Modern Feels:
Interwar Britain and the Bodily Politics of Visual Social Media

by

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I will not be just a tourist in the world of images, just watching images passing by which I cannot live in …

– *Anais Nïn*

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ii

LIST OF FIGURES vii

ABSTRACT ix

CHAPTER 1 Catching Feels:
Materials of Media History 1

MEDIA HISTORIES, HISTORY'S MEDIA 13
TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT 19
Feeling/Aesthetics *19*
Sensible/Visible *21*
Reading *23*
Retrojection *24*
Technogenesis *26*
Embodiment/Feminism *29*
CHAPTER OUTLINES 31

CHAPTER 2 Reading Real Time:
Tabloid Visuality, Melancholy Bystanders, *Vile Bodies* 35

A HISTORICAL PREAMBLE 41
THE PHOTOGRAPHABLE PRESENT 49
REAL TIME MELANCHOLIA 58
A SNAPSHOT OF *VILE BODIES* 64
UNREAL AND OVER-RECORDED 67
UNCOMMEMORATED GHOSTS 72
INDIFFERENT INTIMACIES 78
HAPPILY EVER AFTER 82
"THE ORIGINAL SOCIAL MEDIA" 90

CHAPTER 3 Filtered Flesh:
Glamour Photography, Disability Aesthetics, Lee Miller 95

ALGORITHMIC FILTERS IN DIGITAL CULTURE 102
"SEMIOTICS OF GLAMOUR" 106
ARMORING AESTHETICS 116

Lee Miller's Bodies 119
Disability Aesthetics, Relational Reading 124
Fascist Glamour 136
Instaworthy Images @cindysherman 144
Selfie Surgery 154

CHAPTER 4 Sousveillant Storytelling:
"Subjective Cameras," Participatory Publics, Mass-Observation 161

Sensible Sousveillance 169
"Subjective Cameras" 175
"Make-Believe and Ballyhoo" 180
Distorted Lenses of Daily Life 187
"A perceptual training ground" 197
(Re)Situating Sousveillance 204
Distortion, Crisis, & Fake News 209

LOOSE ENDS:
Lessons in Recognition 215

BIBLIOGRAPHY 223

List of Figures

FIGURE 1.1TWO SCENES FROM KIIARA'S "FEELS" MUSIC VIDEO 3

FIGURE 1.2 COMPUTER-TRANSMITTED FEELS (2019) 5

FIGURE 2.1 PORTRAIT OF DIANA MITFORD IN THE BYSTANDER (1929) 35

FIGURE 2.2 U.S. NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT TOUTING THE SPEED OF AP WIREPHOTO TECHNOLOGIES 45

FIGURE 2.3 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS'S PORTABLE WIREPHOTO EQUIPMENT (1936) 45

FIGURE 2.4 THE BYSTANDER CAPTURES "THE PASSING HOUR" (1932) 53

FIGURE 2.5 THE TATLER'S "SOCIETY NEWS OF THE PASSING HOUR "(1928) 54

FIGURE 2.6 DIANA AND UNITY – "FRIENDS OF THE FÜHRER" (1936) 87

FIGURE 2.7 DIANA AND UNITY AT NAZI RALLY (1937) 89

FIGURE 3.1 PHOTOGRAPH OF LEE MILLER BY EDWARD STEICHEN (1928) 96

FIGURE 3.2 KOTEX ADVERTISEMENT FROM DELINEATOR MAGAZINE (1929) 98

FIGURE 3.3 COLLAGE DEPICTING 15 ORIGINAL PRE-SET FILTERS ON INSTAGRAM (2011) 104

FIGURE 3.4 SOME SUBTLE EDITS USING FACETUNE2 (2016) 105

FIGURE 3.5 A STATUESQUE SAMPLE ILLUSTRATION FROM JOHNSON'S TREATISE (1901) 109

FIGURE 3.6 SCHRIEVER'S "STATUARY FROM LIFE" EXERCISE FOR ADVANCED ETCHING (1909) 111

FIGURE 3.7 A SELECTION OF KNIVES USED FOR RETOUCHING NEGATIVES (1941) 112

FIGURE 3.8 PHOTOGRAPH OF DOLORES DEL RIO BY EDWARD STEICHEN (1929) 113

FIGURE 3.9 PHOTOGRAPH OF TOTO KLOOPMAN BY GEORGE HOYNINGEN-HUENE (1933) 114

FIGURE 3.10 PHOTOGRAPH OF JOAN CRAWFORD BY GEORGE HURRELL (1936) 115

FIGURE 3.11 MILLER, WITH MAN RAY, AT A RETOUCHING DESK (1931) 119

FIGURE 3.12 LEE MILLER WITH SABRE GUARD(1930) 122

FIGURE 3.13 LEE MILLER WITH SHADOW-SCARRED SKIN (1930) 126

FIGURE 3.14 "THE NECK" (1929) 127

FIGURE 3.15 UNTITLED [NUDE WEARING SABRE GUARD] (C. 1930) 129

Figure 3.16 Untitled [Severed breast from radical surgery in a place setting 2] (c.1929) 131
Figure 3.17 Untitled [Lee Miller] by Dora Maar (1933).. 132
Figure 3.18 Miller as an armless statue Cocteau's Le Sang d'un Poet (1930)..................................... 133
Figure 3.19 Sample exercises for learning retouching strokes 135
Figure 3.20 Dead SS Prison Guard Floating in Canal (1945).. 138
Figure 3.21 Suicide of the Burgermeister's Daughter Regina Lisso (1945).. 139
Figure 3.22 Glamour Photograph of Jane Russell (1941) 140
Figure 3.23 One of Sherman's fashion photographs: "Untitled #299" 149
Figure 3.24 Cindy Sherman Instagram Post #1 150
Figure 3.25 Cindy Sherman Instagram Post #2 150
Figure 3.26 Cindy Sherman Instagram Post #3 152
Figure 3.27 Cindy Sherman Instagram Post #4 153
Figure 3.28 Promotional Material for AirBrush 155
Figure 3.29 Homepage of Airbrush Website 156
Figure 3.30 Skin editing using an eraser tool 158
Figure 4.1 Mann with a version of his wearable computing technologies (1994) 169
Figure 4.2 Bill Brandt's "East End girl dancing the Lambeth Walk" (1939)..................................... 181
Figure 4.3 Diagram of the "Social Area of the Observer" 189
Figure 4.4 Onlookers using homemade periscopes 194
Figure 4.5 Crowd with periscopes on Coronation Day 194
Figure 4.6 Moments from the sequence of Spare Time described above 203
Figure 4.7 A situated view of 2018 210

Abstract

My dissertation, *Modern Feels: Interwar Britain and the Bodily Politics of Visual Social Media*, juxtaposes interwar texts with digital theoretical concepts in order to examine how everyday media use impacts subjects' responses to material human bodies. I assemble a multimodal archive from 1930s Britain—Evelyn Waugh's novel *Vile Bodies,* a selection of Lee Miller's photography, and publications from the Mass-Observation Movement—that connects the period's increasingly pervasive mass visual media ecology to subjects' capacities for regarding both individual and mass historical trauma. Each chapter locates a different digitally native phenomenon ("real time," algorithmic filters, and sousveillance) in one of these texts in order to reframe these terms' meanings and to foreground their effects on human habits of sense-making. I draw on these connections to forward a theory of media history that does not rely on direct equivalences or causality between the modern and the contemporary; instead it leverages both eras to identify modes of embodied, relational reading that technologies can habituate in human subjects without deterministically circumscribing these practices within particular devices.

This approach draws attention to how everyday reading practices form a connective tissue between bodies and media that is often overlooked in posthuman models of technogenesis. Moreover, tracing seemingly benign habits of reading to encounters with violence in the fraught political context of the 1930s—an era haunted by the lingering trauma of WWI, anxiously anticipating WWII, and plagued by the rise of fascism—

underscores the stakes of attending to everyday mass media practices across both eras. Just as repeated contact with images of injured bodies in the media may numb viewers and shape their real life responses to pain, my dissertation argues that mundane habits of media readership can likewise inure subjects to violence with profound political consequences. Through its historical juxtapositions, *Modern Feels* offers new interpretations of 1930s texts and new definitions of digital concepts that link both to embodied practices of sense-making and an ethics of encountering the pain of others.

Chapter 1

Catching Feels:

Materials of Media History

In 2017 Merriam-Webster facetiously labeled the increasingly popular use of "feels" as a plural, countable noun an "epidemic."[1] While not acknowledging the emerging usage as an official dictionary entry, their website singled out "feels" as a "word we're watching," reflecting the term's rising prominence in mainstream culture. Beyond its new ubiquity, this use of feels is intriguing because it was born in a digital environment and popularized through online exchanges, but has quickly become a common colloquialism offline.[2] Two popular definitions from urbandictionary.com (a crowdsourced website that documented this phenomenon well before Merriam-Webster) capture the expression's origins within internet fan communities:

> A wave of emotions that sometimes cannot be adequately explained
> ***Watching* Back to the Future** *gives me all sorts of Nostalgic* ***Feels.***
> #feels #feelings **#tumblr** #emotion **#gif** [KissTheDragon June 28, 2012]
>
> Short for feelings. Typically when someone is **fangirling/fanboying** over something, or just saw something sad
> *Ugh* ***this show*** *is giving me* ***so many feels***
> *Right in* ***the feels***
> #feelings **#fangirling** #sad #emotion **#feels** [Alice707 March 30, 2012][3]

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[1]The article also elaborates that "the word feel jumps out because it is used in a way it's hardly ever used […] as a countable noun in its plural form. The phrases soon took on lives of their own in meme culture." "'All the Feels' All the time," merriam-webster.com, https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/all-the-feels-meme-word-meaning (2017) (accessed 1/18/19).

[2] Its origins can be traced back further to the 2010 meme "I know the feel bro" that circulated widely in spaces like 4chan and reddit. Yet the adoption of feels (plural) and its adaptation by more feminized fan cultures has defined its recent increasingly mainstream trajectory.

[3] (bolded emphases, mine) "Feels," urbandictionary.com, https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Feels (accessed 1/18/19).

When these entries were first posted in 2012, feels was most often found on online platforms like Tumblr and usually described users' affective responses to popular media objects. Now, though, feels is not only standard in discussions *about* contemporary cultural products, but is consistently used *within* them to capture a wider range of emotional interactions. It enters naturally into offline contexts—spoken conversations, print magazines, and the lyrics of top 40 hits. "I've got way too many feels" the chorus of Kiiara's 2016 song "Feels" laments, while Calvin Harris's 2017 hit single by the same name advises "don't be afraid to catch feels."[4] The rapid adoption and apparently contagious spread of the usage in recent years reflect its resonances with the structures of feeling that permeate everyday experiences in the twenty-first century. Just as a digitally native mode of describing emotion can migrate into the "real world," so too can the embodied practices of feeling, reading, and responding that accompany it.

The music video that 23-year old Kiiara produced for "Feels" [Fig. 1.1] illustrates how this colloquialism is part of an affectively charged connective tissue between media environments and material bodies. Her short production opens and closes with a strange scene where she sits adjacent to a static-filled television set that dwarfs her shadowed form. Another screen dynamically buzzes with static in the corner of the same room, slightly blocked from view. These conspicuously outmoded and bright devices draw in a viewer's attention, highlighting the dominating physical presence of visual media in this space. Given that the repeated chorus "I've got way too many feels" is first introduced here, the aggressive predominance of the screens, even when devoid of any informational content, seems linked

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[4] Kiiara, *Feels* (Atlantic Records, 2016), https://genius.com/Kiiara-feels-lyrics (accessed 1/18/19).
Calvin Harris, *Feels* (New York: Columbia Records, 2017), https://genius.com/Calvin-harris-feels-lyrics (accessed 1/18/19).

to this expression of affect. As the electronic static persists through the video, the alignment between feels and media becomes even clearer. Outside of the apartment, walls, objects, and people in the neighborhood begin dissolving into pixilated pieces until Kiiara is wandering a field of static alone. It is as if the visual noise of the television has expanded to encompass the entire physical landscape, interfering with her (and the audience's) scopic access to these surroundings. While on one level the song's lyrics are clearly about numbing emotions with marijuana and alcohol, the video's complementary visual enactment of having *too many feels* suggests other coexisting meanings, such as how a hazy blizzard of media-native affect can transgress the screen's boundaries. Tangibly materializing in the atmosphere, excessive feels leak out of their mediated frames and rub against the bodies that try to traverse this space.

Figure 1.1Two scenes from Kiiara's "Feels" music video[5]

[5] Kiiara, "Feels (Official Video)," YouTube Video, 3:23, 10/31/2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6US7RN74D0k (screenshots taken 1/18/2019)

Considering how feels manifests in popular cultural beyond this video highlights the expression's tense ambivalence and its gravitation towards bodies. Feels both acknowledges and deflects emotion. When used by fans it proclaims a text's affective impact while also self-consciously marking that text as trivial or as fictional instead of "real." In its wider circulation, feels captures a particular form of readerly response that identifies an external object as "affecting" (that thing outside of me gives me the feels) while simultaneously creating a firm rhetorical border around the human subject that could be actively *feeling* something. Katy Waldman sarcastically synthesizes these dynamics in a 2015 *Slate* article, informatively subtitled "When Feelings became Feels: How We Distance Ourselves from Emotion on the Internet." Here she explains:

> "Feels" do not seem like an honorable, instructive, or meaningful thing to have. More mild skin condition than noble Romantic sentiment. As a diminution of feelings, they call out for some kind of conversion formula: five feels equals one-third of a human emotion. Talking about your feels can be a charming eyeroll or ironic shrug, a way of distancing yourself from your reaction.[6]

Waldman describes feels as a different breed of feeling than conventional emotion—diminished, degraded, and guarded. Yet even as she argues that this rhetoric is a distancing strategy, she turns to the material body to illustrate it. Feels is a physical gesture (eyeroll, ironic shrug) or a form of eczema, not just "on the internet" as the subtitle suggests. Even if it refers to a kind of affect that is only skin deep, it still alters the texture of that skin—the tactile organ mediating subjects' relationship to the world around them. Feels may be a diminutive version of feeling, but it takes shape in and through contagious corporeal contact.

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[6]Katy Waldman, "Not Feeling It," *Slate* (Jan 29, 2015), http://www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon_valley/2015/01/29/all_of_the_feels_how_we_distance_ourselves_from_emotion_on_the_internet.html (accessed 3/9/2019).

This expression is a prime example, then, of how a digitally-generated affect can travel outside of bounded media contexts not only into pop culture but also into human bodies.

Figure 1.2 Computer-transmitted feels (2019)[7]

Feels may seem like a fairly trivial phenomenon. Yet, as Ann Cvetkovich, Sianne Ngai, Kathleen Stewart, and others have compellingly demonstrated, the minor and the ordinary are often especially revealing when it comes to feelings.[8] Furthermore, I am not alone in my academic fascination with the feels. For example, a collective of researchers at Mälmo University's Medea Research Lab prominently references it in an ongoing ethnographic study entitled "All of the Feels." Focusing on how "young people *make sense* of their own practices on and with social media," they probe their subjects' emotional and cognitive interactions with digital media platforms.[9] Some of the lab's preliminary findings support the broad claim I have traced through Kiiara's video and Waldman's article—that born-digital habits of feeling and readerly interaction condition material, embodied

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[7] "My feels they hurt," from "feels," *Dictionary.com*, https://www.dictionary.com/e/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/66a.png (accessed 1/18/2019).
[8] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Harvard University Press, 2009).
Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
[9] Italics mine. See article by Katrin Tiidenberg summarizing the project and some of its preliminary arguments: "All the Feels: Making Sense of Instagram and Snapchat," https://futuremaking.space, https://futuremaking.space/all-the-feels/feels-making-sense-snapchat-instagram/ (accessed 7/4/2018).

experiences even independently of direct contact with the media platforms where they originate. Summarizing trends in their preliminary interview data the researchers explain that, "Instagram has permeated the experience of social mediated visuality to the extent that everyday life is viewed through and already created content measured against the lens of 'instaworthy.'"[10] Everyday life is seen through visual practices that are trained on social media; everyday experiences are encountered through the affective responses that this same media usage habituates.

My dissertation takes the integration of media-native feeling into the body and the embodied experience of everyday life seriously. As opposed to dismissing the extension of "Instaworthy" into the "real world" as a trivial or narcissistic aberration that only applies to a select number of (primarily young, female) social media "influencers," it argues that habitual media usage trains individuals' quotidian modes of navigating their environments and materially impacts physical sensations.[11] Indeed, the insistent and often awkward movement of media habits into the flesh is a form of technogenesis that has the power to reconfigure what the human is and how humans relate to one another in deeply embodied ways. An online practice of readerly response can spread until it becomes an offline "epidemic" of a "mild skin condition" that impacts the constitution of the body and infiltrates everyday interactions. Going beyond the aims of Medea's study, my work looks not just at how individuals use media to make sense of their environment, but how media usage impacts their capacities to sense and make sense even outside of media interfaces. Instead of exploring how particular media objects give people the feels, I draw on a range of minor

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[10] *Ibid.* italics mine

[11] I do not disagree with critics such as John Durham Peters who stress that technologies and techniques are themselves fundamentally material, however my focus is markedly more human-centric and is therefore most concerned with how media come to matter in the bodies and behaviors of human subjects. See *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

texts on the margins of avant-garde art and popular culture to examine how habitual interaction with dominant media forms can train feeling itself. Moreover, by focusing on corporeal and relational interactions, my dissertation stresses that ethical stakes of these modes of media engagement. Shaping how subjects encounter their own bodies and the bodies of others, they drive consequential responses to vulnerability, violence, and even war.

***

Feels, though, is simply a seed of this inquiry as opposed to its primary object. Suppositions about new media technologies' impacts on human perception are not unique to internet culture in spite of the commonly held belief that the digital is a radical rupture from the past. Accordingly, my dissertation takes a wide temporal view of what it means for media-conditioned habits of sense-making to move into bodies, relationships, and everyday life. Unearthing the barely perceptible perceptual shifts that are difficult to catch in the moment of their emergence, my project picks up where ethnographies of the twenty-first century like Medea's necessarily leave off. It turns instead toward media history as an analytic method to glimpse the dynamic "structures of feeling" that Raymond Williams argues are covertly dissolved within the experience of everyday life.

Western Europe's rapidly expanding visual media ecology—a site where concerns about the changing nature of the human and human feeling frequently surfaced—acts as the project's historical fulcrum. Much like early twenty-first century digital culture, this 1930s environment was defined by the rapidly increasing circulation of visual media content. In this period, technological advances integrated image-driven newspapers and magazines into the texture of everyday life for an increasingly large portion of the population. This proliferation of the mass media, augmentation of the reading public, and accelerating pace of photographic documentation profoundly impacted individuals' habitual practices of sense-

making. As a result (and also resembling twenty-first century discourse) the new forms of readership that emerged in this moment prompted widespread anxiety about how shifting patterns of media consumption might interfere with subjects' capacities to engage with the "real world." However, the hypnotic and shocking media effects that theorists diagnosed in the 1930s could not be fully bracketed as pop cultural fads with limited consequences for the majority of the population, as is often the case with topics like "Instaworthiness." Although some specific objects—including lowbrow popular culture and feminized publications like fashion magazines—were dismissively trivialized, in the interwar context it was painfully clear that even the most seemingly banal media consumption was not wholly separable from the concurrent mediated political mobilizations of citizens by Nazi fascism and other new propaganda machines.[12]

One of the most prominent critics addressing these concerns was Walter Benjamin, who famously theorized modern visual media technologies as perceptual training mechanisms that could alter the nature of human experience.[13] Most influentially, his writing links modern media ecologies to a population's relationship with violence, arguing that when fascism co-opts these new technologies for ritual purposes it can influence individuals' everyday aesthetic reception of the world such that the masses "experience their own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure."[14] Beyond this notorious example, Benjamin also describes how habitual media use alters the physical body and creates a new type of human

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[12] See Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Interwar Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004) for more on women and newspapers, and the feminization of the lowbrow popular press.

[13]He articulates this most explicitly in relation to film, underscoring the importance of the point with italics: "*The function of film is to train human beings in the apperceptions and reactions needed to deal with a vast apparatus whose role in their lives is expanding almost daily.*" Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael William Jennings, and Brigid Doherty (Harvard University Press, 2008), 26.

[14] *Ibid.,* 41.

organism with a rearranged perceptual organization—a "technologically transformed *physis*"—in more mundane ways. [15] He suggests that subjects' mimetic interactions with media encourage them to take on the apparatus's own ways of seeing and experiencing the present. Benjamin's model thus addresses how a technique like feels, of "distancing ourselves from our feeling online," that evolves out of online affordances can become a learned behavior for managing and experiencing emotion in everyday life.

Reading twenty-first century phenomena through Benjamin's lens is, of course, not a radical move; digital studies scholars from a wide variety of backgrounds frequently cite Frankfurt School theorists.[16] However, such work rarely seriously engages with the historical contexts or cultural productions adjacent to the theory. Representative of this tendency, Mark Hansen explicitly states the need to bracket history in order to make Benjamin relevant to critical questions in digital culture: "rather than focus on Benjamin's peculiar, admittedly fascinating historical moment, I want to ask what Benjamin can offer us in our effort to reconcile *experience* with the infrastructure of the emergent posthuman world."[17] While this approach creates its own set of instructive juxtapositions, my dissertation dwells longer in the details of the interwar moment and the insights that a multimodal array of its "minor" texts can offer the present instead of relying primarily on "pure theory." I demonstrate that a number of cultural artifacts from the period, which were deeply integrated in the everyday lives of the subjects who grappled with modern visual media ecologies, are underutilized resources for critically engaging with digital media effects.[18]

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[15] Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (University of California Press, 2012), 80.

[16] Including danah boyd, Richard Ericson, John Cheney-Lippold, Wendy Chun, Seb Franklin, Kevin Haggerty, Alexis Lothian, Zizi Pappacharissi, just to name a few.

[17] Mark Hansen, *Embodying Technesis: Technology Beyond Writing* (University of Michigan Press, 2000), 232.

[18] Minor objects that are, to a certain extent, on the same register as the music video and *Slate* article above.

The interwar era is also, in its own right, a particularly fertile place to pose my questions about the interlocking nature of embodiment, perception, and new media. Modernist studies' rigorous, historicist attention to aesthetics as both literary technique and technologically-conditioned sensation emphasizes the intersection of these concerns in the period's cultural productions As Michael North's argues, "that there should be some significant relation between aesthetic modernism and new media seems true almost by definition."[19] David Trotter's figuration of "Modernism's Media Theory" develops this stance further, claiming that the modernist artist was "on the watch for new emotions, new vibrations 'sensible to faculties as yet ill understood.' There would be no aesthetic that was not also a theory of media."[20] And Mark Goble's *Beautiful Circuits* likewise posits that many modernist texts were driven by "the expanded field of aesthetic possibility associated with modern media."[21] But the period's exceptional utility for understanding perceptual technogenetic shifts is perhaps best articulated by Sara Danius. Her reading of high modernist novels as aesthetic negotiations of new "technologies of perception" culminates in the claim that: "the modernist moment bears witness to a transition from *prosthesis* to *aisthesis*."[22] In other words, while obviously not the only era when new technologies transform from external appendages into fleshy forms of sensation, modernism makes the process abnormally visible by crystallizing it in its own striking aesthetic forms.

My dissertation develops out this critical cluster around modernism/modernity, while remaining firmly embedded in digital studies scholarship. To strategically juxtapose

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[19] Michael North, *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word* (Oxford University Press, 2005) v.
[20] David Trotter, "Modernism's Media Theory," *Critical Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (2016): 16.
Ezra Pound, 'The Wisdom of Poetry,' in Selected Prose 1909–1965, ed. William Cookson (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 329–32 (pp.230–31), qtd. in Trotter.
[21] Mark Goble, *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) 17.
[22] Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), 194.

these two traditions, each chapter uses interwar texts to trace an apparently born-digital characteristic of media readership through experiences of everyday life in the predigital 1930s. While the three concepts that I focus on—"real time," algorithmic filters, and sousveillance—were all first theorized in digital media environments, I show how they train readers' interpretive and relational practices in wider contexts. Locating them within an analog media ecology helps draw attention to the role of visual culture and circulation practices in establishing embodied media effects beyond the ontological status or detailed affordances of particular (digital or analog) devices. Moreover, by situating these terms within a multimodal selection of modern texts that all actively negotiate the ethically fraught intersection of corporeal vulnerability and the period's changing visual media ecology, I draw out the habitual practices by which media alter relational encounters between bodies.

Unlike the modernist scholars cited above, my archive (Evelyn Waugh's novel *Vile Bodies* and tabloids like *The Bystander*, Lee Miller's surrealist photography and war journalism for *British Vogue*, and publications from the Mass-Observation Movement) is composed of "lower brow" popular culture that feels far-removed watershed year of 1922. As opposed to the formal dexterity of high modernism, these minor texts are precariously strung between art and mass media, culture and its critique. But from their unwieldy hybrid vantages they bear witness to the evolving, technologically-conditioned nature of aesthetic experience; they disrupt the historically situated transition from "*prosthesis* to *aisthesis*" such that traces of feeling become tangible. By using these unsettled texts to occupy the ragged edge of late modernism instead of neatly excising its theoretical insights, my research lingers in the equally ragged connections between media and flesh. This messy inter-space, which captures an affectively adapting embodied human (that cannot pass as fully posthuman), illuminates

the subtle processes by which modes of media readership alter everyday affective experiences and shape the relational tissues binding subjects to their environment.

Pausing in the space between the wars also produces insights about critical praxis. Although Benjamin is only one of many theoretical sources in this project, I am indebted to his historicist philosophy and reflections on what it means to write a media history of the present. To use Miriam Hansen's synthesis:

> for Benjamin, actuality requires standing at once within and against one's time, grasping the 'temporal core' of the present in terms other than those supplied by the period about itself […] and above all in diametrical opposition to developments taken for granted in the name of 'progress.'[23]

Throughout my dissertation I strive to stand within and against my own moment, leveraging a Benjaminian form of actuality to offer new readings of interwar texts. These texts, in turn, cultivate alternative ways of approaching the present by re-articulating digital readership practices and affective formations in the absence of specific digital technologies. This method looks back at digital culture from without, defamiliarizing ingrained assumptions about its "media effects" and trajectories of technological "progress." These cross-temporal juxtapositions reveal the material habits of engagement and imagination that media ecologies can train on an everyday basis, while avoiding the limiting determinism that relying on particular devices often encourages. It enables me to engage with the affective orientations media ecosystems foment not just their specific technical affordances. Placing two disconnected moments in dialogue, while eschewing claims of equivalence or causality,

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[23] Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience,* 75.
Hansen cites Kracauer here because he begins the "Mass Ornament" by describing the importance of attending to the surface expressions of a period: "The position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface-level expressions than from that epoch's judgments about itself. Since these judgments are expressions of the tendencies of a particular era, they do not offer conclusive testimony about its overall constitution." Kracauer suggests that the way of going beyond the judgements of the moment is through the "unmediated unconscious" of these surface objects; by contrast the historicist thrust of the argument that Hansen puts forward and its connection to actuality is Benjamin's. Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," *The Mass Ornament and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Thomas Levine (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 75.

destabilizes the position of the reader and the critic such that these unprecipitated structures of feeling become palpable.

Media Histories, History's Media

My project takes methodological inspiration from theorists who have skirted linear or causal approaches to media history. These models suggest how conversations across two different historical moments can enrich critical engagement with both eras beyond tracing the evolution from one to another. While the questions I am invested in are not absent in the intervening years between the interwar period and the digital present, the project's goal is not to follow a continuous progression from the early twentieth century until now, but instead to use the 1930s to illuminate affective phenomena within digital culture that might otherwise be overlooked or hidden. At the same time, digital culture can hail interwar media with terms "other than those offered by the period itself."

Although Benjamin's description of a flash of history breaking into the present may be the most poetic way of encapsulating this methodology, other scholars have explored the unconventional possibilities of transhistorical analysis in more concrete ways. Friedrich Kittler, with his canonical *Discourse Networks: 1800/1900*, signals the critical potential of pairing two disparate moments without tracing a strictly continuous relationship between them. More recently Lisa Gitelman's *Always Already New* places two different media ecologies (one analog, one digital) in explicit dialogue in order to foreground user agency and examine

"the data of culture" within new technologies' developmental trajectories.[24] Richard Grusin and David Bolter's writing on remediation and Grusin's subsequent theorization of premediation are additional influential projects that address media history's unconventional temporalities and leverage them into analytic insights.[25] While these last two concepts draw closer to causality than the other examples, they still focus above all on leaps, tangles, ellipses. Media from different moments are intertwined in Gordian knots; their relationship is not simply one of progress, but of erratic dialogues that move simultaneously backwards and forwards in time.

Gitelman, Grusin, and Bolter's methods push back on the technological determinism that can so easily slip into discussions of new media in the present, where the digital is understood as an exceptional break from older forms. This attitude, that Vincent Mosco names "the digital sublime" and Gitelman identifies as the tendency to see the digital as "the end of media history," creeps into a wide range of canonical scholarship.[26] Kittler memorably claims that with digital technologies "something is coming to an end. The general digitization of channels and information erase the differences among individual media."[27] And Paul Virilio echoes these assumptions in apocalyptic terms, arguing that the internet allows for an accelerated virtualization of action, which uniquely undermines subjects' attachment to the real and inevitably culminates in "the first world war of time."[28] Even Jonathan Crary, who usually carefully attends to historical specificity, begins *Techniques of the Observer* with a

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[24] Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 2. Unlike Gitelman who sees her two moments as two different case studies for a larger argument about how media come to matter socially, my work leans into the particular insights the interwar era can offer the digital as opposed to viewing both as different exemplary moments in media history.

[25] David, J. Bolter and Richard A. Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000). Richard Grusin, *Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11* (New York: Springer, 2010).

[26] Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace.* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

[27] Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 1.

[28] Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb* (New York: Verso, 2005), 143.

discussion of the digital's drastic difference. In his estimation, computer-generated imagery dematerializes vision and "is part of a sweeping reconfiguration of relations between an observing subject and modes of representation that effectively nullifies most of the culturally established meanings of the terms observer and representation."[29] While the digital undoubtedly beckons in its own modes of subjectivity and media readership, one of the many lessons that modernism can teach is that crisis and rupture are rarely so complete.

In addition to texts that foreground cross-temporal methodological experimentation, my project is in dialogue with scholars who posit historical connections between early twentieth century and digital media forms. Among the most prominent of these is Lev Manovich, who succinctly pinpoints the 1920s avant-garde as the origin of "new media" in a mere two sentences of explanation:

> from the point of view of mass communication, the key decade was the 1920s. Between the second part of the 1910s and the end of the 1920s, all key modern visual communication techniques were developed: photo and film montage, collage, classical film language, surrealism, the use of sex appeal in advertisement, modern graphic design, modern typography.[30]

While this cursory justification may lack argumentative substance, Manovich is not alone in making claims about the interwar moment as the genesis of new media. Specialists in modernism have made similar assertions about the period's status as an origin point. Trotter, for example, terms 1927-1930 Britain the "first media age."[31] He backs up this claim by arguing that this phase of media development was radically novel because it reached unprecedented numbers of people in unprecedentedly pervasive ways. Due to its overwhelmingly rapid expansion (from the cheap rotary press to the cinema, from the radio

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[29] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 1.
[30] Lev Manovich, "Avant-garde as Software," (Media Revolutions, 1999).
[31] David Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age (*Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013

to the telephone): "it began to seem that the hold mass media maintained over the public mind had become a stranglehold."[32] In his estimation, the seemingly unbridled influx of media into everyday life during these years added forms of connectivity and interaction faster than the human could comfortably adapt.

Unlike these critics, my choice of the latter half of interwar era is not based on claims about the period's media environment as an origin point. Nor does it simply rely on proximity to the Frankfurt School as a principal justification. Instead I see the combination of the period's quickly expanding quotidian media ecology in tandem with its heightened concern about the ethical and political stakes of media readership to be a particularly productive context in which to position my research. Tyrus Miller's *Late Modernism* discusses the peculiarity of this semi-porous period between high modernism and postmodernism in depth.[33] He argues that late modernist literature is shaped by the era's fraught politics and subjects' uncomfortable negotiations of their heavily mediated and mechanized environment. Caught within multiple technopolitical crises, late modernist novels frequently feature forms that fail to fit together or that seem on the verge of disintegration; likewise, their characters barely hold a human shape as they are seized by the tense pull of these historical forces. In Miller's words:

> If modernist texts are a mesh of interrelated statements, evaluations, and judgments, then late modernist writing is the product of the pressure of historical circumstances on that mesh, which threatens to fray or break at its weakest points. Late modernism does indeed deform and change the shape and function of that network; yet it also heightens latent strains within it.[34]

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[32] *Ibid.*, 3.
[33] Alan Wilde qtd. In Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars* (Berkeley: U. California Press, 1999) 11.
[34] Miller, *Late Modernism,* 19.

The frayed deformation of connections in these interwar texts reveals the feedback loop between human and media that contributes to embodied, technogenetic change. In their continual malfunctioning, such circuits become exaggerated and unusually visible. Furthermore, in spite of this mechanistic emphasis, there is no mistaking these characters as fully posthuman given the texts' unyielding insistence on human vulnerability and mortality.

Perhaps because of these qualities that Miller points to, modernism and modernist scholarship have both been central not just to the considerations of technology and aesthetic perception discussed above, but also to emphatically embodied theorizations of affect in human-machine interaction. Justus Nieland's *Feeling Modern* and Jessica Burstein's *Cold Modernism* are prime examples of how discussions of modern emotions frequently turn to machinic metaphors and cyborg subjects.[35] In the former, public feelings are defined by new kinds of impersonal sensory amusement that new technologies enable; in the latter the interior, emotional life of human subjects disappears as individuals resemble automatons. Additionally, Tim Armstrong's *Modernism, Technology, and the Body* and Hal Foster's "Prosthetic Gods" both tie together new technologies, the visible contingency of bodies in a post WWI world, and the inception of a prosthetically enhanced hybrid human-machine subject. In this context, the prosthetic trope that is so frequently metaphorically deployed in media studies is powerfully present in the population's many injured bodies. Late modernist texts therefore often can preserve the fleshy nature of technogenesis.

Within interwar Britain a number of factors converge around the beginning of the 1930s. These include the development of new visual media forms and circulation techniques like the picture press, wire photos, photographic retouching techniques, and artificial lighting

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[35] Jessica Burstein, *Cold Modernism: Literature, Fashion, Art* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2012). Justus Nieland, *Feeling Modern: The Eccentricities of Public Life* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

technologies. Moreover, by this point the silence about the Great War was finally beginning to break. Although "no version of the war from 1919-1926 has entered the canon" and during this immediate post-war period "the greatest prose books had yet to be written," by the late twenties the era's imaginative vacuum was finally being filled.[36] The belated emergence of these narrative accounts led to widespread reflection about the wartime's ethical contracts binding nations and citizens, the home front and the front line. These ties appeared particularly urgent as Nazism abroad and Blackshirt fascism within Britain were on the rise, supported by sophisticated propaganda machinery that implicated civilian bodies in total war more than ever before.

Although "interwar" might seem like an anachronistic label, the anxious anticipation of WWII was entrenched in the period's structures of feeling well before the conflict officially began. In Paul St. Amour's gloss, the interwar era "was understood by many from its midst, even from its inception, as an interval between the First World War and its likely sequel."[37] Subjects were submerged in both the commemoration and anticipation of mass violence on an everyday basis. Furthermore, given the importance of propaganda to both conflicts and the increased prevalence of photographic documentations of war in the intervening years due to the Spanish Civil War, the late modern stakes of responding to pain were clearly connected to the new modes of communication that emerging media forms were establishing.

Closing out this discussion of history and methods I want to reiterate again that, just as my approach is not about describing a causal progression from one media ecology into

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[36] Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: The Bodley Head, 1990), 423.
[37] Paul St. Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedia Form* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 34. See also Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2019) for more on the affects of anticipation in the period.

another, it is also not about drawing direct equivalences between twenty-first century digital culture and the 1930s. The unique events and contexts of each period do not easily map onto other moments. Nevertheless, this juxtaposition reveals their resonances in productive ways. Locating digital terms in a pre-digital media ecology is frequently messy, but this very convolution is what transforms them into tools that reveal modern "structures of feeling" and re-train us to read the present.

Terms of Engagement

Constructing a provisional theoretical framework to support this tangled encounter between past and present without collapsing the two eras together, this section introduces a set of conceptual nodes that run throughout the project—open-ended provocations that scaffold its major preoccupations and premises. These "terms of engagement" stand here as a contextual safety net(work) that moors the following chapters to shared queries and interlocutors. Gesturing outwards toward other ongoing scholarly stories, these terminological thought-clusters stake out a field within which the project can begin to operate on its texts' own terms.

