response-ability from witnesses. Viewers are positioned as being in possession of facts and information, that, in the absence of someone telling them what to do with, they must ascertain on their own how to respond to, how to take the revelation into account. The mute, or "dumb" look of the camera, in this sense, bears moral witness

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to events by simply observing them in their "raw" state, showing them as opposed to interpreting their value, and leaving the work of making their meaning to the viewer. This, in turn, gives viewers access to an event, as opposed to an ideological narrative.

John Durham Peters explains that witnessing is a mode of viewing, of observing, that connotes "a source possessing privileged (raw, authentic) access to facts" (250). An "excessive" amount of interpretation, embellishment, of hyperbole involved in reporting the witnessed act detracts from the legitimacy or credibility of the witness, and undermines the factual authenticity of the testimony. "Passivity," Durham Peters explains, "or even dumbness is another source of believable witnessing. Mechanical witnesses can be preferable to smart ones" (251). As a witness, understood as "the semiotic residue of [an] act (the statement as text)" this piece of cinematic text functions as precisely the sort of preferable, authentic "dumb" witness that Durham Peters discusses. Dumb, in this context, is taken to be not a synonym for unintelligent, but for muteness and silence. In this sense, *Control Room* bears witness to the Iraq war with mute, silent passivity. In doing so, unlike Jones, this documentary quietly invites its viewers to witness in the same manner, embodying a certain passivity that belies the active pleasure offered to the conspiracy witness hailed by Jones' narration to frantically link and make haphazard connections; to enjoy pre-packaged certainty delivered to them. These witnesses can in turn respond to the events presented, and actively construct the meaning of the information, as opposed to being led through it by a Jones-type narrator. In this sense, the film's passivity, and hence its witnesses', translates into a kind of participatory response-ablity.

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Viewers are invited to see the moral dimension of the event for themselves, a technique achieved by diminishing the presence of the production apparatus. In detaching themselves from an identification agenda structured by the cinematic apparatus, spectators are placed in a position of passivity with regards to the event, and can allow it to affect them in its "un-interpreted" state. Subjects in the film appeal to principles of journalistic integrity and objectivity, and the liberal democratic value of seeing and having access to multiple sides of an issue. Although Khader and others acknowledge on multiple occasions that facts and information are always constructed and interpreted with a particular agenda in mind, they emphasize the importance of having access to multiple perspectives. The narrative of journalistic objectivity not only lends credibility to Al Jazeera as a entity responsible for reporting the news, it is mobilized in the service of situating *Control Room*'s viewer as a witness responsive to this position herself. Although the language of liberal objectivity is used, the manner of engagement called for is conducive to Durham Peters' notion of passive, yet engaged, witnessing: one who is porous in a certain way, able to absorb the events without evoking an ideological agenda.

Control Room's selective interviewing of Al Jazeera personnel, as well as Lieutenant Rushing, also exemplify the sense in which the film leads the viewer into the response-able, ethical witnessing position by way of the detached liberal subject and her commitment to notions of democracy, objectivity, rationality and fairness. Use of liberal values is a pragmatic strategy that obfuscates the film's moral agenda. This strategy is used to first convince of Al Jazeera's credibility as a legitimate news source. Early in the

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film Khader, for example, states that the project of Al Jazeera is to contribute to the function of democracy by cultivating "respect for the other opinion." Another journalist, Hassan Ibrahim, is captured in the documentary expresses his desire for "both sides" of the war to be available for the public to see, in order to create a "balanced" perspective on the issue. He sees the mission of Al Jazeera to supply this balance to the international community. These statements of the Al Jazeera journalists, without narration or explanation by the filmmakers, stand on their own. Noujaim's questions are entirely edited out of the film; her voice is never heard. Al Jazeera's self-presentation conforms to the notion of the liberal witness discussed by Durham Peters. Mobilized by the rational desire to hold two views simultaneously, to investigate the facts and weigh multiple sides of the issue simultaneously, liberal objectivity seems to initially characterize the witnessing position initially crafted by this film. This liberal subjectivity and journalistic philosophy appears to characterize reporting by Al Jazeera English as well. [42] The film leads it's viewers to response-able witnessing, and moral conviction, however, by first espousing objectivity and liberal rationalism, then exploding it, to lead the witness to a place where, in "rationally" comparing mainstream U.S. news to Al Jazeera, they witness, respond to, and feel the suffering behind the atrocities of war that only Al Jazeera will depict. Imagery of Bush and Rumsfeld declaring war and denouncing Al Jazeera, although not contextualized or interpreted by narration, is editorialized with

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[42] Al Jazeera journalists are highly committed to establishing this credibility for themselves as well, seemingly, at least in part, a tactic for advocating for their own journalistic legitimacy in the eyes of Western viewers. On the weekly news program *Empire*, available on AlJazeeraEnglish.net, journalists labor to distance themselves from jihadists and terrorists, touting their commitments to objectivity and balanced reporting while decrying "terrorist's" usage of the Internet to advocate jihad and other radical Arab nationalist/separatist views.

other cinematic techniques. *Control Room* invites its witness to link events on their own, and to draw conclusions from the incongruity present in the gaps between the images. This manner of linkage and participation is the sense in which *Control Room'*s witness responds to the events made available to her.

