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# Surveilling the City

## Whiteness, the Black Man and Democratic Totalitarianism

*John Fiske*

**T**HE CAR CARRYING O.J. Simpson along the LA freeways was the most watched object in American history. O.J. Simpson was a Black man who had been accused of killing his white ex-wife. He had been a football star, and was now a TV commentator, a movie actor and a popular celebrity. He did not surrender himself for arrest and, for a short period, disappeared. When police located him in his white Ford Bronco a bizarre chase ensued in which police helicopters and cruisers followed the car for two hours as it drove steadily along the freeways. TV was not far behind the police. At least seven helicopters and countless correspondents on the ground relayed the chase live to the second largest TV audience ever (the largest watched the first day of the Gulf War).

A Black man<sup>1</sup> in a white Ford Bronco who had been accused of killing a white woman was chased by a racialized police force under the eyes of millions of white and Black viewers. Much was at stake. Here I wish to note briefly that the contemporary white imagination has made the Black man into the figure of the American racial crisis and much of what anxious whites fear is wrong with their society is embodied by them into this figure. So O.J. Simpson, Rodney King, Clarence Thomas, Willie Horton, Mike Tyson, Marion Barry are all different people, but they all figure the racial anxieties of the 1990s because they are all hypermediated Black men whose racial identity was sexualized, whose masculinity was racialized, who were all, whether found guilty or not, criminalized: then, to cap it all, many were associated in the white media with drugs. Race, sex, crime and drugs were the ingredients mixed differently in the figuring process of each, and the significance of each figure lies in his particular embodiment of this explosive mix.

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All four ingredients were combined into the figure of O.J. Simpson, but for this article the significance of his chase lies only partly in the man who was seen and more in the ability to see him. Surveillance, not semiotics, is the focus. The development of surveillance technology is fueled, of course, by the social need to see, and that, in its turn, is motivated by the social significance of that which must be seen. In a racially unstable society where whites are about to lose their dominance in numbers, and fear losing it in politics and economics, the need to have the threatening other always in sight is paramount: In the contemporary USA the Black man is he who must be seen.

Like the hypermediation of the Gulf War, that of O.J. Simpson's chase offered to millions the power and the pleasure of panoptic vision. While both Foucault and Orwell theorized the power of this panoptic eye, neither imagined how technology would invite the general population to experience that power as America was invited to peer through the lenses of the television cameras focused on the fleeing white Bronco. Most whites were able to put themselves behind the TV lens with pleasure and fascination, and could watch from the singular position of the 'spectator-policeman'. For African-Americans, however, watching was much more conflicted. Asadullah Samad (1994), for instance, saw the chase as a high-tech replay of the old nigger hunts in the South in which the media images of the handcuffed O.J. were 'nothing but the kind of pre-lynching parading that has always taken place, whether they had the right man or not'. He heard clear echoes of the lynch mob when Gil Garcetti, the Los Angeles District Attorney, proclaimed at a press conference that 'O.J. Simpson will be brought to justice'. Samad commented:

No scarier words have ever been issued when it comes to blacks and justice. Black men's hearts skipped nationwide. We knew what their justice for us means. Code words for 'Look out for this runaway Nigga, and when we find your black a\*\* . . .'. The media caught the cue. Once they put that call out on you, you're fair game. We all knew what it meant. . . . Nobody expected to see O.J. alive again.

An African-American I interviewed used a telling metaphor, 'My eye was in the helicopter with the police', he said, 'but my heart was in the Bronco with O.J.' Another felt similarly conflicted: he told me how watching the chase reminded him of how, at some level, he was always aware of 'the eye in the sky' that was watching him, and that having this eye made visible justified his feeling of being constantly surveilled, but being able to look through its lens disturbed him deeply by giving him a taste of the fascination of the panoptic. Watching the white Bronco from above, he said, 'made me see what I feel I look like'.

This article discusses the video surveillance of the US city as a rapidly developing control mechanism directed particularly upon the Black male as he moves through its so-called public spaces, from the neighborhood store

to the suburb, from the shopping mall, the office building or the airport to the public street. It traces ways in which the surveillance that both Orwell and Foucault understood to be essential to the modern social order has been racialized in a manner they did not foresee: today's seeing eye is white, and its object is colored. Surveillance thus operates differently upon Blacks and whites, and this article details some of the politics of that difference. Surveillance is a technology of whiteness that racially zones city space by drawing lines that Blacks cannot cross and whites cannot see. Surveillance enables different races to be policed differently, and it has an insidious set of 'chilling' effects upon the freedoms of opinion, movement and association that cumulatively produce racially differentiated senses of 'the citizen'.

### **Democratic Totalitarianism and Non-Racist Racism**

Giddens (1987) has alerted us to totalitarian tendencies that are endemic in the complex democracies of late capitalism; they are, to put it briefly: widespread surveillance; appeals to moral totalism; terror and intensified policing; and the attraction of charismatic leadership. All are widely recognizable in the contemporary US. The combination, in particular, of surveillance, intensified policing and moral totalism accelerates totalitarian tendencies whose effectiveness depends upon their ability to operate underneath the structures of democracy: the effect is that the totalitarian creeps forward unnoticed because its advance apparently leaves democracy untouched. Surveillance is, arguably, the most significant of the three, for without it, moral totalism is ineffective and policing cannot be intensified efficiently.

We live in a technologized 'scanscape' (Davis, 1992) in which the operations of the video camera, the computer, as well as those of non-technological surveillance, are extending to cover all the practices and spaces of public life, and are constantly shrinking the terrain of the private, which we must now define as that which can be made invisible. Surveillance, as an agency of the totalitarian, is not readily opposed by traditional democratic politics, for it works through techniques rather than policy, and a technique is much harder to oppose than a plank in a party political platform, not only because we have less experience of doing so, but, more importantly, because a technique always has beneficent, if not utopian uses, which are enthusiastically endorsed by its proponents and most readily recognized by those who are not the immediate object of its constraints. Foucault constantly reminds us that modern power is so effective because its repressive effects are always hidden by its efficiency and beneficence. Bentham's panopticon was, above all else, designed to be a humane as well as an efficient prison, and the eye at its center was Godlike. Video surveillance is reaching into every corner of our cities because it can claim real social benefits that range from traffic management, through reducing drug-dealing and street crime, to counter-terrorism. But its beneficence hides an icily oppressive side; it acts as an agent of the totalitarian, for the law-abiding citizens who are most subject to it have no

say in its operation and no ability to influence its impact upon their daily lives.