Feeling/Aesthetics

The barely perceptible norms that define sensation and sense-making in a given historical moment are famously described by Raymond Williams as "structures of feeling." He characterizes these phenomena as emergent modes of experience that arise out of particular sociohistorical contexts and guide the ways individuals construct meaning in the world; "structures of feeling," he metaphorizes, are "social experiences in solution, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more

evidently and more immediately available."[38] Williams's theorization of feeling as a historically contextual orientation towards everyday experience is at the heart of this dissertation. I take up his essay's challenge to cultural theorists to excavate emergent "alive, active, 'subjective'" modes of navigating given historical moments without converting them into fixed products and artificially *precipitating* them.[39] Taking "feels" as part of twenty-first century structures of feeling, for example, means refusing to stabilize it immediately as a symptom of postmodern disinterest. Likewise, in the interwar moment this approach requires resisting sweeping diagnoses of modern subjects as sleepwalking, shocked, and numb. Throughout this project I strive to let feeling remain precariously open as opposed to ossifying into solid, finished phenomena in order to foreground visual media's influence on "meanings and values as they are actually lived and felt." [40]

While structures of feeling cannot be isolated within a particular text or work of art, their elusive traces are visible in embodied aesthetic encounters. Although some strands of aesthetic theory emphasize disinterested intellectual judgement, both Baumgarten's original conceptualization of this "science of sensible cognition" and many modernist scholars highlight its fundamentally corporeal nature.[41] For example, Susan Buck-Morss follows Baumgarten in synthesizing aesthetics as "a form of cognition, achieved through taste, touch, hearing, seeing, smell—the whole corporeal sensorium."[42] Understood in this way, aesthetics is deeply relational. As Tobin Siebers simply but powerfully summarizes, "aesthetics tracks the feelings some bodies feel in the presence of other bodies."[43]

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[38] Raymond Williams, "Structures of Feeling," *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford Paperbacks: 1977), 133-4.
[39] *Ibid.*, 128.
[40] Williams, "Structures of Feeling," 132.
[41] As translated by Dirk Michel-Schertges, "Aesethetics as a Precondition for Revolution," *The Palgrave Handbook of Critial Theory*, ed. Michael J. Thompson (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017), 329.
[42] Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered" *October* 62 (1992), 6.
[43] Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 1 .

Encounters between body and world, body and aesthetic object, and body and body are all places where structures of feeling at least momentarily materialize. Aesthetics can thus enable situated and embodied critical examinations of a given context's affective dynamics.[44]

Sensible/Visible

Jacques Rancière addresses the ethical and political implications of such aesthetic encounters by coining the "distribution of the sensible" to describe "what is seen and what can be said about it."[45] The sensible maps "the landscape of the visible" and thereby defines "the relationship between doing, making, being, seeing, and saying."[46] As his close alignment of the sensible and the visible suggests, vision is a privileged sense in Rancière's account. Habits and capacities of vision, established by a history of aesthetic encounters and the resulting distribution of the sensible, create a horizon line demarcating what is imaginable, readable, and doable in the world at any given moment.

These horizons of visibility don't merely exist outside of the body but also seep into it and alter the senses themselves. Crary's discussion of the nineteenth century observer makes a compelling case for how new visual technologies create seeing subjects that are particular to the new fields of vision they establish:

> The problem of the observer is the field on which vision in history can be said to materialize, to become visible. Vision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both the historical product and the site of certain practices, technologies, institutions, and procedures of subjectivity.[47]

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[44] Patrick Jagoda's recent *Network Aesthetics*, for example, argues that aesthetics offer an "expansive rubric for sensing and thinking through culture." Patrick Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 5.
[45] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible (*London: Continuum, 2004), 13.
[46] *Ibid.*, 42.
[47] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer,* 5.

To put it another way, historically contingent habits of seeing are integral not just to what is seen but also to who is doing the seeing. Orit Halpern extends this claim into a different period in her study of post-45 "vision and reason." Affirming that "our forms of attention, observation, and truth are situated, contingent and contested and that the ways we are trained, and train ourselves to observe, document, record, and analyze the world are deeply historical in character," she offers another example of how specific media environments generate their own kinds of seeing subjects.[48]

In the British interwar era, the situated production of the observing subject is not tied to optical toys and psychophysics, as in Crary's work, or to the prevalence of data-driven modes of visualization that Halpern discusses. The problem of the observer in this moment is instead most frequently framed as a crisis in her ability to observe at all, in the widespread impoverishment of the sensible. The interwar texts this project engages are less concerned with new media's revelation of a brand new worldview that changes individuals' conception of reality than with subtle changes to the mechanisms by which already-established visual technologies circulate and integrate into reality. For example, by this point photographs are not incredibly novel to the majority of the population, but their increasing immediacy, standardization, and ubiquity all change how individuals interact with and aesthetically respond to them. The distribution of the sensible in this period is thus fundamentally linked to the changing circulation of mass media forms, and with the anxieties they provoke about human feeling becoming disconnected from this circuit.

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[48] Orit Halpern, *Beautiful Data: A History of Vision and Reason Since 1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015) 1.

Reading

Interwar Britain's evolving norms of media circulation are inseparable from a contemporaneous imagination of the reading public. Reading is a key term throughout the dissertation because its central texts are inextricable from an imagetextual interwar press culture that includes daily newspapers, tabloid spreads, fashion magazines, and more. While modern mediums were increasingly visual, many of the conventions readers used to interact with them—such as tactilely flipping through their pages—were primarily established by earlier text-based forms. Moreover, the new circuits between readers and media objects that emerged in this era were all laid on top of the foundational routes already established by Britain's much longer tradition of print culture.

Reading is also significant on a more conceptual level because anxieties about new media ecologies' destructive impacts on human communication are frequently framed in terms of changes to reading habits and the reading subject. In *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,* Kittler argues that when the only means of preserving the past is writing, a reader must actively convert symbolic traces into living, meaningful content. However, new media prompt different practices that transform what reading entails: "once memories and dreams, the dead and ghosts become technologically reproducible, readers and writers no longer need the powers of hallucination."[49] As photography, film, and sound recording, all sidestep the need for an engaged human reader to conjure imaginative visions, Kittler questions the durability of this seemingly essential ability.[50]

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[49]Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 10.

[50] In particular he succinctly claims that "once storage media can accommodate optical and acoustic data, the memory capacity of humans is bound to dwindle." *Ibid.*, 10.

Conjuring capacities aside, readership's theoretical importance also stems from a widespread belief that readers' immersion in fictional worlds impacts how they approach reality outside of the text.[51] In particular, reading has frequently been framed as a means of cultivating ethical responsibility and tolerance in everyday life. Martha Nussbaum, for example, forwards the notion of "narrative imagination" to describe how textual immersions transfer empathic capacities into real world experiences.[52] Operating under these premises, the position of the reader is essential to my argument because it highlights parallelism between engagement with media and the "real world." Additionally, I draw these two spheres into even closer contact throughout the project by treating readerly practices as embodied ways of occupying that world instead of primarily discursive constructions. As Lauren Berlant's work emphasizes, familiar narrative forms undergird the basic emotional habits that individuals use to navigate the world and interpret their feelings, offering tools for "figuring out the terms and genres for valuing living."[53] Engaging with stories and interpretively reading reality are essential ways subjects affectively situate their own experiences and orient themselves toward others.[54]

Retrojection

The concept of "retrojection" also amplifies reading's value as a key term by diagramming a feedback loop between discourse, embodiment, and feeling. In Joanna Bourke's account, retrojection refers to the ways stories of the body continually enter back

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[51] Indeed this is often the driving principle behind requiring medical humanities coursework for medical students
[52] Nussbaum argues: "Narrative imagination is an essential preparation for moral interaction. Habits of empathy and conjecture conduce to a certain type of citizenship and a certain form of community." *Cultivating Humanity* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 90.
[53] Lauren Gail Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 44.
[54] Anne Balsamo also explores the embodied aspects of reading in relations to new media on a more literal level in her discussion of the XFR exhibit, arguing that "In focusing on the body of the reader these interactives probed another dimension of the future of reading: the role of the body in the practice of meaning making." *Designing Culture: The Technological Imagination at Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 86.

into and revise the flesh. For Bourke, this cycle is especially evident when it comes to the experience of pain. As she elaborates:

> Naming can instruct bodies how to respond. This concept of 'retrojection', or the means by which ways of naming pain are mapped back into the flesh, is important for any historian of the body. When a series of figurative languages or concepts for pain are repeated time and again from infancy, they become internalized and infused literally within the individual's body. Through retrojection, sufferers 'infuse the imagery of cultural metaphors' into their bodies, thus, feeling "the power of discourse within."[55]

Retrojection describes an active, ongoing dialogue between cultural objects and corpora that materially influences what bodies feel and how they are understood by others. As a result not even pain can be reduced to a bounded physiological object, but is instead "a way of being in the world or a way of naming an event […] pain is practiced within relational environmental contexts. There is no decontextual pain-event."[56] Structures of feeling, aesthetic experiences, and the distribution of the sensible can all be understood as background conditions from which embodiment and the perception of the human body necessarily emerge. Building on these ideas, my dissertation suggests that, in addition to rhetorical frames, subjects' habitual practices of reading visual media are also "mapped back into the flesh" and constitute a "relational environmental context" from which embodied feeling emerges. Retrojection points toward the complex material processes through which new technologies, by becoming part of communicative and narrative circuits, can end up transforming human sensory/aesthetic capacities. [57]

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[55] Joanna Bourke, T*he Story of Pain: From Prayer to Painkillers (*Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014), 20. Bourke takes the term retrojection from anthropologist Michael Kimmel, who she quotes in this citation: "Properties of Cultural Embodiment," *Body, Language and Mind (Vol. 2). Interrelations Between Biology, Linguistics and Culture (*Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 77-108.

[56] Bourke, *The Story of Pain*, 8.

[57] Bourke's retrojection is closely linked to discussions in feminist science and technology studies that interrogate the line between culture and biology. See, for example, Elizabeth A. Wilson, *Gut Feminism* (Duke University Press: 2015). However, the emphasis on process in Bourke's term is especially well-suited for this project's focus on connective tissue and technogenetic evolutions.

The visual, and primarily photographic, interwar media that I take as my primary objects of analysis intensify the felt, corporeal nature of this phenomenon even more than the circulating cultural metaphors Bourke focuses on. This is not only due to the importance of vision in distributing the sensible and establishing the possibilities of the observing subject, but also reflects the deeply visceral nature of photography itself. As Elizabeth Abel reminds us, photography is "a medium whose special relationship to touch is often noted and whose surface is often figured as a second skin."[58] This physicality of photography also uniquely facilitates my proposed critical praxis of occupying the connective tissue between media and body. Indeed Roland Barthes evokes his own version of this figure in a famous reflection that: "A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze; light, though here impalpable, is a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed."[59] Beyond the many ways in which language and narrative seep into the flesh, habits of touching and feeling visual media on a daily basis also alter how the body is "instructed to respond."

Technogenesis

Using retrojection to describe the evolving conjunctions of media and corpus diverges notably from more canonical conceptions of technogenesis in media studies, such as the figure of "prosthesis." Sigmund Freud famously evoked prosthesis in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) in response to new technology's gruesome complicity in mass violence at the start of the twentieth century. In spite of affirming modern man enhanced with tools as a "prosthetic god," he included the grave caveat that "those [auxiliary organs] have not grown

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[58] Elizabeth Abel, "Skin, Flesh, and the Affective Wrinkles of Civil Rights Photography," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 20, no. 2 (2012): 36.
[59] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (1980), Trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000) 81.

on to him and still give him much trouble."[60] Decades later, Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media*: *Extensions of Man* expounded on the trope in more detail and popularized it in media studies. In McLuhan's view, all media are expansive forms of prosthesis because they take human communication and perception beyond its embodied limits. At the same time, though, his writing also draws attention to a concurrent "autoamputation" that accompanies extension; an organ or capacity of the body is cut off as its function is transferred to the newly added technological "limb." Under this schema the prosthetic device extends the body into new activities, but its use reductively alters the original organism's anatomy.

A number of alternative models have revised the prosthetic trope and forwarded less normative, ableist, and masculine views of technogenesis.[61] Donna Haraway's famous "ironic dream" of a radically hybrid cyborg complicates the interface of human and machine by unraveling the binaries that cut boundaries between these two categories in the first place. And N. Katherine Hayles situates her influential explanation of posthumanism in direct opposition to prosthesis:

> becoming posthuman means much more than having prosthetic devices grafted onto one's body. It means envisioning humans as information processing machines with fundamental similarities to other kinds of information processing machines.[62]

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[60] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1962) 39.
[61] Despite its conceptual utility and scholarly ubiquity, prosthesis has been critiqued as a flawed metaphor, perhaps most powerfully from a disability studies perspective. Sarah Jain, for example, convincingly argues that the prosthesis trope dematerializes the body in ways that frequently obfuscate both the enabling and injurious aspects of technology's relationship with real physical bodies. Sarah S. Jain, "The prosthetic imagination: Enabling and disabling the prosthesis trope," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 24.1 (1999): 31-54.
Rosi Braidotti posits the posthuman as a means of moving past assumptions about the "natural" human self, which has traditionally been synonymous an autonomous, white, male, able-bodied, liberal subject. Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley) 2013.
[62] Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 246.

Hayles argues that dominant imaginaries about how meaning is constructed and where information resides change the nature of the human body more than the physical attachment of new devices onto its external form.[63] Her discussion of posthumanism is especially generative because, as opposed to focusing on a particular technology as an isolated added limb, it considers the holistic transformation of human subjects within their technohistorical contexts.

Yet, while I am indebted to Hayles's work, my engagement with the interwar era does not neatly fit this template. The 1930s texts I draw on depict a dynamic form of technogenesis that, like posthumanism, holistically alters the body beyond the surface level. However, echoing Freud's writing in this same era, they also stress the way "the organs have not grown on to him and still give him much trouble at time." Despite its profound integration into the body, this media ecology does not create even the semblance of a new posthuman subject. Its coupling with the human subjects is frictive in ways that preserve a rough, unsteady border between humans and media objects even as those media objects retrojectively shape corporeality.[64] My interwar archive underscores how this circuit, while deeply embodied and tightly bound, is also glitchy—fraught with troubled or interrupted transmissions. These late modern texts belie subjects' inability to become fully posthuman or cyborgic in spite of the many machinic fantasies that were forwarded throughout these

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[63] Mark Hansen's trio of books *Embodying Technesis, New Philosophy for New Media,* and *Bodies in Code* all draw heavily on Hayles's view of the posthuman to explore technogenesis in affective and phenomenological terms. The last book in particular turns to the pre-personal and haptic body in order to address a driving aim of his whole body of work: "to prepare the ground for an expanded analysis of technological materiality, one capable of exploring specifically those materializations through which technologies mediate the material rhythms of embodied life." In many ways Hansen articulates the same question this dissertation pursues. However, as opposed to dissolving the conscious individual into the posthuman or the pre-personal to get at the "material rhythms of embodied life," I understand these rhythms as palpable in everyday lived habits of sense-making and readership. Mark Hansen, *Embodying Technesis: Technology Beyond Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 4.

[64] This tactile materiality of the interwar picture press's print culture also distinguishes my discussion from Hayles' emphasis on informational imaginaries.

years.[65] Focusing on a process-based version technogenesis that resembles retrojection and that highlights visceral quality of the period's visual print media ecology foregrounds the dynamic experience of individual human bodies throughout this dissertation. It sits with ongoing structures of feeling and relational interactions as new media habits are (often awkwardly) etched into the flesh.

Embodiment/Feminism

In its consistent concern with corporeal materiality and its embodied treatment of vision, the dissertation continually aspires toward a situated form of feminist media history. I am guided by Anne Balsamo's call to feminist critics in her reading of cyborg women to "resist the easily dissolution or dematerialization of the body."[66] And, despite my divergence from Hayles' vision of the posthuman subject, I take inspiration from her discussion of a posthuman future that is not "seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality."[67] Pushing aside the militaristic and masculine ideals of the prosthetic god, I strive to instead linger with the minor, relational, and affective negotiations that occur on a daily basis between bodies and media, bodies and bodies, bodies and history. The project's insistence on corporeal contingency and vulnerability plays a key role in sustaining this approach throughout the chapters. To quote Vivian Sobchack, "there is nothing like a little pain to […] counter the romanticism and fantasies of technosexual transcendence that characterize so much of the current discourse on the techno-body."[68]

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[65] As described compellingly in Hal Foster, "Prosthetic Gods," *Modernism/modernity* 4. 2 (1997).
[66] Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 40.
[67] Hayles, *Posthuman*, 5.
[68] Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 167.

Haraway offers her own critique disembodied knowledge and fantasies of transcendence in her work on "situated knowledge." Here she contests vision's historical imbrication in a distant and omniscient god's eye view in order to relocate it within the feeling and "permanently mortal" body:[69]

> insisting metaphorically on the particularity and embodiment of all vision (although not necessarily organic embodiment and including technological mediation), and not giving in to the tempting myths of vision as a route to disembodiment and second-birthing .[70]

Her insistence on embodiment suggests that vision is always partial, shifting, local, and constantly in the process of being negotiated. My project internalizes this ethic of "feminist objectivity" by attending to vision's reliance on relational encounters between bodies and by affirming its contingent precarity. Moreover, it aligns with Haraway's corollary that "subjugated standpoints" can contribute to richer and more ethically accountable forms of knowledge construction—not because they are inherently more clear-sighted but because they frequently have acquired an advanced repertoire of visual techniques that make them "least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge."[71] Thus, without claiming or desiring to construct a unified female perspective of interwar media or digital culture, throughout the dissertation I attend to female bodies (from little shopgirls to "Instagram models") and frequently-trivialized feminized media objects (tabloids, fashion magazines, and diaries) in order to learn from their particular affectively attuned and situated vantages. The dissertation thus aims to let media historical methods emerge from these embodied, optical tactics.

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[69] For a comprehensive discussion of the "ocularcentric" basis of Western philosophy see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
[70] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of the Partial Perspective," *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 188.
[71] *Ibid.,* 191.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 2 extends the methodology outlined in this introduction by locating real time in the 1930s and exploring its melancholic impacts on subjects' engagement with the present. While the tabloids existed earlier, the enhancement of technologies like halftoning and photo-wiring in this era transformed the number of quality photographs they could publish as well as the speed of their reporting. Kracauer lamented that this evolving form of illustrated news created a "photographable present" that diminished both awareness and memory.[72] By putting this interwar media environment in dialogue with more recent digital studies scholarship, I argue that the temporally unsettled 1930s "photographable present" can be understood as a form of "real time" that highlights this concept's underexamined relational, readerly, and affective characteristics. In doing so, I extend Tung-Hui Hu's argument that "real time" is not a concrete technological measure or inherently tied to digital media, but is instead a particular melancholic attitude towards representation and reality. The chapter then traces the consequences of real time reading through the celebrity culture of Britain's Bright Young People (including the trajectory of notorious fascist socialite Diana Mitford) and Evelyn Waugh insider engagement with their tabloid-targeted antics in his 1930 novel *Vile Bodies*. Waugh's novel compellingly highlights how the affective habits that real time media disseminate can turn readers into bystanders of their own present experiences and disturb more conventional narrative structures of sense-making. Moreover the uncomfortably doubled reading experience that the text itself creates in its distorted mirroring of Waugh's contemporary reality forces the reader of the novel to also confront real time's melancholic impacts.

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[72] Siegfried Kracauer, trans. Thomas Y. Levin, "Photography," *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essay*s (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 58.

Chapter 3 looks closer at corporeal form by interrogating the standardized filters that are ubiquitous on twenty-first century mobile phones and social media platforms by aligning them with the 1930s photographic "semiotics of glamour." Lighting, camera, and retouching technologies in this period enabled a hard, smooth, and sculpted image of the body to be reliably mass produced and normalized in much the same way digital algorithmic filters alter photographed flesh today. Lee Miller's unusually diverse oeuvre repeatedly interrogates how these standardizing technological protocols act on the body and mobilizes an arresting disability aesthetic to literalize their corporeal effects. Drawing on her own experiences with chronic pain, her surrealist images turn glamour's technical features against themselves to highlight contingency instead of perfection. Moreover, her unnervingly glamorous depiction of dead Nazis in her war journalism for *British Vogue* emphasizes how the everyday representation of the body can fuel fascist politics and what Siebers terms the "aesthetics of human disqualification." I conclude by drawing parallels between Miller's work and Cindy Sherman's use of filters on the Instagram account she made public in 2017. In addition to underscoring the chapter's relevance to understandings of digital culture, my reading of Sherman's selfies clarifies the relational dynamics of filtering by probing how algorithmic protocols shield readers from their own affective responses. Her abject bodies slip through the conventional filters of fashion or social media, forcing readers to witness their own everyday reliance on the standardized modes of visualization that protect them from visceral encounters with vulnerability and difference.

Chapter 4 pivots deeper into the situated vision of the interwar readers, examining how new visual media technologies can foment political engagement and creative habits of sense-making. Focusing on the British Mass-Observation Movement's publications, practices, and films between 1937-9, I redefine *sousveillance* as a habit of socially situated

storytelling that is rooted in visual media imaginaries as opposed to a particular apparatus. While sousveillance is usually considered a product of particular networked digital technologies (like cell phone cameras that can capture instances of police brutality and share them on social media), Mass-Observation's strange hybrid artistic/anthropologic media experiment in the late thirties exemplifies how this practice functions in a broader range of contexts and, above all, in less technologically dependent ways. The movement's work affirms everyday visual practices as vehicles of empowered storytelling by which individuals can enter into larger political communities of *dissensus,* while also drawing on interwar visual media forms as resources to enhance this vision. These initiatives aimed to teach the population to actively, interpretively participate in their environment by embracing the affective and socially situated distortions of their own "subjective cameras." While this idealization of distorted narratives may seem dangerous in our current political landscape of "fake news," I argue that sousveillance points to the potential of a weak politics that brings individuals' distortions into view not to create alternate realities but to recognize "feminist objectivity" as the ethical center of individuals' political agency within larger collectives.

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The processes by which new media move into everyday habits of sense-making, slip into structures of feeling, and retrojectively act on the flesh are difficult to trace as they unfold in the present. Much like the static in Kiiara's video, such affective shifts dynamically surround us at all times but cannot be paused easily for the sake of examination. We are usually too much a part of them to find the sites where they become visible or to parse their migration into material bodies in order to grasp how they "instruct bodies to respond." It is so hard to hold onto these real embodied enactments, hard to catch the feels long enough to perceive their mechanisms of contagion, except when they are thoroughly defamiliarized,

placed under tension, frayed at the edges. My approach to media history helps us encounter a new image of past media and the bodies of 1930s readers both within and against our current vantage. The pressure the twenty-first century digital visual media ecology exerts on human flesh and its particular fraught ethics of relational, feeling readership can also be newly apprehended in this meeting—if only through a flicker of the past, a moment of profane illumination.

Chapter 2

Reading Real Time:

Tabloid Visuality, Melancholy Bystanders, *Vile Bodies*

all that succession and repetition of massed humanity… Those vile bodies…

- *Evelyn Waugh (1930)*

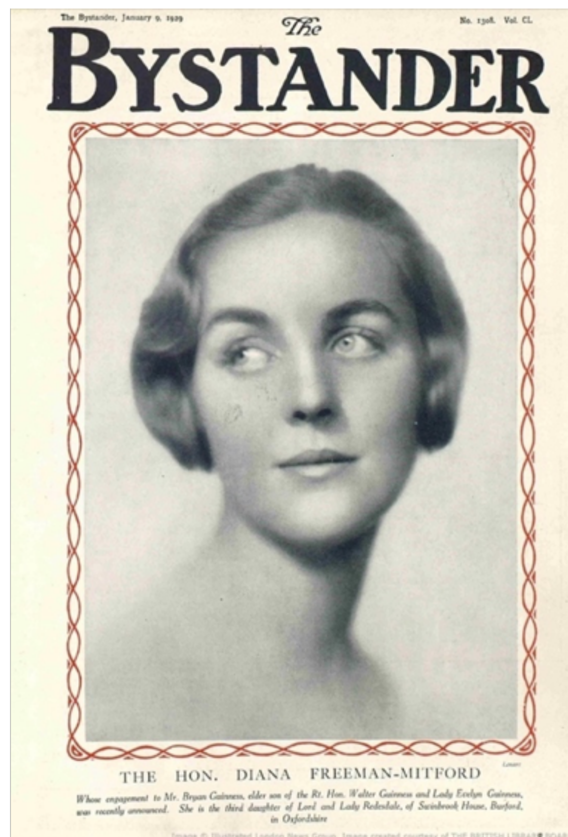

Figure 2.1 Portrait of Diana Mitford in The Bystander (1929) [73]

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[73] *The Bystander,* 1/9/1929, scanned version by *The British Newspaper Archive*, pp. 3, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/results?basicsearch=diana%20mitford&somesearch=diana%20mitford&retrievecountrycounts=false&newspapertitle=the%2bbystander (accessed 10/10/2018).

On *The Bystander*'s January 9, 1929 cover "The Hon. Diana Freeman-Mitford," reproduced in a gauzy halftone photograph, gazes askance [Fig. 2.1]. While her face is squared to the camera, her torso turns away and her eyes conspicuously dart out of the photographic field. At the same time, her bare body slips from the defined limits of the stark red braided frame and dissipates into a cloudlike cluster outside the visual purview of the reader. The magazine's name draws attention to the relational dynamics embedded in the image, foregrounding Mitford's strangely absent, disengaged presence—an effect both the pose and the medium establish. She is an ambivalent bystander to the casual visual consumption of her image, the unseen object her eyes gesture at, and the dissolution of her body through the halftone's pointillistic effects. Additionally, the cover chiastically reflects back the reader's own bracketed, bystanding relation to the portrait. The decorative frame and explanatory caption below are barriers around the photographed subject that obstruct immersion in image-space and limit interpretative engagement. Even though Mitford's body is immortalized through photography, it is printed on a disposable, transient medium that demands only cursory attention. Her backward-looking glance is a reminder that as the reader skims the caption and flips to the next page the photograph is already forgotten, out of sight, and relegated to the past. Even as she is being read, she has already disappeared from view.

Bystanders in this print culture context might automatically evoke a more recent image of the notoriously ethically suspect British tabloids, especially after their public scrutiny in relation to the death of a different Diana. Yet this is not the only meaning embedded in the term or even in its intersection with tabloid culture. By contrast, bystanding can be approached as a much more fundamental habit of modern life that is encouraged by evolving norms in the picture press, and that extends far beyond a small selection of over-

zealous reporters into larger swaths of a mass readership. Taking the OED's definition of a "bystander" as "one who is standing by; one who is present without taking part in what is going on; a passive spectator," the production of bystanders is actually a deeply entrenched goal of mass news media, which frequently strives to offer readers access to events in which they cannot physically participate.[74] The increasing penetration of the press into everyday life in the interwar era multiplied the situations in which subjects were bystanders by increasing the ratio between the events they distantly observed in the papers and those in which they took part. These developments naturalized new reading habits that individuals carried with them not just into their media consumption but also regular interpersonal interactions. Although this broadened notion of bystanding might at first appear to trivialize the concept, I hope to show in this chapter that attending to these seemingly mundane manifestations can give it new purchase in relation to trauma and loss.

Technological advances were essential to the development of a 1930s bystanding reading public. Improved halftoning techniques enhanced the quality of printed images and increased publications' use of visual content; the ubiquity of the telephone allowed eye-witness verbal accounts to be directly relayed and recorded in print; wirephoto devices transformed the speed at which photographs could be reproduced in faraway papers. This increasingly "real time" style of documentation, with its ideals of immediacy and indexicality, appeared to give readers constant in-depth access to the present. Its photo-centrism and speed combined to make audiences feel perpetually "there" in the moment as opposed to encountering relayed narratives in retrospect. As the distance between the record of the present and its actuality seemed to collapse in the picture press, subjects' relationship to

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[74] "bystander", OED Online, Oxford University Press, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/o/oed/oed-idx?q1=bystander&type=Lookup (accessed 5/22/2018).

reality and to time evolved in response. These shifts raised the possibility that a new generation of readers might lose the ability to engage meaningfully with durational narratives, altering what it meant to participate in the present.

This chapter traces how the reading habits real time media and their technological imaginaries disseminate influence individuals' responses to pain and trauma even in seemingly unmediated contexts. It focuses on how the interwar era's quickly developing print media ecology impacted the audiences' affective engagement with the present in ways that appeared to naturalize presence without participation on an everyday basis. After summarizing some key sociotechnical conditions of the modern British press with a short historical overview, I turn to two important 1930s theorizations of this period's new media ecology: Siegfried Kracauer's diagnosis of "the photographed and photographable present" and Walter Benjamin's discussion of the concomitant "decline of storytelling."[75] These interwar theorists argued that the increasingly common and rapid production of image-saturated publications—which favored ephemeral, decontextualized information over active awareness or interpretative engagement—was altering how human experience was read. As readers discarded embodied and durational modes of sense-making to keep up with the accelerating pace of a real time media ecology, their imaginative narrative abilities risked falling into disuse. While taking Kracauer and Benjamin's somewhat alarmist views of the interwar press seriously, this chapter supplements them with recent digital studies scholarship in order to provides a more affectively complex and ambivalent view of real time reading. Drawing, for example, on Tung-Hui Hu's 2015 discussion of real time's

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[75] Siegfried Kracauer, trans. Thomas Y. Levin, "Photography," *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essay*s (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskow." *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections (*New York: Schocken, 1969).

"melancholy imagination," I address how modern readers' media-conditioned bystander position was colored less by numb disinterest and more by a vague, uneasy, and disempowering sense that their relationship to the real was shifting in ways that seemed to place the present at an untouchably safe distance.

My reading of Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930), a novel that was dedicated to cover girl Diana Mitford the year after her portrait was published in *The Bystander*, drives this argument. The text is itself ambivalently located in relation to the interwar press in ways that illuminate real time media's tense pull on readers. By straddling the line between novelistic fiction and tabloid journalism, the text implicitly contrasts practices of reading the popular picture press and more conventional narrative genres. Furthermore, Waugh links this commentary to ethical dilemmas and feeling bodies, highlighting how shifts in popular print culture inform human capacities to witness the ongoing suffering and pain of others in real life. His satirical representation of interwar Britain's celebrity scene of *Bright Young People* captures a semi-fictional tabloid culture full of inattentive readers who insensibly stand by in the face of personal and mass historical violence. These characters thrust their apparent lack of feeling on a reader of the novel, interrogating her ability to affectively respond to others both within this fictional media ecology and in the real contemporary context it tensely, asynchronously mirrors.

While many critical interpretations of *Vile Bodies* focus on its satirical "coldness" and "cruelty," I instead trace the ways in which affect is not wholly absent but instead lost in the limited web of communication practices that the novel's mediated environment leaves available. By examining scenes where media and feeling collide, I suggest that the emotional flatness of the text and the apparent illegibility of characters' feelings are intertwined with a critique of the media-conditioned modes of reading that might *make* emotion illegible. The

novel highlights how, in spite of trying to provide readers a more complete view of the present, the period's picture press frequently reduces their ability to communicate and understand human experience on a daily basis. The constant real time documentation of events inflects how characters encounter the news, one another, and their historical context, repeatedly transforming them into disengaged bystanders of the violence and loss that permeate the narrative. I thus argue that the novel is not indifferent itself, but repeatedly stages the mediated proliferation of indifference in order to confront readers with interwar real time's glitchy, melancholic affects. As, in Lauren Berlant's words, a glitch is "an interruption within a transition, a troubled transmission," real time's glichiness points both toward the stalling technogenetic evolution of human subjects and the troubled transmission of feeling between bodies within a real time temporality.[76]

Tracing habits of media usage and readerly response through the novel also provides insights into how real time factors into twenty-first century structures of feeling. Dissociating the concept from the digital technologies on which it frequently relies reveals real time as an orientation towards the present as opposed to a concrete measure of speed. Although it frequently hides its mechanisms in attachments to particular technologies or appeals to a sense of unmediated indexicality, Waugh's text suggests critical strategies for seeing real time's effects and affects in everyday practices. The end of the chapter extends this intervention by reflecting on how media historical methods and examining the notion of bystanding in digital culture's version of real time. I argue that the novel's unsettled, *parallactic* positioning of readers offers a model for cultural criticism in the present. Simultaneously

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76 Lauren Berlant, "The Commons: Infrastructure for Troubling Times," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* no. 3 (June 2016): 393–419. doi:10.1177/0263775816645989.

offering two slightly different lines of sight toward the same media ecology—a view from the fictional characters and another from a "real" person outside of the novel— without closing the angle between them, the text demonstrates how a critic can leverage views from two different historical moments to better position herself in relation to a single object of analysis. Premediating digital fantasies of continual, immediate access, *Vile Bodies*'s engagement with the 1930s press illuminates how the early twenty-first century's own version of the "photographable present" conditions what presence feels like in ways that shape readerly responsibility today.

A Historical Preamble

Political contexts and technological innovations during Britain's interwar era pushed the photographic documentation of everyday life to unprecedented levels. Transformations in the press—which increased its production speed, emphasized visual features, and altered attitudes about its social role—helped establish a reading public so ravenous that by 1939 at least two thirds of the population in Britain "regularly saw a daily paper."[77] Indeed, newspaper circulation doubled in the years between 1918-1939. During the decades leading up to the golden age of the photojournalism (frequently dated to the start of *LIFE Magazine* in 1936) photography was becoming increasingly important to the way individuals regularly encountered information about the world. The tabloids—a prolific mode of condensed and image-heavy journalism that had first emerged at the fin de siècle—developed the visual

[77] Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Interwar Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004) 3. Additionally, at this moment "the British public consumed more newspapers per head than any other nation." Adrian Bingham, and Martin Conboy. *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to the Present.* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), vii.

language that later publications relied on and that helped massively extend the press' quotidian reach. As Ryan Linkoff argues:

> photography was crucial to a new form of journalism that sought to communicate and appeal to mass audiences in a way that was self-consciously distinct from the methods and modes of Victorian reporting. The explosion of photographic reporting facilitated by the tabloids significantly altered how the public saw and experienced the news."[78]

The term "tabloid" was first coined in 1901, repurposing a common colloquialism describing a compressed dose of medicine. However, 1930 marked another turning point in the form's history.[79] *The Daily Herald's* decision to address an increasingly dense, competitive market by rebranding and drastically increasing its use of images this year catalyzed a new generation of tabloid journalism. As Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy argue, "the transformation when it [*The Daily Herald*] relaunched in 1930 was spectacular. News values were reoriented, human interest entered the columns, and the amount of space given over the photographs, features, and advertising increased dramatically."[80] The publication's efforts were an unquestionable triumph, and by 1933 *The Daily Herald* became the first newspaper to sell two million copies.[81] Recognizing this updated visually-striking format as an easily reproducible formula for success, many competitors followed suit and adapted their aesthetic approaches accordingly. While publications drew on a range of strategies to revise their visual layouts and attract readers, the most consistent alteration was how "photographs became bigger and more numerous, and were integrated into the editorial in more innovative ways."[82]

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78 Ryan Linkof, *The Public Eye: Celebrity and Photojournalism in the Making of the British Tabloids, 1904—1938* (University of Southern California, 2011) 20.
79 *Tabloid Century*, 11.
80 *Ibid.,* 11.
81 *Ibid.,* 11.
82 *Ibid.,* 13.

The tabloids had always been defined by their compact and highly visual formula, but interwar technological developments enabled the strategic intensification of these characteristics by making photographic information more readily, cheaply, and quickly available. Until the 1920s it wasn't feasible to fill newspapers consistently with large numbers of photographic reproductions that were at least passably legible as real records. The perfection of the halftoning process in the period allowed publications to create quickly and cheaply reproducible, but still recognizable, copies of original images. This less information-dense, easily printable type of image accelerated the press's visual production process and brought mass indexical documentation to a mass readership. Despite the sense of immediacy these pictures transmitted, though, halftoning also materially obstructed the reader's access to the captured scenes; the process re-photographed the original image through a physical barrier in order to parcel it into a set of discrete dots.[83] Much like the frame around Mitford's cover portrait, the literal halftone screen blocked out the reader's immersion in the image by pre-filtering extraneous details, reducing its informational content to a minimum without undermining its indexical value.[84]

New technologies that relayed information across large distances also intensified the sense of speed and immediacy associated with the interwar press. Reporters could now call in stories as they were still happening via the telephone. Even more radically, photographs could be wired from remote, previously inaccessible places. Much like halftoning,

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[83]Richard Benson, *The Printed Picture (*New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008).
[84] The halftone's trade-off between information density and speed is found throughout the history of multiple media and relies on the human organism's physiological capacities to fill in the gaps such that the information-poor version is still recognizable. See for example Johnathan Sterne's scholarship on MP3 compression where he writes "In other words, the mp3 is a medium which, in most practical contexts, gives the full experience of listening to a recording while only offering a fraction of the information and allowing listeners' bodies to do the rest of the work." Jonathan Sterne, "The mp3 as cultural artifact," *New Media & Society* 8, no. 5 (2006): 835.

photowiring functioned by fragmenting the original image and filtering the density of information that reached the reader. It divided a photograph into a series of horizontal lines that were then transmitted as frequencies across telephone wires and reassembled by a device on the other end. Arthur Korn's Telautograph was one of the first inventions to enable this process, and *Daily Mirror* editor Guy Bartholomew—known as "the godfather of the British Tabloids—adopted this apparatus in 1908, barely a year after its invention."[85] However, the resulting images were poor quality at this time and the device's scope was limited because it was not portable; the *Mirror* could quickly print photographs sent from a Paris office that also had Korn's machine, but not much else. The later invention of the Belinograph fixed this problem by offering a means of wiring photographs that "was smaller than a typewriter, easy to operate, and capable of being connected to an ordinary telephone."[86] The British press adopted this machine in 1928 and it was a mainstay in European newspapers through the 1930s and 40s.[87] Wirephotos shifted expectations about how quickly events might be relayed to the reading public [Fig. 2.2 & 2.3]. Even if most images in the papers were not produced in this way, the technology's ongoing development shaped the perceived place of photographs in the press and the kind of fast, unmediated access that publications could aspire to provide.

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[85] Kevin Williams, *Read all about it!: A History of the British newspaper* (New York: Routledge, 2009). Bartholomew was also part of the invention of the Bartlane photographic transmission device in 1920, which sent images via undersea cables. Linkof, *The Public Eye,* 104.

[86] Anton A. Huurdeman, *The Worldwide History of Telecommunications* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 296.

[87] *Ibid.*, 297.