One scene, for example, contrasts a shot of a U.S. press announcement delivered by Rumsfeld, who denounces Al Jazeera for staging events to make it appear as if a bombing campaign has targeted women and children. He decries this alleged deceitful practice, accusing Al Jazeera of "playing propaganda over and over and over again." Sound effects of exploding bombs accompany this image and muffle Rumsfeld's voice. The camera then cuts to a shot of an al Jazeera staff member translating Rumsfeld's announcement into Arabic, and then cuts in a shot of Al Jazeera coverage of the aftermath of a bombing. A distressed woman stands in front of a demolished home, crying and screaming into the camera, and addressing Bush. She demands that Bush deliver the "truth" about civilian deaths in Iraq, and ends her plea to Bush, crying "where is your conscience? Where is your God?" The Al Jazeera logo is, as is the case with all footage from the network, clearly visible in the lower right hand corner of the frame. The film cuts back to the control room, and zooms in on an Al Jazeera reporter watching the coverage from the studio, as tears fall down his face. This process of revealing atrocity, however, resists the designation of a quilting point. Rushing, Bush and Rumsfeld are not rendered into monstrous figures or enemies. Their perspectives, however, are contrasted with other images and counterweighted views, shots selectively paired with images and sequenced with other shots, to inspire ethical response to those views.

The value of exposure and visibility as an integral component of witnessing is espoused in *Control Room*. Another piece of the film deals with the issue of representing dead U.S. soldiers in uniform and images of suffering Iraqis, images that, the film reveals, are denounced by the Bush administration as manipulative propaganda. One sequence dealing with this issue focuses on Lieutenant Rushing's response to viewing Al Jazeera coverage of dead U.S. soldiers on Al Jazeera. The segment begins with a clip of the footage with the sound muted. Rushing is then interviewed for his response. He reflects on the affect of seeing these images, stating that they made him physically ill and profoundly viscerally disturbed. He then admits that he did not have the same reaction upon seeing dead Iraqis on U.S. news, and did not have difficulty eating dinner after being exposed to this content. The camera lingers on him following his statement, as he looks off to the side in silence, as if deep in thought. Rushing appears contemplative and as if he had reflected on the significance of this revelation. In presenting Rushing's epiphany, in voice as well as silence, *Control Room* demonstrates, as opposed to instructing or narrating to its witness, the role of exposure in producing response-able ethical witnessing.

As Durham Peters discussed, images of suffering and pain can serve the function of producing an ethical witness, as long as they prompt a moral response, and are not limited to a spectacle or entertainment. *Control Room*, through Rushing, demonstrates the value of this witnessing by documenting the sense in which it changed him. Led to an openness to view and respect "the other side" under the auspices of liberal rationality and belief in democracy, the viewing position offered by *Control Room* switches the register

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from reason to emotion, from recognition to affect. In doing so, it demonstrates the value

of seeing, viewing, and witnessing; of the ability to respond ethically to traumatic,

transformative affect. Liberal rationality, in this sense, does not ultimately characterize

the subject position offered by *Control Room*. The register is sentimentality, empathy

and affect, cultivated along the lines of Peters' analysis of moral witnessing and human

suffering. The moral conclusion is drawn emotionally, from pathos, not from reason.

Perhaps, as a mode of witnessing, this speaks to a sense of ethics cultivated through

affect. By being encouraged to view two sides, to weigh and balance them, this film

inculcates in its viewing position the value of respectful dialogue and openness to other

views and perspectives. In doing so, it leads its viewer to a place of responding that

encourages a general ethic of humanity undergirding and constituting the importance of

seeing different views.

By revealing, through her camera and editing equipment, the views of Al Jazeera

personnel and content of their news reporting, *Control Room* acts in the service of

constructing response-able, ethical witnessing. Moreover, as Kaplan discussed ethical

witnessing involves not simply the encouragement of visualizing and constructing an

affective encounter with public atrocities, but of ego dis-identification. In other words,

the ethical witness ought not to identify for or against individuals or groups. In *Control

Room*, this is achieved through the film's muteness. There are no heroes, villains, or

monsters, and no one narrating the story being told to us. The facts and images speaks

for themselves, and through their revelation the witnesses to them are invited to this place

of revelation. Use of liberal rationality is deployed as a savvy narrative tactic, and

demonstrates a sense in which film and visual media can produce responsible, ethical witnessing without appearing overly preachy, didactic, sanctimonious, or morally superior.

What is significant about the current interactive media environment, moreover, is that the response component of ethical witnessing is not limited to an experience of spectatorship involved in watching a film. In the following section, I analyze the interactive website that accompanies the *Control Room* film, with an eye towards the practices and activities offered by this platform, and the extent to which they complement the ethical witnessing position produced by the film itself. In a convergent media landscape, possibilities exist for constructing a multiplatform, immersive, experience with media. This participatory network, rather than simply being an instantiation of communicative capital or a new method of interactive marketing and advertising, can bridge the distance between the viewer and the other. In the following section, I analyze the interactive website that accompanies *Control Room*, with a careful eye towards relationships between viewing, ethical witnessing, interactivity, and responsibility. Perhaps it is the opportunity to act that moves ethical response-ability into political responsibility, and these interactive opportunities supply the possibilities for acting in this manner.