The high visibility of the structures of democracy masks totalitarian undercurrents and offers those who prefer not to see an alibi for their blindness. In the realm of race relations this motivated blindness has produced what we may call a 'non-racist racism' (Fiske, 1994). This is the form of racism that has been developed by white-powered nations that avow themselves to be non-, or even anti-, racist. It is a racism recoded into apparently race-neutral discourses, such as those of the law, of economics, of IQ and education, of health, of housing or of capital accumulation: each of the social domains within which these discourses operate has racially differentiated effects for which the causes can always be made to appear non-racial. Indeed, racism is illegal in most of the domains of US public life, and many whites, while enjoying all the advantages of whiteness, profess to believe that, in post-civil rights America, racism, if not actually eliminated, has been reduced to the status of a non-problem. It is of deep concern that such a belief can flourish in the face of so many economic, educational and other indicators that the gaps between white and Black Americans are increasing, not narrowing. The belief is, of course, confined almost exclusively to whites: in Black America there is a widespread knowledge that racism is waxing, not waning.

The fact that race relations are perceived so differently by white and Black America is, I believe, a critical indication of the depth of the current racial crisis; the racial gap produces not only different life experiences of US society, but different knowledge systems, different ways of knowing what it is to be American. Polls taken during the months of O.J. Simpson's trial, for instance, showed consistently that a large majority of whites believed him to be guilty, whereas an almost equal majority of African-Americans believed he had been framed by the police: such different knowledges of the legal system and of methods of policing are not only products of different life experiences, but exemplify non-racist racism in practice – for the white knowledge of the state apparatuses of the courts and of policing is imprinted with ideas of objectivity, equality and justice that ascribes race-free causes to the racially disproportionate effects of those apparatuses. The Black knowledge, however, knows that white racism informs the operations of those apparatuses despite its absence from their public faces. All racism is totalitarian, so the apparent paradox of a non-racist racism is the form it must take in a society whose democracy appears undisturbed by its totalitarian undercurrents.

### **Video Surveillance**

The urban scanscape has developed rapidly since Davis coined the phrase. We have grown familiar with the video cameras watching stores and shopping malls, airports, banks and cash machines, we know they watch the entrances, elevators and hallways of office buildings. In an anxious scanscape the controlling look of video cameras cannot be restricted to

‘owned’ public space such as airports and shopping malls: so their sight lines are being extended to cover all so-called ‘public’ space. In the US the whole of downtowns in cities like Minneapolis, Newark and Detroit are now covered by cameras that can zoom in to read a credit card. In Australia, Wainwright (1995) counted 200 cameras surveilling Sydney’s central district (and there are many more that cannot be counted, for owners need no permission to install cameras to watch the street in front of their premises, and many have done so). In Britain, according to the Home Office, 95 percent of town and city councils are considering installing video surveillance of all their streets and open spaces. By early in 1995, 29 percent of British towns and cities had already done so, another 29 percent had firm plans to and 23 percent hoped to. According to one estimate 81 percent of British streets will soon be video surveilled (Polman, 1995).

Surveillance is a perfect technology for non-racist racism, for the ubiquity and apparent impartiality of its technology and the benignity of the assumption that all citizens benefit from increasing public safety, enhancing public order and improving traffic flow enable it to mask the racial difference in its operations and effects. It is the very supportability of its claim to operate for a generalized public good that enables it to hide so effectively those of its operations that are oppressive, exclusionary and racist. Understanding and possibly supporting its socially benign operations does not require us to recognize that it is always also constructing the eye of whiteness as the power to make the racial other visible, and thus to hold him (or, more rarely, her) within the disciplinary mechanism. The apparently non-racist nature of discipline as technique of social order to which all citizens are subject masks the racial dimensions of the norms by which a threat to disorder may be recognized and dealt with. Because the Black man is the focus of white fear and is made to embody all that appears to threaten the social order, he has to be always watched: while the development of the surveilled society may not have intentionally been directed upon him, in practice it often is. And Black men are acutely aware that surveillance is discriminatory: the Korean stores were targets of Black anger in LA partly because of their constant surveillance of Black customers, a surveillance routinized into mundanely painful experiences of disrespect and social othering. Street behaviors of white men (standing still and talking, using a cellular phone, passing an unseen object from one to another) may be coded as normal and thus granted no attention, whereas the same activity performed by Black men will be coded as lying on or beyond the boundary of the normal, and thus subject to disciplinary action. For such action to serve the public good, these Black men, at least, have to be excluded from the notion of the public, and thus ‘the public’ as an instrumental concept, is whitened. Black behavior is seen, white behavior is not, and the difference is solely one of color: blackness is that which must be made visible, just as invisibility is necessary for whiteness to position itself as where we look from, not what we look at. Foucault’s conflation of surveillance and discipline describes whiteness accurately if unwittingly: “The perfect

disciplinary apparatus', he writes, 'would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly. A central point would be both the source of light illuminating everything, and a locus of convergence for everything that must be known' (Foucault, 1979). The Los Angeles Police Department helicopters that hovered over the Rodney King beating and the O.J. Simpson chase bristled with searchlights and cameras: they are the technological form of Foucault's theoretical formulation.

Coding normality is, as I argue later, crucial to surveillance, for the function of surveillance is to maintain the normal by disciplining what has been abnormalized. The racialized other, of course, is one of the most urgent objects of abnormalization, for his or her visibility is a formative factor in the constant normalization of whiteness.