Increased Speed

"Today's news pictures with today's news stories" was the original Wirephoto slogan. Now it is "This forenoon's news pictures with this forenoon's news stories" and "This afternoon's news pictures with this afternoon's news stories." This increased speed is made possible by the portable Associated Press Wirephoto sending machine which will flash pictures of the Democratic National Convention direct from the convention hall to The Herald and other Wirephoto newspapers from coast to coast.

Figure 2.2 U.S. newspaper advertisement touting the speed of AP wirephoto technologies[88]

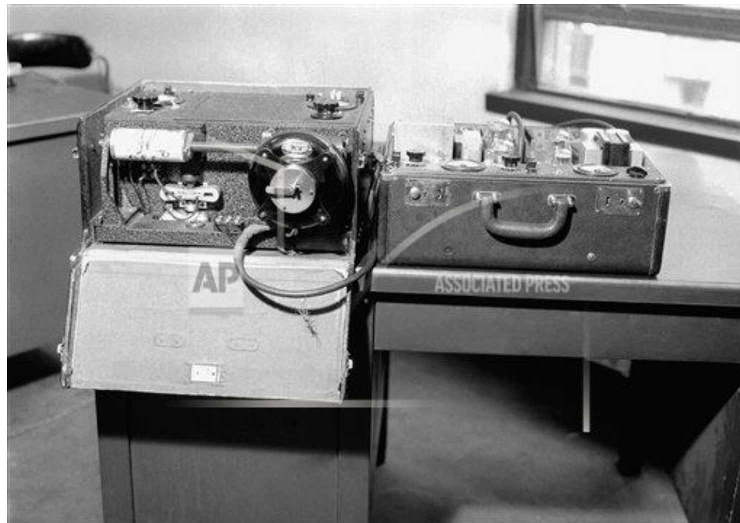

Figure 2.3 The Associated Press's portable wirephoto equipment (1936)[89]

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[88] *The Syracuse Herald*, June 11, 1936, scanned copy on newspaperarchive.com, https://newspaperarchive.com/tags/wirephoto/?psi=67&pci=7&ndt=by&py=1930&pey=1939&plo=convention&ob=1/ (accessed 11/20/18).
[89] "Portable AP Wirephoto Equipment 1936," AP Images, July 1936, http://www.apimages.com/metadata/Index/Watchf-Associated-Press-Domestic-News-New-York-/8d4f116995764562bfbd9c021535e795 (accessed 11/20/18).

Beyond the introduction of these particular technologies, the Great War's mark on the contemporary sociopolitical context also contributed to the image-focused evolution of the press. The struggle for mediated power in the papers earlier in the century had begun blurring the line between news, propaganda, and reality. This was especially true in the British context given that, in the words of Mark Wollager, "during the Great War, Britain invented the greatest propaganda campaign that the world had ever seen."[90] The print culture that resulted from this massive effort to circulate information that could sway public opinion extended beyond particular events and past the end of the war. From the perspective of critics like Peter Buitenhuis, these wartime media practices undermined the British public's faith in the truthfulness of discourse and rhetoric even into the interwar era.[91] Satirical critiques of language in the period, which have been frequently discussed in scholarship about the era, reflect this wide-spread suspicion of verbal narrative's ability to accurately convey reality.[92] Complex argumentation and artistic illustrations revealed the mediated nature of content, therefore appearing suspect in comparison to immediate, observed fact that could be accompanied by photographic "proof."

Wollager stresses that the most important lasting effect of the British WWI media machine was the "transformation of a factual enumeration into a form of rhetoric divorced from empirical grounding, and the formation of what Walter Lippmann called a "pseudo-environment" of mediated images."[93] While Wollager means to suggest that propaganda

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[90] Mark Wollaeger, *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda: British Narrative from 1900 to 1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) xvii.
[91] Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: British, American and Canadian Propaganda and Fiction, 1914-1933* (Vancouver, Canada: University of British Columbia Press, 2011).
[92] For example see: Modris Eksteins, *Rites of spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000); Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: The Bodley Head, 1990); Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., 2009).
[93] Wollager, xvii.

rhetoric creates a false vision of the world, the passing invocation of Lippmann's famous 1920 study on public opinion and the quick slippage from rhetoric to "mediated images" is worth pausing on. Lippmann proposed that, in a modern world increasingly filled with information that individuals didn't have direct, experiential contact with, the population was becoming increasingly dependent on a media-fostered picture of reality. While these newspaper readers acted in a real environment, their decisions and general "cognitive mappings" were grounded in a press-produced pseudoenvironment: "looking back we can see how indirectly we know the environment in which nevertheless we live. We can see that the news of it comes to us now fast, now slowly; but that whatever we believe to be a true picture, we treat as if it were the environment itself."[94] The interwar visual mediascape's seeming immediacy and indexicality augmented the confusion of pseudoenvironment and environment. In Lippman's account: "photographs have the kind of authority over the imagination to-day which the printed word had yesterday, and the spoken word before that. They seem utterly real. They come, we imagine, directly to us without human meddling."[95] In other words, the photograph's reality effects made the picture press appear like a transparent window on the actual happenings of the present in ways that appealed to claims of "factual enumeration" as opposed to rhetorical flourishes. In a society skeptical of words and wary of manipulation, images promised to step in to ground the truth. As Nicholas Hiley, stresses, "it was through the figure of the press photographer that the early tabloids promised readers unmediated truth." The medium therefore "produced a culture of visibility based on visual immediacy and documentary access."[96]

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[94] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Haracourt, Brace, and Company, 1922), 4.
[95] *Ibid*., 92.
[96] Quoted in Linkoff, *The Public Eye*, 46.

The infamous socialite collective known as the Bright Young Things was a prime site where the 1930s British tabloid press regularly looked for "visual immediacy and documentary access" to sustain their lucrative pseudoenvironment.[97] This strange set of mostly aristocratic young people (to which Diana Mitford belonged) filled the papers with their antics and "made a spectacle out of their embrace of photographic publicity."[98] Emerging from the particular confluence of these newly pervasive media technologies and the Great War's disruption of older sociopolitical norms, the Bright Young People were clearly a product of the moment's changing cultural imaginations and communicative norms. They attracted mass public fascination and were largely inextricable from the interwar press: "more than any youth cult that had preceded them, the Bright Young People were a creation of the media."[99] As German writer Paul Cohen-Portheim reflected during a 1930 visit to London, "The interest which the whole nation takes in Society is astonishing… Every newspaper tells you about their private lives and every illustrated paper is perpetually publishing photographs of them."[100] But the popularity of the Bright Young People was not only due to escapism and hedonistic curiosity; these socialites also seemed to stand in for the troubled and traumatized experience of an entire postwar generation. Their documentation was deeply entrenched in the widely felt difficulty of seriously re-engaging with society, making meaning, or embracing individual agency in the post-Great War world.

Invested in the continuous recording of their own lives, the Bright Young People meticulously curated public personas and intentionally attracted publicity: "[the media] turned the activities of the Bright Young People into self-consciously public events, which

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[97] Also referred to as bright young people—I will use these denominations interchangeably in the rest of the chapter.
[98] Linkof, *The Public Eye*, 307.
[99] David John Taylor, *Bright Young People: The Rise and Fall of a Generation, 1918-1940* (New York: Random House, 2007) 209.
[100] Qtd. In Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers?: Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 232.

would not have happened—or, rather, would not have happened in quite the same way—without the presence of the press."[101] Their relationship to the present and to one another was colored by their belief in and cultivation of the present's photographability; most of their parties and interactions were self-consciously staged with their intentional press documentation in mind. Going beyond even Lippman's diagnosis, pseudoenvironment and environment were not merely confused in the inevitable situations where individuals had no direct access to the documented events, but occurred even when individuals personally witnessed the "real" events for themselves. Given the extremity of the Bright Young People's ever-recording, image-saturated behavior, this unusual social scene provides an ideal place to understand contemporary critical theories about how generalized habits of bystanding and affective disengagement from reality might emerge in tandem with changing modes of mediated reading.

The Photographable Present

Consider Bright Young Diana Mitford, caught in a photographic reproduction on the cover of *The Bystander* [Fig. 2.1, page 35], as the "demonic diva" Kracauer introduces in his 1927 essay "Photography"—a halftoned female body "featured on the cover of an illustrated magazine."[102] His vivid ekphrastic description details her form's meticulous preservation by a pattern of discrete points that are only visible through abnormally close attention to the image: "if one were to look through a magnifying glass one could make out the grain, the millions of little dots that constitute the diva."[103] Instead of bringing the reader

[101] Taylor, *Bright Young People*, 210.
[102] Kracauer, "Photography," 47.
[103] *Ibid.*, 47.

nearer to her, looking closer dissolves the image into an abstract cloud of ink. In spite of being "diligently recorded by the camera," the diva is demonic in her photograph's dissociation from her material body, its inability to serve as a likeness or to refer meaningfully to its referent's real existence beyond surface resemblance: "the smile is arrested yet no longer refers to the life from which is was taken."[104] The photograph does not preserve the woman except as a superficial "mannequin" because all traces of her lived existence beyond this paused, reproducible moment disappear. Mitford is captured in an illustrated frame but simultaneously dissipates into ghostly thin air; Kracauer's halftone diva is both perfectly preserved and not really there.

While this opening primarily concerns memory and history, the essay also considers the photographic press's impact on the present. Kracauer's writing exudes a profound anxiety about a kind of mass-mediated uncertainty principle. New technological modes of recording the present fundamentally alter that present. Subjects witness, interact with, and respond to an always already documented reality as opposed to the "real thing." Although the quantity of supposedly indexical information available to readers increases with the camera's ever-present presence, readers are less (not more) aware of their environment:

> Never before has an age been so informed about itself, if being informed means having an image of objects that resembles them in the photographic sense. Most of the images in the illustrated magazines are topical photographs, which refer to existing objects. The reproductions are thus basically signs which may remind us of the original object supposed to be understood. The demonic diva. In reality, however, the weekly photographic ration does not at all mean to refer to these objects or ur-images. If it were offering an aid to memory, then memory would have to determine the selection. But the flood of photos sweeps away the dam of memory. The assault of this mass of images is so powerful that it threatens to destroy the potentially existing awareness of crucial traits.[105]

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[104] *Ibid.*, 47.
[105] *Ibid.*, 58.

Accompanying the demise of memory, its present tense corollary—awareness—is also discarded. The ever-recording and recorded atmosphere of the illustrated magazine present surrounds readers with visual resemblances of events and people that interfere with their ability to engage with the originals as opposed to simply supplementing them. The diva's photograph is not just detached from the referent, but is a threat to that referent's "real world" legibility. Individuals struggle to participate or to make sense of their lived experience when the record "sweeps it away" as it unfolds.

Kracauer points to the accumulation of decontextualized photographs in the magazines as a major feature disrupting readers' ability to situate themselves meaningfully in relation to the present:

> the invention of the illustrated magazines is one of the most powerful means of organizing a strike against understanding. […] The contiguity of these images systematically excludes their contextual framework available to consciousness. The "image-idea" drives away the idea. The blizzard of photographs betrays an indifference to what things mean.[106]

Documentary images are "contiguous" with the referents because they are read as indexes in such fleeting encounters. As photographic immediacy is paired with the seemingly exhaustive comprehensiveness of the magazine's visual field, readership of the picture press replaces creative, interpretative readings of everyday reality. The ever-renewed blizzard of photographs acts as an environmental white-out condition that eliminates empty space on the page and discards long, involved stories in favor of short captions that annotate the image-saturated field. It leaves few gaps for imaginative understanding and context building, for readers to insert themselves or integrate their experiences as they, in Lauren Berlant's words, "grasp towards stabilizing form."[107]

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[106] *Ibid.*, 58.
[107] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 44.

While alarmist, Kracauer's claims are derived from tangible trends within interwar publications. For example, *The Bystander* ran a recurrent section during the late 1920s and early 1930s that exemplifies how tabloids connect readers to an idea of the present. "The Passing Hour: 'The Bystander' holds up the Mirror to the Gay World" [Fig. 2.4] pitches its regular collection of topical photographs as an immediate reflection of the world.[108] While these pages often contain a short central narrative about an important recent social event, most of the spread's images are unrelated to this story—miscellaneous snapshots of people and happenings that a reporter's camera happened to capture. The selection of photographs within the magazine privileges aesthetics and number over coherence, providing brief descriptive captions for each individual image but rarely contextualizing them in relation to one another or the main text. The overwhelming number of discrete moments indexed in these pages is what Kracauer would argue "sweeps away the damn of memory" by ensuring that no single image (or cohesive impression of the whole) can be readily recalled after the magazine is set down. Given the impossibility of forming enduring narratives out of this content, a reader accepts the image-idea over the idea; she becomes a gazing voyeur privy to various arbitrary, isolated windows into the world as opposed to an immersed actor.

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108 Notably, this phrasing of "the passing hour" is not confined to *The Bystander* but also repeatedly appears as a section header in other magazine like *The Tatler* in tandem with even more photographically-oriented content.

The Bystander, June 22, 1932 555

The Passing Hour

"The Bystander" holds up the Mirror to the Gay World

Mr. Horace Smith, Miss Skimming, and Miss Noble taking part in the Coaching Marathon. Mr. Smith won the Silver Cup for the best coach, harness, and equipment

Yvonne Gregory

Miss Angela du Boulay

Left: Miss Angela du Boulay, daughter of the late Col. H. du Boulay and Mrs. du Boulay, who is engaged to Mr. Iain Murray, Sir Malcolm Murray's son. Sir Malcolm Murray is Comptroller to the Duke of Connaught.

"Who is Rosemary? Wha-a-at is she?" was the universal variation of the old ballad that one heard bandied about on all sides in the Royal Enclosure on the opening day at Ascot. The answer was "Miss Rosemary Glyn." Some people thought she was a walking advertisement for a dressmaker's shop. Others said that she was trying to be a feminine version of an eighteenth-century Eton boy on June 4. Nobody could miss her outstanding costume and the huge lettering of "Rosemary" on her hat.

There were many other very striking figures at Ascot, so striking, indeed, that they nearly knocked one down. For instance, there was the bride and her bridesmaid—quite transparent, my dear, when the sun was in the wrong quarter. Why *do* people do things like that? Miss Margaret Whigham in her very plain dark-blue marocain dress was a great disappointment to the photographers, who were even more in evidence than usual. Her sole touch of originality was the use of a diamond clip on her pale-blue gauntlets.

This lack of originality was distinctly unfair to the photographers, who all know Miss Whigham by sight and are certain of catching a celebrity when they snap her, and do not waste plates on securing someone they believe to be Lady X, only to discover afterwards that the well-dressed woman is Mrs. Smith of Peckham.

The real hero of Ascot was Arthur Fawcett, who was making his début as handicapper at Ascot. Mr. Dawkins had done it for so long, but Mr. Dawkins has never had such a success as Mr. Fawcett, with his dead-heat in the Ascot Stakes and his series of head wins, both on Tuesday and Wednesday. It was good to see Brown Jack galloping round again. Ascot would not be itself without this game horse.

The two prettiest girls I saw were Miss Sylvia Regis de Oliveira and Miss Kathleen Horlick. Their dark beauty was a delight. Lady Buchanan-Jardine wore a highly conspicuous hat of

Mrs. Woolley-Hart arriving at Ascot on the first day, wearing one of the fashionable "split" hats, and armed with sun-glasses. Mrs. Woolley-Hart is one of the most hospitable of London's hostesses

Figure 2.4 The Bystander *captures "The Passing Hour" (1932)*[109]

[109] "The Passing Hour: 'The Bystander' holds up the Mirror to the Gay World," *The Bystander,* June 22, 1932. scanned copy on The British Newspaper Archive, pp. 5, available at https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/results/1932-06-22?NewspaperTitle=The%2BBystander&IssueId=BL%2F0001851%2F19320622%2F&County=London%2C%20England (accessed 4/12/2018).

No. 1425, October 3, 1928] THE TATLER

In the Society News of the Passing Hour!

LADY MARY SCOTT, LORD BURGHLEY, AND THE DUCHESS OF BUCCLEUCH AT LANGHOLM LODGE

Walter Brydon

MR. AND MRS. J. D. PLAYER

MRS. GRINLING AND HER COLLIES

LORD AND LADY HAMBLEDEN

All these pictures are the results of some rapid shooting by the photographic machine gunner, and have to do with events of the immediate moment. Lord Burghley, England's high-speed hurdler, is at Langholm ostensibly for the shooting, but he also happens to be engaged to Lady Mary Scott, one of the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch's charming daughters. Lord and Lady Hambleden, who was Lady Patricia Herbert and is Lord and Lady Pembroke's only daughter, were married in Salisbury Cathedral last week, and some more pictures of this event appear elsewhere in this paper. Mr. John Player, son of the head of the famous tobacco firm, married Major and Mrs. Guy Reynolds' pretty daughter at St. Margaret's, Westminster, on Thursday. Major Reynolds, who used to be well known racing in India first and afterwards in England, was unable to be present owing to illness, and the bride was given away by her god-father, Mr. W. B. Purefoy, who is also very well known in the racing world. Mrs. Grinling entered for the competition at Woking in National Dog Week for the prettiest owner and prettiest dog

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Figure 2.5 The Tatler's *"Society News of the Passing Hour "(1928)* [110]

Even apart from the images themselves, the press's "mirror" actively manages readers' gazes in ways that frequently shift agency away from human subjects and toward photographic technologies. For example, the text announcing "Society News of the Passing Hour" on a October 3, 1928 page in *The Tatler* [Fig. 2.5] fetishizes the camera's

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[110] In the Society News of the Passing Hour!." *The Tatler*, October 3, 1928, scanned copy on The British Newspaper Archive, pp 7, available at https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/results/1928-01-01/1928-12-31?basicsearch=passing%20hour&somesearch=passing%20hour&exactsearch=false&retrievecountrycounts=false&newspapertitle=the%2btatler (screenshot accessed 4/12/2018).

documentation over the subjects it so urgently transmits: "All these pictures are results of some rapid shooting by a photographic machine gunner, and have to do with events of the immediate moment."[111] The reader is interpolated by the camera apparatus as she shares its mechanical gaze and encounters the scene as a disembodied eye as opposed to an involved agent. Likewise the June 22, 1932 edition of *The Bystander*'s "The Passing Hour" segment [Fig. 2.4], which focuses on the Ascot Horse Race, comments at length on the visual aspects of the attendees and on the process of their documentation. For example one woman is described positively as a walking advertisement while another was "a great disappointment to the photographers, who were even more in evidence than usual."[112] The camera is elevated to a protagonist status in ways that discourage the reader's active engagement with the living humans it documents, underscoring that the present is not just "photographed" but has become defined by its photographability. Repeatedly experiencing the immediate moment as a bystanding camera trains readers how to look and reinforces ideas about their relationship to the present's quickly passing hours.

This magazine training mechanism can be parsed in light of Christian Metz's distinction between primary and secondary cinematic identification—identification with the camera versus identification with characters.[113] When reading the illustrated news, the photographic gaze is more proximal to the reader than any of the photographed subjects. As opposed to identifying with the depicted individuals, which might generate empathy or prompt the reader to suture herself into their world, her identification remains at the level of the camera. In the cinema, this primary identification with the apparatus offers an illusion of

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[111] "In the Society News of the Passing Hour!." *The Tatler*, October 3, 1928.
[112] "The Passing Hour: 'The Bystander' holds up the Mirror to the Gay World," *The Bystander,* June 22, 1932.
[113] Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

active, omniscient vision even as the spectator cannot exert any real influence on the direction that the camera takes in the film. However, as will be become clearer later in the chapter, identification with the apparatus remains more incomplete in the magazine's pages than in the immersive cinema palace. The photograph's borders and the descriptive captions on its edge repeatedly mark the boundaries of what can be seen. A reader is aware of her limited outsider status but clings to this field of vision as the best means of accessing the present that she can find.

Image and text co-produce a bystanding, voyeuristic reading experience even beyond these direct descriptions of the camera and photographic processes, reinforcing one another by operating within similar logics and formal conventions. Just as the photographs accumulate momentary glimpses through different unrelated, decontextualized windows, the captions are disorientingly abrupt and disconnected. Take the caption in Figure 2.5:

> Mr. John Player, son of the head of the famous tobacco firm, married Major and Mrs. Guy Reynolds' pretty daughter at St. Margaret's, Westminster, on Thursday. Major Reynolds, who used to be well known racing in India first and afterwards in England, was unable to be present owing to illness, and the bride was given away by her god-father, Mr. W. B. Purefoy, who is also very well known in the racing world. Mrs. Grinling entered for the competition at Woking in National Dog Week for the prettiest owner and prettiest dog.[114]

Short, flatly descriptive sentences paired with photographs emphasize the reader's outsider status and lack of interpretive agency. These sentences dissuade her entrance into this world and encourage her to speed by because they are not rationally or syntactically connected to one another, merely collected as bounded data points. Such captions exemplify what Benjamin termed "information" in his 1936 critique of the press's impact on human habits of understanding. For Benjamin, information is an immediate, direct, and flatly factual mode

[114] "In the Society News of the Passing Hour!" *The Tatler*, October 3, 1928.

of communicating content that directly opposes the imaginative and durational patterns on which narrative meaning-making hinges. Enabled, above all, by the modern news, it is also a historically contingent phenomenon. The interwar press relies on information in order to quickly transmit data about the present to the reading public who immediately assimilates it and is ready for more. Experience and narrative, which operate at an incompatible pace and level of imaginative involvement, are therefore gradually abandoned.

Information is affectively encountered and communicated in a radically different way than stories. On the one hand, it only makes sense in the "now." As Benjamin synthesizes, "the value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time."[115] The lack of duration undermines the continuity of events over time that a conventional narrative plot relies on for meaning; it also inhibits a reader's ability to quilt this content into her own parallel understandings of ongoing experiences because the information is lost as soon as it is read. Furthermore, in addition to this temporal immediacy, information is suffused with the photograph's indexical imaginary such that it appears "understandable in itself."[116] It habituates readers to continually receive new content without drawing on their own perspectives, knowledge, or feelings to contextualize it:

> Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in newsworthy stories. This is because no event comes to us without being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it. […] The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the

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[115] *Ibid.*, 89.

[116] Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 89.
This is particularly true when the photograph is formally transformed into information and surface by technologies like the halftone. Caption and image, blurred together as marks of ink on the page, become a multimodal artifact that reinforces the image's role as evidence and predigests its meaning. Together, the already explained and already obsolete presentation of the illustrated news leads to the continual accumulation of new information without giving individuals the time and space to actively structure those moments into a longer narrative arc or personally engage with them.

> psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.[117]

Informational explanation discourages individuals' interpretative capacities by proclaiming their contents self-evident and plastering over the absences that active readers would fill with imaginative connections and personal meaning. Newly normalized modes of reading cause storytelling capacities to dwindle and, as a result, modern subjects' basic communicative abilities atrophy. Benjamin identifies this expressive decline as an essential facet of modern structures of feeling: "It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences."[118] While earlier media innovations (like the novel) posed a small threat to the traditional oral, bard-like storytelling Benjamin seems to idealize, the interwar press's abundance of information seems capable of eliminating it entirely. The habitual shift to disconnected moments of immediate explanation over narrative duration and imagination thus threatens to fundamentally alter human interaction with the present and with others.

Real Time Melancholia

A pivotal concept that both Kracauer and Benjamin appear to be circling around—in their concern about how an increasingly immediate and indexical visual media ecology alters subjects' interactions with the present—might now be labelled "real time." First coined a decade after these two essays were written, in 1946, real time was initially used to describe a

[117] *Ibid.*, 89.
[118] *Ibid.*, 83.

hypothetical digital computing machine designed to enhance analog military technologies.[119] By the twenty-first century, though, as real time has become commonplace in mainstream popular discourse, its definition has expanded. It now more broadly refers to the technologically enabled representation or recording of an event that appears to happen simultaneously with the event itself or that is immediately communicated. In other words, real time media collapse the distance between a moment and its documentation, the real and the record. Real time might, on the surface, seem like a concrete measurement (i.e. the speed needed to produce this reality effect) especially since it is commonly associated with the processing power of digital technologies. However, it is an inherently relational construct that can only emerge out of the triangulation of audience, media record, and event. As opposed to a technological achievement, real time is a complex assemblage of representations, readings, and receptions that exist in different permutations across a variety of mediums and contexts.[120]

Building from Benjamin and Kracauer's writings about the interwar press, this section incorporates more recent theoretical discussions about real time as a means of centering human bodies and readers' lived experiences of that changing modern media ecology. Backing away from the 1930s illustrated magazine's particular technological affordances opens pathways into everyday affective experiences that the Frankfurt School only hinted at. It also offers a dynamic view of how this media-made temporality can

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[119] According to Hu, "The phrase is first used in J. P. Eckert's 1946 description of a digital "'real time' computing machine" that might replace analog (or "true") computing machines in gun positioning, missile guidance, flight simulation, and industrial control." Tung-Hui Hu, "Real time/zero time," *Discourse* 34, no. 2 (2012): 164.

[120] Supporting this point, real time's core fantasy of direct contact with the referent can also be traced to an earlier photographic imaginary that operated within different temporal and technological conditions. In Wendy Chun's account, "What is real unfolds in 'real time.' If earlier visual indexicality guaranteed authenticity (a photograph was real because it indexed something out there) now 'real time' does so." Wendy Hui Kyong Chun*, Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media (*Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 75.

condition felt experiences of time and of the real in ethically consequential ways. Furthermore, this later scholarship fleshes out the figure of the reader as bystander by aggressively pursuing real time's connections to real world violence.

Paul Virilio and Mary Ann Doane,'s canonical writings from the turn of the twenty-first century affirm how easily the critical concept of real time maps backwards onto the 1930s. Both critics cite interwar theory in order to explicate digital contexts, while also extending this foundation into direct meditations on real time's violence. Virilio argues that real time media's reliance on presence at a distance encourages user practices of "snooping" instead of immersion. Media readership and intersubjective interaction alike therefore remain at the level of removed voyeurism as opposed to engaged participation. Echoing Benjamin's thesis about declining communicative capacities he posits that "in the generalized violence of acceleration, we can envisage suffering passing without complaint; horrors going unbewailed, not that there would be anyone to hear the wailing; and anxieties going without a prayer—and without even an analysis."[121] As this quote suggests, Virilio's discussion is most concerned with a level of speed that precludes subjects' attentiveness to any event's particularities. He attributes real time's bystanding habits and ethical vacuum above all, then, to a situation of rapid information overload where "conditioned reflex wins out of over shared reflection."[122]

Evolving out of her earlier work on television's *liveness*, Doane's argument follows a different trajectory. She considers how real time media alter human perceptions of time's forward motion in ways that reduce the meaningfulness of material flesh. In line with Kracauer's point about the illustrated news's contiguity with the present, she argues that real

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[121] Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb* (New York: Verso, 2005) 72.
[122] *Ibid.,* 65.

time "makes possible a repetition that threatens to annihilate the temporal gap between the event and its representation—in the live telecast, the event is virtually its own repeatability. The scandal would be the disappearance of the very idea of the unique, the loss of death as a measure of singularity."[123] In this framing, contiguity's ethical stakes are clear. Readers interpolated by real time perceive the progressing present and the bodies inside it as part of an endlessly recorded, and therefore renewable, timeline. Real time hides the irreversibility of lived time as well as the body's inevitable susceptibility to change under the pressures of that ongoing forward motion.

Virilio and Doane move many of Benjamin and Kracauer's core tenets into clear contact with corporeality and violence. However, they are less concerned with everyday human experience than with societal consequences writ large. The lived, quotidian level of real time—fraught with glitches, delays, and ragged edges, and navigated by feeling subjects—might not so completely detach individuals from their investments in the material present or destroy their awareness of these changes. As Wendy Chun writes, gently rebuffing Virilio's stance, "just because images flash up all of a sudden does not mean that response or responsibility is impossible."[124] Readers' capacities for ethical witnessing are rarely irrevocably foreclosed even if their conventional pathways are technologically altered or frustrated. Moreover, individuals are not necessarily entirely naïve or unaware of the media-effects that the contemporary critics around them identify. Theoretical speculations about real time form part of the cultural imaginary, hovering in the backdrop of everyday media consumption. Even the names of interwar publications like *The Bystander* draw readers'

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123 Mary Ann Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe." *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader,* ed. Wendy Chun, Anna Watkins Fisher, Thomas Keenan (New York: Routledge, 2005), 263.
124 Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future is a Memory." *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (2008): 171.

attention to their position on the outside of the action looking in, indicating that this remove is integrated into the reading experience (at least at some level).

Hu's recent theorization of 1950s real time—a moment when "computer speeds were slow enough that digital technology was not synonymous with instantaneity and the very idea of real time required explanation"—identifies affective patterns apart from automatic numbing within this temporal regime.[125] As he elaborates:

> Real-time media leave us with images that seem (artificially, phantasmatically) alive. But in their rush to capture the next instant, however, we lose the sense that any time has been lost at all: a loss of a loss. Understood correctly, real time is not the present tense; real time is a melancholic imagination of the present from the perspective of the future, which is always just a short interval away.[126]

The argument that, in real time, each moment is quickly forgotten and pushed away in the rush towards the next record is familiar by this point in the chapter. And, much like Benjamin, Hu suggests that the norms of this media ecology disrupt durational narratives that rely on continuity in favor of momentary information. Yet his essay generatively elaborates that this disruption is not just a question of the image-idea replacing the idea as Kracauer claimed. It instead emerges as readers gaze at the moment they materially inhabit from the vantage of a future that they never actually physically occupy. "Always just a short interval away," they perceive a gap between their experience and their image of the present; however, simultaneously "los[ing] the sense that any time has been lost at all," the perception of loss manifests only as a vague sense of melancholy or disrupted access that can't be fully grasped. Primary identification with the camera, which immediately marks the content it captures with Barthes's *noeme* "this-has-been," makes readers situate the photographable

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125 Tung-Hui Hu, "Real time/zero time," 163.
126 *Ibid.,* 172.

present in the already photographed past even as they embrace its supposed immediacy.[127] Seen from the perspective of the future, the present appears as an already written history. Like Benjamin's angel of history, bystanding readers gaze backwards with "eyes staring, mouth open." Yet, even while they watch, they remain caught inside the accumulating wreckage of time's forward progress.

Real time melancholia is tied to the experience of repeatedly losing something that was missed or not experienced in the first place—"a loss of a loss." While practices of mourning actively work through trauma by identifying the lost object and meaningfully situating it within a larger narrative, melancholia continually fails to grasp it. The press's contiguity with reality inhibits subjects' ability to address these gaps and convert loss into meaning. Melancholia perpetuates a disperse feeling of dis-ease that cannot be connected to material experiences or objects and is, thus, not actively dealt with. The resulting pathological symptoms, in Freud's description, are "a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world."[128] It depletes "the capacity to love" and causes apparent indifference to violence even as it inflicts pain on the sufferer; melancholia "behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathectic energy from all sides."[129] Freud's characterization of the melancholic wound as an affective black hole suggests, in Eugenie Brinkema's interpretation, that "the melancholic's strange and sad etiology is due to an energy glitch […] Melancholia, in a sense, just uses the self up."[130] Real time's bystanders might therefore be better understood as glitchily melancholic subjects rather than cruel or indifferent pawns hurtling numbly towards inevitable catastrophe. They do not lack feeling,

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[127] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (1980), Trans. Richard Howard. (London: Vintage, 2000).
[128] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," trans. Joan Riviere in *Freud: General Psychological Theory*, ed. Phillip Rieff (New York: Touchstone, 1991), 165.
[129] *Ibid.,* 174.
[130] Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press: 2014), 58.

but are so exhausted by enduring losses that continually slip out of reach without meaning, that their cathectic energy cannot travel outwards to love or even witness others. Real time thus defines how subjects respond both to the continual erosion of the present in the abstract and to the traumatic erasures inside it. Deaths that occur within this media ecology are not fully mourned or witnessed, but they are also not immaterial; their absences phantasmatically circulate, saturating the present with unreadable signifiers of loss.

A Snapshot of ***Vile Bodies***

The interwar picture press slows down real time even further than Hu's mid-century case study, offering a glimpse of how its melancholic influence translates into everyday practices and feelings. Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930), a novel invested in media's adherence to bodies and deeply critical of its ethical consequences, is an ideal location to linger. As underscored by two brief, but meaningful paratexts, *Vile Bodies* is simultaneously an extension of and a commentary on the mediated experience of the Bright Young Things and their modern visual press ecology. Stressing the connection between his fictional mediascape and real contemporary social context, Waugh's original typescript reveals how his novel is both implicated in and critically distanced from the Bright Young People's press antics: "BRIGHT YOUNG PEOPLE AND OTHERS KINDLY NOTE THAT ALL CHARACTERS ARE WHOLLY IMAGINARY (AND YOU ARE GETTING FAR TOO MUCH PUBLICITY ALREADY WHOEVER YOU ARE)."[131] At the time of its publication, the novel was a huge popular success because of Waugh's insider knowledge of the celebrity set he rejects by name in this disclaimer. As Aaron Jaffe puts it, "*Vile Bodies*

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[131] qtd in Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 47.

became a 'runaway bestseller' and Waugh assured his celebrity as a novelist on the assumption that the Bright Young Things were not wholly imaginary."[132] Many readers bought the book as a supplement to their informational diet of gossip columns, muddying the distinction between press coverage and fiction. More than purporting to realistically document the socialite scene, though, Waugh's novel focuses on how it is defined by ever-present real time documentation. The perpetual accumulation of information—enabled and accelerated by the picture press—holds the novel together on a basic level while also establishing its notorious emotional flatness and cruelty. The fact that everyone is "getting far too much publicity" has material consequences that are directly implicated in the dismissive indifference to "whoever you are."

Waugh's author's note in the first edition further proves his investment in real interwar press practices. It comparatively positions the novel's fictional media conditions in relation to 1930s Britain's actual mediascape:

> The action of the book is laid in the near future when existing social tendencies have become more marked; I have postulated no mechanical or scientific advance, but in the interest of compactness and with no pretensions to prophecy, I have assumed a certain speeding up of the legal procedure and daily journalism. In the latter case I have supposed somewhat later hour for going to press and a greater expedition in the general distribution than is now generally the case.[133]

His lack of "pretensions to prophecy" is suspect in a novel that prophetically ends in a world war nearly a decade before WWII's outbreak. Furthermore, its relentless troping of reckless and dangerous acceleration suggests that the exaggerated speed and distributive power of journalism is an important, measured choice as opposed to a mere technical convenience.

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[132] Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* ,47.
[133] Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies*. [1930] (New York: Back Bay Books, 1999) front matter.

The increasingly immediate media and its encroachment into more hours of the day are the key ways "existing social tendencies have become more marked" as opposed to a coincidental parallel development. Finally, given that tabloids themselves emphasized and relied on "compactness" to efficiently administer information, Waugh's second disclaimer only further entrenches the novel in a blurred space between literature and press supplement.

While scholarship on *Vile Bodies* frequently focuses on the text's impressive inventory of interwar technologies, these readings often overlook media's imbrication in human communicative habits. Emphasizing the writing's bombastic celebration of speed and machinery, the experimental novel is commonly thought of as a satirical "Futurist fantasy" or, alternatively, as a parody of Vorticism.[134] Within this paradigm, the many media technologies that populate the text are manifestations of the general avant-garde fetishization of new mechanical inventions like cars and airplanes that also occurs throughout the novel. Subsuming media's particularities in this larger category of modern machinery, these readings discount their particular communicative and representational affordances. The few critical accounts that do engage with media technologies, tend to limit their perspective to Waugh's innovative use of the telephone and telephonic dialogue without seriously addressing the complex multimedia systems around it.[135]

Scholars also often overlook communicative practices in the novel because of a prevailing belief in the work's coldness or inhumanity. As Naomi Milthorphe summarizes, *Vile Bodies* "is frequently read as modernist in feeling and construction, particularly in its

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[134] Brooke Allen, "Vile Bodies: A Futurist Fantasy," *Twentieth Century Literature* (1994), 318-328.
Archie Loss, "Vile Bodies, Vorticism, and Italian Futurism," *Journal of Modern Literature* (1992), 155-164.
[135] David Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
Bronwen E. Thomas, "'It's good to talk?": An analysis of a telephone conversation from Evelyn Waugh's Vile Bodies," *Language and Literature* 6, no. 2 (1997), 105-119.

rejection of sentimentality and emotion. Waugh ruthlessly expunges interiority from his characters […] In this flat world, intimacy or emotion is rendered illegible."[136] Characters are seen as flat literary experiments in modernist impersonality, devoid of interiority or feeling. While this standard interpretation would seem to place the novel neatly in Jessica Burstein's category of cold modernism, the reality is more complicated.[137] For example, Milthorphe pushes against the text's reputation as unfeeling by attending to the production of readerly shame. While her work is an important step in recognizing that "Waugh's novel is not itself without affect," she confines affect wholly to the *reader's* feelings and continues affirming the coldness of the fictional environment.[138] Calling the characters "things behaving like people," after Wyndham Lewis, she still misses the text's core critique of the media mechanisms that strip characters of their embodied, feeling personhood.[139] "Emotion is rendered illegible" because of how norms of media readership limit characters' capacities for storytelling and generate a melancholic imagination of the present.