Part Two

Interactivity, Responsibility, and Action: *Control Room*'s Online Links

1. *Control Room*'s Website and Self-Narration: Building a Witnessing Position

Control Room's website, at

http://www.noujaimfilms.com/controlroom/site/01.html, is mentioned in the credits at the

end of the film. The website contains a myriad of additional content, including an

interview with the director, articles about Al Jazeera and *Control Room*, links to Al

Jazeera English, CNN and Central Command, and a form to fill out for volunteer

opportunities. While navigating the film's website, users are afforded an immediately

apparent, self-reflexive degree of agency in controlling their access to information about

the film. Links are arranged from left to right, and include the film's trailer, synopsis,

characters, an interview with the director, opportunities for volunteer involvement, and

contact information. The website's interface is presented in a manner that positions the

participant as a television viewer: as one clicks on different links, white-noise static, both

audibly and visually, fills the screen while the server processes the request. The visual

field of nearly every link is arranged so that one is viewing a still shot from the film and,

within the graphic image of a smaller television set, clips from *Control Room* are

supplied. In the far-right corner of the screen, the graphic of a remote-control is

provided, so that, by clicking on the mouse or touch pad, viewers can "change the

channel" (although only to other images from *Control Room*). This mode of self-

reflexivity constructs an interactive viewing experience conducive to the notion of

agency and involvement also produced by the narrative flow of *Control Room*. When

navigating the website in this manner users literally go through the protocols of changing

the channel.

In each of the link tabs, an old-fashioned television is present, screening different segments of the film that the interactive viewer can switch among. The situations in which the televisions are present are varied, including what is presumably supposed to resemble a Pentagon War Room, a Middle-Eastern household (visually coded by an oriental rug, concrete walls, and dilapidated concrete buildings visible beyond the front door), a room in Central Command, an Arab Boardroom, Al Jazeera's newsroom inside Central Command, and a Middle-Eastern café. The people depicted in these situations are variously attentive to the presence of the televisions. In the bar and café, people watch with rapt attention; in the bar viewers are pointing at the screen. Inside Al Jazeera's studio, the image of a man goes about his work operating a switch board while former U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, on the television, denounces Al Jazeera for its "habit of repeating propaganda over and over and over again." This clip of the Rumsfeld quote is, with clever irony, looped so that the former Defense Secretary's words play, in fact, over and over and over again. In the Pentagon room and household, no people are present on screen. In the Arab boardroom, two men are engaged in conversation while the television depicts subjects reacting to the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue, suggesting that the entire event was a U.S. staged spectacle. Further, the presentation and style of the televisions differs based on the context in which they appear. In the Pentagon room, all 5 of the televisions are plasma screens, wall mounted. In the Arab contexts, the TVs are older models, some sporting antiquated accoutrements such as rabbit ears, dials, and built-in VCRs.

The ubiquitous presence of television screens, in this platform, serves to further

contextualize the responsible witnessing activity with regards to media viewership. The

user of this website is denied the immersive pleasure of getting lost in a screen, and is

forced to remain aware that they are watching and operating media technologies-

changing channels and looking at screens. Using the little graphics of televisions, in this

sense, foregrounds the apparatus of viewing and situates the viewer as one aware that she

is watching a screen. In doing so, a certain kind of awareness with regards to one's

passivity-of being immobilized-is produced. This manner of self-reflexivity

complements the narrative of the film, in which reporters discussed the constructed,

agenda driven nature of journalistic facts. Viewers of the little screens on the website are

reminded that they are watching a televised presentation, that they are consuming content

that has been selectively arranged, produced and presented for particular effects.

Awareness that one is watching television, when this interactive self-reflexivity is

contextualized in the content of the film, invites a viewing perspective aware of

journalism's manipulative possibilities. It also walks viewers through the process of

changing the channel, providing the basis for an activity that extends beyond watching

the *Control Room* film and prompts investigation of Al Jazeera content. Constructing the

interactivity in this manner, also, situates the witness in a self-reflexive position with

regards to their interactivity: unless they follow a hotlink to another site, they are still

watching *Control Room* content. Leaving the *Control Room* space, however, allows the

witness to build linkages with content bundled by this platform in a manner that creates

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similarity and nodal network connectivity, which the Alex Jones conspiracy apparatus

also achieved through the You Tube interface.

The *Control Room* milieu, however, does not foster the same sense of psychotic

certainty as the conspiracy apparatus, however, it guides the participant through activities

that enable them to seek out, view, explore, and investigate content that will further allow

them to build their understanding of Al Jazeera and left critiques of the post-9/11 wars.

In this sense, response is articulated to activity, and the response-able witness becomes in

turn responsible for what she has just watched in *Control Room*. Through the interactive

architecture of the website, he can in turn actualize this responsibility by investigating

content that expands upon the views presented in the documentary. This witness does not

exist in a closed loop, as Jones' conspirator did, but rather enters participatory media as a

citizen invited, not told to, "see for themselves" what Al Jazeera is all about.

The "synopsis" tab of the website, for example, describes the film as a documentary

> "[B]y an award-winning Arab-American filmmaker who has lived within and
>
> embraced both worlds, [and]provides an opportunity to re-examine what is
>
> perhaps the most pressing question of international relations today: is America
>
> radicalizing or stabilizing the Arab world?" Without miring itself in shadowy
>
> conspiracy theories.

Through this narrative framing, the website shapes a particular viewing experience and

intellectual understanding of the documentary. Issues of "radicalization" are naturalized

as problematic and excessive, with the stigma in this case discursively spanning both

Arab world terrorism and conspiratorial style. Implicit in the rejection of "radicalization"

as a discursive form is the ethical rejection of processes of quilting and enemy-making. The user of the website, then, is hailed as one who does not engage in these activities; they are held responsible for the "see both sides" message produced by the film.