Normalization is a power process that, of course, extends far beyond the domain of race relations. A reporter in the video control room of King's Lynn, a sleepy country town in Norfolk, described the normality that is watched so closely:

A young mother bends to zip up her baby's jacket. Across town, a pensive kid in a flannel shirt sits on a bench with a bag between his knees, his right leg wiggling. In a parking lot, an elderly couple squabble as the man fumbles for his keys. On a shopping street, a toddler on a leash topples over, and the mother stands him up with a flash of exasperation. . . . 'You even notice who the regulars are' says the security guard. . . . 'Who parks in what space every day, who does the shopping, who's waiting for someone . . .'. 'And the camera doesn't lie', adds Sgt Peter Thompson, a crime prevention officer on the town police force. 'We're talking constantly to this control room. Things like, "Hmmm, what's that bloke doing down there, he's been sitting in his car for half an hour".' (Polman, 1995)

The British government's encouragement of video surveillance is more than just rhetorical, in 1994–5 it granted over £5 million in seed money, and it proposed a law to prevent councils blocking the installation of surveillance systems by exempting them from planning regulations – this was its response to Birmingham City Council's rejection of a video surveillance system because of the lack of any guidelines covering the use and storage of the images (Davies, 1995). The closer to the center of power one gets, the stronger the demand for video surveillance. Central government, local chambers of commerce and police are all in its favor, and cite impressive statistics that include increases in conviction rates and dramatic reductions in street crime in surveilled areas (in King's Lynn the crimes most often seen on video are, in order of frequency, shoplifting, car theft and burglary, drugs, vandalism, urinating in public and littering/graffiti). More objective criminologists dispute the statistics, claiming that lumping all crimes together can cover the increase in some with the reduction in others – such as urinating in public. More seriously, there is growing evidence that video surveillance does not prevent crime, but merely displaces it into

non-surveilled areas (Davies, 1995). Surveillance priority is granted to commercial districts, sites of public recreation and upscale residential areas, that is, to areas where whites conduct their business and their recreation, so its effect is to further ghettoize the city into zones of safety, order and whiteness and into dark zones that can be unseen, uncared for and ignored. The problem is not policing these zones, but containing them, and surveillance is a mechanism not only of knowledge, but of containment. The video-surveilled city, then, is sharply divided into ‘go’ and ‘no-go’ areas that are colored differently not on published maps but in the ‘street wisdom’ of those who live and move in them.

For people’s movements can be closely watched. A ‘person of interest’ can be monitored for miles as s/he passes from the field of one camera to the next, and detailed documentation of her/his activities and contacts can be compiled. In Florida the NeuroMetric Company has developed a Computerized Facial Recognition system that can scan the video image of a face in 0.5 of a second and match it against digitized images in a database (which can be compiled from photographs on drivers’ licenses). When (not if) this system is linked to video surveillance, not only ‘persons of interest’ but also their most casual contacts will be immediately identifiable and documentable. The widespread concern for law and security is driving this surveillance machine and its loudly trumpeted, and probably distorted, benefits are enthusiastically endorsed, while little concern is being paid to the price by which they are bought. The freedoms that underpin any sense of a free and relaxed citizenry grew in a society with no experience of saturated high-tech surveillance: only recently has it become so urgent to consider whether the freedoms of association and movement may be violated when both can be documented at will.

The coverage of the O.J. Simpson chase by videcopter only goes to show how far Los Angeles lags behind King’s Lynn. Had O.J. gone on the run there, police would have been able to sit cheaply and comfortably in the control room watching the white Bronco slip from monitor to monitor. These traffic control cameras can already scan number plates and match them to owners, and will soon be able to scan occupants and match them to known identities. The order of the contemporary city depends, in large measure, upon its being rendered into a field of visibility. One basic principle of the panopticon was a walled circumference within which all was to be seen, but outside of which lay that which did not need to be known. In the modern city, the model is reversed: the wall, invisible but real, surrounds the ghetto where the unseeable, the unknowable and the unthinkable can be contained and ignored. Outside the ghetto, everything must be subject to the order of the visible.

In this technological scanscape there are eyes far higher than any helicopter or high-rise building. The Los Angeles Police Department paid a company called Psytep to obtain, search and enhance satellite photographs to see if they could identify O.J.’s white Bronco outside Nicole’s apartment at the time of the murder. The company has claimed that satellite images

can be used to identify the make and model of cars and the size and gender (and presumably race) of pedestrians. It is hard to verify these claims, which may well be commercially motivated exaggerations – Psytep did fail to locate the Bronco. The reason for the failure has not been made public: it may be that satellite imagery is not yet precise enough, it may be simply that a satellite was not overhead at the appropriate time, or it may be that the 60 satellites continually photographing the earth produce so much information that retrieval of any one bit of it is, as yet, almost impossible. But the photographs exist, the will to use them exists and the justification of that use appears to be unquestioned. Police did make some effective use of satellite technology, however; it enabled them to pinpoint the location of the Bronco from O.J.'s cellular phone calls, and thus to begin the chase.

Between 1992 and 1994 the Clinton administration made it increasingly easy for commercial companies to gain access to photographs from military satellites. There are different reports on the precision of these images – some claim that the photographs can identify objects as small as 3 feet in diameter, others claim that a 2-meter resolution is their technological limit. Such an apparently technological limit may actually be one of commercial access, for only the lower-grade military images have been made available for commercial use. The advanced cameras in the military Keyhole satellite imaging system KH-11 can give as good a picture of a football game as a TV camera in the Goodyear blimp (Hough, 1991: 180). It may also be temporary: the Lockheed Corporation has been granted government licenses to put more sophisticated cameras into orbit. The media do not appear worried by this, and the commercial uses of satellite images which they report are, predictably, as benign as that of a rancher monitoring the movements of his cattle.