Unreal and Over-Recorded

Vile Bodies begins by staging the disposal of imaginative, durational storytelling in order to dramatically beckon the characters and the reader into the photographable present of real time information. While the entire novel self-consciously engages with how the illustrated press immediately reproduces a surface version of reality, a more personal,

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[136] N. E Milthorpe, "'Too, too shaming': Evelyn Waugh's Vile Bodies." *Affirmations*, no. 2 (2014): 75.
[137] In cold modernism the self has become non-existent or purely exterior in the form of serial copies or prosthesis; it thus cannot feel or affectively respond. Jessica Burstein, *Cold Modernism: Literature, Fashion, Art* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2012), 2, 13.
[138] Milthorpe, 94.
[139] Although the interchangeability of things and people is interestingly paralleled in the ambiguous naming conventions of the Bright Young Things/People

reflective, and interpretative means of narration is first explicitly excised. After a rough crossing over the English Channel, protagonist Adam Symes steps onto his native British soil with "nothing but some very old clothes and some books" only to be immediately assaulted by the customs officer.[140] Adam's personal library, mostly composed of classic literature like the collected works of Aristotle, physically repulses the officer who labels them "pretty dirty." He insists on confiscating these illicit items, explaining, "particularly against books the Home Secretary is. If we can't stamp out literature in the country, we can at least stop its being brought in from outside."[141] Literature is perceived as a threat that sullies the neatly knowable, hygienic, and protected national information ecology. While narrative may still covertly persist, public discourse and everyday structures of feeling are founded on other ideals.

The classics are not the only casualties of this literary censorship. The destruction of Adam's freshly written memoir during the episode elucidates the connection between the literary ban and Benjamin's theory of devalued experience even more clearly. Adam's autobiography is not only added to the pile of items that are held under consideration, but is condemned as the worst of the lot: "as for this autobiography, that's just downright dirt, and we burns that straight away, see."[142] Autobiography, as a prolonged narrative account of the self, is unreadable and somehow perverse in this landscape. Especially in a post-Great War moment where undertaking that reflective task is also one of re-engaging with the rupture of the war, the integration of past, present, and future is perhaps too risky for the nation to bear. In spite of Adam's protests that the official must be misinterpreting the work, its basic

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140 *Vile Bodies,* 23.
141 *Ibid.,* 23.
142 *Ibid.,* 25.

form is illegible and undesirable beyond salvage. As *Vile Bodies* progresses this lost autobiography comes to signify the destruction of Adam's "livelihood" in more than just financial terms. It is the loss of his "likeness," much like in the case of Kracauer's demonic diva. The obliteration of a reflexive, narrative sense of self turns out to be irrevocable. It signals Adam's migration into a media ecology in which storytelling itself is inaccessible, replaced with a continual stream of information that exists only in and for the present. The reader is faced with the challenge of continuing to read a novel that takes place in a world where narrative has already forcibly been cast out.

The novel's structure seems to have internalized the censure against story that Adam encounters so early on, forcing a reader also to grapple with its unsettling lack of meaning or temporal continuity on a formal level as well. In Stephen Greenblatt's assessment "there is practically no plot and no continuity of narrative."[143] Or, as a reviewer from *The Bystander* warned readers in 1930, "You cannot be given an outline of plot, for the simple reason that there is none."[144] As opposed to other practically plotless examples of modernism that turn inward, the novel neglects the characters' interiority and development as well. What usurps the role of story and character to hold *Vile Bodies* together, then, are media and media networks. Telephones, photographs, and newspapers all feature prominently in the text and even take over its pages at times—entire telephone conversations are transcribed and newspaper articles are reproduced in full. The most consequential media apparatus is an amalgam of press-photograph-telephone that enables many events in the novel to be recorded, published, and circulated in near perfect synchrony with their actual occurrence. Reporters infiltrate the relentless sequence of wild parties and telephone their appraisals of

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[143] Stephen Greenblatt, *Three Modern Satirists: Waugh, Orwell, and Huxley* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 13.
[144] Ralph Straus, "Mr. Evelyn Waugh Presents," *The Bystander*, January 15, 1930.

the guests and events to the press office as they unfold so that they can be typed up, printed, and circulated first thing the next morning. While from a twenty-first century vantage this might not suggest simultaneity, Waugh's author's note is a good reminder that the novel's accelerated mediascape would have been faster and more immediate than anything interwar readers had ever actually experienced. This is real time in the 1930s picture press.

Generally, the verbal reports relayed to the papers are ekphrastic portraits of the guests that must often exactly double the photographs that are simultaneously being taken. The immediacy, instantaneity, and supposed indexicality of these descriptions (a direct eye-witness account enabled by the telephone) gives them a photographic quality themselves. They are mass-reproducible versions of the guests that accumulate on top of the photographs, thickening the informational blizzard. Characters are confronted with a surfeit of multiplying descriptions that neither demand nor receive interpretative engagement, and that appear to have no consequences beyond the moment of their transmission. Embalmed before experienced, the present takes on a ghostly or demonic quality such that characters seem doomed to keep missing the material world they occupy.

The novel's first party scene exemplifies the omnipresent real time press structure that runs through the text, gesturing at its impact on human subjects. At this event the reporter Lord Vanburgh accumulates identificatory information and closely scrutinizes a guest named Mrs. Panrast. Almost immediately he translates his scopic appraisal into the press via telephone: "Five minutes later he was busy at the telephone dictating his story. '...Orchid stop new paragraph. One of the most striking women in the room was Mrs. Panrast - P-A-N-R-A-S-T, no T for telephone, you know—formerly Countess of Balcairn. She dresses with that severely masculine chic, italics, which American women know so well

to assume, stop.'"[145] Vanburgh, lurking on the fringes of the event to gather his record, is not the only bystander in this scene. Mrs. Panrast is also impacted by the recording process and her self-conscious awareness of being watched. The phone monologue affectively flattens her into a more easily reproducible, circulatable form; her "story" becomes a litany of visual information that can be easily packaged in the papers. As a result, Mrs. Panrast's physical body merges into the same disembodied surface as the ink that reproduces her. Her masculine *chic* and the italics that create the aesthetic of page's text become equivalents in a world that does not privilege the living human over the form of its storage.

There is violence in this documentation that exploits the living self as raw material for a rearranged, more easily circulated informational format. The real Mrs. Panrast must, like her name that is exploded into mere letters, be dismantled on some level in order to be repurposed in mediatic form. Her deconstruction into discrete units of information that facilitates media-transmission is reminiscent of both halftoning and photowiring—reproductive processes that rely on fragmenting and filtering the photographic "original." At the same time, the continuous *photographing* in the scene also underscores how real time's deadening affects rupture the forward progression of time.[146] The depiction of the photographers at this party belies the temporal shock that mechanical reproduction inflicts. Explosions and flashes, with an air of wartime bombing and visceral violence, unsettle characters' ability to occupy the moment: "There were two men with a lot of explosive powder taking photographs in another room. Their flashes and bangs had a rather disquieting effect of the party, causing a feeling of tension."[147] The present is assaulted and

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[145] *Vile Bodies*, 63.
[146] The camera has a long relationship to death that has been repeatedly theorized and I will not attempt a comprehensive summary here beyond mentioning Barthes's canonical passage in *Camera Lucida*: "by shifting this reality to the past ("this-has-been"), the photograph suggests that it is already dead."
[147] *Vile Bodies,* 66.

disrupted as it is transformed into information; instead of feeling in the moment, characters are only able to feel the rather disquieting *affect* of missing it.

Uncommemorated Ghosts

This move away from embodied interaction and towards media circulation may not seem terribly dire in the abstract. However, the diminishing importance of the physical body alters the way people interact with one another on a daily basis. The novel is littered with violent incidents that are overlooked by unaffected bystander-characters who either completely miss the traumatic events or are more invested in creating a record than experiencing them. Trained to be passive onlookers by the press, characters are unable to respond to the present even when they are in physical proximity to pain. At the same time, a reader of the novel is repeatedly placed in uncomfortable ethical binds where she must decide to identify with these indifferent responses or to diverge from the models of reading available within the text.

Miss Florence Ducane is the first victim. When she falls to her death from a chandelier during a party, the text quickly glosses over her (likely) suicide. The event barely makes a dent in the narrative's texture and elicits no affective response from the characters even in its immediate aftermath. Accustomed to encountering fixed indexes of the real through the real time press, they do not register this physical body's contingency, vulnerability, and singularity. When Adam arrives at the scene, Miss Ducane's death is only mentioned in passing as "a disaster there with a chandelier that one of his [Judge Skimp's] young ladies had tried to swing on. They were bathing her forehead with champagne; two of

them were asleep."[148] The fact that this "disaster" is a mortal accident and that there is a corpse in the room escapes acknowledgement, let alone emotional engagement. The wounded body disappears, just as bodies so frequently disappear when they are converted into information by the press. While the other party attendees are peripherally aware of this loss of life, at least enough to mention it to Adam, their normalized real time vantage of the present from the future undercuts its impact. As opposed to witnessing or mourning her death, the women closest to the body lethargically, melancholically try to embalm the dead girl in a champagne gloss—a dot pattern of effervescent bubbles that itself obliquely evokes a halftone matrix.

As her death is detailed in the papers soon after, Miss Ducane's media-made ghost continues circulating. But, just as her corpse has been cleansed, the record strips her death of ugliness, suffering, and emotional testimony: "Tragedy in West-End Hotel: The death occurred early this morning at a private hotel in Dover Street of Miss Florence Ducane, described as being of independent means, following an accident in which Miss Ducane fell from a chandelier she was attempting to mend."[149] Adam's response to the "tragedy's" reappearance in the newspaper ignores the dead girl yet again. The publicized account supersedes the real event even for those who were physically present for her death, making Miss Ducane's pain and possible suicide unreadable. Meaningful personal commemoration is subordinate to the information circulated in the press, which remains unquestioned in spite of its suspicious gaps. Furthermore, although the news about her death is published only a few hours after it occurs, it quickly expires and slips out of public awareness as a new batch of information takes its place. Like Mrs. Panrast, Miss Ducane has no "story."

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[148] *Ibid.,* 69.
[149] *Ibid.*, 100.

One might dismiss Adam's apparent indifference as a result of his lack of acquaintance with Miss Ducane, but equal apathy is evident in the tragedies that befall closer members of his circle—supposedly intimate relations like Agatha Runcible. Given that these figures are major characters, they exert extra pressure on a reader of the text to negotiate her own responses to these characters' injuries alongside or counter to the bystanders inside the fictional universe. These moments capture real time's melancholic quality by repeatedly thrusting loss onto characters that they miss or are unable to name; the reader, by contrast, can recognize the "loss of a loss" that occurs over and over again.

In one of the most dramatic and striking sequences of the novel—a section critics tend to focus on to highlight Waugh's cold, experimental, and mock-Futurist qualities—a group of core characters goes to a car race. In many ways this scene condenses the dynamics of media acceleration and bystanding that are more diffusely distributed throughout the text, allowing them to manifest in viscerally exaggerated forms. The crowded event promises to be a spectacle of speed, technology, and violence. Titillating advertisements for "lost limb insurance" pave the group's way towards their seats and "floated over [the track] between the telegraph posts."[150] In this media-saturated space the group "discussed the technicalities of motor car designs and possibilities of bloodshed, and studied their maps of the course to pick out the most dangerous corners."[151] The desire to witness violence from a safe, non-interventional distance structures their aesthetic understanding of the event.

As publicized, the race is filled with crashes, murders, and assorted foul play, all of which the characters observe from a bemused and disinterested remove. Unexpectedly, though, the line between spectator and spectacle is blurred when Miss Runcible replaces one

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[150] *Ibid.*, 230.
[151] *Ibid.*, 230.

of the drivers and proceeds to lose control of the car, running headlong into a monument and mortally wounding herself. Despite this turn of events, her friends cannot shift into a more engaged or proximate register and instead maintain the same indifference that colored their readership of the race before her involvement. The novel's account of the accident is stoically informative and evacuates Miss Runcible from the scene: "The car had been found piled up on the market cross of a large village about fifteen miles away (doing irreparable damage to a monument already scheduled for preservation by the Office of Works). But there was no sign of Miss Runcible."[152] The text documents the visibly damaged *things* in its description of the accident, but hurries the potentially marred body out of sight. "No one seemed to have witnessed the disaster" and no character's emotional concern breaks in to read or recover the seemingly illegible event.[153]

Even after Miss Runcible is found, collected, and brought back into the text, her injuries are not seriously acknowledged or noticed by her friends. She is taken to a nursing home because she has had a "great shock," but the fact that she eventually dies there indicates that plenty of physical pain is hidden from view beyond a passing mention of her "bandaged limbs."[154] The maddening trauma dreams that are directly depicted in the text and that she mentions to her friends hint at her psychic injury as well. Even in the face of descriptions of her dreams and her rapid mental deterioration, no one in this fictional world is aware of her experiences or even listening to her narrative. The reader, having more access to her trauma here than in the scene of the crash, is saddled with the problem of how to witness suffering that has already been dismissed and that the characters keep failing to see.

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[152] *Ibid.*, 256.
[153] *Ibid.*, 257.
[154] *Ibid.,* 267.

Miss Runcible's conspicuous inability to communicate her story is implicated in the lack of counsel she receives. As Benjamin argues, counsel is dependent on one's own capacity to provide an intelligible account of oneself to others:

> But if today 'having counsel' is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others. After all, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning a story which is just unfolding. To seek this counsel one would first have to tell the story.[155]

In addition to the ether that interrupts and silences these traumatic incursions, Miss Runcible forecloses the story of her suffering by evading narrative practices. In omitting her own account of the events, she excises the feeling of the accident from the scene along with the fear that its impacts will endure into the future. She merely deflects her pain and trauma as "rather odd" before demanding a ration of tabloid information and reverting fully to bystander status herself.

On the other hand, her pain is also overlooked because her friends are more concerned with recording information than being present or communicating with her. One of them even goes so far as to get on the telephone and begin dictating a summary of his visit for the papers while it is still occurring, a version that erases the traces of suffering that suffuse the hospital atmosphere: "Yesterday I visited the Hon. Agatha Runcible comma Lord Chasm's lovely daughter comma at the Wimpole Street nursing home where she is recovering from the effects of the motor accident recently described in this column stop. Miss Runcible was entertaining quite a large party which included…"[156] The ongoing, real time dictation of the press narrative continues to interrupt the unfolding scene to the extent that Miss Runcible becomes increasingly absent in the chapter. The impulse to record rather

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155 Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 86.
156 *Ibid.,* 269.

than respond inhibits both the telling of her story and her friends' caring participation in the present. Without any readers to receive her narrative, her death is also not witnessed, but instead mentioned in passing well after the fact. Another lost loss. Echoing Virilio's argument that, "in the generalized violence of acceleration, we can envisage suffering passing without complaint," the acceleration of information that begins with the literal speed of the car race and then persists through the subsequent depictions of Miss Runcible's trauma makes her suffering illegible.

Miss Runcible's progressive deterioration after the crash hints at how the incommunicability of feeling does not just create an indifferent present, but is also implicated in future suffering. Causal continuity raises the stakes of a novel reader's decisions about how to respond to multiple traumas in the text even if the characters are oblivious to the future consequences of any of their actions. Another death in the novel provides a clear example of how ignoring present pain can lead to future violence. After being barred from accessing parties following a journalistic misstep, one of the *Daily Excess* reporters, Simon Balcairn, falls into a deep depression.[157] He expresses this emotional pain to Adam in no uncertain terms ("I may as well put my head in a gas oven and be done with it") but his suicidal ideations are not acknowledged by his interlocutor.[158] The only time Adam responds is to tell Balcairn to stop; this direct expression of feeling and implicit plea for intervention is *almost* making him uncomfortable:

> "I do so wish I were dead."
> "Don't cry," said Adam, "it's too shy-making."[159]

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[157] Son of Mrs. Panrast, formerly Countess of Balcairn
[158] *Ibid.,* 115.
[159] *Ibid.*, 118.

Balcairn's active expression of emotion does *nearly* affect Adam, but he automatically lodges that affect outside of himself, stripping his own person of any responsibility or agency. He ignores what is perhaps an involuntary bodily response to Balcairn's tears that could potentially be the seed of emotional transmission. Adam does not feel shy but instead locates "shyness" in an external environment in order to maintain his position as a bystander who is untouched by this suffering. However, refusing to witness pain does not obliterate the feelings that reside within the afflicted individual. By contrast it frequently perpetuates and escalates them. The very next day, Balcairn brings his words to fruition and kills himself by turning on his gas oven: "He spread a sheet of newspaper on the lowest tray and lay down, resting his head on it [...] breathing made him feel very ill; but soon he fell into a coma and presently died."[160] The details of Balcairn's suicide reiterate the real time press's implication in violence as the newspaper literally lies beneath his death.

Indifferent Intimacies

Adam's rhetorical mode of expressing passive, impersonal responses to emotion ('shy-making") in his interaction with Balcairn is an apt figure for how practices of readership in the real time photographable present extend outside of press documentation into structures of feeling and interpersonal interactions. This odd verbal tick is not confined to a single scene but constitutes a consistent part of characters' expressive repertoires. The semantic structure recurs over and over again in the text—employed by multiple characters who reject affective engagement or intervention by labelling situations "shy-making," "sad-making," "sick-making," etc. Furthermore, emphasizing the porous division between the

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[160] *Ibid.*, 146.

novel and interwar readers' actual context, this form is not Waugh's satirical invention but a real 1930s cultural phenomenon. He derived this detail from his immersion within the Bright Young Things' milieu and, especially, from time spent with Diana (Mitford) Guinness and her husband as he was writing.[161] While a seemingly minor feature, this consistent pattern of expression encapsulates of how bystanding manifests in human subjects' basic communicative habits, Much like the "feels" discussed in Chapter 1, it reflects an orientation towards experience in which one evades immersion in the sensible present by reading from a distance. This externalization of emotions is directly opposed to engaged sense-making; it is a near-automated response, contiguous with the stimulus that pushes it away and moves on before it can gather context or meaning. These ingrained habits, not just pure speed, are what turn characters into bystanders and, in Virilio's phrasing, let suffering pass by without being bewailed.

The novel's affectively deadened public environment conditions how characters interact in all facets of their lives, including close personal relationships. The attitudes that real time media engender obstruct empathy not just in the interface of body and media or in encounters that are publicly documented, but also in the private connections between bodies. Habits of media readership that rely on the indifferent accumulation of information as opposed to narrative interpretation and that locate subjects at a remove from the present are retrojectively incorporated back into the apparently "unmediated," fleshy facets of everyday life. As these effects are located in the practices of reading subjects, not in the media objects themselves, there is nowhere to turn to escape their melancholic pressures.

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[161] And to whom he dedicated the novel.

Vile Bodies insists that there is no space outside of these networks where emotion is safe; even the closest intimacies occur without anyone being moved.

Waugh's innovative use of the telephone—particularly the phone conversations between Adam and his fiancé Nina—is a principal area of critical interest in the novel.[162] However most studies ignore the telephone's implication in the press ecology that defines so much of the novel as a tool for relaying visual and verbal material to the papers in real time. Its role does not radically change when disconnected from this circuit. Nina and Adam repeatedly attempt to communicate to one another over the phone, but never receive acknowledgement or care from their interlocutor. In Trotter's reading "their exchanges involve an excess of information and a deficit of meaning."[163] When information replaces meaning it causes a deficit of personal feeling, understanding, and engagement—the same problem plaguing the press and coloring daily public interactions. As Nina and Adam are not affected by the suffering they are causing one another and have no consciousness of its duration, they cannot forge bonds of emotional intimacy or find ways to alleviate their respective burdens in the future

Even physical suffering is lost in their interactions' informational noise. Nina's repeated insistence to Adam that she's "got a pain" in nearly every phone conversation stands out as a strange, unexplained detail in the text. In one telling example Nina begins a telephone exchange with Adam by mentioning her pain. He responds by verbalizing his own emotional suffering, but betrays no reaction to her feeling:

> '... I've got rather a pain.'
> 'My dear, if you knew what a pain I've got…'

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[162] See selections of Jacqueline McDonnell, *Evelyn Waugh* (London: Macmillan, 1988) and David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel: connected essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), as well as Bronwen E. Thomas , "'It's good to talk'? An analysis of a telephone conversation from Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies*." *Language and Literature* 6, no. 2 (1997), 105-119.
[163] David Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 63.

'Yes but that's different darling.' [164]

Nina—most likely modelled after Diana Mitford and her own kind of demonic diva—offers a behind the scenes view into the lived experience of the interwar tabloid covergirl. Her repeatedly ignored invocation of pain is often read by critics as a defense mechanism that enables her to shirk responsibility and avoid dealing with unpleasant realities by remaining at home, protected by the telephone. However, it is a mistake to entirely dismiss it as such.[165] The risks are well-illustrated by Bronwen Thomas's analysis, which problematically mirrors the cold habits of the characters in her appraisal of Nina: "during the course of the novel, we begin to detect a certain irony in his constant references to her mysterious 'pain'. For it becomes apparent that Nina can be something of a 'pain' herself in her whining and her irrational attitudes towards sex."[166] If we accept the serious possibility that Nina actually does suffer from chronic pain, the fact that her continual vocalization of this feeling remains entirely ignored by characters and critics alike begins to seem horrifying. Nina's unintelligible pain brings the fictional characters and the real reader unnervingly close to converging.

Even when the telephone is removed, typical habits of media readership have impacted Nina and Adam's emotional capacities so much that their most intimate face to face meetings suffer from the same indifference and end up being defensively reconnected to visual media forms that ward of feeling. After their first sexual encounter, Nina is not just entirely put off by the whole experience but also in great discomfort. As she continues repeating her familiar incantation of "it's given me a pain," their post-coital interactions

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[164] *Vile Bodies*, 81.
[165] I want to re-assert the importance of Nina's pain as a marker of ignored female pain to underscore the stakes of not dismissing it as a fiction of the irrational female mind. Leslie Jamison beautifully articulates in her "Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain" how female pain in particular is so often overlooked, not taken seriously, or just made into abstraction, with real detrimental consequences for the sufferer. *Virginia Quarterly Review* 90, no. 2 (2014): 114-128.
[166] Thomas, 109.

disintegrate into mild hostility. Yet Adam salvages the situation by using an aestheticized media reproduction of Nina to re-instantiate distance: "he told her that she looked like a fashion drawing from *Vogue*, only without any clothes on. Nina was rather pleased about that but she said that it was cold and that she still had a pain."[167] This moment of vulnerability and physical closeness is missed as it is automatically translated into a surface-level, informational reproduction. The solid visual form of the fashion magazine blocks out the fleshy interpenetration of bodies that has just occurred and prevents further emotional access. Something important has been lost, but it already seems too far in the past to matter. More than anything else in the text, Nina's pain threatens to disrupt the real time temporality in its persistent continuity, its unrelenting duration throughout the novel and in this particular scene ("she *still* had a pain"). It is the trauma that comes closest to being named as opposed to melancholically going missing. To push it away and to reinstate real time's governing temporality, Adam must transform Nina's body into a static, flat magazine image that can flipped past and forgotten in an instant.

Happily Ever After

A world evacuated of feeling and populated by bystanders is also one evacuated of agency to account for or learn from historical violence and suffering. As ongoing events are immediately transfigured into ephemeral records, both the lived experience of those events and their context within a longer historical progression slip out of reach. The lessons, consequences, and responsibilities of the past and present are lost in the real time rush to the future. If war and mass death occur without being witnessed in this environment then, as

[167] *Ibid.*, 109.

Elaine Scarry suggests, the dead body that is war's real referent disappears from view: "The main purpose and outcome of war is injury. Though this fact is too self-evident and massive ever to be directly contested, it can be indirectly contested by many means and disappear from view along many separate paths."[168] In Waugh's work the way in which the injury of war disappears is the same way in which everyday suffering is ignored. As merely another addition of accumulated information, it becomes impossibly distant and unreadable, a loss that can't be recognized except by those literally on the frontlines confronting its assaults.

There is no mention of the Great War in Waugh's text, but its shadow stalks the pages just as it haunts interwar Britain. The book's very title, in fact, bears a trace of the conflict. In addition to the connotations of "vile" in English, "vile bodies" is a plural translation of the Latin *corpus vile*: "A living or dead body that is of so little value that it can be used for experiment without regard for the outcome; *transf.*, experimental material of any kind, or something which has no value except as the object of experimentation."[169] While these *corpora vilia* could be the characters that Waugh experiments with and disposes of so freely, the term cannot help but evoke what Samuel Hynes has called the myth of the Great War—the narrative of how the Britain's young men were brutally sacrificed by an older generation of generals and politicians in a poorly managed, fruitless war.[170] The titular phrase is only mentioned once in the novel and buried in a long parenthetical list of parties: "(...Masked Parties, Savage Parties, Victorian Parties [...] dull dances in London and coming dances in Scotland and disgusting dances in Pairs—all that succession and repetition of

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[168] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 63-4.
[169]"corpus vile, n.". OED Online. Oxford University Press (accessed 12/3/2015).
[170] "A brief sketch of that collective narrative of significance would go something like this: a generation of innocent young men, their heads full of high abstractions like Honour, Glory, and England, went off to war to make the world safe for democracy. They were slaughtered in stupid battles planned by stupid generals. Those who survived were shocked, disillusioned and embittered by their war experiences, and saw that their real enemies were not the Germans, but the old men at home who had lied to them." Hynes, *A War Imagined*, x.

massed humanity….Those vile bodies…)."[171] The massed humanity is not just the Bright Young Things, but the masses of soldier-casualties slaughtered on the battlefield. Within this long list, the war loses specificity and its traumas are dampened; it becomes not just the "show" that Wilfred Owen termed it, but yet another unreal party. This profound loss that cannot be named, seen, or mourned in this fictional universe amplifies the epidemic of melancholia. The trace of the dead is relegated to a supplementary note, much like a caption to an unseen image. Trauma remains located in the repeated ellipses of this parenthetical series, the lost space that is skipped past in the rush towards the next issue.

These casualties also exceed the Great War. The very act of moving past them without mourning or meaning solidifies their place in "all that succession and repetition" of further mass historical violence. A new war seemed terrifyingly likely in the thirties when Waugh was writing and lurks on the horizon as a disconcerting inevitability in the novel. Father Rothschild, a minor character, expresses this political situation and its connection to press culture in a conversation with the Prime Minister (who, of course, refuses to be affected by this prognosis):

> 'That's the whole point. No one talks about it [the coming war], and no one wants it. No one talks about it because no one wants it [...]Wars don't start nowadays because people want them. We long for peace, and fill our newspapers with conferences about disarmament and arbitration, but there is a radical instability in our whole world order, and soon we shall all be walking into the jaws of destruction again.'[172]

Because the lessons of the past and the potential discomfort of immanent conflict are not registered, they remain invisible. While an abstract vision of disarmament and press-produced peace circulates in the papers, it means nothing in terms of stopping the real growing violence that threatens to assault still vulnerable bodies. Each new conference can

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171 *Vile Bodies,* 171.
172 *Ibid.,* 185.

calm a population that has forgotten how the preceding ones have failed to deescalate the situation and is divorced from a sense of temporal continuity. Such "cruel optimism" gives an illusory sense of safety and permanence to an unsettled and violent world, while also perpetuating its disintegration.[173] The loss of the opportunity for real enduring peace is yet another loss that is missed in the moment, but that nonetheless has material consequences that endure into the future.

The text's form mirrors the "radical instability" of history built on real time recording as opposed to the experience and understanding of engaged subjects. Its increasingly frenetic accumulation of information does not add up to a meaningful narrative arc but leaves a trail of ruin and violence in its wake. This mounting wreckage and the battlefield it uncontrollably speeds towards are inseparable from the novel's fictional media and information-laden form, which "stockpiles the elements" immediately without any temporal continuity or context. Waugh's absurd invocation of the "happy ending" as a narrative convention underscores again just how incompatible the novel's real time media ecology is with storytelling and engaged mechanisms of sense-making. As opposed to offering any resolution it places Adam in the midst of utter desolation: "On a splintered tree stump in the biggest battlefield in the history of the world, Adam sat down and read a letter from Nina."[174] War has flickered as a shadowy destiny throughout the novel, but vague melancholic anticipation has not prevented it. Even after war breaks out, it fails to materialize or affectively impact those who observe it from a distance. In Nina's letter, which stands in for the home front experience of war, it is evident that the conflict's documentation has adopted the same tone as the celebrity news earlier in the novel. Nina

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[173] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism.*
[174] *Vile Bodies,* 314.

goes so far as to end a summary of recent war stories in the papers with the quip, "Isn't it amusing?"[175] The same habits that characterize characters' behavior throughout the text, however frivolous they may seem, are the ones that turn war into an inevitable outcome and perpetuate their bystanding even in the face of "the biggest battlefield in the history of the world." The detachment from feeling human bodies that has always defined this real time environment attaches to all facets of life, even war and death.

As war continues to be evacuated of meaning in the present and stripped of the vulnerable bodies in pain that populate its ever-expanding battlefields, its endless repetition becomes a given—just like the continuation of Nina's unacknowledged chronic pain. The weighty lessons of the past are forgotten and the new ongoing horrors fail to make any enduring mark on the people of the present who melancholically watch it happen from the outside, from the perspective of the future. The war and its victims are flattened as they are typeset and photographed, translated into indexically impenetrable, easily reproducible two-dimensional surfaces of ink and paper that clutter the present without actually being seen. The home front cannot make emotional contact with the causalities and injured bodies who are just more informational data points of the photographable present. The Great War has been frequently examined in terms of the way it transformed the humanity and pain of soldiers into data through the sheer number of casualties and the strategic rationalization of violence.[176] Yet quantification is not the only way people turn into 'mere" information. Other modes of supposedly indexical information circulate in even more pervasive ways that equally obstruct ethical encounters with the present and the feeling bodies of others.

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[175] *Ibid.,* 314.
[176] See Margot Norris, *Writing War in the Twentieth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 3.

Subsumed in a steady stream of information, the corpses disappear from view, and more masses of vile bodies are left strewn on the battlefields—accumulating without witnesses.

FRIENDS OF THE FÜHRER

THE HON. MRS. BRYAN GUINNESS AND HER SISTER, THE HON. UNITY MITFORD

Two of the charming daughters of Lord and Lady Redesdale. The Hon. Mrs. Bryan Guinness, the third daughter of the family, was formerly known to us as the Hon. Diana Freeman-Mitford. Her sister, Unity, has also the attractive name of Valkyrie. The two sisters are frequent visitors to Germany and great admirers and friends of Herr Hitler. They are both so blonde as to set their "Nordic" qualifications far above question

Figure 2.6 Diana and Unity – "Friends of the Führer" (1936)[177]

In spite of Waugh's hyperbole, the divide between his fictional satire and a contemporary reader's real context remains unsettlingly confused even in this ending. The links between the Bright Young Things' frenetic tabloid lives and reprehensible politics is not an unrealistic stretch if we return to the trajectory of demonic diva Diana Mitford. Her

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[177] The Tatler, 3/18/36, The British Newspaper Archive, pp. 7, available at https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/results/1930-01-01/1939-12-31?basicsearch=diana%20mitford&somesearch=diana%20mitford&retrievecountrycounts=false&newspapertitle=the%2btatler (screenshot accessed 1/17/2018).

celebrity stardom as part of this fashionable socialite set that placed her on the cover of *The Bystander* in 1929, was only the beginning of her notoriety. By the mid-1930s she and her sister Unity had become ardent advocates of fascism at home and abroad. Unity, in particular, is infamous for being Hitler's "fangirl." Fascinated by his image in the media, she went to Germany to seek him out in person and was integrated into his close circle. Diana accompanied her on this journey, and both British sisters became intimate enough with Hitler to be referred to by him as his "angels."[178] This pivot in their social milieu was faithfully documented by the British press in the same style as earlier developments in their lives. Although Nina's depiction of the war coverage in *Vile Bodies* is absurdly insensitive, a 1936 *Tatler* story about Diana and Unity that pairs a glamourous portrait of the socialites with the large heading "Friends of the Führer" seems even more tonally fraught. [Fig. 2.6] When the present speeds by without duration and is already lodged in the photographed past, the stakes of such alliances lose their ethical dimensions.[179]

Diana made even deeper inroads into British fascism. By 1939, after divorcing her first husband, she married Blackshirt leader Sir Oswald Mosley in a secret ceremony at Joseph Goebbels's Berlin house (with Hitler in attendance, no less). Far from a coincidence, though, Julie Gottlieb has shown how the British Union of Fascists was entrenched at a deep level in the "political technology" of celebrity culture. In addition to his support by a number of socialite figures, Mosley was popularly described as "the Rudolph Valentino of fascism" in his era since his "sexual energy and kinetic and physical qualities fostered a celebrity and a body cult."[180] Of course this is not to label all the Bright Young People

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[178] Anne De Courcy, *Diana Mosley* (New York: Random House, 2012).
[179] "Friends of the Führer," *The Tatler,* March 18, 1936.
[180] Julie Gottlieb, "The Marketing of Megalomania: Celebrity, Consumption and the Development of Political Technology in the British Union of Fascists," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 1 (2006): 35-55.

fascists or to claim that Waugh predicted this turn of events in Diana's personal life. However, following the trajectory of the demonic diva across the decade reiterates the novel's intersection with the era's cultural phenomena and materializes its fictional characters' suspect politics in real life. As a jovial photograph of Unity and Diana at a 1937 Nazi rally [Fig. 2.7] drives home, the real time press can transform fascism into just another inconsequential party, cut off from its historical context and ethically consequential trajectory into the future. Melancholy readers in this media ecology are so indifferent to "all that succession and repetition of massed humanity" within real time's immediate, ever-renewing informational paradigms that they might even perceive their "own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure" and watch it from a bemused distance.[181]

Figure 2.7 Diana and Unity at Nazi Rally (1937) [182]

[181] Benjamin "Work of Art," 42.
[182] "Diana and Unity at the Nazi Rally in 1937" in Anne De Courcy, *Diana Mosley* (London: William Morrow, 2003). (photograph of text)

Playing out some of the most dire fears about new media that were circulating in the period's imaginary, this bleak ending might appear to wholly align Waugh's text with technopessimistic accounts of real time. Still, this dark "happily ever after" is not a prophecy. The acceleration of violence is a foregone conclusion in the fictional world of the novel, which reflects but does not clone its contemporary interwar context. By giving the reader space to witness the characters' melancholy occupation of the present and to negotiate a different kind of aesthetic response, the novel retains the possibility of personal agency. 1930s readers grappling with the illustrated press's real time and its modes of orienting individuals to the present were still a step removed from these characters in the fact that they had the vantage (potentially) to see the losses that the characters kept repeatedly missing. Readers might be pushed towards bystanding both by the interwar press's real time and the novel's cold style, but the possibilities of witnessing, mourning, and interpretation remain partially open in both contexts. Of course, though, if the novel's critical reputation is any indicator, the sliver of space the text leaves to swerve in a different direction is frequently missed.

"The Original Social Media"

Although *The Bystander* was absorbed into *The Tatler* in 1940, *The Tatler* is still going strong in 2019.[183] The publication's recently updated tagline hails it as "the original social media"—an assertion that head editor Richard Dennan justifies by arguing: "It was the original media platform that talked about the social world."[184] While an oversimplified

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[183] *The Tatler's* online platform pays homage to this midcentury acquisition with a "Bystander" section that is marked by the photo-heavy documentation of socialite and celebrity parties.
[184] Richard Dennan quoted in Natalie Theodosi, "Exclusive: Richard Dennan Marks New Era at Tatler" wwd.com, May 31, 2018, https://wwd.com/business-news/media/richard-dennen-marks-new-era-tatler-1202685171/ (accessed 10/25/2018).

narrative that works conveniently as a marketing strategy, the claim's intuitive believability highlights how digital social media do frequently play similar roles as the illustrated press once did. This connection is even more compelling, though, in light of Waugh's dramatization of the Bright Young People in *Vile Bodies*. As his characters' habits premediate a contemporary visual social media landscape (particularly with their prolific production and circulation of spectacular self-images) these Bright Young People seem like exemplary prototypical online produsers.[185] Especially in Waugh's satirical rendition, one can easily imagine them thriving on a digital platform that affords myriad opportunities capture, publicize, and circulate an image of one's photogenic, ongoing life in real time.

This uncomfortably close relationship between digital social media and the interwar picture press resembles the way in which the fictional world of Waugh's novel and the 1930s reality of a contemporary reader mirror each other but still remain unassimilably apart. As this chapter has argued, the latter juxtaposition establishes the critical vantage from which a reader can potentially affectively engage with an otherwise cold text and perceive her own habituated modes of mass mediated reading. My experience as a twenty-first century reader looking back at *Vile Bodies, The Tatler,* or *The Bystander* as historical artifacts has a similarly generative *parallactic* effect. It forces me to sit with two different views of the same phenomenon, from two different and irreconcilable vantages. Current technohistorical contexts easily mingle with the interwar world—"too sad-making" may as well be "too many feels" and the Bright Young People's are simply "doing it for the 'gram'" in their everyday media performances. Yet, just as readers cannot physically enter Waugh's fictional world, the British interwar moment is an inevitably bracketed, closed off environment as I look back

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[185] A portmanteau of producer and user coined by Axel Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008).

from the future. It is also a narrative like *Vile Bodies* in which war is inevitable. However, even though I cannot actually inhabit the past, the chiming of concepts and experiences across a fundamentally un-crossable divide of difference, from two divergent lines of sight, makes missed losses peripherally visible and sheds light on the elliptical affective shades of history. This parallax offers an "alive, active, 'subjective'" glimpse of the 1930s and of my own position in relation to twenty-first century real time —its acute angle is a fragile opening into unprecipitated structures of feeling.[186] While the following chapters continue meditating on tactics of self-positioning and media historical strategies of seeing, I end here by briefly affirming some of the more concrete possibilities that this chapter's account of real time bystanding might open up in relation to digital culture.