Viewer participation is called upon as an integral factor in shaping this conception of the film, provided through interviews with the director (who works to explain some of these issues and dispel conspiracy concerns) and visual arrangement of the various tabs. The "synopsis" tab of the site is paired with the scene in the Arab boardroom, with the small television playing the clip from *Control Room* suggesting U.S. involvement and organizing of the Saddam Hussein statue-toppling event. This juxtaposition of visual and text situates the narrative of *Control Room* as critical and oppositional, simultaneously distancing itself from any form of excessive dissent. By distancing itself from the conspiratorial view, as well as radicalism, *Control Room*'s interactive space disavows the viewer of an unethical viewing position, one marked by psychotic certainty. In doing so, it further constructs an ethical witness responsive to "both sides" of the issue; one who can respond to the matter of war and humanity without defaulting to an oppositional mentality formulated on notions of enemy-making or evil. In doing so, the space invites the viewer to engage with "the most pressing questions" on his own terms, to view the content and reach a conclusion ostensibly driven by a sense of objectivity, while the aesthetic layout of the site subtly invites moral response. As ethical witnesses, users of the site engage with events themselves, such as the statue toppling spectacle, and are hailed as responsible for drawing a conclusion on the event.

The "volunteer" tab of the site, where viewers are asked to provide contact information (email, name address, phone) to sign up for local volunteer opportunities (of an unspecified nature) is paired with clips on the little television (in an Arab home) where an American and Al Jazeera journalist discuss possibilities for journalistic objectivity when both sides hold political opinions on the wars. With this tab, viewers are, in a manner similar to the *Cloverfield* contest, hailed to contribute their labor to advancing the scope and reach of the primary film text. Here, however, the parameters of participation differ. Unlike the *Cloverfield* trailer contest, which comingled protocols of disaster response and training, recognition through use of digital consumer technology, free advertising, and the affective pleasure of creative fan participation, *Control Room* invites audience participation in a much different manner. *Control Room* mobilizes audience participation under the sign of volunteer work, terminology that suggests civic duty and social responsibility inculcated in response to viewing the film. What is important about this mode of hailing, though, is the extent to which viewer/user involvement is directly predicated on the "do something" ethos that flows from the position of ethical, responsible witnessing. The "do something" element, moreover, injects a political dimension into the field, thereby supplying an extension of the witnessing ethic to the zone of immanent action. The manner of agency invites here correlates to a sense of moral responsibility, as a mode of witnessing, and this manner of response is structured by the website in conjunction with the film's narrative.

While being assured through a multiplatform, multimodal network that Al Jazeera and *Control Room* are not vehicles for any manner of extremist views (terrorist and/or

conspiratorial), spectators are invited through a myriad of technical and aesthetic

presentations-such as being situated in the viewing position of a dilapidated Arab home

in a war zone, and being shown images of the Iraq war censored by U.S. television news

but supplied by Al Jazeera, to witness the "unspeakable," the horrors of war previously

shielded from them, and invited, in many cases, to view from the perspective of the other.

Importantly, though, seeing from the perspective of the other is allowed to stand on its

own, and not situated against some other villainous characters. Bush and Rumsfeld,

although presented in a critical light, are not made into targets of quilting, they are not

demonized. The affect constructed is empathy, and the response entails seeking out other

content and information, including volunteer opportunities, to build a standpoint, and take

action against, the wars in the Middle East. It is the event itself, not the United States or

its leaders, however, that the witness is invited to affectively identify against. This

distinction-event versus imaginary/symbolic identification-separates ethical witnessing

and responsible action from conspiratorial revelation or compensation via surveillance.

The activities launched do not involve designating, managing, or capturing others.

By being called to see through this window, and to see in a new way, witnesses

are then put to work by being asked to register their support with this carefully

legitimated mode of witnessing- democratic dissent- in interactive spaces that presumably

aggregate and tally responses as data (thereby registering support in numerical

assessment quantifiable in number of bodies who filled out the fields) and enlist

volunteer labor to further extend and expand the network of galvanized, yet responsive

witnesses. The volunteer tab, then, interacts with the other networked, convergent

aspects of *Control Room* in ways that hearken back to Kaplan's analysis of ethical

witnessing and cinematic spectatorship:

> Certain films may be pertinent in constructing a position for the viewer that
>
> enables him/her to take responsibility. These works position the viewer as a
>
> "witness" to trauma in an elusive, disturbing, and perhaps haunting way that
>
> nevertheless provokes in the viewer a need to take responsibility (124).

Crucially, the significance of media convergence and interactivity in building this

analysis is that the viewer is more than positioned by the text to take responsibility. They

are given the tools to do so through this interactive platform, and this is the site where the

transition from ethics to politic-from witnessing to action-can take place. In witnessing

the human toll of the war, the witness is positioned to respond in ways that register this

dissent on humanistic grounds. In the Interview section of the website, for example,

Noujaim sums up the goal of presenting inclusivity and balance as deriving from her own

hybridized subjectivity as an Egyptian-American "growing up and going back and forth

in two worlds; gaining different perspectives on events." Noujaim explains that the goal

of *Control Room* is to foster dialogue between the West and the Middle East regarding

September 11th and the subsequent wars, a mission inextricable from journalistic aims

and the presentations of events from multiple perspectives. This is important, Noujaim

explains, for "how are people supposed to communicate if basic perspectives on the

world are different?" She goes on to discuss her dismay regarding the ways that Al

Jazeera journalists covering 9/11 in New York City were widely accused of reporting

"propaganda." This experience, she explains, prompted her to make a film that aimed at