### **The Public and the Private**

For cattle, privacy and freedom of movement are not salient issues. For people, they are. Legal scholars are beginning to question whether the surveillance of public space might not be unconstitutional. Jennifer Granholm (1987), for instance, argues that video surveillance of public places may violate at least three constitutional rights: it may infringe upon first amendment rights because of its chilling and restrictive effects upon the freedoms of expression and of association – a group of young Black men on a street corner, for instance, may well be dispersed by cops alerted to their presence by a surveillance system, or, more seriously, may not meet at all because they know they will be seen and subsequently moved on; it may infringe upon fourth amendment rights by constituting an unreasonable search – the camera's zoom lenses may see objects or actions that would not be in 'plain view' to a police officer on the beat and whose discovery would properly require a search warrant and thus justifiable suspicion; and it may infringe upon the more general right of privacy found within the 'penumbra' of the constitution. Granholm concludes that it is fundamentally unconstitutional to monitor people who have done nothing to trigger justifiable

suspicion, and that ‘television surveillance will destroy the atmosphere and spontaneity of a free and relaxed citizenry’ (1987: 708). The Supreme Court does not share her worries. In 1986 it ruled that aerial photography, even of one’s house and yard did not interfere with a person’s expectation of privacy, nor with society’s recognition of privacy, and in 1987 it ruled that open areas are not covered by fourth amendment protection.

The issue of privacy in public is an important one. The *Sydney Morning Herald* (Wainwright, 1995) laments the absence of any privacy laws governing the private or public use of video to survey public space, so neither the police nor building owners need to apply for permission to install them, nor to tell the public they have done so. A spokesperson for Darling Harbour, a recreation and convention site in Sydney that has installed 25 cameras to cover its public spaces, claimed that the cameras did not infringe people’s civil liberties – that would only be the case, he argued, if they were installed in toilets and change rooms (the reduction of privacy to one’s private parts is a point worth pondering) (Reeves and Molitorisz, 1995). The Lawyers Reform Association disagreed: ‘Video surveillance’, said their secretary, ‘is inherently invasive of people’s privacy, subjecting them to systematic observation and information gathering regardless of any involvement in criminal activities. These cameras are a potential threat to freedoms of movement, association, assembly and speech’ (Reeves and Molitorisz, 1995).

In a surveillance society privacy is political. Pro-Choice women, of course, are well aware of the politics of privacy, for *Roe vs Wade*, the Supreme Court decision that granted abortion rights, was based on a woman’s right to privacy: control over her own body depends directly upon the privacy of that body. The moral totalism of the Christian fundamentalists does not recognize that right, so throughout the nation its members have placed clinics, doctors and pregnant women under oppressive surveillance. The legislative changes that many states have made under pressure from this moral totalism (typically a mandatory waiting period for ‘counseling’, or the necessity of parental or legal consent if the woman is a minor) all allow socially powerful others knowledge of and thus power over the woman’s body: the surveillance and public knowledge of her pregnancy, and of her desire to terminate it, is a disempowering reduction of privacy that transfers the eroded portions out of the control of the woman and into that of the more powerful. Privacy maintains the area where the less powerful can exert control over the immediate conditions of their lives and bodies, so reducing it decreases what I have called elsewhere (Fiske, 1993) the localizing power of the weak and increases the imperializing power of the strong: it extends the totalitarian.

But the politics of privacy are much broader than this one issue, important though it be. The closeness of the links among power, privilege and privacy has some obvious indicators: the well-off spend heavily to buy privacy, and much of the cost of their houses goes to equipping their exteriors with private buffer zones between them and the public street, and

their interiors with enough rooms for individual family members to have their own private spaces. The pauperized lack both external and internal privacy. Similarly, social power always involves the power not to be seen, or at least the power to control which of its doings are to be made visible. The disempowered have no such protection, and even claiming welfare or housing assistance requires them to open up their private lives, including their sexual lives, to public scrutiny. Brett Williams (1988) has published a moving study of the differences between the poor Black residents of a Washington, DC neighborhood and incoming white professionals who are buying what used to be working-class houses and 'gentrifying' them. In comparing their own living conditions to those of the new gentry, the poor note particularly their lack of privacy: they have no privacy zone, for their apartment doors open directly on to public hallways or open space; they have no cars, so they have to haul their purchases home open to public view in wire supermarket carts (some line them with black plastic to gain a measure of privacy), and they have no private spaces within their crowded homes. In a telling perception of the connections between power, privilege and privacy, one Black resident commented that the white incomers differed from him in that they had 'Privacy and Say-so'.

While it may be clear the reduction of privacy is deeply disempowering, it is still unclear whether privacy is violated by the act of surveillance itself or by the process of retrieval that turns 'dead' information into 'live' knowledge. The pornographic video that O.J. Simpson viewed a few days before the murders, for example, was rented from the hotel in which he was staying: the record of that rental was stored as inert information in the hotel's computer system until there was a need for it, at which point it was retrieved and added to an active, and hostile, knowledge of O.J. Simpson. Legally there may have been no invasion of privacy here, but we may well consider our reading and viewing to be part of our private life, and that documenting and recording them, and thus making them potentially available for public knowledge, has a chilling effect upon the freedom of opinion. It is worth pausing to consider that our library borrowings, most of our book purchases, our video rentals, our magazine subscriptions, our charitable donations, the political causes we support and our courses attended at university are all recorded and are thus available to be turned into knowledge by which the powerful may 'know' what we think. Most of the cultural resources from which we form our opinions are now documented and the potential is there for our conversations on email to join them in the data bank. The information about each of us is adequate, were it activated into knowledge, to produce a useful and usable picture of what is going on in our heads; a 'thought profile' that would be at least as accurate as the consumer profiles that are now commonplace. The technological infiltration of the previously private makes increasingly possible that deeply dystopian concept of the 'thought police'.