Popular discussions of the social media bystander in digital contexts almost immediately turn to "slacktivism" or "clicktivism." Familiar criticisms suggest that users are more likely to "like" or share an image than to actively get involved in a solution, and that this response actually can diminish their emotional reaction, activist participation, and even willingness to contribute money.[187] This now common idea inevitably emerges as a major discussion point after any tragic event, and entire organizations are even built around the goal of dismantling this kind of bystanding.[188] Less frequently discussed, but also important to acknowledge, are the responses of individuals who are physically present at scenes of violence, but whose reactions are nevertheless also highly mediated by real time records. Keshia Naurana Badalge's 2017 *Quartz* article describes several cases in which bystanders

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[186] Raymond Williams, "Structures of Feeling," (see Chapter 1, page 29).
[187] See, for example, Cerise L. Glenn, "Activism or "slacktivism?": Digital media and organizing for social change," *Communication Teacher* 29, no. 2 (2015): 81-85.
[188] For example, Witness.org. Reiterating the importance of real time to these public conversations the organization's Mobile-Eyes Us project is subtitled "Engaging Distant Witnesses in Real Time." https://technology.witness.org/tools/ (accessed 10/25/2018).

with mobile phones recorded violent incidents to post on social media instead of actively intervening in the incidents themselves. Her takeaway is that "to prevent a culture of disembodied bystanders, we must learn to better asses the appropriate actions when we're in a situation that demands immediate attention. In doing so, we hopefully transcend the idea that recording an event is replacement for actions."[189] As this chapter has stressed, understanding how a "culture of disembodied bystanders" might come about in the first place and how humans "learn to assess appropriate actions" requires a more expansive and disperse view of how habitual social media use alters human capacities than can be garnered from studying discrete, unfortunate cases. Given that structures of feeling are a fundamental part of these ethically suspect responses, there are be better places to look for answers.

This chapter's engagement with *Vile Bodies* and the interwar photographable present demonstrates the possibility of understanding digital bystanding by approaching real time as an orientation to the recording/recordability of everyday life. The affective impacts of media ecologies often are not to be found in particular devices or in predictions of the inevitable apocalypse, but in more mundane features of popular culture that new media practices and imaginaries bring into being. These places don't just prove assumptions about how media destroy empathy or agency but instead dramatize subjects encountering the increased risk of their failure on an everyday basis. The question may be less about how people respond to violence in real time and more about how quotidian interaction with real time media conditions their capacities to respond at all.

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[189] Keshia Naurana Badalge, "Our Phones Make Us Feel like Activists, but They're Actually Turning Us into Bystanders," *Quartz.com*. May 25, 2017, https://qz.com/991167/our-phones-make-us-feel-like-social-media-activists-but-theyre-actually-turning-us-into-bystanders/ (accessed 10/25/2018).

Without demonizing the still-emergent patterns of reading and structures of feeling that digital social media disseminate as inevitably catastrophic, it is worth meditating on the complex, awkward, and uncomfortable ways that their integration into everyday life connects readers to history, to violence, and to loss. Waugh's text suggests ways of seeing these seemingly invisible links between quotidian habits of media readership, reactions to real world trauma, and historical agency. Moreover, his novel affirms the theoretical value of minor cultural texts that can help reveal those missed, fraying connections. Lingering in these ragged, messy artifacts can push critics beyond familiar alarmist narratives about social media's numbing impact; it can reveal the corporeal intricacies and glitchy feelings that exist within individuals' usage/reading habits and that define new visual media's most pervasive social impacts. Beyond the halftone, the wirephoto, and the illustrated news we find Diana Mitford as socialite cover girl, demonic diva, and Hitler's angel. We find the Bright Young People, a second World War, and all "those vile bodies…." What lies beyond the interface, the newsfeed, or the filter that can bring into focus the shifting imaginations, emphatic capacities, and melancholic losses of digital culture's own real time readership?

Chapter 3

Filtered Flesh:

Glamour Photography, Disability Aesthetics, Lee Miller

Do you think it's that simple to get rid of a wound, to close the mouth of a wound?

- *Lee Miller (1932)*

In 1928, soon after being "discovered" by fashion tycoon Condé Nast, 21-year-old Elizabeth Miller was photographed by Edward Steichen [Fig. 3.1]. Steichen was an established artist whose creative use of lighting and painterly retouching had marked his unusual, recognizable style starting near the turn of the century.[190] At the time Miller's image was produced he had transitioned away from his early pictorialism into popular commercial fashion and advertising work; however, in spite of this shift, his characteristic commitment to innovative photographic manipulation over assumed indexicality held constant.[191] The hard, sculpted aesthetic that he cultivated during the twenties showcased the cutting edge of the camera's evolving technical possibilities and subtly celebrated its means of revising reality. His widely circulated images did more than just redefine the photographic medium's

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[190] According to Carolyn Burke "When Elizabeth began posing for Steichen he was the wealthiest artist in America and a celebrity whose glossy portraits of other celebrities summed up the period's love affair with glamour." *Lee Miller: A Life.* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 59.
[191] Steichen's take on photographic indexicality versus manipulation is nicely captured in an article entitled "Ye Fakers" that was published in *Camera Work* in 1903. At one point he writes, "Whether this intervention consists merely of marking, shading and tinting in a direct print, or of stippling, painting and scratching on the negative, or of using glycerine, brush and mop on a print, faking has set in. In fact, every photograph is a fake from start to finish." qtd in Patricia A. Johnston, *Real Fantasies: Edward Steichen's Advertising Photography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

place in popular culture, though. As Steichen's camera repeatedly fixed on human subjects like Miller, it simultaneously produced a new visible imagination of the human corpus itself. Especially as his innovations became the foundation of Hollywood glamour photography in the following decade, these aesthetic formulas would end up fundamentally shaping the habitual representation and consumption of bodies in the mass media for years to come.

Figure 3.1 Photograph of Lee Miller by Edward Steichen (1928)[192]

Steichen's photograph of Miller encapsulates this nascent style of glamour and the pressures it exerts on the physical body. Contained within a sleek, minimalist, and metallic

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[192] Edward Steichen, "Lee Miller," " in Mark Hayworth-Booth, *The Art of Lee Miller (*New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) (photograph of text).

enclosure, Miller's form appears streamlined and statuesque. Even the softer facets of this image, such as her wavy but perfectly tamed hair and exquisitely draped dress, are hardened by the strategic influence of sharp lighting and perfected with post-processing. Thus treated, her shiny photographed body seems as industrially manufactured as the nondescript metallic surroundings. Gazing away from the camera, she is not relationally absorbed into her environment, to use Michael Fried's formulation; instead she solidly reflects off of it, converted into blocks of light and shadow that draw attention to mechanically reproduced surface over unique interiority.[193] Miller's body also inaccessibly casts back the reader's gaze as the photograph's manipulated style acts as the protective fourth wall of this harsh enclosure. The camera effects veil the image with the same smooth and polished quality that characterizes the background, armoring the model's impervious figure. As if to reiterate all of these formal means of solidity and enclosure, her hand placement acts as yet another gesture of containment—one that simultaneously holds her together and wards of proximity, reinforcing her untouchability.

However enticing Steichen's photographic construction of cold perfection might be, the living body stubbornly resists such revisions. The image's more risqué circulation in a Kotex advertisement [Fig. 3.2] the following year gestures at the underlying presence of a real female form that cannot be as neatly contained as its impregnable camera-made counterpart—that is instead porous, contingent, and vulnerable to its environment.[194] The advertisement, which uses the picture to sell a "protective" feminine hygiene product,

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[193] Fried uses absorption to describe moments in paintings where the represented subject is raptly engaged in some activity as opposed to theatrically presenting herself to the viewer. He argues that such absorption concurrently affects the viewer by inviting a relationship with that absorbed subject in the painting, whereas theatricality highlights the staged nature of the encounter and the painting as art object. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

[194] Miller was the first woman to appear in an advertisement for feminine hygiene and was initially upset by this new use of her image that she had little control over. Burke, Lee *Miller: A Life.* 67.

crystallizes a basic truth about the glamorously processed body; the page inadvertently demonstrates the effective shielding capacity of the medium as much as that of the commodity. Burgeoning photographic norms obfuscate the recalcitrantly sticky textures of the living flesh and ossify Miller's form into an impenetrable whole that is already protected from any physical leakage.

Figure 3.2 Kotex advertisement from Delineator Magazine (1929)[195]

Miller's concurrent trauma-stained personal life exposes the photograph as a technology for sealing off corporeal contingency in more troubling ways than the commercial afterlife of the image. Even as this pristine picture was being processed, her body was subjected to invasive medical procedures. After being raped at the age of seven

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[195] *Delineator Magazine*, March 1929, Museum of Menstruation website mum.org, http://www.mum.org/lemiller.htm (accessed 3/5/2018).

and infected with gonorrhea before antibiotic treatment was widely available, Miller continually managed symptomatic flare-ups and chronic pain.[196] Excruciating chemical irrigations, repeatedly performed at home and at medical facilities, were a consistent feature of her care regimen. Given that silver and mercury were often part of these medical solutions, she was likely physically administered many of the same chemicals that Steichen would have used to prepare, enlarge, and finesse her photographic form.[197] The uncomfortable resonances between these twin treatments materialize visceral parallels between the manipulation of flesh and image. Much as medical ministration can physiologically alter bodies, image "doctoring" can change how bodies are read by others. Miller must have considered the photograph's solid armor a desirable fantasy; yet its incongruity with reality was unignorably, painfully present for her. The singular application of Steichen's glamour filter could visually treat and protect the mediated body in ways her physical corpus stubbornly resisted in its insistent, continual solicitations of care.

The repeated reproduction of this armored aesthetic in the interwar mass media would have affected not just Miller, but also how regular readers of image-saturated texts perceived the human body in "real life." Technologically retouched realities return to alter the original, retrojectively conditioning what bodies can be read as normal and what affective capacities they are attributed.[198] In this era, meticulous manipulations of popular imagery coalesced into a standardized form of filter, a manual algorithm that screened out the contingent situatedness and sensitivity of its glamourous subjects. Just as Adam's figurative conversion of Nina into a fashion drawing in *Vile Bodies* erased her pain from their post-

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[196] Bourke, *Lee Miller*.
[197] Thomas Benedeck, "History of the Medical Treatment of Gonorrhea," *Antimicrobe: Infectious Disease & Antimicrobial Agents,* http://www.antimicrobe.org/h04c.files/history/Gonorrhea.asp (accessed 1/29/2019).
[198] My use of retrojection comes from Bourke's *The Story of Pain*. See Chapter 1 for a more detailed explication of the term.

coital conversation, 1930s readers' repeated encounters with already treated, ideal bodies threatened to push fleshy feelings out of sight on an everyday basis. In this latter case, the effect occurred not by removing the body from a durational timeline or disrupting a reader's access to the present as with real time, but by using modern photographic conventions to filter it—solidifying the skin between body and image, body and world, body and body into hard, inanimate armor. Regularly interacting with flesh that appeared immune to harm, environmental sensitivity, or any kind of external deformation reconfigured readers' basic understandings of the physical feelings and sensitivities. As a result, like Nina's pain, even material bodies could be flipped past like stock magazine images instead of vital, responsive corpora that demand care.

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Moving from the temporalities examined in Chapter 2 to these more textural features of readerly engagement, this chapter argues that the standardized, mass produced photographic reproduction of the body impacts how subjects touch one another. To address these tactile and relational structures of feeling I read what Liz Willis-Tropea terms the 1930s "semiotics of glamour" as an early iteration of the algorithmic image filtering that flourishes on social media platforms in digital culture. Just as real time is a relational attitude towards reality as opposed to single technological affordance, I argue that filters are not simply a set of technologically-enabled edits. This chapter's juxtaposition of historical moments and media environments instead isolates filtering as a dynamic aesthetic process that acts on corporeal forms and troubles modes of affective readership. Applied to referents before they reach readers, filters do not just rest on the surface of images but fundamentally alter the way flesh is relationally encountered inside and outside of magazines.

After outlining how filtering has been conceptualized in digital contexts and tracing

its defining features through interwar glamour photography, I interrogate filters' effects on readers and reading practices. Adapting prominent interwar discussions about media's dangerously anaesthetizing potential, I propose that these photographic treatments work by interfering with embodied aesthetic encounters as opposed to prosthetically protecting discrete individuals. Lee Miller's diverse oeuvre (as a model, surrealist artist, fashion photographer, and war journalist) supports my claim by providing critical access to this intermediary space. By oscillating between both sides of the camera, she occupied an unusually ambivalent location in relation to the photographic image and its production. Drawing on these creative resources as well as her own intimacy with pain, Miller's art mobilizes a disability aesthetic to visualize the impacts that glamour's standardized filters have on photographed bodies and their readers. Furthermore, her embeddedness in the world of magazine production at *American, French*, and *British Vogue* links these interventions directly to the ethical practices of a modern reading public. Her art emphasizes how, as the glamour filter excises permeability, softness, and imperfection from mass circulated imagery, it shields subjects from acknowledging pain and contingency in everyday life.

At its extreme limit—in her journalistic coverage of the fallen Third Reich and its casualties—Miller's work directly implicates popular photographic practices in Nazism's "aesthetics of human disqualification." [199] Here she extends the ethical stakes of glamour's emerging representational norms into questions of collective political responsibility. Her disturbing images insist that, although glamour's filter may present itself as innocuous surface sheen, it can also entail the violent erasure of feeling and difference in ways that reduce the communicability of experience and alienate subjects from sensible flesh. As much

[199] Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

as more overtly militaristic aestheticizations of politics in Nazi parades or Riefenstahl's films, photographic protocols can foster structures of feeling and habits of readership that can end up supporting totalitarian agendas. They define what violent abuses individuals are capable of withstanding, witnessing, and even apprehending.

The final two sections of the chapter locate these insights back in digital culture through readings of Cindy Sherman's heavily retouched Instagram posts from 2016 and 2017, which parallel Miller's interwar critique of media filters in a number of ways. Read through the lens of Miller's work, it becomes clear that Sherman's social media account also engages with filters as invasive treatments that radically reshape the sensible human body. More than just doubling Miller, though, Sherman's images clarify how filters protect readers as well as for photographed subjects. She confronts her large audience of Instagram followers with the unsettling, anxiety-provoking bodies that they must encounter when the visual algorithmic armor malfunctions or fails.[200] Within their different techno-historical contexts Miller and Sherman both teach modes of critically materializing media filters so habituated that they recede from view, absorbed into the flesh itself.

Algorithmic Filters in Digital Culture

With the mass ownership of cell phone cameras, the popularity of visual social media platforms, and the flourishing industry of image retouching software, filters are ubiquitous in twenty-first century digital culture. Lens filters that were physically appended to cameras to alter the color, light, and texture of resulting images have long been a part of photographic practice. However, the evolution of filtering in tandem with digital media has significantly

[200] As of 1/17/2019 Sherman has 230,000 followers on Instagram

shifted its applications and meanings. Digital photography, from its very inception, pushed filtering beyond particular hardware to denote sets of processing techniques and protocols. W.J.T. Mitchell describes filtering as an inherent part of all digital technology given how its functionality hinges on deciphering pattern versus noise and removing unwanted data to create legible information. He argues that filters are tools to "bring out aspects of interest and to suppress others."[201] Beyond this very general proposition he also elaborates on a host of more artistic and technically demanding modes of digital filtering that determine the "granularity, texture, sharpness or softness, detail, edge and line qualities, tonality, contrast, and color balance of the final image."[202] Lev Manovich echoes these points, but stresses the importance of standardization in these processes. In his view filtering is essentially "the algorithmic modification of an existing media object or its parts."[203]

Consistent with this definition, algorithmic modification is key to most popular understandings of twenty-first century filters. Within digital social media ecologies, filters almost always refer to user-friendly modes of retouching photographs based on coded formulas instead of the artisanal effects that Mitchell describes. Software that enables users to easily change the texture, colors, and lighting of any image according to pre-set parameters [Fig. 3.3] is automatically incorporated into nearly all mobile phones.[204] In socially networked environments online, individuals are also frequently prompted to apply platform-specific filters instead of or in addition to the set options already available on their device. A user publicly sharing a photograph on almost any social media platform or even privately

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[201] William J. T. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994) 87.
[202] *Ibid.,* 87.
[203] Lev Manovich. *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001) 132.
[204] "computational photography" on mobile phones also frequently filters images to enhance their focus or color even before the user makes any intentional alterations.

sending it through an application like Whatsapp will be met with an option to filter it first.[205] Filtering is aggressively pushed on individuals because it directly impacts the circulation and readership of images. One recent market research study claims that "filtered photos are 21% more likely to be viewed and 45% more likely to be commented on by consumers."[206]

Figure 3.3 Collage depicting 15 original pre-set filters on Instagram (2011)[207]

While the majority of pre-set filters on devices and platforms alter the photograph as a whole, these options are all at least partially driven by the human body's aesthetic ideals. For example, most of these predetermined lighting and color options wash out the skin's texture in order to create the same smoothness that characterizes Steichen's 1928

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205 It is telling that data collected from Instagram, for example, usually includes the "filter" used in the post's image in addition to essential metrics like username, location, number of likes and comments, caption, and location. This analytic norm suggests that the very ontology of Instagrammic images already takes into account that they are manipulated with pre-set filters as they enter into circulation. See the Digital Methods Initiative's "hashtag explorer" for example.

206 "The application of on-camera visual effects, also known as filters, takes an essential part of the mobile photo sharing success, since filtered photos are 21% more likely to be viewed and 45% more likely to be commented on by consumers." Saeideh Bakhshi, David A. Shamma, Lyndon Kennedy, and Eric Gilbert, "Why We Filter Our Photos and How It Impacts Engagement," *Proceedings of the Ninth International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* (2015), 12-21.

207 ragesoss, "A collage showing a photograph, along with the same photograph processed through all 15 filters in the iOS app Instagram," Wikimedia commons, April 2011, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Instagram_collage_with_15_different_filters.jpg (accessed 12/25/2018).

photograph of Miller. Other common retouching applications make this corporeal focus more explicit by isolating the body and particular body parts instead of acting on the entire image. Many tools, which seamlessly interface with mobile phone cameras and social media platforms, use facial recognition technologies to help users easily doctor photographic bodies with more precision. Facetune, for example, not only touts its ability to make skin appear smooth and "glowing," but also offers additional near-automatic refinement options that identify and reshape facial features such as the jaw, eyes, nose, and lips [Fig. 3.4]. In addition to these highly technical digital applications, the obsession with smooth, blemish-free skin and sharply defined facial features has begun influencing the analog hardware updates on phones. Many devices are now equipped with intense LED "torch" lighting that pre-emptively washes out details to create the desired texture on screen even before digital editing effects are deployed. These consistent norms of photographic lighting are part of the filtering process as much as the coded algorithmic edits that are more commonly labelled as such.

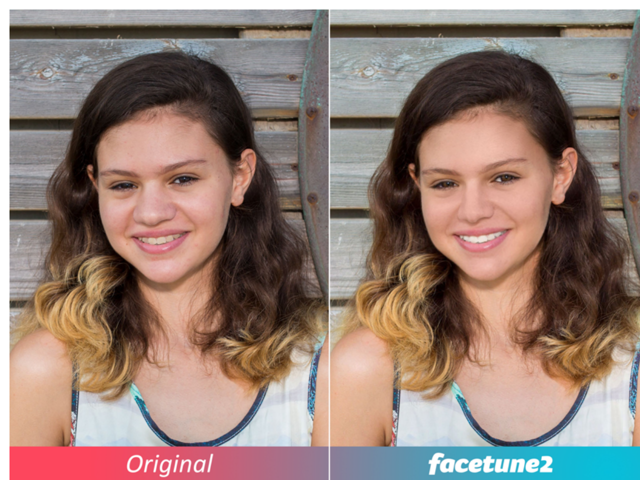

Figure 3.4 Some subtle edits using facetune2 (2016)[208]

[208] "Model #1," Facetune_2 Presskit Demo Photos, Lightricks Ltd, November 23, 2006. Google drive folder accessed from https://www.facetuneapp.com/ on 1/17/2019.

The impulse to filter content has its own politics outside of virtual contexts. Jill Walker Rettberg's *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology* dedicates an entire chapter to filtering in which she explains it as a pervasive cultural process spanning many different spheres: "We cannot represent our lives or our bodies without using or adapting, resisting and pushing against filters that are already embedded in our culture, whether those filters are cultural or technological."[209] Photographic protocols frequently reflect or double cultural filters by, for example, selectively choosing the kind of bodies that "deserve" visibility.[210] However, filtering extends beyond editorial selection. Standardized modes of retouching images can affect the offline body independent of the specific cultural values from which those aesthetic choices initially emerged. While it seems intuitive that dominant cultural filters are often incorporated into the architecture of digital technologies, the reverse process also occurs; media-made norms frequently leak, retrojectively, offline.

"Semiotics of Glamour"

Well before the invention of smartphones or even the introduction of Photoshop in 1990, standardized retouching was already a prevalent part of photographic practice. In addition to dramatic avant-garde experimentations with montage, subtler forms of doctoring were common features of 1920s and 30s popular culture.[211] Much like the digital filters discussed above, these modes of visual processing algorithmically defined the form and texture of the body that circulated in the media *en masse*. With the rise of a highly visual

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[209] Jill Walker Rettberg, *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology: How We Use Selfies, Blogs and Wearable Devices To See and Shape Ourselves (*Basingstoke: Palgrave Pivot, 2014) 24.
[210] i.e. tending disproportionally towards white, able bodies
[211] Much of the scholarship that addresses photographic indexicality and manipulation in this period revolves around avant-garde experimentation with montage or the lingering traces of spirit photography as opposed to celebrity culture.

celebrity scene in this era—ranging from the Bright Young People to Hollywood film stars—filtered bodies became an essential feature of everyday media consumption. Glamour photography's norms not only generated a modern imagination of celebrity culture and camera-made aesthetics, but also established new means of apprehending the body itself.

Recent scholarship has identified glamour as a technological mode of representation that emerged in the 1930s with the power to fundamentally alter the material make-up of the subjects it captures. In her study of the interwar birth of glamour, Judith Brown connects high modernism's aesthetics of impersonality to a burgeoning celebrity culture's media presence. She suggests that glamour conditioned the relationship between the viewer and the photographed object/subject as a modern and mechanical iteration of Benjamin's aura or Kant's sublime. Moreover, she defines this effect in affective terms, stressing that "glamour is cold, indifferent, deathly."[212] Emphasizing the camera's centrality to these developments, she argues that glamour's distinct visual and sensible code was created as "the photographer was enlisted to take the ordinary mortal and transform her into something more than human [...]celebrities were fashioned with brilliant illumination, floating out of backgrounds, shining, and hardly human."[213] Glamour photography's norms of sculpting human subjects into solid statues and removing individual bodies' distinctive, fleshy imperfections enabled a fantastically unfeeling corporeal imagination—a "machine aesthetic in the guise of a human."[214] As this transformative visual approach circulated in tandem with the indexical imaginary discussed in the previous chapter, even these "hardly human" forms seemed to signal the real thing on some level.

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212 Brown, *Glamour*, 102.
213 *Ibid.*, 102.
214 Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

Brown's historically grounded conceptualization of glamour echoes the notion of filtering discussed above in multiple ways. Relying on the selection process that Mitchell and Rettberg both highlight, glamour operates by sorting out unwanted or threatening aspects of human bodies:

> glamour—the effect of the merging of human object, market, and machine aesthetic—depended on an evacuation of the recognizable limits of human life that enmeshed the 'ordinary' citizen. Glamour did not emerge from human warmth, morals, and the messy emotions of the everyday; rather in their place was the coolly aloof and beautifully coiffed personality, hovering over the multitudes of indignities on the ground.[215]

Not just an added layer of enchantment, it is produced through the excision of qualities that might interfere with the desirable, luminous, and artificially whole image. Removing features like "messy emotions" from the mass circulated corpus can shift the nature of emerging structures of feeling. And although these mediated images hover above quotidian life, they still alter the distribution of the sensible in more ordinary spheres.

Glamour also resonates with digital filtering because cutting-edge technologies enabled its stylized aesthetic formula. While harder to neatly demarcate than a single algorithm, this polished, mass reproducible "machine aesthetic" is tied to a set of newly possible and readily reproducible photographic protocols. Willis-Tropea's work on the "semiotics of glamour" compellingly illuminates the standardized, algorithmic nature of 1930s celebrity imagery. She argues that, as opposed to being a coincidental side-effect of celebrity culture, the immediately recognizable world of glamour emerged from a specific series of forms and techniques:

> a particular connection was made between the somewhat ambiguous idea of glamour and the evolving technologies of publicity photography in the early 1930s. Hollywood studio photographers established a "semiotics of glamour" by endlessly reproducing a set of visual signs, consisting of technical qualities

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[215] *Glamour*, 100.

> (such as lighting, retouching, and focus) coupled with an increasingly sexualized, gender-specific appearance of the subjects.[216]

In addition to Hollywood business strategies and the sexualization of stars, technology was a fundamental precondition of glamour's emergence. As Willis-Tropea stresses, this seemingly elusive, magical quality is derived from cohesive formula of photographic production and processing tactics. Lighting, retouching, and focus were choreographed into a single filter that could reliably mark mass-mediated bodies with the "semiotics of glamour."

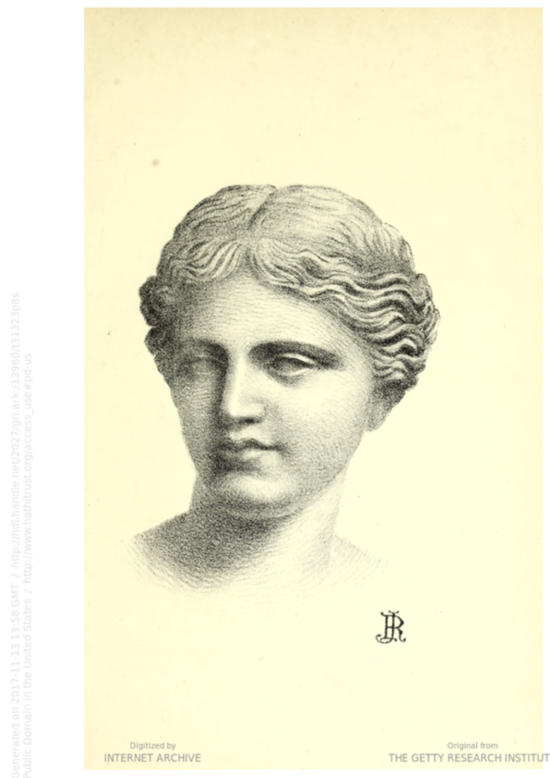

Figure 3.5 A statuesque sample illustration from Johnson's Treatise (1901)[217]

[216] Liz Willis-Tropea, "Glamour Photography and the Institutionalization of Celebrity." *Photography and Culture* 4, no. 3 (2011): 261-275.
[217] Robert Johnson, *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Retouching Photographic Negatives: And Clear Directions how to Finish and Colour Photographs*, 5th edition (London: Marion and Company, 1901), 13. Digitized by Getty Research Institute for archive.org, https://archive.org/details/completetreatise00john_0/page/12 (screenshot accessed 2/10/2018).

The 1930s "glamour filter" drew from a much longer history of photographic manipulation, consolidating older image processing strategies into a new easily identifiable and reproducible formula. Retouching had been a part of photography since the mid-nineteenth century, and instruction manuals for both amateurs and professionals circulated widely throughout the Western world by the fin de siècle. Many of these manuals considered finishing the negatives by hand an essential part of the image-making process.[218] They also stressed how retouching turns photography into an act of sculpture and suggested it had the power to transform everyday photographed subjects into ideal representations by aligning them with classical Greek forms of beauty. For example, Robert Johnson's *Compete Treatise on the Art of Retouching Photographic Negatives*, originally published in 1886 and then reissued in multiple editions over the following decades, includes lengthy sections on how to improve the texture and form of the photographed body by smoothing skin, removing freckles, reshaping figures' outlines, and more.[219] He accompanied his instructions with illustrations resembling statues more than real people [Fig. 3.5] and advised beginners to procure plaster masks of classical figures like Juno and Venus to train their eyes in "correct" form. Likewise, one of the advanced retouching exercises [Fig. 3.6] in Shriever's 1909 *Complete Self-Instructing Library of Practical Photography* involved "mak[ing] a marble statue from a living subject, with all the likeness retained."[220] As these manuals evince, prominent schools of photographic

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[218] A little later one 1920s editorial (critically) reviewing new airbrush technology begins with the premise that all readers would accept that "retouching is a necessary evil" Frederick C. Davis "Push the button retouching" *Photo-Era: An Illustrated Monthly of Photography and the Allied Arts*, Wilfred A French Boston V. 45 (1920) p 173.

[219] Robert Johnson, *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Retouching Photographic Negatives: And Clear Directions how to Finish and Colour Photographs*, 5th edition (London: Marion and Company, 1901), Digitized by Getty Research Institute for archive.org, https://archive.org/details/completetreatise00john_0 (accessed 2/10/2018).

[220] James Boniface Schriever,. *Complete Self-instructing Library of Practical Photography: Negative retouching, Etching and Modeling. Encyclopedic Index. Glossary.* Vol. X. Scranton, PA: American school of art and photography (1909), 239. https://books.google.com/books?id=wKU9AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA239&lpg=PA239&dq=mak%5Bing%5D+a+marble+statue+from+a+living+subject,+with+all+the+likeness+retained.&source=bl&ots=ZUtxGShHYw&sig=7Zu-ac0K56Ul9swi--uMTsuHkxc&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjLm4vBycPfAhWM5YMKHaWjAuIQ6AEwAHoECAgQAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed 2/10/2018).

practice in the early twentieth century envisioned their work as a means of stabilizing human bodies not by storing their referents through "light writing" alone, but by turning them into solid monuments of stone.

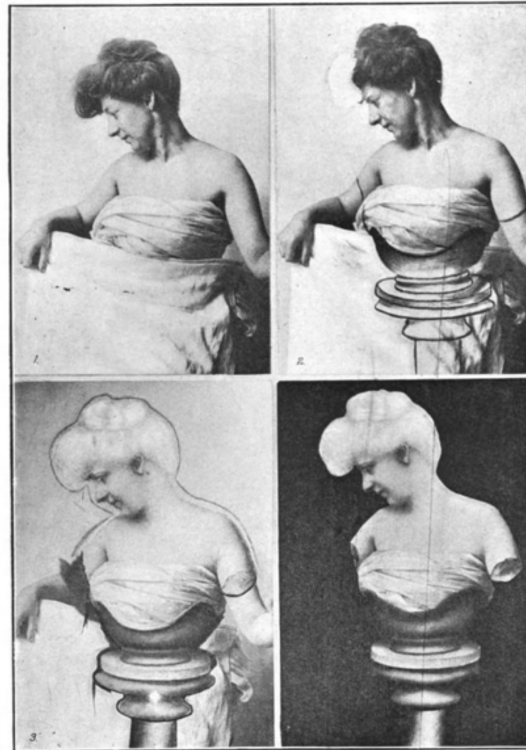

Figure 3.6 Schriever's "Statuary from Life" exercise for advanced etching (1909) [221]

Despite these manuals' emphases on sculpting, during this period retouching was also frequently conceived of as a surgical technique that was performed on the photographic

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[221] "Illustration No. 36: Advanced Etching –Statuary from Life," James Boniface Schriever,. *Complete Self-instructing Library of Practical Photography: Negative retouching, Etching and Modeling. Encyclopedic Index. Glossary*. Vol. X. Scranton, PA: American school of art and photography (1909), 236. https://books.google.com/books?id=wKU9AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA239&lpg=PA239&dq=mak%5Bing%5D+a+marble+statue+from+a+living+subject,+with+all+the+likeness+retained.&source=bl&ots=ZUtxGShHYw&sig=7Zu-ac0K56Ul9swi--uMTsuHkxc&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjLm4vBycPfAhWM5YMKHaWjAuIQ6AEwAHoECAgQAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false (screenshot accessed 2/9/2019).

negative. It is hard to ignore how closely retouching tools [Fig. 3.7] resembled surgical implements, literalizing the notion of "doctored" images that digital photoshop remediates. Using scalpels to shore up the borders on the body, remove porous surfaces, and smooth out its textures was a kind of pre-emptive anesthetizing surgery that replaced vital fleshy feeling with hardened sculpture. This figure is especially striking given how these precise, invasive cuts and alterations are made on the ghostly trace of a real body, imprinted onto film.

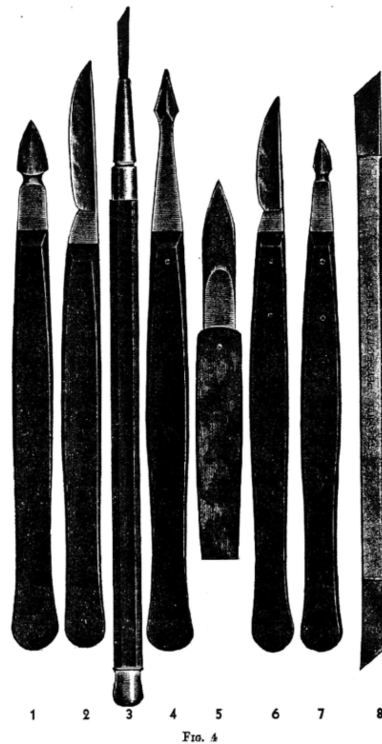

Figure 3.7 A selection of knives used for retouching negatives (1941)[222]

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[222] "FIG. 4," Robert Johnson, *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Retouching Photographic Negatives: And Clear Directions how to Finish and Colour Photographs*,14th edition, revised with additions by Arthur Hammond (Boston: American Photographic Publishing CO, 1941), 33. Digitized by Getty Research Institute for archive.org, https://archive.org/details/artofretouchinga000681mbp/page/n45 (accessed 2/10/2018).

As photographic images became increasingly prevalent in magazines and new modes of enlarging were developed that made their details acutely visible, negative doctoring became more and more necessary. In response, the meticulously artistic approach to image post-production described in the manuals was efficiently standardized and mechanized. By the 1920s tools like airbrushes were fairly common at large publishing institutions, replacing the fine-grained, labor-intensive work of the scalpel. "Banks of retouchers" were employed at *Vogue* to prepare the images for publication by filtering unwanted imperfections out of the final products.[223] This more Fordist style of photographic image finishing further codified aesthetic ideals so that edits could be implemented quickly and consistently.

Figure 3.8 Photograph of Dolores del Rio by Edward Steichen (1929)[224]

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[223] in the words of Lee Miller, as quoted in Burke.
[224] Edward Steichen, "Dolores del Rio wearing an August Abernard," *Vogue*, 1929, condenaststore.com, https://condenaststore.com/featured/dolores-del-rio-wearing-an-augustabernard-wrap-edward-steichen.html?product=art-print (screenshot accessed 1/20/2019).

Figure 3.9 Photograph of Toto Kloopman by George Hoyningen-Huene (1933)[225]

Just as LED lights on mobile phones complement their algorithmic retouching software, interwar filtering occurred at the moment of photographic capture as well as in the manipulation of a negative. Artificial lighting and film innovations helped solidify the hard, sculpted body that retouchers were working towards. In the 1920s fashion studios of *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* Edward Steichen [Fig. 3.7] and George Hoyningen-Huene [Fig. 3.8] used incandescent lights and panchromatic film to create dramatically high contrast black and white images. These tools intensified the technical glamour that could be achieved through retouching, reliably producing images with "sharp focus, high contrast, artificial lighting, and simplified backgrounds."[226] As Willis-Tropea summarizes: "These two photographers greatly

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[225]George Hoyningen-Huene, "Toto Kloopman, evening dress by Augusta Bernard," France, 1933, http://www.artnet.fr/artistes/george-hoyningen-huene/toto-koopman-evening-dress-by-augustabernard-cggsWsQjHv2bzvNtTarqnQ2 (screenshot 1/20/2019).
[226] Willis-Tropea, 263.

contributed to a transatlantic, transnational movement that emerged in the mid-late 1920s; it would soon manifest in both Hollywood publicity portraiture and high-fashion imagery, as artistic cross-pollination produced the 'glamour tradition' in photography."[227] This tradition that began in high end fashion magazines culminated in George Hurrell's iconic 1930s portraiture of Hollywood stars [Fig. 3.10]. Although his images go even further to sculpt human bodies as streamlined, smooth forms, he is clearly indebted to this earlier imagery. Hurrell adopted the same aesthetic formulas to which Steichen and Hoyningen-Huene had already made readers receptive; he employed these techniques to freely re-shape and shore up the protective the boundaries of the human body.

Figure 3.10 Photograph of Joan Crawford by George Hurrell (1936)[228]

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[227] *Ibid.*, 263.

[228] George Hurrell, "Joan Crawford," 1936, http://georgehurrell.com/gallery/joancrawford-tif/ (screenshot accessed 1/20/2019).

Together, retouching and compositional lighting norms formed a cohesive "glamour filter" that reliably produced the recognizable "semiotics of glamour." The implementation of these protocols consistently altered the image of photographed bodies to appear harder, smoother, colder, and more statuesque than would be possible in "real life" or without these effects. Given how these standardized treatment could be applied to any portrait to shape it into a familiar and attractive form, photographic glamour in the interwar era can be understood as a pre-digital algorithmic filter even though it exceeds a single technology or technique.

Armoring Aesthetics

Glamour's obsession with armoring was not a niche whim of fashion photography, but part of the era's wider investment in new media's potentially protective qualities. Canonical writings on spectatorship and media have frequently probed interwar technologies' capacities to shield or anesthetize viewers from sensation, often taking the rise of fascism as their extreme limit case. More often than not, Benjamin's notorious condemnation of the "aestheticization of politics" is at the center of this conversation. As discussed in Chapter 1, Benjamin's 1936 "Work of Art" essay argues that new media technologies can either be empowering means of training the modern sensorium or, in service of fascism, can forge "self-alienation" so intense that spectator/citizens experience their "own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure."[229] For my argument what is most important about this provocation is its elaboration of an interwar aesthetic experience

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[229] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael William Jennings, and Brigid Doherty (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 42.

marked by the anticipatory protection of bodies. Susan Buck-Morss parses this feature of Benjamin's argument, synthesizing that 1930s media can be read as buffers against the increasing shock of modern life, "anaesthetizing" those caught within its overwhelming sensational fabric.[230] This tendency culminates in the political spectacle of fascism, which alters the very nature of "the human" by completely numbing the body's fleshy sensitivity to pain.