"trying to understand how news was being created at Central Command and Al Jazeera, rather than trying to forward some agenda." Whereas Noujaim's voice was absent from the film, in the space of the website she contextualizes and explains her mission in making the documentary. Faith in dialogue, as a component of reaching a shared, pacifist sense of humanity, is the organizing principle that defines the ethic of *Control Room*'s witness. Engaging in anti-war dialogue, from this standpoint, defines the political action built into the interactive space. This feature of the interactive platform, where viewers can ferret out the agenda of the director, exemplifies further the trajectory of witnessing constructed. In denying that she is trying to "forward some agenda" Noujaim leaves the work, and hence the revelation, of response-able witnessing, and responsible action, to the viewer. Upon seeing how news is being created, and the differences in "basic perspectives on the world" that result, viewers are invited to reach a moral conclusion on the consequences of these differences. This is achieved through the pairing of images, graphics, audio, and interactive platforms. The volunteer opportunities offered is indicative of one sense in which response is structured. Another concerns the additional content linked to *Control Room*'s website, which routes the viewer to other sites and spaces that further encourage the becoming of responsible witness. The sense in which this process is defined by affective moral realization of shared humanity, and agency on behalf of this belief, as opposed to adherence to objectivity, distinguishes the ethical humanism of this platform from a standpoint limited to liberal rationality.

2. Beyond the Text: Linking the Ethical Witness

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Hyperlinks to *Control Room*'s press coverage provide participants with access to reviews, interviews at democracynow.org and salon.com, which further build upon the statements and standpoints made about the film in the tabs. The first interactive feature, a digital graphic of an older-model television and remote control supplies a trailer for the movie with embedded reviews. One, from the UK Newspaper *The Independent*, praises the film as "a transformative work of political art that will change the way you view the world forever." Through this platform, reviews are selected and presented that allow the viewer, through their participant activities, to quickly and immediately access pre-aggregated information that invites them to confront the film with a prefigured viewing experience: that which is transformative, radically altering, unprecedented. The perspective offered by Noujaim, who denied forwarding an agenda, is maintained, although viewers are encouraged to feel transformed. The reviews, in positioning the film as transformative of worldview, push past these limits. In this sense, the response-able witness is not simply positioned by the film, she emerges out of an interaction of film plus website. Viewers are invited to look a certain way-to look at the post-9/11 wars in the Middle East from a new perspective-and this look is constructed and figured by the interactive, participatory spaces that augment the actual viewing experience of the movie. In this sense, the holistic experience of *Control Room* works to construct a witnessing experience that is indispensible from the technologies used to frame and shape this viewing. The politics that emerges from this witnessing ethic of responsiveness is one who takes action against the Iraq war. Appealing to humanity and morality, moreover, positions this politic in peace.

The Salon article, as a node linked to the *Control Room* website, builds an interactive space that further constructs the witnessing position in the film. Although liberal objectivity was used as an inroad in prompting viewer "understanding" of Al Jazeera, linked content builds a relationship with media such as Salon and Democracy Now! That espouse more radical platforms. In building a linked relationship with these outlets, *Control Room* moves the viewers through a media space where left anti-war politics, and affective ethical witnessing, is cultivated. Whereas Alex Jones linked with Glenn Beck and the Tea Party Movement under the sign of the Obama Joker and through You Tube as a distribution platform, *Control Room* links to left, even socialist media outlets and builds a witness who sees injustice and the need for action and solidarity. These matters are addressed in the Democracy Now! interview, where Noujaim explains the exigency of opposing the post-9/11 wars and the toll in human life they have taken. This witness takes a moral stance, she does not limit her experience to giving airtime to both sides of the issue and rationally balancing their arguments.

The Salon review lauds the film for avoiding a supposedly excessive/simplistic "Arabs good/Americans bad" storyline, and applauds the narrative for "debunking" the notion of journalistic objectivity, evidencing the political agendas present from all sides. The film itself, and especially the director, would not go nearly this far. The interactive, networked format augments the narrative of the film, creating a participatory, and responsive, media space where viewers actively make and remake the cultural story of 9/11 and its consequences. Moreover, the Salon article takes the witness past the position of the liberal subject who values objectivity in journalism, and presents the argument of

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facts as constructs driven by agendas. *Control Room* and its peripheral content did not tell the participants this itself-quite the contrary, but it is situated in a linked environment that moves to advance this perspective. The *Independent* article tells us that the film will change our worldview, the Salon piece tells us that it debunks objectivity, Noujaim vis-à-vis Democracy Now! encourages us to oppose the war on moral grounds, and the film shows us how to see in a manner that invites moral responsibility by taking in and weighing two sides of an issue. These pieces exist together as nodes in a network, each component relates to another in the building of a perspective.

Spectator-witnesses are positioned to see the implications of the wars-and the impossibility of detached objectivity with regards to it-through a myriad of aesthetic choices. At the same time, however, witnesses are not asked or told to identify with or against any particular people or groups, just to oppose the war based on the death toll. As Kaplan explains, this type of distancing from individual identification allows a film to invite viewers to "participate in an experience" of trauma "through the aesthetic devices used, and have a perspective on injustice broader than that of the main protagonist herself" (135). The trauma here is war itself. The atrocity is not limited national trauma, not just 9/11 itself, but the consequences of the ongoing response to it around the world. With *Control Room*'s participatory and interactive landscape, the networked, multi-nodal and convergent circulations of these various points of entry into the cultural story allow for response-able witnessing to take place, and lead to responsibility for what one has viewed, culminating in supplying options for political action. No longer involved with a singular, centralized text, spectators are situated within a network of nodes, each

containing a different component of the cultural story, and speaking to one another in various ways. Involvement in this landscape is immersive, and rejects the sort of "objective" and removed mode of viewing that is incompatible with bearing ethical witness to an event. The nodes, however, network to each other in a manner that encourages a coherent ethical and political stance. Giving witnesses the tools, through the interactive tabs to see Al Jazeera for themselves speaks to them as a rational subject.