The technologized hypervisibility of our society (and here I move briefly from Foucauldian to Baudrillardian thinking) has undermined any

certainty we might once have enjoyed about the difference between the private and the public. That unstable point where the difference was once established has become a locus of intense anxiety, both about what should or should not be seen, and about the power to introduce events, actions and people into the field of visibility. The disturbing fascination of pornography lies equally in seeing (making public) in obscene magnification the parts and operations of the body that, although well known to occur, are normally unseen, either in private or public. The fascination of the obscene lies less in what it sees (which is mundane and predictable) and more in its power to erase the boundary between the seen and the unseen, the public and the private. Pornography is destabilizing because it makes public operations that are normally known but unseen, and thus, at another level of knowledge, unknown. The video of Rodney King's beating was, precisely, racial pornography: it pulled into close-up visibility operations that the normalized whitened 'we' knows but prefers not to see.

The private, or at least the not-public, is a double-sided space: besides being the realm that those who inhabit it can defend against surveillance, it is also the realm where what is deemed unsuitable for public knowledge can be contained and hidden. The private can be a technology of containment as well as a zone of freedom, a ghetto as well as an enclave. The difference between the two is a difference of control over what, or who, is inside and over who has the right to cross the boundary between inside and outside. The US military's 'don't ask don't tell' policy is at least as much a means of containing homosexuality as a means of producing a privacy zone of freedom and safety for its gay and lesbian personnel. In practice it has produced ghettos rather than enclaves.

Tabloid television talk shows, to give a counter instance, fascinate not just because they typically make public what is normally private (the fascination of the pornographic, of the voyeur), but also because they make visible the power that normally polices that boundary and controls the movement across it. The participants assert their power to make their private public; they treat their private as a ghetto or, to borrow a term from gay politics, a closet from which they have the power to decide to emerge. Coming out in public on the terms of those making the move is often highly offensive to the self-appointed guardians of a so-called 'public interest' or public morals and provokes them to remobilize their moral totalism in their struggles against the social conditions of diversity. What is in the public interest to be publicly known is a terrain of contestation over the power to designate the knowable and thus to control the movement between the private and the public. A regime of truth and power is constituted by the regularities of what is said in public over the dispersed sites of public speech, so control over the speech that can be made public is crucial to maintaining it. In an age when anything *can* be said, when anything *can* be made visible, the struggle over what *is* said, what *is* seen, on whose terms and at whose volition, is an urgent and inescapable one. That unstable boundary between the private and the public is so deeply fascinating to us

because controlling the movement across it determines whether the private functions as a zone of containment or of freedom: it determines whether making public is a violation of privacy or an assertion of one's rights to a presence in public space.

Normally there is a close association between power and privacy: the powerful exert their power not to be seen, or only to be seen on their own terms and volition, by extending their zone of privacy as far as possible. The tabloid press flourish to the extent that they can invade this zone and scandalize the socially powerful by making visible that which they would prefer not to be seen. The less powerful, who are still the socially normalized, are equally scandalized by tabloidism, for the more powerful are simply, in this analysis, the more normal and thus in the same social category. My point here is neither to excoriate nor to celebrate tabloidism but to argue that its scandalizing revelations, its uncovering of the covered up, are pleasurable to the disempowered or abnormalized not because of what they make known (which, as with pornography, is typically mundane, predictable and trivial) but because in an age of surveillance, the tabloids reverse the power of seeing and knowing, they provide momentary reversals and resistances. It is only the differential play of power that deems it 'legitimate' to make public the sexual life of a single mother claiming welfare for her children but 'scandalous' when an equivalent visibility is imposed on a politician. The telephoto lenses of the papparazzi are the tabloid technology of countersurveillance.

The Rodney King beating video was, in this sense, tabloid. It scandalized the normally unseen operations of white power by making them visible and thus contestable. What its countersurveillance revealed may have been predictable and part of the mundanity of Black experience, but it was certainly not trivial. In a related, but opposite way the Los Angeles uprisings (we must shun the abnormalizing power of the word 'riot') were also tabloid, for they shattered the containment of the ghetto and forced its anger and frustration into public visibility. The televisual dimension of the uprisings was crucial to their politics for it overthrew the management of a racialized regime of truth/power.

Countersurveillance may be the most immediately available means of resistance in a surveilled society. In private hands, the video camera can become a guerrilla weapon. In Berkeley, California, there is an organization called 'Copwatch' whose members monitor police radio and rush video cameras to document police behavior towards the dispossessed, particularly the homeless and African-Americans. And, paradoxically, the only complaints about the video surveillance of Detroit's downtown came from the police, for the cameras were recording behaviors they preferred to remain unseen.

Like pornography, countersurveillance is important because it contests the management of visibility. In a surveillance society, the organization of the seen and the unseen is a critical political process, one of whose key components is the micromanagement of the unseen. Invisibility is

managed in part by techniques of erasure, by which the operation of power and the doings of the powerful are rendered unseeable; in part by techniques of containment, by which the ghetto or the obscene may be refused public visibility; and, conversely, by refining the techniques of surveillance so that the unavoidably invisible (the private realm of the disempowered) may be seen, known and disciplined.

Such intensive and extensive surveillance makes privacy a critical political issue. The Australian Lawyers Reform Association has made explicit what is often overlooked – that privacy is the foundation without which the freedoms of movement, association, assembly and speech cannot survive, and we might extend their argument to point out that without these freedoms, no resemblance of a public sphere can survive. Privacy is not just the concern of the individual, but it continues from the individual into the public sphere.