Hal Foster forwards a similar claim by outlining the prosthetic logic behind fascism's fascination with new technologies' protective capacities. Particularly in the wake of WWI, with the "natural" human body seeming more vulnerable than ever, fascist regimes strove to transform citizens into "prosthetic gods" with artificially solid, impenetrable bodies that appeared immune to harm. In these accounts, mechanical inventions would shield individuals from environmental threats not by giving them tools to better manage and encounter feelings, but by pre-emptively guarding against sensation itself. Subjects would be safe if they were already "deader than dead."[231] The machine aesthetic of the camera's lens was a particularly potent tool for visualizing this modern superhuman subject. The fantasy of photographically enabled immunity is abundantly clear, for example, in Ernst Jünger's discussion of a militarized breed of man whose communion with the camera places him "outside the sphere of pain."[232]Annihilation might be experienced as pleasure if mediated treatments have already transformed the flesh into a cold, technological armor that cannot be damaged by environmental assaults.

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[230] Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered." *October* 62 (1992): 3-41.
[231] Hal Foster, "Prosthetic Gods," *Modernism/modernity* 4. 2 (1997), 7.
[232] Ernst Jünger, qtd in *Ibid.,* 8.

Glamour's sleek, seemingly metallic surface signals how this protection is less about directly appending prosthetic devices to individual bodies and more about how technical protocols shape relational encounters. The affective impact of smoothness, defined by the lack of details, blemishes, stickiness, etc. is a fundamental feature of glamour's shield. Referencing Renu Bora, Eve Sedgewick summarizes that a glossy texture signifies "the willed erasure of its history."[233] When that texture is part of the body, glossy filters erase the contingent histories etched on the individual's flesh that reflect its material sensitivity to the environment over time. Furthermore, following Sarah Ahmed's definition of stickiness as "an effect of the histories of between bodies, objects, and signs," glamour's slippery sheen actively repels embodied relationality in past and present alike.[234] As bodies are photographically polished, the reader's relationship to the bodies of others and even her own body becomes increasingly distanced and alienated. The skin is imagined as a solid protective enclosure as opposed to a means of sensibly interfacing with the world that bears the traces of previous encounters; instead of facilitating feeling, it filters out affective contact.

Critics usually locate interwar technology's potentially fascist armoring qualities in militaristic and predominantly masculine spaces. However, these theorizations chime so deeply with Brown's delineations of glamour and manifest so literally in the popular picture press's photographic practices that this more feminized media context should not be dismissed. While the era's mass celebrity culture and Hollywood cinema have been critiqued for the production of escapist, passive spectatorship and easily coerced, politically

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[233] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 15.
[234] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 91.

disengaged subjects, the implications of its formal representation of the body have been underexamined.

Lee Miller's Bodies

Figure 3.11 Miller, with Man Ray, at a retouching desk (1931)[235]

By bringing the worlds of fashion and fascism into intimately embodied contact, American born model and photographer Lee Miller reveals a different narrative that emphasizes the continuity of these visual cultures. Miller is unusually well positioned to provide insights into the semiotics of glamour because she was enveloped by them at their inception. Not only was she photographically represented in this mode, she was also adept at

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[235] Theodor Miller, "Lee Miller and Man Ray in her Studio," Paris, 1931, *Lee Miller Archive Online,* https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/UVOwwpX1ebnymKdsBuy0gQ..a?ts=1oM7NdGDBQGvZmGO5VsOdRHj16ReDz7CwzCvm4C3MG4.a (screenshot accessed 1/12/19).

performing these filtering techniques herself [Fig. 3.11]. Her work on both sides of the camera illuminates the relational impacts of these technological treatments that act in the space between reader and image, body and body. With her technical skill and creative ingenuity, Miller pushed newly established visual media conventions to their limits, re-centering the fleshy histories that glamour's protocols usually protectively plastered over.

As might be suggested by the opening of this chapter, Miller has a seductively glamorous biography that is pockmarked by private personal trauma. Her professional trajectory in the world of photography, fashion, and print culture began in 1928 New York City when she was discovered as a model by magazine mogul Condé Nast. Seeming to encapsulate *Vogue*'s latest image of the modern woman, Miller immediately inspired an illustrated cover and appeared in multiple fashion spreads. Still in the midst of this quick rise to fame, she moved to Paris where she integrated into the surrealist art milieu and sought out Man Ray as a mentor. With some persistence she became Man Ray's apprentice, model, lover, and, in time, collaborator. The techniques Miller acquired facilitated her shift to the other side of the camera as she became a surrealist artist in her own right. Later on, after establishing her reputation as a professional photographer and even giving one solo show in New York, Miller began taking fashion shots for *British Vogue*. Her work for this magazine quickly expanded in scope and ambition with the outbreak of WWII when she documented the London Blitz and continued photographing models within the eerily ruined cityscape. A few years into the conflict, she became the magazine's international war correspondent, making her one of the few female reporters to witness WWII's devastation in France and Germany.

Critiques of glamour's filter are essential to two strands of Miller's artistic output that entangle the relationship between standardized technological modes of imaging the body,

the shifting ontology of feeling flesh, and affective readerly responses. Her early surrealist images (both as model and photographer) draw on the same popular techniques that established the semiotics of glamour. Despite working in the fashion industry, she repeatedly undermines glamourous image production by taking these approaches to their extreme in ways that foreground a disability aesthetic and bring arresting encounters with corporeal vulnerability to the center of the frame. Particularly given her personal experiences with trauma and chronic pain, Miller's subversion of these recognizable protocols can be tied to her impulse to make embodied sensation legible, even in its most challenging, hard-to-witness forms. Miller implicates the mass media's standardized glamour filter in disseminating fantasies that convert receptive, feeling skin into cold, impenetrable armor.

Her WWII journalism deepens this critique of photographic treatments that filter vulnerability from sight and excise traumatic histories. Her documentation of the fallen Third Reich bitingly implicates glamour's semiotics in the same fascist violence that concerns Buck-Morss and Foster; here she explicitly aligns this media-enabled hardening of the body with what Siebers terms the "aesthetics of human disqualification." This under-examined selection of her oeuvre underscores that, however distanced these popular aesthetic standards might feel from Jünger's militaristic fantasies of an insensible camera eye, they share similar politically consequential investments in human abilities to feel. Miller's art illustrates how—more than just normalizing an ideal vision of bodily form—the habitual readership of unfeeling, mechanical corpora can be weaponized to alienate populations from real pain and violence.

Figure 3.12 Lee Miller with Sabre Guard(1930)[236]

Critical discussions of Lee Miller's early surrealist output frequently focus on its representation of the body, concentrating above all on how that body is marked by gender. Some of the first images she modelled for, nude studies taken by her father, are consistently described by biographers in terms of gendered vulnerability, pointing to a narcissistic masculine gaze that the young girl needed to fend off.[237] In her fashion modeling, Miller's female form was commodified as an object of desire and a prop for displaying clothing. And when she joined the surrealist milieu in Paris, the objectifying male perspective persisted as a central artistic preoccupation. Man Ray's photos of Miller from this period repeatedly fragment or disarm her corpus in unsettling ways. In one photograph [Fig. 3.12] a sabre

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[236] Man Ray, "Lee Miller," 1930, *Man Ray Trust Digital Photographic Archive*, http://www.manray-photo.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=722&osCsid=adf0ae259bbe8b5dcbe21714aaddc59a (digital image accessed 1/12/19).

[237] for example, Burke, *Lee Miller: A Life* and Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

guard—traditionally used by swordsmen for protection—cages and immobilizes Miller's face. Mary Ann Caws reads this image as one of entrapment and submission that turns Miller into "a prey who is rendered simultaneously mute and speaking of objecthood."[238] Even in Man Ray's images without protective props, her body regularly appears violated, passive, and open to view as it held in stasis by the photographically enabled male gaze.

Critical fixation on Miller's female body often shies away from the physicality of the material flesh, which is connected to but not wholly defined by her gendered subjectivity. Especially given Miller's survival of sexual trauma, it is evident that she viewed sexual aggression as a potent violent threat as opposed to a purely psychic energy. Injury in these images does not simply represent oppressive and destructive gender interactions on a figurative level, but also comments on the body's vulnerability to harm and the way the camera is implicated in the (non)communicability of its painful experiences. My analysis of Miller's interwar surrealist art first points to this focus on physical violation by suggesting how she cultivates a disability aesthetic in her work. It then turns to interrogate how photographic filters and the semiotics of glamour are bound up in this artistic project. I argue that, beyond merely making disability and vulnerability visible, her images highlight the way relational encounters and human feelings are shaped by standard technological processes. The arresting aesthetic encounters she thrusts on readers defamiliarize routinized photographic treatments and trouble their capacities to block affective responses.

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[238] Mary Ann Caws, *The Art of Interference: Stressed Readings in Verbal and Visual Texts (*Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 114.

Disability Aesthetics, Relational Reading

Miller's insistent emphasis on deformation, contingency, and wounding reflects her oeuvre's reliance on disability aesthetics in addition to feminist critiques. The interwar French avant-garde in which Miller participated was profoundly impacted by WWI's gruesome death toll and the deluge of injured veterans returning from the battlefield. Amy Lyford's scholarship argues that famous French surrealists' proximity to wounded bodies and to the reconstructive surgery developed for these *mutilés de guerre* was a fundamental part of their art's development. While surrealism's shocking violation of the body is often taken as a representation of psycho-sexual forces, Lyford claims that the movement repeatedly staged encounters with physical contingency, injury, and mortality. Its treatment of the body can thus be characterized by its very real "aesthetics of dismemberment."[239] Her approach to the avant-garde in the period supports a reading of Miller's photographs that centers painful flesh and is rooted in the experience of injured bodies.

Siebers's theoretically rich notion of "disability aesthetics" deepens and extends Lyford's situated elaboration of the early twentieth-century French avant-garde's "aesthetics of dismemberment." As he explains:

> Disability aesthetics refuses to recognize the representation of the healthy body—and its definition of harmony, integrity, and beauty—as the sole determination of the aesthetic. Rather, disability aesthetics embraces beauty that seems by traditional standards to be broken, and yet it is not less beautiful, but more so as a result.[240]

Disability aesthetics relies on brokenness and formal incompleteness as opposed to privileging an ideal, symmetrical whole. In doing so it challenges the "natural" cohesion of corporeal form and pushes a viewer into contact with the responsive contingency of all

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[239] Amy Lyford, "The Aesthetics of Dismemberment: Surrealism and the Musee du Val-de-Grâce in 1917," *Cultural Critique*(2000): 45-79.
[240] Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*, 3.

bodies. The passage of time and imbrication in a web of environmental forces necessarily make bodies—human, animal, and even architectural—susceptible to damage or alteration. Not just mimetic of particular bodies, though, disability aesthetics is fundamentally engaged with imaginative readership and communicative practices:

> Aesthetics is the human activity most identifiable with the human because it defines the process by which human beings attempt to modify themselves, by which they imagine their feelings, forms, and futures in radically different ways, and by which they bestow upon these new feelings, forms, and futures real appearances in the world. [241]

When this deeply human activity meets bodily brokenness it catalyzes new means of imagining, encountering, and occupying the flesh. Disability aesthetics not only comments on the contingent, shifting, and "non-normative" forms that it represents, but is deeply relational since it triggers the viewer's imagination of her own corpus and of embodied feelings more generally.

Disability aesthetics helps account for the striking beauty and formal logic of Miller's work. While not drawing explicitly on a disability studies framework, Rosalind Krauss's analysis of a famous Man Ray–Miller collaboration [Fig. 3.13] demonstrates the possibility of reading Miller's art as a commentary on the injured body. Krauss identifies this photograph as a key example of the surrealist aim to represent the loss of corporal boundaries by demonstrating the "inscription of space on the body of an organism."[242] From this perspective, the shadow of the screen that bathes Miller is not a cage as Caws claims when she equates this shape with the sabre guard discussed above; it is instead a sign of the external world's imprints on the body. In Krauss's interpretation, the "whole" form of the

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[241] *Ibid.,* 3

[242] Rosalind E. Krauss, Jane Livingston, and Dawn Ades. *L'amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 74.

"normal" corpus is held up for questioning as it merges with and is scarred by the setting. A disability lens can extend this reading by also drawing attention to the arm that is swallowed up in shadows as amputated by the threatening dark environment that encroaches on her body's form. Like the screen's shadows this missing limb demonstrates the alteration of anatomy through externally imposed wounding. The aesthetic composition of the image prompts a reader to actively trace the surface and outlines of a body that appears susceptible to injury and sensitive to its surroundings. This interaction starkly contrasts encounters with glamour photographs that are so standardized that they barely require reading and where filtered flesh reflects "brilliant illumination" as opposed to sensible presence.

Figure 3.13 Lee Miller with Shadow-Scarred Skin (1930)[243]

[243] Man Ray, "Lee Miller," 1930, Man Ray Trust Digital Photographic Archive, http://www.manray-photo.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=1488&osCsid=adf0ae259bbe8b5dcbe21714aaddc59a (accessed 1/12/19).

Figure 3.14 "The Neck" (1929)[244]

Other Man Ray photographs that Miller models for, like the iconic *The Neck* [Fig. 3.14], further support disability-oriented readings and highlight the role of photography in generating this aesthetic. The positioning of Miller's bare outstretched neck in this image emphasizes its unprotected vulnerability. Moreover, cropping and lighting nearly dismember her head from the shoulders; her neck tapers to severe thinness under the influence of a sharp shadow that encroaches on her body from behind. The profile of her face blurs into the darkness above her, impinged upon by ominous outside forces until it takes on a new alien shape. *The Neck* prompts a similar active readerly tracing of the body as in the window screen photograph. Unlike Hurrell's portrait of Joan Crawford [Figure 3.10], for example,

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[244] Man Ray, "The Neck" 1929, Man Ray Trust Digital Photographic Archive, http://www.manray-photo.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=679&osCsid=adf0ae259bbe8b5dcbe21714aaddc59a (digital image accessed 1/7/2019).

where shadows' sharp clean lines jut across the perfectly still photographed subject, the lighting appears unstable and in motion in this image. The shadow feels dangerous because it gives the impression of actively encroaching; its blurred interface with the flesh is dynamically shifting. This inscription of temporality and process in the skin's boundaries prompts a reader to attend to its form and texture in a way that diverges from the classic stasis of the glamour photograph. Of course, even taking these aesthetic features into account, it is possible to read this photo as one of eroticized female passivity as opposed to a depiction of the external world's violent imprint on corporal form. Yet Man Ray's *Le Logis de l'artiste*, an oil on canvas a year later, points to the overt wounding present in the photograph. In the painting he inflicts more violence on the already semi-decapitated figure by drawing Miller's throat as pictured in the first image but this time crossed with a dark bruised gash and a large red hand holding a menacing weapon. It literalizes the bodily damage that is just hinted at in the original photograph.

Miller's approach on the other side of the camera also hinges on disability aesthetics, using many of the same props and effects that are present in her modelling work. Her photograph *Nude Wearing Sabre Guard* [Fig. 3.15] clearly evokes her own positioning in *The Neck* as the nude model's form is similarly, vulnerably extended. The image likewise emphasizes the body's fragility through the contrast between light and shadow that tapers neck and torso to dangerous thinness. Additionally, a sabre guard covers one of her arms while the pose and dark shadows eliminate the other arm from the reader's view. Although Jean Gallagher reads the sabre guard in this image as a weapon to fend off the male gaze, I would complicate her interpretation by arguing that the lighting amputates her physical form in the same way as Man Ray's earlier portrait. Not just an empowering defense, then, the asymmetrical interplay between the arm that is explicitly guarded by armor and the absent

one suggests that the missing limb is not just out of sight but has been violently removed in spite of the shield's presence. The image's construction hinges on asymmetry, broken beauty, and an aesthetics of dismemberment; it stresses the body's need to be defended against external assaults and thrusts the radical contingency of its form on a viewer. Furthermore Miller's capturing of this model's body in positions she herself has occupied augments the complex relationship her disability aesthetic provokes in the reader. She calls attention to the relational nature of visual readership and the ability to feel others through photography—another reminder that images inform how bodies affectively interface with one another.

Figure 3.15 Untitled [Nude Wearing Sabre Guard] (c. 1930) [245]

[245] Lee Miller, "Untitled [Nude Wearing Sabre Guard]," Paris, c.1930, *Lee Miller Archive Online,* https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/The-wire-mesh-sabre-guard-is-a-device-intended-to-protect-swordsmen-but-here-it-contrasts-severely-with-the-soft-vulner/J6Mbtj6Kr0QdSVv0FwTN2A..a?ts=eDmju8MmHd7xqK2Qr1wT9haZ4lQ4QTNr8MEiEpubnQU.a (screen shot accessed 1/20/2019).

Although they don't foreground technical camera effects to the same degree, Miller's more explicitly violent treatments of the human body confirm her oeuvre's concern with threatened physical flesh. Her photographs of a breast removed in a mastectomy [Fig. 3.16] exemplify this aestheticization of material wounding. These images invert the examples above, which show the implicitly disabled human body. In these photographs, by contrast, the dismembered appendage is unavoidably in view. Miller literally puts the human fragment, charged with the pain of its amputation, on a plate for the viewer's consumption and invites aesthetic contemplation. The photo has been interpreted as a critique of the male fetishism of the female body, playing on the notion of "consuming" the breasts. But this reading does not sufficiently account for its raw, visceral violence. By associating the body with meat, the Miller reveals human flesh's precarious nature in the world and its potential subjection to external assault. In line with Gilles Deleuze's provocative meditation on "the meat" in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, the breast's torn and ragged tissues still appear to vibrate with feeling that leaks onto the white plate and into the reader's body. "Meat is not dead flesh;" he writes, "it retains all the sufferings and assumes all the colors of living flesh. It manifests such convulsive pain and vulnerability."[246] The injured organ's raw convulsiveness, plated and pushed on the reader, assails her habituated consumption of the photographically prepared body.

[246] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation,* Trans. Daniel W. Smith (London: Continuum, 2003) 23.

Figure 3.16 Untitled [Severed breast from radical surgery in a place setting 2] (c.1929) [247]

The disability aesthetic that I have just outlined in Miller's art is deeply intertwined with the same technologies and protocols that established the semiotics of glamour. The dismembering shadows that repeatedly, threateningly encroach on the body in her surrealism originate from the same lighting techniques and retouching methods that create superhuman solidity in Hurrell's dramatic photographs of models and celebrities. And the smoothed skin bears the traces of retouching processes that would have been a normal feature of her more lucrative commercial fashion modeling and photography. Taking these formal conventions

[247] Lee Miller, "Untitled [Severed breast from radical surgery in a place setting 2], Lee Miller Archive Online, Paris, c. 1929, https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/nKUTYitwsll197XW6vsUXg..a?ts=g3wbkb73rUZL6c_TGFb5hgwhKhEzoJ1nC2O5sIzUq3A.a (screenshot accessed 1/20/2019).

of filtering to their extreme reveals their impulse to harden the body's surface and to obstruct sensible experience.

Figure 3.17 Untitled [Lee Miller] by Dora Maar (1933)[248]

Miller's increasingly mature modelling work, independent from Man Ray's creative vision, makes the connection between her disability aesthetic and glamour's standard technological effects particularly explicit. A portrait she collaborated on with fellow female surrealist photographer Dora Maar and posed for in 1933 [Fig. 3.17] is a particularly striking example. Made with high contrast lighting and multiple exposures, the image resembles conventional glamour shots from the era on a number of levels—the vacant stare away from the camera, the glossy hair, the smooth illuminated skin, the clearly defined outline of the body, and the stark, simple backdrop. It also recalls a longer history of photographic

[248] Dora Maar (Henrietta Théodora Markovitch), "Untitled [Lee Miller]," (1933), *Harvard University Art Museums Bulletin* 7, no. 2 (2000), 74. http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/stable/4301588 (screenshot of pdf accessed 1/20/2019)

pressures that invasively retouched female bodies, such as Schriever's statue exercise mentioned above. Yet, in this case, strategic lighting and advanced post-processing techniques unsettle the solid perfection that is usually fetishized in such images. In the same way that Siebers reads disability aesthetics into the armless Venus de Milo's artistic power, this portrait affects the reader with a broken instead of harmonic beauty. The amputated arms are not an aberration but the foundation of the image's aesthetic interest and an unavoidable part of the viewer's interaction with it. The photograph also harks back to Miller's performance as year earlier as a Venus de Milo-esque figure in Cocteau's *Le Sang de Poet* (1932). In this surrealist film she played a statue that actively lambasts the desire to plaster over pain by fetishizing an impenetrably solid body. One of her few spoken lines calls out this impulse while simultaneously dismissing its feasibility. "Do you think it's that simple to get rid of a wound, to close the mouth of a wound?" her character aggressively questions the artist-protagonist.

Figure 3.18 Miller as an armless statue Cocteau's Le Sang d'un Poet *(1930)*[249]

[249] *Le Sang d'un Poet,* directed by Jean Cocteau (1930), Film still, *AnOther Magazine*, https://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/558/blood-of-a-poet-steve-severin (screenshot accessed 1/10/2019).

Dora Maar's portrait of Miller likewise assails the glamour filter's transformation of the body into an impenetrable, insensitive statue. Instead of verbally underscoring its impossibility as she does in the film, in the photograph Miller undermines this idealized view of the body by presenting her own form in a way that resists wholeness and solidity at the same time it is glamorously reified into a statue. By offering up a bust that is already broken in its inception and remains fragmented in spite of glamour's protocols, she challenges the efficacy of filtered photography's anesthetizing gaze; the image forces a viewer to interact with a body that is not just objectified by these techniques but assaulted by them. Miller's nearly decapitated and fragmented form stands powerfully in tension with the protective glamour protocols deployed in the photograph's production. This image doesn't just point to a generalized desire to close the mouth of the wound, but emphasizes the troubling way this closure is ubiquitously standardized in the body's modern, mass-mediated presentation.

Offering one last case, the sabre guard images [Fig. 3.13 & 3.15] and the shadowed photograph of Miller's torso that began this section [Fig. 3.14] are clear examples of how her disability aesthetic implicates standardized retouching effects and lighting protocols in the increasingly normalized readership of corporeal impregnability. In their engagement with these photographs, Gallagher reads the sabre guard as armor that protects the female body from the male gaze and Krauss stresses the shadows' inscriptions of space onto the body. Yet, by grounding these images within the contemporary glamour filter's processes of photographic production as opposed to leaning on psychoanalytic symbolism, my interpretation addresses the very real material interaction between shadow, screen, and corpus.

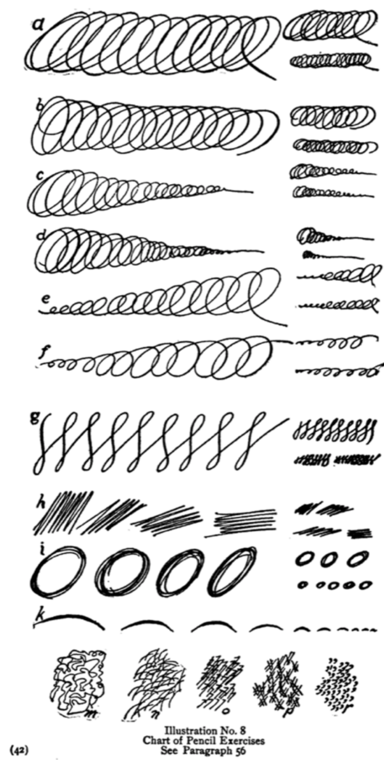

Figure 3.19 Sample exercises for learning retouching strokes [250]

Given Man Ray and Miller's intimate familiarity with photographic post-production in both avant-garde and mainstream settings, it is no coincidence that the pattern of both the sabre guard and the screen resemble the forms of common retouching techniques [Fig. 3.19]. Marking negatives with cross hatches in order to improve the skin's texture and erase blemishes was at the heart of manual negative doctoring.[251] These repeated geometric scalpel

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[250]James Boniface Schriever, "Illustration No. 8: Chart of pencil exercises," *Complete Self-instructing Library of Practical Photography: Negative retouching, Etching and Modeling. Encyclopedic Index. Glossary.* Vol. X. Scranton, PA: American school of art and photography (1909), 42. https://books.google.com/books?id=wKU9AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA239&lpg=PA239&dq=mak%5Bing%5D+a+marble+statue+from+a+living+subject,+with+all+the+likeness+retained.&source=bl&ots=ZUtxGShHYw&sig=7Zu-ac0K56Ul9swi--uMTsuHkxc&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjLm4vBycPfAhWM5YMKHaWjAuIQ6AEwAHoECAgQAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false (screenshot from google books).

[251]J.B. Schriever, *Complete Self Instructing Library of Practical Photography* (Scanton, PA: American School of Art and Photography, 1908), 42.

strokes removed the imperfections and textures of embodied flesh, leaving only a solid smoothness armoring the skin. This process enabled the erasure of the sticky, uneven, and continually evolving personal histories that are inscribed on the flesh, the living body that moves and is moved in contact with its environment and other bodies. The physical apparition of these techniques in the sabre guard's grid like form shows how filters act both as a shield for the photographed body and as a barrier between that body and its readers. In remediating these standard surgical strokes, Miller's surreal images materialize the invisible mesh filter present in the majority of mass-circulated magazine photographs. The screen and the sabre guard literalize the armor that occupies the space between viewer and image, body and body. Yet, because the sabre guard is so often paired with apparently amputated limbs, Miller's disability aesthetic also underscores the glamour filter's inefficacy as real protection.

Fascist Glamour

This emphasis on fragmented bodies defines Miller's work across a staggering range of contexts. Her camera continually gravitates towards broken beauty that she finds in the world or intentionally manufactures in the studio. Some of her most famous images outside of this early surrealist phase are dramatic images of bombing ruins during the London Blitz, graphic portraits of wounded soldiers, and the dead bodies of holocaust victims. Her consistent focus on injury and harm makes it all the more striking when she draws on the semiotics of glamour to present uncannily solid, whole bodies while covering the fallen Third Reich for *British Vogue*. This is a very different way of holding standardized aesthetic protocols up for questioning, one that foregrounds their larger political impacts. Here it becomes especially clear that filtering does not just act on represented bodies but defines collective structures of feeling and a population's ethical readership practices.

Miller's underexamined pictures of Nazi casualties and her written journalism covering post-war Germany challenge glamour's implication in "aesthetics of human disqualification" more subtly, but perhaps even more uncomfortably, than her avant-garde art. This work's eerie power lies in its utilization of the fashion magazine's standard armored aesthetic to represent vulnerable bodies that are not figuratively immune to death but instead literally embody it. She turns fascism's aesthetics of perfection back on itself to reveal the affective structures of deathly desensitization latent within it. Her images subvert this technological treatment such that, as opposed to enabling the superhuman immortality of filtered bodies, it highlights the corporeal contingency that lies behind this illusive shield. Deconstructing glamour by connecting it so directly to violence and to fascism also radically challenges the viewer. It the destabilizes popular aesthetic protocols used by the fashion magazine that employs her by linking them to ideological violence and deathliness. Although the modern photographic medium enables the visualization of an artificially solid person, when Miller applies this aesthetic code to dead Nazi bodies instead of models or celebrity film stars, the inefficacy of its desensitizing shield becomes uncannily visible.

Her photograph of an S.S. officer at Dachau [Fig. 3.20] overtly recalls the compositional characteristics of glamour photography. A serene figure positioned in a perfect profile emerges from the dark background of the canal. The reflection off the water makes the uniform shimmer as it dissolves into the dark surroundings. The guard's head is highlighted against this backdrop as if artificial lighting had been strategically directed to sculpt a film star's solid and masculine profile in a studio. Miller layers glamour's coldness on top of the already frigid body, a coat of aesthetic sheen that is doubled and reinforced by the shiny layer of water that materializes a distorting lens between viewer and photographed subject. This is a more understated take on the visibility of the skin's armored post-

processing that defined her sabre-guard images that more clearly emphasizes the history-erasing gloss of the filter. Here the apparently pristine, solid body, covered by the smooth, shiny texture of the water interrogates the protective, embalming power of the photographic medium by reproducing the formal norms of the glamour shot. A viewer encounters familiar visual tropes of the genre but the material reality both exaggerates them and uncannily strips them of enchantment. While the water's glossy texture evokes a celluloid sheen, this shield does not protect the body in real life, but instead smothers it. When glamour is thus literalized in the world, it emerges as a trace of death itself.

Figure 3.20 Dead SS Prison Guard Floating in Canal (1945)[252]

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[252] Lee Miller, "Dead SS Prison Guard Floating in Canal," (Dachau, 1945), Lee Miller Archive Online, https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/em6WyXpB4OwCP2aR07BrwQ..a?ts=896s2tfNnJ-Yojhmd3OUNiuLiDYJ44JG0rQfTG2tf1Y.a (screenshot accessed 1/20/2019).

Figure 3.21 Suicide of the Burgermeister's Daughter Regina Lisso (1945)[253]

Another photograph, this one of the Liepzig Bürgermeister's suicided daughter Regina Lisso [Fig. 3.21] draws on similar aesthetic techniques in order to evoke the mass circulation of celebrity images. The *memento mori* inverts glamour's deathly embalming power by framing the dead girl as if she were a movie star—elegantly draped on the sofa with her eyes delicately closed and lips pursed, her hands resting softly on her body. This pose resembles a film still in which the girl would be swooning in a lover's arms with the soft shading of the light highlighting her feminine features and perfect, impenetrable skin. The photograph's semiotics of glamour can be readily confirmed by how uncomfortably the image evokes Hurrell's portraits of actresses [Fig. 3.22] who were frequently posed reclined,

[253] Lee Miller, "The Burgermeister's Daughter [Regina Lisso]," (Leipzig, 1945), Lee Miller Archive Online, https://www.leemiller.co.uk/media/FMj6ngdcseSIpt7k0TevPw..a?ts=thlwF0GGAQdJMX4C_F_Qhbskp8FfzO3_V-A3HBnlBMI.a (screenshot accessed 1/20/2019).

with heads tilted back, and eyes fluttering shut. This particularly unsettling image is all the more powerful because it would not seem amiss at all as a fashion spread or glamour shoot given how images of female celebrities stressed the models' seductive sleepwalking blankness in order to transform their faces and bodies into blank slates for the projection of desire and immortal, universal idealization.[254]

Figure 3.22 Glamour Photograph of Jane Russell (1941)[255]

By reproducing these forms in the dead girl's body, Miller illustrates how glamour's photographic filter transfigures flesh in ways that efface the line between the living and the dead. The article draft accompanying this image further stresses the deathly glamour bound up with Nazism by ironically narrating the suicide scene that binds them together: "The love

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[254] See Brown, *Glamour*

[255] George Hurrell, "Jane Russell," (1941), https://i.pinimg.com/736x/3a/b9/a7/3ab9a791a65d3768fd955ec8bb05a7a3.jpg (digital image accessed 1/20/2019).

of death which is the under-pattern of the German living caught up with the high officials of the regime, and they gave a great party, toasted death and Hitler and poisoned themselves."[256] This dark commentary links the image back to the voyeuristic documentation of socialite parties that so frequently flooded the British picture press. Yet Miller's description highlights a cold inhuman logic behind glamour's idealization of celebrities. She stresses how fetishizing deathly perfection, the seductive and enchanting under-pattern of the regime, catches up with the Nazi officials and can only be accessed in their own deaths. The reader is implicated in her own seduction by this same pattern via her desire to consume such representations.

These unnerving photographs did not make it into *British Vogue* in the end. The magazine instead included much tamer selections of Miller's reporting. However, her article "Hitleriana," which details her tours of Hitler and Eva Braun's apartments, did escape censorship. This journalism further reinforces my argument about Miller's engagement with the semiotics of glamour as a way of deconstructing standardized modes of reading the body that can prime the fascist ideologies. The protective protocols that are developed on camera are retrojectively mapped onto real flesh, filtering living bodies such that they match their photographic ontology. Touring the intimate spaces of these "celebrities," Miller's writing reads much like an expose about the glamorous private life of stars that could easily appear in a popular magazine. In Braun's apartment she carefully details all of the expensive beauty products—themselves material tools to construct the perfect feminine aesthetic by filtering out human imperfections in real life:

> Heavy crystal bottles and scent sprayers were on the top shelves, empty like a lot of wedding presents. A carton of envelopes of a soapless hair wash for blondes, a few belts, a tweed beret and a douche bag were all that was left of her envied wardrobe

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[256] Lee Miller, ed. Antony Penrose, *Lee Miller's War* (Wheelers Hill, Australia: Monash Gallery of Art, 2007), 176.

> and equipment. The long mirrored dressing table had odds and ends, tweezers, Elizabeth Arden lipstick refills (marked Milan), a half bottle of Arden skin tonic, little funnels and spatulas for transferring beauty products. Nothing was grimy, everything looked new.[257]

The impressive collection of designer cosmetics makes Braun seem superhuman and enviable for a curious *Vogue* reader. As Gallagher notes, "the naming of the familiar name brands functions as an enormous and grotesque parody of the pages of *Vogue* itself."[258] The strategic marketing of listing this litany of brands make Braun's state not only desirable but accessible to a reader through her purchasing power. In addition to their commodified value, Miller also highlights the "newness" of everything. The beauty relics appear immune to the sticky textures of the living human or the deteriorating effects of time. Their glamourous gloss erases Braun's body and its immersion within particular histories.

Yet the accumulation of beauty products slips seamlessly into a chest of medications, signifiers of the vulnerable and sensitive flesh underneath the shield:

> Her bathroom was supernormal, except for two medicine chests, both of which were crammed with drugs and patent preparations, enough for a ward of hypochondriacs. The two sisters must have had similar diseases, although there was more of everything in Eva's Evipan, eyewash, sleeping pills, and nose sprays. A variety of bronchial cure-alls—gland medicines and vitamins. The neighboring girls said Eva was always taking something for some sort of pain, especially girl's troubles.[259]

Braun's medicine chests are filled with tools for filtering out her "girl's troubles" from actual relationships and the public eye, just as glamourous processing norms treat the photographed body. The composite meaning of supernormal captures a tension in which this state is beyond the natural/normal but has simultaneously been naturalized as the normal state of how bodies should look, behave, and feel. Still, underneath the supernormal

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[257] *Ibid.*, 179.
[258] Jean Gallagher, *The World Wars through the Female Gaze (*Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998) 91.
[259] *Ibid.*, 179.

body that occupied the supernormal bathroom there is a degenerate and painfully sensitive body at risk of falling apart or transgressing its artificially imposed ideal form. As Annalisa Zox-Weaver phrases it, "the anxiety of the Nazi social order that seeks to eradicate the "polluted" bodies of the Jews is thus writ small in Braun's vigilant need to monitor the purity of her own body [...] that, despite its national privilege, bleeds and swells, grows hair and changes shape."[260] The only bodies that can conform to the glamourous aesthetics fascism demands are imagined and dead ones. The living are riddled with sensitivities that familiar algorithmic filters may mask but cannot erase. While Nina's transmutation into a *Vogue* fashion drawing in *Vile Bodies* made her pain illegible, Miller smuggles Braun's pain into *Vogue* and forces a reader to momentarily touch it. Pushing back against the way her own "girl's troubles" were hidden from view and excised from photographs years earlier, Miller's article leaks vulnerable feelings through the magazine's usual protective barrier and into a reader's encounter with this glamorous textual portrait.

Miller's journalism suggests that the mass mediated filtering of the body is an increasingly fraught terrain as glamour comes of age in tandem with the rise of fascism. Fashioning impossible fantasies of immunity, glamour fetishizes not only beauty and immortality, but also violence, death, and human disqualification. As glamour is standardized in a serious of easily reproducible aesthetic effects, it erases feeling and difference in ways that can powerfully play into totalitarian agendas. Readers increasingly interact with ideal and armored images of the human such that the persecution and disqualification of bodies labelled degenerate becomes more and more intuitive. Moreover, repeated contact with impossible, invulnerable "prosthetic gods" drives readers to cling to the artificially unfeeling

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[260] Annalisa Zox-Weaver, "When the War Was in Vogue: Lee Miller's War Reports," *Women's Studies (*2003), 158.

interfaces between bodies as a means of self-protection, to conceive of their own skin as an impregnable enclosure as opposed to a sensitive feeling organ. In jarringly materializing the everyday action of filters on flesh, Miller challenges a *British Vogue* reader to view the values of Nazi Germany and its reprehensible treatment of the body not as an abstract evil, but as something uncomfortably at home in her own everyday habits of media consumption.

Instaworthy Images @cindysherman

Miller's disability aesthetic shows how glamour operates in the relational interface between photographed bodies and readers, reframing filtering as an assemblage of ethically consequential practices as opposed to a particular technical affordance. This conceptual framework can be transported beyond her historical context to examine how visual filters inflect human readership habits in digital culture without getting mired in common debates about digital photography's uniquely fraught relationship to indexicality. Filters' particular effects on the body in the twenty-first century are often lost in more general discussions of digital photography's troubling malleability. Mitchell's much-referenced *The Reconfigured Eye*, for example, argues that digital images only belong in the history of photography insofar as they "replace" analog photography like analog photography "replaced" painting over a century earlier. He goes so far as to label digital photography "post-photographic" on the grounds of its slippery editability that changes the relationship between image and referent in the digital image economy.[261]

However, Mitchell's narrative of rupture is not the only version of this story. Mia

[261] According to Mitchell, while analog photographs are technologies of capture, digital images are defined primarily by intermediary processing with computational tools; therefore "the connection of images to solid substance has become tenuous." *Reconfigured Eye*, 57.