This manner of address is similar to that mobilized by Jones-viewers are ostensibly hailed as fact finders, independent citizen journalists who heroically uncover the truth of 9/11 on their own. As the filmmaking style of *Road to Tyranny* demonstrated, however, only one conclusion was to be reached, the one called for by Jones. In a sense, the film and interactive environment also mobilize a manner of discourse that appeals to liberal rationality and objectivity, then moves to construct a conviction based upon notions of moral responsibility for human life in the aftermath of national trauma and war. Witnessing "the other side's" perspective, and being provided with the interactive opportunities to seek out and aggregate information about the other side are integral factors in the process. The certainty of the *Control Room* space, however, is not that of the psychotic, conspiratorial quilter, but seems to more closely resemble the certainty discussed by Jodi Dean in her call for a new left politics of conviction. *Control Room* taps into morality, and is not radically open in its call to accept and respect the views of any and all others. There is a directive here that calls for conviction and outrage regarding the atrocities occurring in the wake of 9/11; the *Control Room* environment implores viewers to witness the atrocities and take a stand, accept

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responsibility, and respond. This space, then exemplifies the move from ethics to

politics. Although there exists a certain inherent tension in this move-getting to closure

always already entails violating the ethic on some level-the politics of peace comes as

close as possible to adhering to a Levinasian ethic while allowing for the assertion of

conviction that the current moment seems to call for.

Conclusion

Vision, Action, and Response-ability

The gestalt of the *Control Room* environment, interactivity, narrative form, and

peripheral content, creates an atmosphere in which viewers are invited into the

participatory network, and invited to understand its ramifications. Snippets of the

primary text are contextualized in different images that pull the viewer out of the context

of reception that they may have naturalized and reinserting them into the viewing

position of the other-someone who might be sitting in a living room in Iraq, anxiously

waiting for more information on the unfolding situation as events transpire outside.

Through its visual presentation, and ability to change contexts, *Control Room*'s mode of

mobilizing viewing in the context of media convergence creates a visual space where

viewers are not permitted to simply view the other as represented on screen-as a

commodified, fetishized image of suffering-they are placed in a context where they view

as the other in a manner (however limited) that, through creating a participating,

response-able, empathetic viewing experience, opens up possibilities for new modes of

spectatorship as witnessing of events, augmented and heightened by new modes of

participatory viewing allowed by interactive, convergent platforms. The participatory

network that this film inhabits allows for the ethical witness to move to a place of responsibility, adopting a politics of conviction for peace, against the post-9/11 global war on terror. Not only does the site offer content that allows for this politic to develop, it provides opportunities to volunteer time and effort on its behalf.

Control Room's viewing and acting space allows for the acknowledgement of, response to, and responsibility for, atrocities of war. Part of this responsibility comes in the form of acknowledging the agenda-driven nature of news programming consumed in the West, and the sense in which there is a particular nationalistic slant to this agenda. Seeking out the other side, rather than providing a new enemy point to rally against, exposes the very failure of objectivity that allows for this patriotic sense to form. In moving beyond the fantasy of journalistic objectivity, and towards a sense of common humanity, *Control Room* exposes the ethical limitations inherent in adhering to a unidirectional viewpoint masked as objectivity and truth. Individual, ego-centric, ideological identification is not called for, and the response constructed is affective and empathetic. This space of response-able witnessing is enabled by the networked, multi-nodal space of the film, its website, and the articles and information hyeprlinked to it. Viewers, when changing the channel, both position themselves in different viewing contexts (e.g. Iraqi homes) and have their pre-figured questions concerning journalistic objectivity of Al Jazeera and American journalists answered through navigating the flow of information made available. The mode of engagement with the interactive technology, and the participatory platform of exhibition, as much so as the content presented, is integral in shaping and constructing a viewing experience predicated on ethical

witnessing. Moreover, it lends itself, to these very forms, of an actualization of this ethical witnessing in an anti-war politics of conviction. The technologies of production, in other words, are inextricably linked to the narrative, in ways that extend beyond the boundaries of traditional cinematic technologies of production. Interactive, convergent media spaces function as a cinematic apparatus in ways that reflect possibilities for, and the political importance of, locating sites of responsible, response-able ethical witnessing as ways of seeing media.

Conclusion

Ethical Witnessing and A Politics of Peace

This dissertation has been concerned with matters of alterity, the ethics of vision, and the role of interactive convergent media in offering opportunities for viewers to form ethical relationships with others. My starting point was theories of vision, based in Levinasian phenomenology, which theorized the ethical problems that arise when faced with the presence of the other's difference. I also began with Jacques Lacan's notion of the Real to discuss the sense in which the affect of encountering difference is registered as a traumatic intervention. This traumatic affect is in tension with the ethical imperative of openness, and complicated and enriched the Levinasian approach by supplying the language to discuss the ways in which subjects attempt to manage, reify, and take this difference into account. A Lacanian notion of affect and alterity was also helpful insofar as it has been used in current media studies scholarship, and represents an attempt to move beyond psychoanalytic ideological criticism, which defined early film theory's approach to the politics of spectatorship. Slavoj Zizek's Lacanian analysis of populist fetishism supplied insight into the politics of populist solutions to trauma.