Habermas has alerted us to the danger of losing a sphere, which he calls ‘public’, that is outside the control of the state and that may be used to form public opinion for the public good. His theory of the public sphere has been widely discussed, often critically. Its prime weakness lies in the implicit assumption that the public good is a singular, consensual concept that can be maintained by a sphere that historically has always been occupied by members of those social groups whose interests are, in general, well served by the power of the state (i.e. white, middle-class men). This aspect of his theory deserves sharp criticism, but the criticism should lead us to rethink the notion of the public sphere, not jettison it. Scholars such as Fraser (1989), and Negt and Kluge (1993) argue that to be viable the public sphere must be less homogeneous than Habermas’s, and they conceptualize it not as a singularity, but as a space occupied by multiple and by counter public spheres, thus transforming its politics from those of consensus to ones of contestation. A surveillance society urgently needs a sphere, which we may call the public, where opposition to its totalitarian tendencies can be organized in a social domain that exceeds the private, but that extends the ability of the private, however eroded, to defend its doings from the eye of the state. In thinking about the nature and position of this sphere, it is more important to distinguish it from that of the state than from the private, for the public sphere depends crucially upon the privacy of the discussions conducted within it, and those discussions depend, in their turn, upon reading, viewing and thinking in private. In fact, it may be more productive to think of the public and the private as continuous rather than distinct, so that an erosion of one always entails an erosion of the other. It is useful, too, to recognize that the private occupies a long stretch on this continuum, for its terrain extends from interior personal thought through interpersonal conversation to the exchange of ideas within a group or limited social formation, at which point it begins to merge into the public. While the private is clearly important to anyone’s sense of, and control over, their individuality, it must not be individualized, for it protects the potential for the interindividual to expand into the interindividual and from there into the collective.

When our concept of the public sphere is diversified into a number of counter public spheres, it becomes even more important to protect this terrain of privacy that extends from the individual into the collective. Early in its first term, the Clinton administration demanded that an electronic eavesdropping capability, called ‘the clipper chip’, should be built in to the loudly touted ‘information superhighway’ so that the agents of the state would have the ability to monitor and record the movement of any information traffic upon it. Its attempt was defeated. But it was not without precedent. In the pre-infotech 1970s both the civil rights movement and the women’s movement were infiltrated by the CIA and ‘private’ discussions were monitored and documented in huge files that have recently been made public. This infiltration of the collective private was, of course, justified by claims to the ‘public’ good, and was yet another attempt to limit the notion of the ‘public’ to those whose behaviors could be deemed ‘good’ by the state or the currently powerful. The knowledge of what was going on in private was necessary to control and limit what might be discussed and done in public. Without privacy, the public sphere is defenseless against normalization, and its boundaries can be drawn inwards so as to exclude the progressive or the radical. By this means any force for social change can be situated and contained within the category of the abnormal, and subject to constraint, discipline and punishment.

Surveillance always acts to normalize, it discourages the different and thus reduces the opportunity to form and propagate those opinions that provide the countering thrust of a counter public sphere. Its effect is always towards the homogenized, it works to reduce the public sphere to the social homogeneity of the coffee houses of 18th-century London. Privacy protects spaces where socially abrasive opinions may be formed before being brought into the public sphere and into interaction with others. This last point is crucial, for the politics of privacy depend upon its relationship with the public sphere. Privacy that is used to formulate ideas whose only public discussion is a bomb blast has a quite different politics from the privacy that is always linked to the public sphere, even if those links are not always activated. This is a privacy that is not a mere luxury of the wealthy, nor a cover for criminality, but the seedbed of social change and the first line of defense against the totalitarian.

### **Public Space**

Without privacy there can be no ‘public’ dimension to the public sphere; and the same is true for public space. Public space is where private citizens may meet to go about their private business unregarded by the state – provided, of course, they conform to the law and respect the rights of others to use that public space for their purposes. The homogenization of the public sphere is continuous with the homogenization of public space. The laws and rights that govern the use of public space relate in complicated ways to the unspecified, but very real, social norms that undergird them. These norms are typically drawn with narrower boundaries than those of explicit laws and

rights, for in a democracy laws and rights have to be inclusive and non-discriminatory, whereas norms are necessarily exclusive, for their very existence depends upon the presence of the abnormalized. This necessary boundary of the normal contradicts the rights of those who are abnormalized and thus positioned beyond it; but, in a democracy, it can only do so under the guise of maintaining the law and protecting the rights of those who draw the boundary of social normality and thus reside comfortably within it. These norms can, for instance, silently designate certain areas of our cities as white, and can be made to operate, against the letter of the law and against constitutional rights, to exclude non-whites from them, but this exclusion is effective only because it works beneath the claim that it is maintaining law and order and protecting the rights of those who have the power to define themselves as ‘normal’ citizens. Underneath the laws that uphold a democracy there is space to operationalize norms that contradict it, which is why a democratic totalitarianism is a paradox that works well.

Norms, of course, are what hold the social order in place. The power to define what is in or out of place is central to the power over the normal. In the contemporary US city the image of a Black man ‘out of place’ is immediately moved from information to knowledge, from the seen to the known. In these conditions being seen is, in itself, oppressive. Surveillance is not applied equally to all, for it is a way of imposing norms, and those whose norms are imposed are, therefore, for practical purposes, free from surveillance whereas those who have been othered into the ‘abnormal’ have it focused more intensely upon them. To be seen to be Black or Brown, in all but a few places in the US, is to be known to be out of place, beyond the norm that someone else has set, and thus to be subject to white power.

Social critics have pointed to the rapid growth of gated neighborhoods whose entries are surveilled by video cameras (e.g. Davis, 1990; Fiske, 1994). A Black professor has told me how he knows such a camera sees him differently than the white visitors. His sense that he is known to be out of place is a tiny but grating experience of oppression from which the whites who pass under the same camera are free. It discourages him from visiting his white colleague who lives beyond it.

A group of African-American students in my university have described how the campus is racially zoned for them by non-technological surveillance. In Computer Science, in Engineering and in the School of Business white students routinely subject them to a ‘What are you doing here?’ look that abnormalizes their presence. The look was so intense, so immediately power-laden, that one woman had to put her forefingers on either side of her eyes and point them at me in an attempt to make me experience how it felt to be on the receiving end of it.

A white woman told me how she and a friend gave a Black male student a ride home after an evening class: he was in the back seat leaning forward talking to them when a police car pulled them over to check that the women were ‘all right’.

A Black friend and I were walking home late one night. It was snowing

and the sidewalks had not been cleared so we walked in the tire tracks on the deserted road. As we passed the gym where he regularly worked out, he commented on how odd it felt to be walking in the road at night. As a white man, I could only look blankly at him, his comment made no sense, it referred to no real or imaginable experience of mine. In daytime, he explained, the sidewalks are crowded, and, when he is wearing his running suit, carrying a gym bag and, sometimes, wearing a gold chain (for whites these signs have become intensifiers of Black masculinity that are often used to identify the Black threat to law and order), he notices that some whites are frightened of him and either step off the sidewalk or press close to the wall as he passes. At night he felt free to use the sidewalk, but in daytime, as he put it, it was simply more comfortable to walk in the road.