Fineman paints a more continuous portrait of photography's waxing and waning claims to objectivity across its entire development. Excavating the ubiquity of photographic manipulation from the medium's inception, she troubles assumptions about the analog's privileged relationship to the referent.[262] By bringing interwar insights to bear on digital culture, my work follows Fineman and brackets the important, but frequently overpowering, strain of scholarship on digital images as uniquely malleable or post-photographic. Distancing filtering from this digitally-dependent discussion opens new pathways to consider it as a relational practice that impacts human bodies in ethically consequential ways.

Meryl Alper's research on embedded war journalists' use of a software application called Hipstammatic is one of the only critical triangulations of filters, violence, and ethics in digital culture.[263] She addresses professional photographers' adoption of a seemingly vernacular style by using the app's pre-set filters (popularized on Instagram), arguing that this style of reporting mimics the ground level perspective of the soldiers. In Alper's view this practice flattens the complexity of the multiple gazes witnessing violent conflict and raises new questions about what photographs of war are meant to do. Hipstammatic's algorithmic filters' add a second layer of censorship on top of the already framed nature of the photograph that selects what aspects of the scene to show; subject matter that is incongruous with the filters' aesthetic options is automatically excised. For example, combat itself frequently falls out of the documentation. Referencing Sontag, Alper asserts that by privileging aesthetics over content filters *anesthetize* viewers from the impact of encountering war's violent, gruesome realities. However, more habitual and banal modes of representation

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[262] Mia Fineman, *Faking it: Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012).
[263] Meryl Alper, "War on Instagram: Framing conflict photojournalism with mobile photography apps." *New Media & Society* 16, no. 8 (2014): 1233-1248.

can have an even more significant effects on individuals' abilities to read real injury and pain. As opposed looking for how explicitly violent content is filtered out of the picture, the rest of the chapter extends Miller's concern with how the widespread filtering of more typical, trivial media imagery influences the viewership of violence in outside of the frame.

Cindy Sherman's Instagram account (@cindysherman), frmly rooted in the everyday, facilitates a temporal jump from the interwar era to the digital present. Like Miller, Sherman has occupied a multiplicity of roles in relation to photographic image production through most of her career, simultaneously acting as a model, photographer, and technician. Using Instagram's filters, Snapchat, Facetune, and other software applications marketed for professional models and makeup artists, Sherman retouches selfies not into more perfect, stable versions of herself but into unrecognizable, discomfiting creations. These posts defamiliarize the ubiquitous retouching interventions that are as second nature to contemporary social media consumers as the semiotics of glamour were in the interwar mass media. Like Miller's oeuvre, Sherman's account questions the assumption that these standardized technological treatments can alter the photographic body without acting on living flesh and informing embodied encounters.

A short overview of Sherman's earlier work contextualizes her Instagram project in relation to these key concerns. According to Fineman, Sherman consistently "practiced a species of metaphotography that sought to turn the medium's seeming transparency against itself."[264] Her classic film stills and her 1990s fashion series both materialize the naturalized lenses covertly mediating readers' affective relationships to images and shaping the female body. Laura Mulvey synthesizes this approach, arguing that the film stills are defined by an

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[264] Fineman, *Faking it,* 40.

interplay between protective surface (enabled by media technologies) and inaccessible vulnerability (located in embodied life):

> An overinsistence on surface starts to suggest that it might be masking something or other that should be hidden from sight, and a hint of another space starts to lurk inside a too plausible facade. Sherman accentuates the uneasiness by inscribing vulnerability into both the mise en scène of the photographs and the women's poses and expressions.[265]

The film stills paralyze the photographed body behind the now-palpable filter of an idealizing, fetishizing gaze as opposed to protectively embalming it. The denaturalized emphasis on surface makes the viewer aware of the representational protocols that make corporeal form feel hard and inaccessible. Yet the trace of vulnerability that slips through the filter through the photographed body's expressive gestures that uncomfortably implicate the viewer in spite of this mediated obstruction of feeling.

Sherman's fashion photographs reflect the increasingly aggressive evolution of her work. And, especially given that many of these images appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* and were used for advertising campaigns, their resonances with Miller's deconstruction of glamour from inside *Vogue* are striking. These images disrupt the conventional relationship between reader and photographically filtered body even more than the film stills by letting a hint of abjection slip into view. To quote Mulvey again:

> they suggest that the binary opposition to the perfect body of the fashion model is the grotesque, and that the smooth glossy body, polished by photography, is a defense against an anxiety- provoking, uneasy and uncanny body. From this perspective the surface of the body, so carefully conveyed in the early photographs, seems to be dissolving to reveal a monstrous otherness behind the cosmetic facade.[266]

More than makeup or social definitions of womanhood, the cosmetic façade is an armor

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[265] Laura Mulvey, "A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body: The Work of Cindy Sherman." *New Left Review* (1991), 5.
[266] *Ibid.,* 8.

constructed by the media processes that scaffold the aesthetic interaction between reader and image. The medium is essential to the defensive polishing Mulvey describes, which armors the surface of the body to erase its situated, embodied individuality and to replace porous, sensitive skin with a "smooth glossy" finish. In the fashion images, though, that protective filter fails.

Whereas Miller's disability aesthetic generates an uncomfortable ambivalence that creates an imaginative relationship between reader and image, Sherman critiques standardized filters by thrusting abject, inadequately filtered female bodies on the viewer. For example, as opposed to being "appropriately" hardened into a defensive armor, the skin of the female figure in "Untitled #299" [Fig.3.23] is soft, stained, and translucent. It ineffectively protects a viewer from contact with the model's internal organs; the tattoo on her neck mimics an anatomical diagram of the trachea and esophagus lying just underneath her gossamer skin. The sheer dress draped over the fragile flesh is likewise a flawed filter that lets too much of the body through. Its transparent fabric reveals the bulky pad covering Sherman's genitals and a dark stain on her inner thighs. This abstract shape appears to spread outwards and down her legs, resembling menstrual blood that the pad failed to contain, leakage from which the reader is not protected. All of these over-disclosed details are abject signifiers of the permeable and contingent boundary between body and external world. However, in these pictures Sherman's personas do not appear wounded, assaulted, or uncomfortable. They do not draw the reader close to the body by established an imaginative aesthetic encounter, but physically penetrate the reader with disgust. These anxiety-provoking bodies force the reader to feel her own reliance on filters for self-protection on a visceral level as opposed to locating their effects entirely in the image. As Ahmed writes, "to

be disgusted is after all to *be affected by what one has rejected.*"[267]

Figure 3.23 One of Sherman's fashion photographs: "Untitled #299" [268]

The experimentally retouched selfies [Fig. 3.24] that constitute the majority of Sherman's Instagram account (made public in August 2017) continue these earlier collections' critiques. Yet her approach is also distinct on social media, focusing even more intently on the role of the technological medium as filter. Echoing Mulvey's reading of the fashion images, these posts operate through the tension between the surface of the smooth glossy body and the near-grotesque abjection lurking just within. Without an easy

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[267] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 86.
[268] Cindy Sherman, "Comme de Garcons," AW94 Campaign (1994) http://www.dazeddigital.com/photography/article/32147/1/your-ultimate-guide-to-cindy-sherman (screenshot)

institutional target like Hollywood or the fashion, this duality is yoked almost entirely to the technological effects that produce these images and the platform that enables their circulation. In the comments Sherman frequently notes the specific retouching applications used to create these effects, which further underscores the importance of digital filtering software to her images.

Figure 3.24 Cindy Sherman Instagram Post #1 [269]

Figure 3.25 Cindy Sherman Instagram Post #2 [270]

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[269] Cindy Sherman, "Goo-goo eyes," *Instagram (*August 22, 2017), https://www.instagram.com/p/BYG-3qFA-Fx/ (screenshot accessed 1/7/2018).
[270] Cindy Sherman, "Head space," *Instagram (*December 15, 2017), https://www.instagram.com/p/BcvOOlMgP3n/ (screenshot accessed 1/7/2018).

Much like bodies in Miller's work, Sherman's body often appears impinged on, shaped, and violated from without. Nearly all of the posts focus on her visibly distorted head. Also like Miller, Sherman retouches her skin's texture in ways that disrupt the viewing experience as opposed to reifying the expected glossy smoothness. While some of Sherman's selfies are so doctored that they look like they were captured in a fun house mirror [Fig. 3.25], her more powerful posts are subtle manipulations that take common retouching practices just a step too far; in this extension they become visible and unsettling as opposed to neutral near-automatic "enhancements." Figure 3.26 is a clear example of this more nuanced approach that showcases Facetune's typical retouching interventions—enlarging lips and eyes, shaping the nose and cheekbones, and erasing imperfections in the skin's texture.[271] These edits reflect outside pressures warping the flesh and make the filtering process unavoidably material. As a result readers begin speculating in the comments on what is natural and what is altered in Sherman's form; their ambiguities and misrecognitions show how these effects destabilize the boundaries of the recognizably "real" body. For example, in Figure 3.26 Sherman corrects one user who hypothesizes that her hair is fake; although her answer "real, just made dif color" puts "real" back into question as opposed to clearly demarcating it. Sherman's selfies occupy the slippery edge of "acceptable" retouching, dipping into the "monstrous" instead of following the protocols to reproduce the expected, stabilized ideal. Forcing the viewer to linger in the indeterminate zone between the two reveals the arbitrary borders of normal photo-enhancement and the physical pressures exerted by the standard semiotics of "Insta-glamour."

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[271] Sherman is likely also evoking a history of feminist performance art in which artists literally altered their bodies with cosmetic surgery, such as ORLAN's "The Reincarnation of St. Orlan." However in Sherman's images and paratextual commentaries it is clear that the technology is not just a means of creating a cosmetic surgery-esque effect on the body, but that the interface of technology and body is the central preoccupation.

Figure 3.26 Cindy Sherman Instagram Post #3[272]

While Miller's 1930s critique focused on the body's textures and formal outlines, Sherman's aesthetic treatments have additional targets. Computer vision technologies that enable the automatic recognition and precise distortion of individual facial features are central to her twenty-first century critique. Despite these technical differences, both artists focus on the habituated filters that algorithmically transform the body into a hard, solid, and supernormal version of itself in order to undermine the naturalness of these mediated processes. Although they share this same basic premise, Sherman's work does diverge from Miller's in certain ways. The impact of Sherman's Instagram posts, like her fashion images, rests more on the reader's discomfort than on the violation of the photographed body. The abject subjects in the photograph and the reader's own uncomfortable, mildly disgusted affective responses to them are reminders of embodiment's contingent sensitivity to outside forces when it is not artificially, technologically stabilized.

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[272] Cindy Sherman, "Untitled," *Instagram* (June 4, 2017), https://www.instagram.com/p/BU5pHwNAKtb/ (screenshot accessed 7/20/2017).

Figure 3.27 Cindy Sherman Instagram Post #4[273]

The majority of Sherman's images use filtering and retouching to visibly challenge bodily cohesion as discussed above; however, a small subset instead generate filtered perfection in contextually unsettling ways much like Miller's Nazi portraits. Sherman's selfie in a hospital bed with oxygen tubes in her nose [Fig. 3.27] is one notable example. In this image she has added a standard filter that uses facial recognition to automatically put "makeup" on her face, enlarge her eyes and mouth, and add a smooth, flushed, and radiant tone to the skin. This type of algorithmic processing is not abnormal in the context of a typical Instagram feed, but the juxtaposition of these techniques with Sherman's sick, hospitalized body defamiliarizes their effect on readers. The image makes explicit an underlying theme that is embedded in the other images—that photographic filters act on the body with the covert intention of embalming and shielding both it and the reader from individual history, contingency, and vulnerability.

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[273] Cindy Sherman, "Am I cured doctor?" Instagram, July 28, 2017, https://www.instagram.com/p/BXFGkbxA-Ky/ (screenshot accessed 7/20/2017).

The caption ("Am I cured doctor?") supports this interpretation, echoing my discussion of Miller's parallel medical and photographic treatments that began the chapter. Photographic intervention becomes an apparent remedy for illness, pain, and other unwanted sensations that populate everyday bodily experience by shielding feeling from view as opposed to grappling with it. Algorithmic media protocols can get in the way of real care, by taking the place of more attentive, embodied, and dialogic forms of interpersonal mediation. Although Sherman asks the doctor to read her body for signs of illness in this caption, this very practice is frustrated by the filter interjected between her flesh and an outside viewer, making the body and its symptoms at least partially illegible. The reader on Instagram is peripherally aware of both Sherman's illness and its inaccessibility behind this standard technological screen. Some commenters ask, with confusion, about Sherman's health while others address her hospitalized body as if it is as insensibly malleable as her digital image—"nip/tuck" one writes, casually interpreting her flesh as ready for cosmetic surgery instead of vulnerable to sickness.

Selfie Surgery

This last image literalizes the "selfie surgery" that has become a familiar feature of everyday visual social media. A recent *Buzzfeed* article about Facetune (the software application introduced at the beginning of this chapter) deploys this phrase to express concern about the rise of accessible photo-retouching applications on mobile phones, arguing that "Your old camera fixed your red-eye, and Instagram fixed your photos. A new

class of apps promises to fix you."[274] It adds that, because of this technical innovation, "aggressive photo manipulation like this might become the norm."[275] Popular critiques of digital retouching technologies frequently emphasize how these applications take advantage of user's insecurities in ways that make individuals feel inadequate in real life and overly dependent on their mediated image. Yet the standardized processing of the photographed body has other consequences. Retouched images on social media are not just outlets for users to magnify existing judgements; instead, emerging technological norms retrojectively map new imaginations of the body offline. In repeatedly "fixing" the visible body, such digital filtering practices simultaneously "fix" or stabilize the cultural imagination of what a body is, how it responds to its environments, and what it can feel.

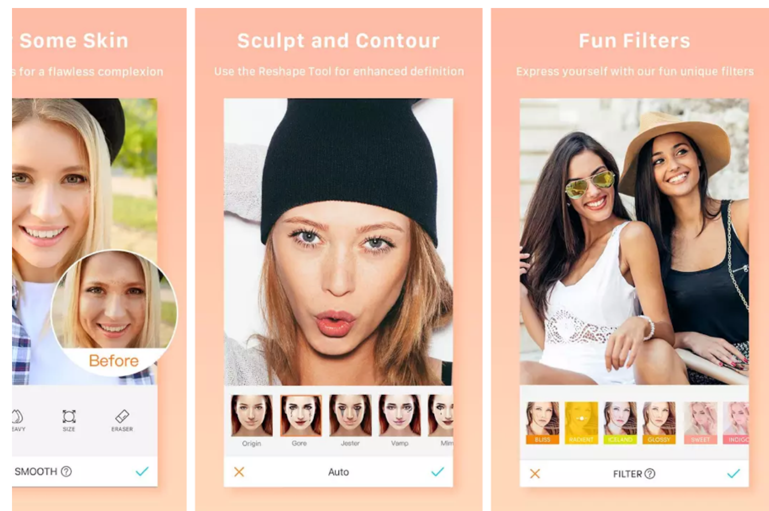

Figure 3.28 Promotional Material for AirBrush[276]

The prevalence of digital filters on social media is currently redefining the concept of the body for a mass readership as much as glamour did in the 1930s. Market research done

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[274] John Hermann, "The Rise of Selfie Surgery," Buzzfeed.com, https://www.buzzfeed.com/jwherrman/the-rise-of-selfie-surgery?utm_term=.fi1EQgBr5j#.qkMp1RD4Vj (accessed 10/2/2017).
[275] *Ibid.*
[276] "AirBrush: Easy Photo Editor," *Google Play Store*, https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.magicv.airbrush&hl=en_US (screenshot accessed 11/13/2017).

by the Relatable, LLC in 2017 suggests that 18% of all posts on Instagram use of one the platform's filters.[277] However, the percentage of doctored posts is certainly much higher, given how mobile phone cameras and other popular photo-editing software also encourage filtering. Facetune is not an outlier in contemporary visual culture, but one of its mainstays. Its most recent version currently boasts over a million downloads on Android devices alone.[278] Also, in addition to Facetune's top-of-the line functionality that users pay a minimal fee to access, similar free products attract even larger user bases. AirBrush (developed by the more internationally popular, China-based photo editing giant Meitu), for example, has been installed by over 10 million Android users.[279]

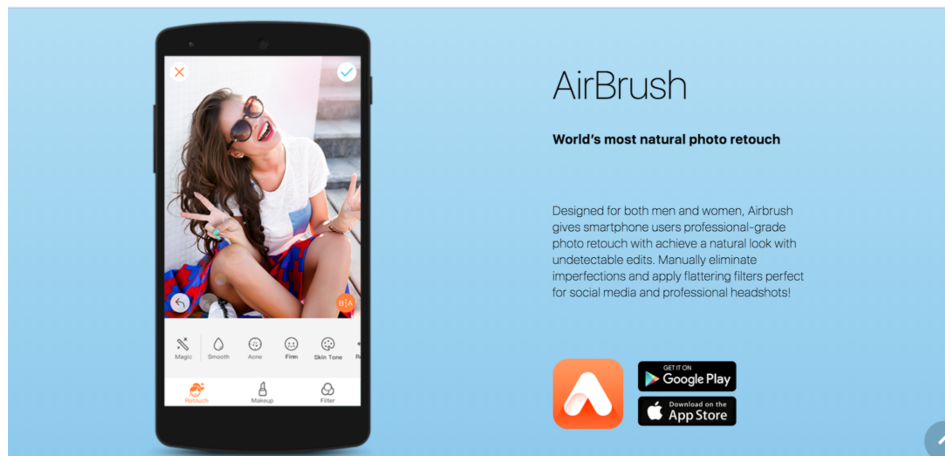

Figure 3.29 Homepage of Airbrush Website [280]

Just like interwar magazine culture's "semiotics of glamour," these algorithmic protocols have political and ethical consequences. Although the production of these images may be more democratically distributed than in interwar magazines, the processes behind

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[277] https://medium.com/@stpe/statistics-how-filters-are-used-by-instagrams-most-successful-users-d44935f87fa9 https://www.relatable.me/ (accessed 1/20/2019).
[278] Lighttricks Ltd., "Facetune – Ad-Free," *Google Play Store*, https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.lightricks.facetune (accessed 1/20/2019).
[279] Meitu Limited, "AirBrush: Easy Photo Editor," *Google Play Store,* https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.magicv.airbrush (accessed 1/20/2019).
[280]"Airbrush," http://appairbrush.com/en/ (screenshot accessed 11/13/2017).

them and their end products are similarly homogenously standardized. For example, AirBrush encourages a particular, limited visualization of the body by automatically "enhancing" users' photographs as they are taken. Effects like smooth skin, enlarged eyes, and a slimmed face are default setting—functionalities that one must choose to turn off, not deliberately turn on. This treatment occurs even before the more intentional and fine-tuned retouching begins. The app's website touts it as the "world's most natural photo retouch" and suggests that users can "achieve a natural look with undetectable edits. Manually eliminate imperfections and apply flattering filters perfect for social media and professional headshots!"[281] "Natural" is not just empty marketing rhetoric. By gradually and interactively introducing a new idea of "natural" to a mass of readers and producers, these filtering norms change what the natural is both online and "in person." The direct suggestion to use these technologies in professional headshots is just one small indicator of how such algorithmic imaginations of the body quickly exceed the bounds of social media and slip into the physical world. Furthermore, just as glamour's effects transformed skin into a technologically enhanced armor as opposed to a feeling organ to enable "the willed erasure of its history," users of this digital application can homogenize the color, texture, and lighting of skin by using an eraser icon. They physically use their fingers to rub this pixilated tool against the photographed flesh, willing visual deletions. As a result, readers repeatedly touch retouched skin while interacting with their own photographs and while scrolling through an Instagram image feed, but that touch is a boundary marker instead of a connection.

[281] "AirBrush: Easy Photo Editor" *Google Play Store*

Figure 3.30 Skin editing using an eraser tool[282]

Filters may seem like superficial layers on top of the photographic image, yet they are more invasive than at first appears. They define what sensations and experiences are accounted for in the physical flesh as well as how the body is cared for in light of those feelings. Furthermore, they shape what physical abuses individuals are capable of witnessing and withstanding in ways that can potentially prime the acceptance of violence in real life. Even digital software's near-automatic filters do not act on images in isolation and cannot be confined to particular applications or devices. Instead filters are located in the feedback loops between media affordances, technical protocols, represented subjects, and readers. Standardizing interpersonal interactions in which bodies are stripped of individual history and sensitivity can estrange readers from perceiving the pain of others and alienate them from their own sensible vulnerabilities.

Yet, as Miller's and Sherman's unsettling and intensely visceral critiques push us to recognize, the camera can also thrust contingency on readers that heightens their affective experiences and spurs the imagination of alternative "forms and feelings." Recognizing habituated modes of aesthetic response between bodies and the usually invisible filters that shape them allows space for conscious reflection about what these encounters leave out—

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[282] *Ibid.*, screenshot of portion of promotional image

space to grapple with the vulnerabilities that are repeatedly pushed out of view and, in deeply embodied ways, to orient oneself towards reading differently. This alternative form of readership that Miller and Sherman point towards, which emphasizes relationality, reciprocity, corporeality, and contingency, cannot be distilled into a single "how to guide." But given the importance of the feeling skin over protective armor in their critiques coupled with their ambivalent positions as both photographer/photographed, retoucher/retouched, filter/filtered, it might take cues from Merleau-Ponty's chiastic phenomenology of the flesh. Emphasizing vision as an ongoing reciprocal and corporeal practice his philosophy embraces the sensible body as always, ontologically, both perceiver and perceived:

> The openness through flesh: the two leaves of my body and the leaves of the visible world. . . . It is between these intercalated leaves that there is visibility. . . . My body model of the things and the things model of my body : the body bound to the world through all its parts, up against it -» all this means: the world, the flesh not as fact or sum of facts, but as the locus of an inscription of truth.[283]

Recognizing that reality is repeatedly co-constituted through inscriptional events, meetings between the flesh of one's body, the flesh of others, and the flesh of the world means reckoning with the imbrication of one's being in its connection with others and facing the ever-present "menaced" contingency of all bodies as they interface with outside forces.[284] This embodied understanding of the visible world brings along its own form of immersive relational ethics that starkly contrasts the filtered readerly experience in which one reflects off of cold unreceptive armor.

Miller's and Sherman's creative gestures towards an ethics of the flesh also speak to the challenges of undertaking a media history of the present, a situation in which the critic's

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[283] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 133.
[284] Merleau-Ponty uses "menace" to capture the fragility and contingency of a world that must be co-produced again and again in ever instant without taking for granted its stability as material fact.

own habituated filters often standardize what is seen and make structures of feeling difficult to grasp. Reaching through these filters means finding ways of being affected by what is usually missed, touching and feeling it even before knowing what it is. The aesthetic encounters that Miller produces in her own chiastic oscillation between agent and object is a lesson in this kind of vulnerable reaching and lingering, a pedagogy that Sherman supplements by forcing her readers to sit with the abject bodies and visceral anxieties these practices inevitably generate. Together both artists can teach a method of cultural criticism that hovers between observer and participant, that is at once past and present. While not providing firm answers they can prompt the critic to start looking for the dynamic forms and feelings that everyday habits of self-protection usually lead one to automatically filter out.

Chapter 4

Sousveillant Storytelling:

"Subjective Cameras," Participatory Publics, Mass-Observation

> *Mass-Observation has assumed that its untrained observers would be subjective cameras, each with his or her own individual distortion. They tell us not what society is like but what it looks like to them.*
>
> \- *Mass-Observation (1937)*

In 1939 British Mass-Observation (M-O) survey researchers asked 460 people, "Is your interest in Crises increasing or decreasing?" Among those who elaborated on their decreasing interest were:

> 5. Butcher. "Makes me sick to open a paper or listen to the news on the wireless."
> 6. Textile warp-twister, 33. "Decreasing. Not yet uninterested, but getting callous and indifferent. Refuse to be made ill and alarmed by horror reports."
> […]
> 9. Deputy registrar, female, 26. "Decreasing interest. It's too blasted uncomfortable."
> 10. Social worker, female, 28. "Decreasing, because the helplessness of the individual appalls me."[285]

They were not alone. M-O's data suggested that public interest in "Crises"—ranging from Edward VIII's abdication to the Spanish Civil War to the German invasion of Czechoslovakia—was decreasing as a whole. Forty percent of the survey subjects acknowledged withdrawing their engagement from unsettling historical events on the eve of

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[285] Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, 1939, *Britain by Mass-Observation (*London: Faber and Faber, 2009) 27.

Britain's long-anticipated entrance into WWII, as yet another new cataclysm was about to break.[286]

These short citations, printed later that year in *Britain by Mass-Observation*, echo the cold, alienated habits of readerly response the preceding chapters have addressed. As these surveyed reflections frequently conflate interest in the news' depiction of crises with interest in the crises themselves, they also reiterate the parallelisms between habits of media readership and engagement with the "real world." But M-O's interviews offer a more direct window into the conflicted experience of interwar reading subjects, who were not just naively passive or affectively deadened in the face of these perceptual shifts and political upheavals. These accounts affirm individuals' reflexive awareness of their modern media ecology's potentially distancing and disenfranchising impacts both through personal experience and by watching the spectacularly mediated rise of fascism abroad. Subjects' recognition of their growing alienation from the world around them was moreover permeated with embodied feeling; their disinterest was emphatically not indifference. Individuals withdrew not because they were already numb and inoculated from trauma, but because they were feeling "sick" or desperately attempting not to be sick. They were "uncomfortable" and "appalled" in the face of events they felt powerless to change or even understand. Major historical crises existed both at a remove (in the papers or the radio, not in real life) and too close for comfort (within the body's involuntary affective responses to them). Although shifting to the body politic in this chapter may initially appear less physical than Chapter 3's intimate focus on fleshy vulnerabilities, the centrality of the feeling corpus

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286 While the reliability of the results are of course questionable, it is still a striking figure that is indicative of cultural trends.

in these interwar conversations affirms the deeply embodied nature of this nexus of media, politics, society, and self.[287]

Far from a straightforward research program, at its inception Mass-Observation was an amalgamation of an academic study, surrealist art project, and political intervention. Its sprawling archive included survey responses, amateur ethnographic reports by paid "observers," informal interview data, "day diaries" submitted by individual volunteers, poetic assemblages of newspaper excerpts, and more. With this profusion of content the movement's founders compiled and edited several collage-like textual publications before the beginning of WWII (most notably *May the Twelfth* (1937), *First-Years Work* (1938), and *Britain by Mass-Observation* (1939)), sharing their findings about what "the man on the street" thought and felt in this tumultuous era. Deeply invested in the role new communication technologies played in shaping public opinion, they also extended their efforts into documentary photography and film. While the movement began as a fringe avant-garde collective, it was subsumed into the Ministry of Information's official propaganda apparatus during the 1940s as a result of wartime pressures. Here it morphed into an institutional tool for tracking morale and surveilling everyday life. As the original founders of the project left, M-O continued shape-shifting—becoming a private market research firm in the post-war period before finally merging with a large advertising agency.[288] While this later legacy has linked the movement's prevailing public image to institutional surveillance, its ambitiously artistic and experimental first phase was more invested in empowering democratic publics than

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[287] This goes well beyond the consequences of societies bringing individual bodies under siege during wartime. As canonical theorists of the everyday like Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau have emphasized, an individual's relationship to society is enacted through habitual, material practices by which the body moves through the world and the conversion of experiential rhythms into sensible stories that are legible to the larger community.

[288] A more academic version of M-O was re-initiated by the University of Sussex in the 1980s. It now operates a digital platform that preserves historical documents and still prompts users to add their diaries and surveys to the expanding archive.

hierarchically monitoring them. In its early, interwar years M-O strove to *look from below* to apprehend emergent political feelings, practices, and narratives that might sustain engaged, ethically conscious publics even in the face of crisis.

M-O was first publicly unveiled in a *New Statesman* article, published two years before the Crises survey was performed. In this short introduction, founders Tom Harrison, Humphrey Jennings, and Charles Madge described their project as a "new science," which developed "out of anthropology, psychology, and the sciences which study man, but plan[ned] to work with a mass of observers."[289] The goal of this "science of ourselves" was not abstract academic knowledge production, but creative political transformation. Heavily influenced by the founders' earlier involvement in British Surrealism, M-O aimed to grapple with the emerging phenomenon of "public opinion" in affective terms, generating "weather-maps of public feeling." Built on the desire to "reveal the world to all observers, so that their environment may be understood, and thus constantly transformed," Harrison, Jennings, and Madge sought to break the cycle of disinterested reading that increasingly appeared to characterize individuals' encounters with their sociopolitical actuality.[290] They believed M-O's interventions might catalyze empowering, active, and poetic "observation" within the entire population, countering the modern media ecology's disenfranchising impacts on human sensible habits that led to feeling "helpless" and turning away.

Harrison, Jennings, and Madge's concerns about media readership align in many ways with Benjamin's perspective in "The Storyteller." As discussed in Chapter 2, this essay argues that modern news media were driving the "decline of experience" and interfering

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[289] Tom Harrisson, Humphrey Jennings, and Charles Madge, "Anthropology at Home," *The New Statesman and Nation* (January 30, 1937): 155.
[290] *Ibid.,* 155.

with intersubjective communication. In particular, it highlights how the incessant production of ephemeral information could diminish human abilities to tell and hear meaningful, durational accounts. Much as Benjamin claimed that the press was reducing individuals' capacities to read imaginatively and account for experience, M-O's founders believed that the media's increasing official documentation of the present was standardizing the world's interpretability in ways that could reduce individuals' everyday expressive repertoires. Shifting from a cacophony of embodied, socially situated narratives to the continual imposition of a few unified, authoritative pictures would eventually undermine the population's capacities to draw on lived experiences as sources of legitimate, legible meaning. By mapping feeling and, more importantly, cultivating individuals' abilities to plot their own subjective (cognitive) maps, the movement sought to re-energize creative, interpretative participation in society. They believed that combatting the "appalling helplessness of the individual" began with facilitating alternative ways of understanding the world on an everyday basis, relearning to tell stories of the self and society by connecting sensibly situated vision to the imaginative possibilities of new media forms.

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Drawing on M-O's experimental practices, publications, and films in the late 1930s, this chapter extends the dissertation's central argument by describing another mechanism through which visual media can alter subjects' material habits of sense-making in deeply embodied ways. It explores how emerging practices of news readership in the interwar period, across a variety of media forms, trained communicative habits that shaped political agency and disenfranchisement. Additionally, this chapter more directly examines readerly resistance, engaging with how media technologies and technological imaginaries might be mobilized to inspire ways of affectively and ethically linking individuals to their material

sociopolitical worlds. In particular, my analysis of M-O suggests that media-influenced visual capacities provide means of connecting human bodies to larger communities and histories without hypnotizing or numbing them. By redefining the modality of everyday storytelling for new media contexts in ways that would enable subjects to actively inhabit and share socially situated knowledge, more people could feel (and be) part of politics.

In order to make these claims, I turn to the notion of *sousveillance*, which digital media innovator, theorist, and artist Steve Mann coined in the 1990s to describe "the recording of an activity from the perspective of a participant in the activity."[291] Mirroring Harrison, Jennings, and Madge's self-described aims, Mann conceived of sousveillance as a political intervention that would cultivate the collective authority of multiple individual viewpoints against the singular dominance of an official, top-down narrative.[292] He took advantage of new digital recording technologies and networks in the late twentieth century, which seemed to finally make the mass storage and circulation of "the man on the street's" perspective a real possibility. Despite many similarities, though, sousveillance does not just double M-O in a more "advanced" technological context; Mann's work offers a new language and theoretical scaffolding to consider the movement's unusual constellation of vision, media, affect, story, and political participation. For example, sousveillance's connection to discourses of surveillance can help tease out the power relations that concerned the movement. It illuminates the emergent social relationships that M-O's efforts to redistribute the sensible worked towards, as opposed to remaining fixed on the evident inequalities between "elite" and "mass" that the founders themselves often inadvertently reproduced. Additionally, this juxtaposition emphasizes the medium specificity of M-O's tactics. Like

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291 "Sousveillance," *Wiktionary.com*, https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/sousveillance (accessed 6/20/2017).
292 However, I am not claiming that Mann himself was inspired by, or even aware of, M-O.

Mann's experiments, the movement was not a generic form of political protest or dissent, but a visual media project that drew on concrete technological imaginaries. Furthermore, sousveillance points toward the ongoing everyday habits that the movement desired to cultivate as opposed to a bird's eye view of M-O as an anthropological experiment. This historical juxtaposition thus helps shift the discussion from products to process.

Likewise, M-O's unusual approach does not merely premediate later usages of sousveillance, but prompts alternative ways of understanding and applying this important theoretical term in digital environments. In addition to revealing sousveillance's translatability into other contexts by unyoking it from specific technological requirements, this interwar movement affirms sousveillance's creative visual features and reframes it as a mode of embodied storytelling. Mann's original conceptualization and the subsequent use of the word in scholarship is almost always tied to cyborg-like modes of recording the world that are enabled by online connectivity and mobile computing devices. I revise this somewhat deterministic strain by reading M-O as an early iteration of sousveillance that draws heavily on media imaginaries without relying on specific devices for its implementation. Placing sousveillance in dialogue with M-O's participatory politics and Benjamin's conceptualization of storytelling shows that, much like real time and filters, sousveillance is an attitude towards seeing that is enhanced by emerging technological environments but not inextricably bound to concrete technological affordances. Transcending any particular apparatus, it is an orientation toward experience that validates distorted perspectives and that generates the relational "feminist objectivity" Donna Haraway describes as "situated knowledge." Additionally, instead of relying on a narrative about the inevitable democratization of the media like Mann frequently does, M-O helps probe how daily habits might realistically intersect with new visual media in ways that

generate engaged communities of *dissensus*, empowering individuals' quotidian communicative capacities with the same new media ecologies that threaten to obstruct them.

While recent scholarship has recognized M-O's resonances with twenty-first century digital storytelling, in this context the movement is usually referenced in passing as a naïve, early attempt to collect participant narratives as opposed to being taken seriously for its potential theoretical value.[293] Against this too-quick dismissal I would argue that M-O's intertwining of new media imaginaries with the language of active affective participation resonates deeply with contemporary conceptualizations of digital produsers, and that its intricate exploration of pre-digital sousveillance can enhance understandings of digital sense-making, political engagement, and community building well outside of institutional digital storytelling initiatives. M-O's elaboration of sousveillance as a mode of situated visual knowledge production might thus offer critical strategies for grappling with the twenty-first century's own alternative media networks and the crisis politics of a heavily mediated "post-truth" era. My retheorization of sousveillance locates it as a potential middle path of participatory politics that opens a space for multiple partial knowledges to mingle without undermining basic belief in a shared reality.

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[293] For example, it is often named as a precursor to projects like the BBC's "Capture Wales. "Capture Wales" conceives of the digital story as a particular confined production with very particular formal requirements. On their website Daniel Meadows explains: "There's a strictness to the construction of a Digital Story: 250 words, a dozen or so pictures, and two minutes is the right length. As with poetry these constraints define the form (e.g. a haiku is a poem written using 17 syllables, and the 14 lines of a sonnet are written in iambic pentameter) and it's the observation of that form which gives the thing its elegance." "Digital Stories" BBC.com, http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/audiovideo/sites/about/index.shtml (accessed 9/24/17)
See also Nancy Thumim, *Self-representation and Digital Culture* (New York: Springer, 2012).
Aline Gubrium and Krista Harper, *Participatory Visual and Digital Methods* (New York: Routledge, 2016).
Helen Thornham and Simon Popple, eds., *Content Cultures: Transformations of User Generated Content in Public Service Broadcasting* (London: IB Tauris, 2013).

Sensible Sousveillance

Figure 4.1 Mann with a version of his wearable computing technologies (1994) [294]

Steve Mann originally conceived of sousveillance in relation to his ambitious artistic/activist/academic project of lifelogging. Like M-O, Mann worked to map a subjective picture of the world from street level, relying on an unconventional intertwining of visual creativity and scientific technique. As early as the 1970s, well before the ubiquity of portable computers and phones, he experimented with wearable cameras. By the nineties he had invented his famous "Eye-Tap" technologies—conspicuously cyborgic precursors to twenty-first century products like Snapchat Spectacles or Google Glass. These homemade devices [Fig. 4.1] enabled him to continually record his own lived point of view and share

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[294] Steve Mann, "Self Portrait with Wearable Wireless Webcam," (12/13/1994), *Wikimedia Commons* (4/23/2007), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:WearableWirelessWebcamSteveMannVisualFilter1994December13th.png (digital image accessed 12/10/2018).

that perspective with a larger online community. The driving motivation behind this activity was the desire to make a counter-image of the world—generated by an individual's own particular visual navigation of space—available to others. In his words, "I came to think of personal imaging (i.e. the archival of personal experience) as an inverse to surveillance, for which I coined the term "sousveillance' […] it's not necessarily aimed at avoiding or eliminating surveillance, but, rather, at creating a separate view in the other direction."[295] The radical potential of sousveillance is evidenced by the amount of resistance Mann's work received, especially in camera-monitored public spaces like shopping malls. Much of his academic writing outlines institutional attempts to regulate and limit his augmented gaze, revealing the pervasive power hierarchies that covertly structure "natural" singular perspectives.