Beginning with these approaches, I approached matters of technology, viewership, and self/other relations as instantiated by a convergent, interactive, multi-platform media environment. Different genres of convergent media dealing with the events of 9/11 supplied a rich body of work to discuss these tensions between trauma and openness with regards to the self and other. How these problems manifested in textual narratives, and provided opportunities for viewer participation and involvement, were

important concerns of this analysis. Tracing the ways in which these viewing

experiences were mobilized as a participatory network supplied insight into the ways that

witnesses could negotiate tensions between trauma and openness.

I chose three generic films to discuss the events of 9/11 in this paradigm: the

conspiracy theory, the monster movie, and the collaborative documentary. All of these

object bundles provided different ways of approaching the other via interactive,

convergent movie culture in the context of 9/11. In each, the question of how to engage

radical alterity arose. Locating each of these genres of film in their participatory

networks, I demonstrated how different witnesses to 9/11 were produced and mobilized.

The conspiracy theory produced the populist conspirator. This witness was produced and

mobilized to apprehend truth through revelation, to experience the plentitude of the gaze

in the form of horrific realization of victimhood. Obsessed with ferreting out evil, this

witness comes to see the supposed radical evil of world leaders, and the sense in which

various forms of governance and police power reflect their agendas. The populist

conspirator then organizes their ideological space around and against these monsters,

reproducing them in abject form, such as the Obama Joker, to quilt the ideological space

closed after the traumatic rupture of 9/11. In this case, the process of forming heroic

identification against the other precludes ethical witnessing. The Tea Party emerges in

this participatory apparatus as a political manifestation of the conspiracy witness. Given

that these witnessing subjects come to see the "truth" of monstrous difference through

their process of revelation, they are not ethical witnesses. The populist conspirator,

although at times espousing principles that could be compatible with left critiques of

power (such as anti-globalization), nonetheless returns to fidelity in extreme nationalism, which ends at ideological quilting. A witness must move past this logic, and form a different sort of relationship with boundaries, subjectivity, and difference. Ethical witnessing as a form of media viewing, moreover, entails identification with scenes, events, and situation, not characters or individuals. Forming identification in this manner causes the dynamic of witnessing to fold back into ideological subject formation on the imaginary-symbolic register.

The third chapter brought issues of surveillance into the picture. As demonstrated by Kelly Oliver, the will to surveillance functions an attempt to harness, via comprehensive recognition, the gaze of difference. Attempted through the use of technologies simple and sophisticated, surveillance as a mode of vision is indicative of anxieties regarding this gaze. The surveilling subject fantasizes that she can control this gaze through technologies' abilities to see, capture, record, and document. If the difference can be seen and tracked, it can be understood and recognized. This chapter also enabled this project to address current literature in media studies, particularly work that deals with surveillance and technology as instances of diffused governance. In addition to this, this chapter demonstrated the relationship between technologies of surveillance and alterity, and the sense in which it exemplifies a manner of viewing. In the allegorical 9/11 movie *Cloverfield*, viewers were positioned as witnesses to radical alterity. Through their use of consumer recording technology, however, viewers captured, and recognized the awfulness of this alterity. Although the characters in the film were annihilated by it, viewers of the movie, through the tenacious abilities of the

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recording device, are provided privileged access to the truth of difference. In the online

contest participants are further empowered to record and capture their responses and

reactions to the event as survivors who have successfully managed the threat of

difference and contained the intrusion of the other. Although there is a dimension of

radical difference challenging the boundaries of subjectivity in this narrative, the sense in

which surveillance technology is deployed to capture otherness indicates the sense in

which this manner of looking allows for the re-inscription of relations with difference

back into the fold of ideological subjectivity. In the fan videos this was apparent in the

way that entrants declined to attempt to represent the shock of difference as a monstrous

creature, and the "terrorist attack" narrative of 9/11, signified by smoke, explosions, and

falling buildings, stood in for the abject difference of monstrosity in its own right. These

audience practices reveal the work that *Cloverfield* did to position viewers with respect to

difference. In using the language of abjection to signify the events of 9/11, and capturing

it on camera, participants in the film's participatory network demonstrate the ideological

fantasy of capturing the awful truth of difference via surveillance. These practices and

activities default to recognition, identification against the other, and antagonism, and thus

are incompatible with a notion of ethical witnessing as well.

In Chapter Four, I demonstrated how a relationship with alterity was produced

that distinguishes this network from the previous two participatory networks. The

witness of the *Control Room* space does not see radical difference, they empathize, and

see through the perspective of, "the other side." They are presented with instances of

successful dialogue in the cinematic narrative, and offered opportunities in the interactive

space to access further views from this side through the lens of Al Jazeera. Witnesses to the *Control Room* space see the other side, but they do not see something incomprehensible or impossible. They see shared humanity, through both human suffering and human identification. Through this humanistic mode of vision, witnesses are produced to identify with the traumatic event. The response-able witness is an empathetic one, and an ethical one.