When the South London borough of Sutton installed video cameras in its streets, it hired a researcher to assess their impact. A Black youth told how he had been accosted by cops on the street who asked him what he was doing and said that he'd been seen on video 'acting suspiciously'. Actually, he was waiting for his girlfriend (Polman, 1995).

Despite the ubiquity of such chilling techniques for managing public space, they are not uncontested. Robin Kelley's account of a technologized contestation over public space is worth quoting at length:

Because ... the pervasive racism throughout the whole city (and country) circumscribe the movement of young blacks, their music and expressive styles have literally become weapons in a battle over the right to occupy public space. Frequently employing high-decibel car stereos and boom boxes, they 'pump up the volume' not only for their own listening pleasure but also as part of an indirect, ad hoc war of position to take back public space. The 'noise' constitutes a form of cultural resistance that should not be ignored, especially when we add those resistive lyrics about destroying the state or retaliating against the police. Imagine a convertible Impala or a Suzuki pulling up alongside a 'black and white', pumping the revenge fantasy segment of Ice Cube's 'The Wrong Nigga to Fuck wit' from *Death Certificate*, which promises to break (LAPD) Chief Darryl Gates's 'spine like a jellyfish', or Cypress Hill's 'Pigs' from *Cypress Hill*, vowing to turn 'pigs' into 'sausage'. Furthermore, hip hop producers have increased the stakes by pioneering technologies that extend and 'fatten' the base in order to improve clarity at louder decibels (appropriately called 'jeep beats'). (Kelley, 1996: 134)

### **Race and the Normal**

The power to produce the normal may be the ultimate social power, but its effectiveness depends upon its ability to extend the normal over the entire social domain. To achieve this, power needs to be able to see what it has categorized as the abnormal, for the abnormal is where the threat to the established order originates; it is, therefore, where social change originates. The abnormal is where power needs to concentrate its disciplinary mechanisms, and to the extent that the private is where abnormality may occur, we may expect it to be increasingly disciplined by surveillance.

The efficiency of high-tech and widely extensive surveillance depends vitally upon an active and minutely refined process of normalization. Ubiquitous surveillance produces such vast quantities of information that any knowledge system would collapse under overload if most of the gathered information were not left dormant and inert until needed and activated into knowledge. The boundary of the normal is the trigger that activates information and transforms it into knowledge. Behaviors and social groups who lie on, or over, this arbitrarily inscribed boundary are thus disproportionately the object of surveillance, because inert information about them is routinely transformed into power-bearing knowledge.

The Drug Enforcement Agency, for instance, has a set of norms whose transgression allows it to identify a ‘likely drug courier’. These norms enable it to stop and search those who can be seen to be outside them at airports, bus stations and on the highways. Ehrenreich (1990) has reconstructed from recent trials some of the video-visible features by which DEA agents can recognize those who are thus abnormalized: they include:

- wearing gold chains
- wearing a black jump suit
- carrying a gym bag
- being a member of ‘ethnic groups associated with the drug trade’
- traveling to or from a ‘source city’ such as LA, Miami or Detroit, or in a car bearing license plates from a state containing source cities, though New York will do

The Black activist intellectual Zears Miles read the full list on *Black Liberation Radio* and pointed out that it worked to punish Black expressiveness (in a way that has a chilling effect upon freedom of expression) and that in order to avoid being stopped and searched at airports or on the highways Black travelers must, as far as possible, deny their Black culture and identity, and look and behave like whites. Surveillance is a technology of normalization that identifies and discourages the cultural expression and behavior of social formations that differ from those of the dominant, and thus chills any public display of difference. It does inhibit a free and relaxed citizenry.

The panopticon was a machine of normalization. It was designed to monitor abnormal behavior, to measure its steady progress toward the normal, and to identify the point at which the prisoner could be returned to society and re-enter normality. This early panoptic surveillance was limited, however, for it could monitor behavior only: its effects could be only corrective and not preventative, it was necessarily *post hoc*. To be preventative, that is, to be proactive rather than reactive, surveillance has to be able to identify the abnormal by what it *looks like* rather than by what it *does*: it needs to abnormalize, or criminalize, by visible social category, not by social behavior. Scientists in the 19th century devoted much energy to this enterprise, and the camera was a vital tool in their efforts. They spent

long hours poring over photographs of criminals and lunatics in their attempt to produce visibly identifiable categories of the abnormal (the criminal or the insane) that could be subject to corrective action in advance of any deviant behavior.

Black masculinity may form the first social category that is both abnormalized and visible. And the LAPD have not been slow to take advantage of the fact: In 'Operation Hammer' Chief Darryl Gates instructed his officers to pick up anyone 'looking suspicious' (Davis, 1990: 268; emphasis added). As a result, 1500 young Black men were taken in for questioning. While most were charged with minor offenses, such as curfew and traffic violations, some were not charged at all but simply had their names and addresses logged in the LAPD anti-gang task force database: documentation is a necessary component of surveillance. In a similar operation, the Gang Related Active Trafficker Suppression program, LAPD officers were instructed to 'interrogate anyone who they suspect is a gang member, basing their assumptions on their dress or their use of hand signals' (Davis, 1990: 272). Kelley (1996: 133) comments on an important sub-theme in gangsta rap that protests this criminalization by appearance as part of an ongoing battle for 'free expression and unfettered mobility in public spaces'.

This criminalization by visual category is not confined to the ghetto. Michael Eric Dyson (1993: 191–3) tells a searing story of attempting to draw some cash from his credit card in a bank. He is a Black man, and was wearing a black running suit (I don't know if he was wearing a gold chain). He is also an academic and a Baptist preacher, but these characteristics were not visible: his Blackness, his maleness and his running suit, however, were. The teller refused to advance any money. Dyson's request to see the manager started an apparently irreversible sequence of events which culminated in the manager slicing his card in two with a pair of scissors. When Dyson protested, the manager called the police. Patricia Williams (1991: 44–51), a professor of law, tells a similar story of being refused entry into, ironically, a United Colors of Benetton store because she was Black, and of the editorial censorship she encountered when writing up the incident for a white legal journal.

Racism is the paradigmatic instance of abnormalization by visible and thus surveillable category. The abnormalization of the racial other that enables the DEA to identify drug runners by what they look like, the bank similarly to identify fraudulent credit card users, and the store to identify shoplifters by their appearance rather than their behavior, is a process without which surveillance cannot work, whiteness cannot work and totalitarianism cannot work. At the core of this process is, of course, the way that whiteness normalizes itself, and excludes itself both from categorizing and from being categorizable: it thus ensures its invisibility – an invisibility that extends into the widespread white ignorance of such incidents. Whiteness wants to see everything except its own operations. We whites, whose norms are used to abnormalize, categorize and identify the

others who are not us, cannot experience directly the oppressive application of those norms, for they are applied *from* our position, not *upon* it. Indeed, we often do not know that such incidents occur, let alone how routine they are. Many African-Americans, however, not only feel the oppressive applications of norms, but also see how whites are largely free from the constraints of normalization, and the perception of the difference is part of the experience of discrimination.

### **Some Issues with which to Conclude**

The rapid extension of video surveillance over our cities cannot be explained by appeals to a form of technological determinism: we do not surveil simply because we have the ability to. It may be a technological feature of the surveillance camera that enables it to identify a person's race, but it is a racist society that wants that information and that turns it into knowledge: technology can determine only what is seen, it is society and its politics that determines what is known. Surveillance technology is being adopted so widely and rapidly in part because it technologizes and makes more efficient a process by which the powerful maintain the social order of whiteness. Black and white are simultaneously differences of light density in the pixels of a TV screen and social categories. They constitute a perfect match between technology and a racist social order within the field of the visible. The closeness of the match between technological capability and social need is what matters.

As whiteness is put into crisis in both the US and Europe by the transnational flows of those who have been raced as non-white its need to abnormalize and surveil the racialized other will intensify. The racialization of the other is, of course, part of the white process of abnormalization, so the category of non-white may, in different historical and social contexts, include the Turkish and the Irish: blackness is a product of whiteness, not of melanin.

We should dispute, too, any claim for the social neutrality of technology. Although surveillance is penetrating deeply throughout our society, its penetration is differential. The lives of the white mainstream are still comparatively untouched by it. But in Black America, its penetration is deep. The urban scanscape is invisibly mapped, both physically and conceptually, into areas where a Black presence is known to be normal or abnormal, where the Black body can be seen to be in place or out of place. A man categorized as black, for example, is 'out of place' in a car with two white women, or on a certain sidewalk when wearing certain clothes in daytime. Neighborhood watch programs train residents to report anyone out of the ordinary, anyone acting suspiciously. Racial identity is a prime identifier of someone out of the ordinary in the suburb, it is a non-ordinariness that can be readily seen from behind the lace curtains of the ordinary. And many neighborhood watch organizations are equipped with video cameras.

We should recognize, too, that surveillance is not just a means of

gathering knowledge that can then be used to exert power by other means, but that the process of surveillance itself is an exertion of power, a power that is differentiated racially while being spatially universal. Surveillance zones the city in ways that give both spatial and temporal dimensions to racial categories. The norms that define such invisible but very real places, their times of occupation, and the behavior or dress deemed appropriate to them, operationalize the totalitarian, for they are norms that are outside the control of those subject to them: they are imposed, and those upon whom they are imposed have no say either in their production or in their application. Such norms, then, are physically experienced by their abnormalized objects as constraints, as divisive and exclusionary mechanisms. For those whose normality has produced them, however, they are unseen and thus unfelt. Norms may be universal in extent, but are they differential in operation.

The invisibility of norms for the normal lies behind the social demand to extend surveillance (between 80 percent and 90 percent of Britons want more surveillance according to Davies, 1995). We have already noted that the price of such a supposed increase in security includes an intensified normalization process that, in a society where ethnic, racial and economic differences are increasing, is certain to prove divisive and inflammatory. A more insidious part of the price may be its effects upon the socially 'normal': their comfort with increased surveillance leads to an internalized acceptance of a totalitarian tendency. This normalizing of the totalitarian is one of the more frightening features of our willed and willing development of a surveillance society. Any increase in the social tolerance of totalitarianism in one domain dulls the vigilance necessary to spot its creeping advances in others: it constantly moves the line of acceptability in a direction that reduces the democratic. The implications of this extend far beyond the processes of surveillance, for extending the tolerance of one totalitarian agency inevitably prepares the ground where others can take root and flourish.

Whiteness has the social power to define itself as the normal, as the point where normality can be produced and elided with the orderliness of the social order: whiteness is both the source and the practice of normalization. Under pressure, and it is under pressure, whiteness appears all too ready to resort to increasingly totalitarian strategies. Surveillance makes the city operate as a machine of whiteness. It is the means by which the sense-making system in white heads is externalized into the spatial system of our cities; it is the mechanism that gives a material dimension to abstract or theoretical concepts such as 'social position' or 'social space', for it makes them literal as well as metaphorical. Surveillance gives a physical geography to the socio-political construct of 'race'. Whiteness is cartographic: as it always has, it colors its maps of the world according to its own norms and interests.

*Note*

1. I follow the convention of capitalizing the word 'Black' to signal the reversal of the negative connotations of the word 'black'. I hope that this article's focus on the Black man will not be taken as a further erasure of the Black woman. In other work (Fiske, 1993, 1994) I have attempted to take some account of her 'double oppression', but my emphasis here is justified, I hope, by the way that the white imagination has embodied its fear into the Black male, rather than the Black female.

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