This chapter also brought to bear a confound between ethics and politics that exists in theorizations of ethical witnessing. If ethical witnessing involves a call or responsibility to act, this action indicates a political move. In acting based on conviction, moreover, a certain type of closure is performed, for the actor decided what they are acting for and against. In the process of attaining this closure, symbolization is taking place. In the case of the *Control Room* environment, the witnessing ethic translates into a politics of peace by way of its place in the participatory network. The film and interactive space stressed the value of dialogue and communication as facilitating ethical encounters around this shared standpoint. Dialogue, in this sense, is mobilized in the service of transformation. Both sides are asked to enter into the process with a sense of openness, of response-ability, to being changed through an encounter with difference. The architecture of the interactive environment serves as the device that can move this ethic into a politicized action. A political commitment to peace is the principle that undergirds this exchange, with the intent of forming a new dialogic space. In order to obtain this politic, the witness must come to a place of reconciliation and healing regarding the trauma of 9/11. This healing process entails accepting the loss of the

national fetish (an extension of the ego-ideal) that was destroyed in the wake of the events, and resisting the impetus to suture the field with a renewed sense of nationalism and designation of a quilting point. Instead, the affect must be of empathy for all, and identification against those events that have produced human suffering on a global scale.

The question of radical alterity, however, is in tension with these ethical and political principles. A "pure" ethics of radical alterity implies something that cannot be captured, destroyed, modified, or altered. It stands on its own, confronting the subject with the possibility of annihilation. This was the terror that Lacan spoke of when analyzing Real encounters with alterity; it is this very terror that we attempt to manage or ameliorate through symbolization. Capturing the gaze involves a fantasy of eradicating or "taming" radical difference. Ethical solutions to this, advanced by Oliver, Kaplan, and Butler call for engaging with the other in a manner that moves beyond recognition. This is the principle that constitutes the notion of ethical witnessing.

The notion of witnessing, however, evidenced limitations as a paradigm through which to deal with interactive media. Reading current Lacanian approaches to viewing through a Levinasian ethic was productive in terms of building a sense of media viewing as an affective experience. However, one limitation of this concept was that notions of ethical witnessing do not seem conducive to translation into political action. Politics, by way of action, conviction, and decision, always entails a sense of closure that places it in tension with the openness of a Levinasian ethic. It is on the plane of politics, however, that encounters with participatory networks come into focus. The political should not be deduced from the ethical, for mapping a general, abstract principle onto particular events

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loses sight of the particular, contingent, situational nature of the plane of politics. It is with this uneasy space of ethics and politics that I conclude this project by turning to the notions of cosmopolitanism and dialogue as political principles that remain as faithful to the ethical principles discussed here as possible.

Cosmopolitanism involves a commitment to global human rights. Cosmopolitanism entails a sense of hospitality and openness, porous boundaries and borders, and "enforceable norms" for both state and non-state actors. (Benhabib 25). There is a "generalized moral obligation" to obey these norms, and oppose actions, such as genocide, that violate them (29). Although the principles grounding these norms are secular and humanist, this moral obligation conveys a sense of higher authority. The notion of hospitality is also important in this system, and refers to "all human rights claims that are cross border in scope" (Benhabib 31). The politics produced by the *Control Room* habitat was one of cosmopolitanism. An ethic of openness to "the other side" was encouraged, and the political position situated by the film and interactive environment was a pacifist stance generated by the affect of exposure to human suffering caused by the global war on terror. This appeal was made on an empathic level, and brought about by a call to question the veracity and integrity of Western news. In checking out other sources and information that complemented the film, users were invited to "open their eyes" and galvanize around a shared, trans-border valuation of human life and rejection of suffering. The sense of cosmopolitanism built here also placed a value in dialogue. Engaging the other in a dialogic fashion was presented as the path to finding a third space, of reconciliation and shared conviction to peace.

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There is a sense in which this process steers away from a focus on radical alterity, for, at a certain point, communication breaks down at the limit of radical alterity. However, moving past the notion of radical alterity also enables a shift away from irreconcilable difference and towards being in common. Paul Gilroy has written compellingly on identity politics as a form of ego-identification that exacerbates racial and ethnic tension, precludes the process of working towards cosmopolitan norms, and fuels ethnocentrism. He suggests that

> [M]ulticultural ethics and politics could be premised upon an agnostic, planetary humanism capable of comprehending the universality of our elemental vulnerability to the wrongs we visit upon each other (4).

The above definition is helpful to the final thoughts of this project insofar as it takes into account issues of vulnerability, difference, and the trauma of alterity. Gilroy is attentive to the atrocities that result from responding to difference with fear and antagonism, arguing that part of the process of forming a peaceful, cooperative approach to difference involves a surrender of the ego-object, which manifests in this case as forms of nationalism, ethnocentrism, and cultural fetishism. In Chapter Two, the antics of the Tea Party Patriots and other conspiracy witnesses revealed some of the more virulent contemporary manifestations of this ideological response to the trauma of difference.

Levinasian ethics, moreover, involve a communicative dimension; encounters with the face are discursive as well as visual. Levinas has been applied in recent work on deliberative democracy, and I find these insights to be promising and helpful. Darrin Hicks, for example, states that

When deliberation fulfills its promise, it is because stakeholders transform their interests by hearing the ways in which the problem being addressed and the proposed solution affect others, by recognizing how their interests contribute to others' misery, and by realizing how reformulating those interests is a precondition for collaborating on an effective solution. (3)

An ethic of deliberation, when combined with a commitment to cosmopolitan politics, offers possibilities for existing with difference. The participatory network of media convergence is a powerful tool in bearing witness to the stakes of these normative principles of planetary humanism. The intervention of this project attempted to theorize subject formation through visual media in a manner not limited to assessing the ways in which ideological subjectivity is constructed. Moreover, analysis of interactive spaces and converging content demonstrates the sense in which participatory media provides opportunities for political action that, when understood for their potential in mobilizing ethical subjects, offer promise for thinking through possibilities of political intervention in a world of globalized, participatory, hyperlinked, trauma.

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