Institutional resistance was not a side-effect, but a central point of his praxis. More than impersonal recordings, Mann's work often approximated avant-garde performance art that relied on staging encounters between different gazes and emphasizing striking, unsettling perspectives.[296] These aesthetic experiments fueled his belief that expanding "augmented vision" technologies and their accompanying habits of seeing to a mass public would inevitably bring about social transformations. Augmented vision destabilized the accepted visual field, and this unsettling revelation of its gaps and imbalances prompted new material actions and interactions. Mann's commitment to creative self-expression is further affirmed by his later elaboration on sousveillance as a type of "first-person vision" or

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[295] Steve Mann, "Wearable Computing: A first step toward personal imaging," *Computer* 30, no. 2 (1997): 25-32.
[296] Reminiscent of, for example, Bruce Nauman's *Live-Taped Video Corridor* (1970), Daniel Graham's *Performer/ Audience/Mirror* (1975), or, more recently, Michelle Teran's *Life: A User's Manual.*

"egography."[297] This supplementary emphasis on –graphy defines sousveillance as a mode of meaningful inscription or "writing" that originates in a seeing subject. It also stresses its imaginative openness that does not merely re-articulate the imbalanced hierarchies of the surveillant gaze in the opposite direction, but allows new narratives to unfold out of an individual's dynamic visual interaction with her environment.

As concerns about technologically enhanced surveillant social control have only expanded with the growth of digital dataveillance and Mann's once radical notion of wearable cameras has become commonplace, sousveillance is an increasingly important theoretical keyword in digital and surveillance studies.[298] However, much of this scholarship amplifies the technological determinism latent in Mann's writing and erases the original playful, artistic creativity that originally energized his experiments.[299] Focusing on specific mobile and digital technologies, recent work in this field tends to locate the concept's power entirely in the act of "surveilling the surveillers." It argues that when the mass below is equipped with technological devices they can look back at power and hold it accountable, creating an equiveillant balance. A classic example, which stresses sousveillance's frequently utopian aspirations, is how civilians with mobile phone cameras can expose law enforcement officers who overstep or abuse their authority.[300] However, this single vector of sight downplays the expressive and affective components that are refracted in a multitude of other

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[297] Steve Mann, Kris M. Kitani, Yong Jae Lee, M. S. Ryoo, and Alireza Fathi, "An introduction to the 3rd workshop on egocentric (first-person) vision," In *Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition Workshops (CVPRW), 2014 IEEE Conference (*2014): 827-832.
[298] David Lyon, *Surveillance Studies: An Overview* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).
[299] Well, not entirely latent. He does in one article go so far as to claim that "sousveillance as a form of social action has positive survival characteristics, so that in the long run, assuming that social and technological trends continue, the widespread adoption of sousveillance is inevitable." Mir Adnan Ali and Steve Mann, "The inevitability of the transition from a surveillance-society to a veillance-society: Moral and economic grounding for sousveillance," *Technology and Society (ISTAS), 2013 IEEE International Symposium* (2013): 243-254.
[300] Ethan Zuckerman, "Why we must continue to turn the camera on police," *MIT Technology Review*, https://www.technologyreview.com/s/601878/why-we-must-continue-to-turn-the-camera-on-police/ (9.24.17)
Elizabeth A. Bradshaw, "This is What a Police State Looks Like: Sousveillance, Direct Action and the Anti-corporate Globalization Movement," *Critical Criminology* 21, no. 4 (2013): 447-461.

directions. Recent scholarship also often ignores sousveillance's visual inflection, applying the term to any number of ways in which citizens use digital technologies to put checks on power (especially power that interferes with the liberal subject's privacy concerns). To give one example, Jan Fernback's 2013 article deploys the concept to describe how Facebook users push back on the company's data-collection by monitoring and exposing this surveillance through discussion on Facebook pages.[301] While valuable scholarship, her approach ignores sousveillant seeing beyond the pragmatic checks on power that new technologies facilitate; moreover, by conflating all forms of monitoring with –veillance, its specifically visual features are undertheorized.

The imaginatively interactive side of sousveillance is largely ignored, save for a few scholars who have identified the term's value in relation to everyday creative practices. For example, in a brief aside in his book on ethnographic approaches Philip Vannini reflects that:

> this concept of sousveillance is useful insofar as it helps us nurture the significant vernacular power in the images and gazes that are encountered at the prosaic levels of the everyday (de Certeau, Giarg, and Mayol 1998; Lyon 1994). Resistances form around such processes, which are in themselves part of this mechanism for conforming, normativizing, and standardizing behavior.[302]

Simone Browne's *Dark Matter*, on the other hand, offers a more prolonged meditation on sousveillance's expressive utility. She stresses its visuality and moves beyond the usual technophilic constraints. For her, sousveillance describes how those from "below" transform their creative –veillant capacities into emergent modes of survival, understanding, and community building. Discussing the historical experience of black Americans she introduces the notion of "dark sousveillance"—a practice by which individuals "chart

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[301] Jan Fernback, "Sousveillance: Communities of Resistance to the Surveillance Environment." *Telematics and Informatics* 30, no. 1 (2013): 11-21.
[302] Phillip Vannini, ed., *Material Culture and Technology in Everyday Life: Ethnographic Approaches*, Vol. 25. (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

possibilities and coordinate modes of responding to, challenging, and confronting surveillance that was almost all-encompassing."[303] In this context, sousveillance is an expansive form of storytelling that "plots imaginaries that are oppositional and that are hopeful for another way of being."[304] It is a transformative way of engaging with the world from embodied perspectives that can reveal alternative interpretations, narratives, and pathways within everyday life.

As Browne's work suggests, the political importance of looking otherwise to form affectively engaged modes of sense-making clearly precedes digital devices and ubiquitous computing. Nevertheless, Mann's notion of sousveillance has proved difficult to extricate from its particular technological trappings. Considering Mass-Observation as an early theorization of sousveillance re-centers human practices just as Browne's writing does. However, this approach also importantly retains the concept's specificity as *a visual media phenomenon* even in a pre-digital context. While the camera eye/I is a common trope throughout interwar culture, M-O is unusually uncanny in its synergies with contemporary notions about participatory produsers.[305] As opposed to being a documentary figure or a "spectroscopic" means of highlighting the phantasmagoric aspects of modern life, this specific camera-freighted structure is explicitly one of strategic, socially situated counter-looking. M-O is also closely aligned with Mann's sousveillant ethos in its validation of the view from below as a powerful check on institutional power. It was dedicated to cultivating visual habits as "a balancing force in a mediated society" by pushing against the power of the expanding press, which threatened to usurp other less official or supposedly objective

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303 Simone Browne, *Dark matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015): 21.
304 *Ibid.,* 21.
305 Michael North's *Camera Works* is a particularly useful critical example.

accounts.[306] In many ways M-O takes Mann's vision of actively recording participants to its extreme by expanding the sphere of participation to encompass the entirety of everyday experience.

Research on the movement has often fixated on its identity as a failed sociological experiment.[307] However, scholars have begun shifting the conversation in the last couple of decades by privileging M-O as an avant-garde project that was invested in narratives of ordinary life over its position as a renegade scientific method.[308] Ben Highmore, for example, describes the movement's desire to trouble mass-mediated consensus that was disconnected from the necessarily unruly nature of quotidian life:

> In some ways this can be seen as a relationship between a media technology which had come to saturate the everyday to the point where everyone was living in relation to the same world of representation (everyday life as homogeneity) and the active and lived experience of people which not only couldn't be reduced to this representation, but in many ways was radically removed from it (everyday life as heterogeneity).[309]

Constant, mass-mediated documentation imposes an official narrative—"the same world of representation"—that ends up dissuading the aberrant stories and visions that necessarily emerge from daily embodied experience. Nick Hubble has argued that, in the face of this modern disconnect between individual and society, M-O conceived of itself as an expanded form of Freudian psychoanalysis that could re-engage the masses and bring about social

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[306] Steve Mann, and Joseph Ferenbok, "New media and the power politics of sousveillance in a surveillance-dominated world," *Surveillance & Society* 11, no. 1/2 (2013): 18.

[307] In addition to the recent digital storytelling framework mentioned above, particular debates about the movement's eventual disintegration, in-fighting, participation in wartime propaganda campaigns, and its relationship to the sociological establishment often overshadow the theoretical and creative richness of its goals and experimental practices. The movement's place in the history of public opinion and social scientific research is fascinatingly fraught, but fixating on this trajectory obscures its embeddedness within a broader historical context and misses the centrality of new media to the project. More than Harrison's anthropological influence, I focus on the early years of Mass-Observation, foregrounding the contributions of Jennings and Madge since their engagement with the movement is above all marked by their preoccupation with both the media and with visuality.

[308] Notable examples include: Nick Hubble, *Mass-Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory*. (New York: Springer, 2005); Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Thomas S. Davis, *The Extinct Scene: Late Modernism and Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

[309] Highmore, 83.

transformation. This expressive therapy—a visually enhanced and scalable version of the talking cure—would counter the top-down official narratives that created a false image of public opinion and constricted individuals' affective vocabulary outside of the media superego's authoritative script. Training what Jennings and Madge referred to as "the poet's expertise in the world of images" would enhance individuals' ability to contextualize and communicate their own experiences. Moreover, the habitual use of this participatory vision would encourage new modes of storytelling as opposed to forcing individuals to choose between affective withdrawal and artificially imposed consensus.

Pairing M-O and sousveillance illuminates how both are deeply intertwined with media environments and preoccupied with the techno-enhanced possibilities of creating new relationships between individuals and their environments. What the following examination of the movement illustrates, though, is that individuals need not carry cutting edge technologies to relationally participate in this way, but can instead engender new forms of gazing by emulating them with their own bodies. M-O's work suggests that the power of sousveillance lies not in the record it archives or the concrete media network it creates, but in how it encourages individuals to integrate their own embodied narratives into larger shared contexts of understanding. Sousveillance becomes the practice by which the same media ecology that threatens to diminish human interpretive capacities becomes a resource for innovating new situated ways of accounting for and communicating individual experience—of, in Benjamin's sense, continuing to tell stories.

"Subjective Cameras"

Published a few years into the project, *Britain by Mass-Observation* articulates the therapeutic, socially engaged goals that Highmore and Hubble identify in language stressing

the primacy of both media and visuality. This text—introduced at the beginning of the chapter—opens by citing a recent newspaper headline and dissecting how it stages the dynamic between "the people" and their view of the external world: "While Europe was tensely watching the crisis over Czechoslovakia, Herr Hitler, accompanied by 8 of his generals, paid a surprise visit to the French frontier to-day."[310] Editor-authors of this volume, Harrisson and Madge, are above all provoked by how this *Star* story frames the practice of "looking." Snarkily they critique the sweeping inadequacy of personifying Europe as surrogate for concrete watching agents: "Europe is a continent, so it can't very well watch anything. Nor can the people watch a crisis in a literal sense."[311] Both the agents and events of this headline exceed the possibilities of daily, personal experience. Yet watching is not only impossible in a direct literal sense; the more dire problem is that all other means of understanding have been equally obscured.

If a population is to see events that are outside of individuals' local lived horizons, these events must necessarily come to them through mediated means. Walter Lippman's influential notion of the pseudoenvironment, which was introduced in Chapter 2 and certainly would have been a touchstone for M-O at this moment, comes from this dilemma that people are increasingly affected by happenings beyond their experiential knowledge in a modern, globalized world. As he theorized in 1921, "the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we

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[310] *Britain by Mass-Observation,* 7.
[311] *Ibid.*, 7.

can manage with it."[312] The papers, radio, and other mass media outlets are meant to bridge the gap between lived experiences and world historical events by creating a simpler, shared picture of reality and facilitating cognitive mapping. Yet Madge and Harrisson assert that, instead of serving as a democratizing aid to vision, the press obstructs sight by colonizing individual interpretative and narrative habits. Instead of producing a pseudoenvironment that supplements reality and enables viewers to grasp history beyond their personal panorama, the mass media supersedes individuals' stories and strips subjects of their interpretive faculties.

Particularly when historical crises disruptively ripple through daily life, individuals crave material that can help them understand, assimilate, and react to these destabilizing rhythms. Aware that the media message is an artificial construct, "People want inside info, they want to get behind the news. This is impossible for the vast majority, so they have to accept what the newspapers say, or else stop bothering."[313] Accepting the flat surface of press narratives and the alternative of deciding to "stop bothering" are both modes of backing away from affective understanding. This radical disconnect between individuals and the mediated picture of the world is what, disturbingly, turns them into "cogs in a vast and complicated machine, which may turn out to be an infernal machine that is going to blow us all to smithereens. In any case, life is short and if we are at all interested in this world (instead of, or as well as, the next world) we had better hurry up and learn where we stand."[314] While perhaps a complete "true" view of history or the whole present is impossible, learning where one stands is still empowering and valuable.

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[312] He also adds that "The only feeling that anyone can have about an event he does not experience is the feeling aroused by his mental image of that event." Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 1921 (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1946).
[313] *Britain by Mass-Observation*, 8.
[314] *Ibid.*, 8.

This urgency to "learn where we stand" affirms that there are means of understanding even if the "inside story" or the "whole story" are inevitably out of reach. M-O intervenes here to forge alternative practices of seeing, communicating, and sense-making: "This book aims to give the other side of the picture—to give both ear and voice to what the millions are feeling and doing under the shadow of these terrific events. Only by understanding this side can we as individuals hope to decide what we can do and, if there is anything we can do, then to do it."[315] The best way to combat the pseudoenvironment's disempowering extension is through a resistant media project focused on the "other side of the picture," which actively cultivates personal records of "everyday lives and feelings." This participatory experiment might encourage and codify new modes of looking that embrace felt, socially situated perspectives over official narratives of mass mediated fact. Continual transformative practices of street-level seeing and feeling could thus begin to counteract the monopoly of the press in determining what counts as knowledge in public life.

As the opening emphasis on "looking" suggests, this ideal outcome hinges on visual capacities. Individuals can reconnect to their environment by becoming ever-recording, actively seeing cameras:

> The observers are the cameras with which we are trying to photograph contemporary life. The trained observer [ie the academic anthropologist] is a camera with no distortion. Mass-Observation has assumed that its untrained observers would be subjective cameras, each with his or her own individual distortion. They tell us not what society is like but what it looks like to them. An observer's social point of view is determined in the first place by himself, and in the second place by other people.[316]

While this passage refers specifically to the limited number of recruited observers that were part of M-O's pilot program, the project sought to extend this practice of "becoming

[315] *Ibid.*, 9.
[316] *Ibid.*, 66.

camera" to the entire population. Learning to look from a "social point of view" that mediates individual vision and shared social realities can preserve the affective, embodied qualities of individual experience as opposed to flattening it into a mass-produced totality. Continual camera vision cultivates awareness of the world that might enable individuals to reach out to others and to create engaged narratives as opposed to withdrawing because of irreconcilable incompatibilities between one's perception and the imposed pseudoenvironment.

While at the time M-O was established there was still a diversity of views in the papers as well as multiple forums for individuals to express alternative opinions, its founders anticipated that the population might become overly dependent on these outlets for daily knowledge creation. Augmenting the already evident trends towards political disinterest and alienation, such reliance would devalue and eventually entirely overtake more distorted, experiential modes of storytelling. With phantoms of Britain's WWI propaganda campaign and the increasing threat of Nazi Germany's "sleepwalking people" lingering in the backdrop, the movement insisted on the importance of honing citizen's abilities to be active viewers and collaborators in the formation of collective knowledge. As the publication continues, it explores the increasing official documentation of everyday life's polarizing impacts. On the one hand the modern media ecology makes individuals feel like apathetic bystanders in history, but on the other it can also invigorate dangerously hypnotic, escapist, and phantasmagoric forces. The public's faltering belief in scientific expertise and the increasing turn to astrology to find meaning are both symptoms of the increasing inability to connect sensible experiences to the prevailing authoritative pictures of reality. Within this framework, the movement's goal was to mobilize feeling in the service of self-expression and connection as opposed to letting that energy be stifled or dangerously coopted.

"Make-Believe and Ballyhoo"

One notable chapter from *Britain* offers a concrete example of how an embodied view from below might make individuals' everyday habits of sense-making communally engaged as opposed to hypnotically alienating. While not as obviously visual as the introduction, the celebratory story of the Lambeth Walk is propelled by the same sousveillant energy that drives the project as a whole. M-O's account of this popular interwar dance elaborates on how the subjective readership of a single phenomenon, transmitted through both visual media and material encounters, can become a democratic form of communication. The Lambeth Walk was initially choreographed for the 1937 London musical "Me and My Girl" and then disseminated widely through the mass media. Soon, though, individual improvisational liberty transformed it into a creative social activity. *Britain*'s chapter about the Lambeth Walk is primarily composed of ethnographic observations and short interview responses from individuals at dance halls, but near its end the editors summarize their belief the dance's value:

> It proves that if you give the masses something which connects on with their own lives and streets, at the same time breaking down the conventions of shyness and stranger-feeling, they will take to it with far more spontaneous feeling than they have ever shown for the paradise-drug of the American dance-tune. The dream-sex of the dance lyric points away from social feeling and activity and towards a world of personal superstition and magic […] It is no more about reality than Hitler's speeches are. Ballroom dancers sleep-walk to its strains with the same surrender of personal decision as that of uniformed Nazis. These Lambeth Walkers are happy because they find they are free to express themselves without the hypnosis of a jazz-moon or a Führer.[317]

The chapter culminates in this claim that the dance is politically significant in spite of its seeming triviality. And, positioned soon after the "Crises" segment, the Lambeth Walk is clearly their foil to the readerly disengagement discussed earlier in the publication.

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[317] *Ibid.*, 182-3.

Ben Highmore's powerful reading of this section focuses on the dance's exaltation of democracy over fascism. His argument stresses the potential of interpretative viewership to facilitate individuals' participatory expression while also providing them tools to feel part of larger publics. The embodied interpretation and reinterpretation of the dance affirms the dancer's social situatedness and draws on this positioning as a communicative practice. In this way the dancers can become active members of a community that is founded not on hypnotic consensus but on the "social feeling" that organically emerges from their creative readership and bodily re-narration of the dance moves.

Figure 4.2 Bill Brandt's "East End girl dancing the Lambeth Walk" (1939)[318]

Lambeth's local specificity, which grounds the dance's good-humored caricature of Cockney culture—that Bill Brandt's famous "East End girl dancing the Lambeth Walk" [Fig.

[318] Bill Brandt, "East End Girl Dancing the Lambeth Walk 1939," *Bill Brandt Archive*, http://www.billbrandt.com/bill-brandt-archive-print-shop/sp36-east-end-girl-dancing-the-lambeth-walk-1939 (accessed 11/8/2018).

4.2] eloquently captures—is key to its generation of "social feeling." While the dance spread to many different countries, it originated as a representation of a particular sector of London society and was tied to an expression of their British identity. As one of M-O's descriptions explains, the dance is "more like acting or impersonation than other dances. When you do the Lambeth Walk you pretend to be a Lambethian. If you don't want to do that, there is no point in the dance."[319] In the U.K., as the dance circulated beyond London's working class, pretending to be a Lambethian was imbricated in performances of individuals' imagination of their own place within the larger nation.

The dance was thus, in many ways, a reflexive visual performance of an individual's situatedness in relation to Lambeth and the British working class more generally. It was a satire based on local stereotypes as well as a real nod to the class dynamics behind their formation:

> One thing which the huge popularity of the Lambeth Walk indicates quite definitively is a very widespread "wish to be these people", though of course that wish is not a simple or straightforward one, and includes elements of make-believe and ballyhoo. The upper classes wish to masquerade as Lambethians […] The middle classes wish to be Lambethians because it temporarily lets them off a sticky code of manners which they usually feel bound to keep up. The working classes wish to be Lambethians because Lambethians *are* like themselves.[320]

While parodic, interpretations of what it was to do the Lambeth Walk were necessarily tied to a person's real mental vision of Lambeth and their particular positionality within Britain. In the dance hall these individual perspectives could combine in the shared desire for community and the "wish to be these people." The merger of local identity and national belonging, mediated by creative communicative action, is perhaps what made the dance such a powerful sociopolitical phenomenon in addition to an amusing fad. Highmore's reading of

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[319] *Ibid.*, 173.
[320] *Ibid.*, 174.

the dance as a force to combat fascism from the ground up is supported by multiple actual occurrences. For example, M-O describes a group of "Anti-fascists who broke up a Mosleyite demonstration in the East End by 'doing the Lambeth walk.'"[321] And outside of *Britain*'s purview, a year after its publication, the dance became the basis of a popular Ministry of Information film that was shown frequently between newsreels. Editing footage from Reifenstahl's *Triumph of the Will,* Charles A. Ridley skillfully produced its two full minutes of Nazi soldiers and officials comically dancing the Lambeth Walk.[322]

Dwelling on this dance performance might appear to digress from my argument's emphasis on narrative and image. However, harking back to the "sensible/visible" node in Chapter 1, *Britain*'s lengthy engagement with the Lambeth Walk can crystalize sousveillance's somewhat unintuitive nexus of vision, political community, and storytelling. The collectives formed by this dance performance are democratic, not sleepwalking or hypnotic, because they are founded on what Rancière calls *dissensus* as opposed to imposed fascist sameness. Summarized in *The Emancipated Spectator,* dissensus is:

> an organization of the sensible where there is neither a reality concealed behind appearances nor a single regime of presentation and interpretation[…] Dissensus brings back into play both the obviousness of what can be perceived, thought, and done, and the distribution of those who are capable of perceiving, thinking, and altering the coordinates of the shared world. This is what political subjectification consists in: in the action of uncounted capacities that crack open the unity of the given and the obviousness of the visible, in order to sketch a new topography of the possible.[323]

As discussed in Chapter 1, Rancière emphasizes that visual perceptive capacities are deeply political because they determine both what can be thought and what can be done, as well as

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[321] *Ibid.*, 172.
[322] "Hoch Der Lambeth Walk," *British Pathé*, 1941. https://www.britishpathe.com/video/hoch-der-lambeth-walk-mute-version (accessed 11/8/2018).
[323]Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (New York: Verso, 2014), 48-9.

who is given the authority to act and to make meaning. Dissensus expands the horizon of public vision and the diversity of seeing subjects, while still linking these different points of view to a shared community. In this model, democratic collectives are made possible by an interpretive and relational difference that connects discrete bodies, a difference that the Lambeth Walk epitomizes. The moves of the dance are not equivalent or standardized in spite of being inspired by the same music and hinging on the same basic formula. Furthermore, modes of individual participation are neither inaccessibly exclusive nor rigidly imposed; regardless of divergent bodily motions, the dance remains legible to others. A community can be formed around the shared ability to make sense of the choreography, to take pleasure in public performance, and to iteratively contribute to the reconfiguration of the Lambeth Walk's material reality.

The different backgrounds, experiences, capacities, and bodies that individuals bring to the dance hall shape the evolution of the dance and the community that is built around it. The Lambeth Walk is not static, but full of dynamic potential energy as the observation of others' bodies voluntarily and involuntarily is absorbed into one's own movements without forcing a collective assimilation. For Rancière the redistribution of the sensible enables dissensus by giving individuals aesthetic literacy. This capacity loops them into larger collectives as co-creators of meaning as opposed to merely receiving imposed interpretations. Yet these emancipated communities don't emerge naturally. A shared reading experience and aesthetic object—in this case the dance—is frequently needed to spark sensible redistributions. M-O's experiments radically sought to make the everyday that aesthetic object. The movement was thus invested not just in how what can be seen determines what can be said, but also in the fact that how subjects are able to look and feel determines the meanings available to them and the stories they can tell.

While Rancière describes the kind of ideal democratic community that sousveillance might create, Donna Haraway's related theorization of "situated knowledges" better encapsulates the individual's place in this ongoing process. She argues against conceptualizations of objectivity as an omnipotent gaze from above, and claims that vision's detachment from the physical body blurs the ethical responsibility attached to subject-object relations and to meaning's situatedness within a web of discourses and communities. Like Rancière, she is adamant that vision determines one's political agency. She elaborates further, though, that ethical vision is based on an embodied reclaiming of this sense, which combats the imposition of the authoritative, supposedly "unmarked" perspective: "I would like to insist on the embodied nature of all vision, and so reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere."[324] Habits of seeing are political practices that situate individuals in relation to others and multiple coexisting understandings of the world. This is not to say that everything is wholly socially constructed, but instead that all individuals enter into a potential shared reality from different vantages and across divergent trajectories.

The Lambeth Walk, as narrated through M-O, exemplifies Haraway's theoretical claims. The initial visual readership of other bodies' movements merges with one's local background (itself constructed by an individuals' trained visual capacities and physical movement through space) to generate an embodied interpretive choreography. Dancing affirms the partial perspective that emerges from individual bodies, enabling more situated pictures of the world to collectively create what Rancière labels the "topography of the possible." Furthermore, it recruits individuals into responsible relationships with their worlds

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[324] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of the Partial Perspective," *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 188.

such that "we might become answerable for what we learn to see."[325] Embracing the gaps in knowledge that characterize "feminist objectivity" does not fracture this topography but instead foregrounds its distributed, shared construction. Situated vision combats disinterest by simultaneously affirming subjects' abilities to make meaning and also requiring them to be accountable for how their sensible habits impact (and are impacted by) others.

Echoing M-O's invocation of "subjective cameras," Haraway also argues that visual media technologies are invaluable resources to train this type of situated seeing:

> The "eyes" made available in modern technological sciences shatter any idea of passive vision; these prosthetic devices show us that all eyes, including our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems, building on translations and specific ways of seeing, that is, ways of life. There is no unmediated photograph or passive camera obscura in scientific accounts of bodies and machines; there are only highly specific visual possibilities, each with a wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organizing worlds. All these pictures of the world should not be allegories of infinite mobility and interchangeability but of elaborate specificity and difference and the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another's point of view.[326]

The visual modes that people "naturally" acquire are not unmediated, but are inculcated by their surroundings. The interwar era's press readership practices and continual political crises distribute habits of sense-making that license disinterestedly averting one's gaze more frequently than intentionally, responsibly managing it. Yet since there is no "original" perfect vision to return to that is inherently democratic, new interpretative habits must be innovated to develop healthier political communities. Media technologies, as historically situated extensions of human capacities, are rich resources to teach individuals of a given era how to adopt relational, intentional, and ethically cognizant means of visually organizing the sensible.

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[325] *Ibid.,* 191.
[326] *Ibid..,* 190.

Although its forward-looking perspective differs from Benjamin's diagnosis of the gradual decline of storytelling and fantasies of oral narrative communities, the situated knowledge that M-O's subjective cameras work toward strive to re-invent what meaningful storytelling looks like; technologically-inspired sousveillance is a way of preserving its core communicative and relational values in a different, updated form. The oral narrative practices Benjamin idealizes were so important to previous periods of human history because they were integrated into the everyday as a "way of life." M-O commits to the belief that sousveillance might become a way of living too. As opposed to a single antagonistic view from below, M-O's approach to sousveillance affirms the individuals' role as a co-creator of everyday reality, not as a direct challenge to the sovereign, nation, or other authority. Envisioned in this context, the politics of sousveillance rely less on antagonizing existing power structures or on attacking consensus directly, and hinge on the democratic dissensus that can emerge from a multiplicity of distributed, partial, distorted, and embodied accounts that are reflexive of their visual ethics.

Distorted Lenses of Daily Life

While *Britain* forwards a more organized, cohesive image of what sousveillant observation might accomplish, the project's enactment of situated vision is better located in its sprawling first publication, *May the Twelfth*. Curating diverse sources with little synthesis or "expert" analysis, *May the Twelfth* is perhaps the closest *text* ever came to the project's participant-driven ideals.[327] Edited by Jennings and Madge (with a much less prescriptive

[327] Davis also marks this text as distinct from later publications, suggesting that "no other Mass- Observation text bears the formal dexterity of *May the Twelfth*, nor are the utopic yearnings for a seamless identification of the population and the state pitched in the same key," 61.

explanatory voice than Harrison's formal anthropological training contributed in the later book) this tome amasses a huge amount of data from targeted observations, newspaper excerpts, and circulated surveys documenting a single day in British history—the coronation of King George VI. Coronation Day is far from an arbitrary choice for this experiment. While not a "crisis" per se, this royal ceremony is a dramatic visual performance of national identity and of the unified British collective that would need to be mobilized in wartime. Citizens are called into being as political subjects through their role witnessing the king's sovereign authority. The movement aims to capture the sousveillant potential already embedded in individuals' everyday habits and to validate an extraordinary range of narratives; in doing so, it works toward a stronger collective body without attacking or deconstructing all established cultural referents. Both the overwhelming multiplicity of perspectives that this text presents of a single day and of the national figurehead illustrates how M-O's intervention is not about tearing down an old world order to start from scratch.

A rare explanatory apparatus in the text [Fig. 4.3] illustrates the sousveillant mechanisms at the publication's core. This analytical schema that the editors propose demarcates a blueprint of the "social area" of the observer. Its topographical horizon represents the realities that individuals traverse on a daily basis via their "social point of view." The diagram is formed of three concentric circles that each demarcate different proximities of habitual social encounters. At the center sits the observer (or any individual) who is immediately surrounded by an area 1 of family, colleagues, neighbors and other familiar figures. The next, middle category (area 2) encompasses relations like acquaintances or strangers and the outermost circle (area 3) contains "people and institutions whose pressure is less direct and personal, but no less effective," such as "classes, official persons, celebrities, people acting in a public capacity, ancestors, literary and mythological figures,

public mouthpieces (newspapers, radio, etc.) and such abstract collections as The People."[328] This simple model emphasizes that outer circles are encountered from within socially embedded contexts, that the smaller intimate spheres mediate access to the larger more distanced spheres.

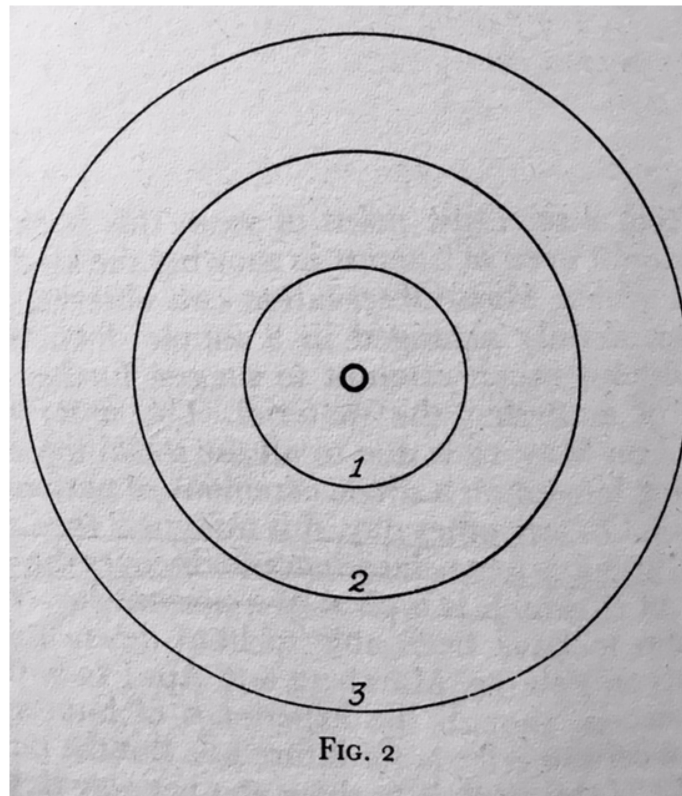

Figure 4.3 Diagram of the "Social Area of the Observer"[329]

Andrea Salter has convincingly argued that these circles have an optical inflection that visually materializes the figure of the subjective camera:

> the "Social Area of an Observer" can be understood with reference to the 'subjective camera' analogy, wherein the 'subjective camera' is located in the centre of these circles. By using different or layered subjective lenses, the observer can engage with each layer of the circle, always of course from their own standpoint. However, not mentioned by Jennings and Madge is the idea that, in engaging with the outermost circle, the observer's lens cannot by-pass those circles closest; it must necessarily

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328 Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge, *May the Twelfth*: *Mass-Observation Day Surveys 1937 (*1937): 348-9.
329 Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge, "FIG. 2" *May the Twelfth*: *Mass-Observation Day Surveys 1937 (*1937), 348. (cropped photograph of print book).

> accommodate them. Put another way, an observer's social horizon is filtered with reference to social interaction taking place in both of the closer circles. [330]

This configuration can be understood as a set of lenses that produce the layered distortions of the observer's situated perspective. Instead of dismissing these skewed optical effects, M-O validates them as a key components of an internal apparatus that might actually strengthen the individual's ability to creatively participate in larger publics and events. The different spheres that constitute the subjective camera's mechanism can be dynamically utilized by an adept observer to bring different subjects and concepts into focus, even if all of these views remain somewhat blurred by a particular embodied vantage.

Highlighting these complex techniques of seeing as modes of exerting political agency harks back to Haraway's point that "understanding how these visual systems work, technically, socially, and psychically, ought to be a way of embodying feminist objectivity."[331] Actively using and understanding these different situated lenses affirms the "psychic apparatus that each individual has" for making sense of experience. And, in spite of how the expanding mass-mediated world threatens to overwhelm embodied knowledge, this capacity still can meaningfully and ethically position readers in relation to a larger environment.[332] Acknowledging one's subjective camera and mastering its affordances through habitual use makes readers increasingly adept storytellers and engaged participants in all spheres of their own lives. A socially situated picture of distant figures and events may be more filtered than local happenings, but such heavily distorted views have their own value that helps the reader

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[330] Andrea Clare Salter, "Women's Mass-Observation Diaries: Writing, Time & 'Subjective Cameras'," (PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2008): 42.
[331] Haraway "Situated Knowledge," 191.
[332] *May the Twelfth,* 265.
As strange as this notion of the psychic apparatus might seem, it is also echoed in canonical public opinion research decades later, particularly in Noelle-Neumann's notion of the "super-sensible organ" in her famous "Spiral of Silence" theory. Noelle Neumann, Elisabeth. "The Spiral of Silence: A Theory of Public Opinion." *Journal of Communication* 24, no. 2 (1974): 43-51.

relate to her social and historical context as a participant instead of a passive onlooker. Managing one's own distortions is also a means of more responsibly reading the press's own partiality, finding ways of integrating it as one resource for understanding and communication among many as opposed to the final, authoritative account.

In the lengthy body of *May the Twelfth,* the press view and the distorted views of various subjective cameras kaleidoscopically collide to reveal the dynamic possibilities of the relationship between situated individuals, larger collectives, and multiple narratives. Embedded in its seemingly arbitrary archive is a subtle editorial argument that affirms organically emerging sousveillant spectatorship. The text begins with a section on preparations for the coronation as narrated by national and local news. A collage-like collection of press excerpts documents the logistics and symbolism of the event while almost universally affirming the British people's enthusiasm. This first section draws attention to the concerted labor of staging reality and facilitating access to a shared version of history that can be "democratically" distributed across society by top-down producers. The curated excerpts meticulously describe the multitude of official preparations while also performing their own role as "one of the main instruments for preparing the people" by explaining what narrative people should expect to take away from the event.[333] They describe the various technologies being put in place—wires, lighting, microphones—that will counter elitist constraints on who is able to attend the event "in person" by relaying the historic moment equally to everyone.[334] Self-consciously reflecting on this responsibility, the cited mass media publications emphasize the democratizing marvels of modern technologies that can

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[333] *May the Twelfth*, 4.
[334] Given the limited space available for people to be physically present and close to the coronation ceremony, most of these seats were given to aristocratic or other well-connected, wealthy individuals.

communicate shared meaning and provide equal opportunities for all citizens to directly access the events. As an institutional technology, the press emphatically claims to help people see and participate in a common vision of reality by meticulously managing the official narrative.

Jennings and Madge highlight the political aims of the papers' self-promoted authority at the beginning of the publication in order to contrast it in the subsequent sections with a counternarrative about how real people relate to this supposedly democratic modern media environment. Referring to the circular schema in a footnote, they reiterate the relationship between the mass media and individuals: "broadcasting plays so vital a role, in enabling contact between areas 1 and 3 to be effected on a far wider scale than has ever been possible hitherto."[335] This new contact has the threatening potential to enable the distant authority of area 3 to colonize or overwrite the sense-making strategies of more closely experienced spheres. Yet, at the same time, it also offers renewed opportunities for connection as long as people are trained to make use of such capacities. The next section of the publication gradually shifts towards this ground level of engagement by collecting dissenting or diverging voices that do find a platform through the press in smaller politically-oriented newspapers, letters to the editor, and other formal complaints. These views range from serious (usually coming from union publications and a leftist political stance) to the seemingly trivial (like the dismal state of canine coronation day celebrations!) but all are

[335] *Ibid.,* 14n.

given equal weight in this assembled context.[336] The text stages the relationship between press and people as one of dialogue and continual negotiation as opposed to unidirectional broadcast.

Yet recording official dissent within the mass media isn't the publication's primary concern. The bulk of its pages are dedicated to a cacophony of views and voices that all claim space to see otherwise and attend to emergent, experiential knowledge outside of the press. These narratives are only made accessible through the movement's attentive means of visually encountering the events from street level and their encouragement of others to reflectively read from their own situated points of view. Designated observers captured these nascent forms of sense-making on Coronation Day by recording overheard conversations and making copious descriptive notes; in addition, M-O's interviews and circulated day surveys prompted many individuals to pay close attention to the details of their day and directly offer their visions of the events. This approach affirms ways of understanding that are not colored by a simple for/against the official version.

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[336] Two examples: "76. Many of us think that the Coronation season would be a fitting time for a special effort to gladden the hearts of British dogs. For thousands of these the "festivities" may just be another succession of drab days like all the rest – chained to a leaky, draughty apology for a kennel; left alone all day with a pannikin of muddy water, and only given scraps of unsuitable food in a haphazard way. Will dog lovers please cooperate in securing amnesty for these canine prisoners? (Letter to *Wallingford and Carshalton Times*, 8.4.37)" 35.
"93. Catering workers in the London area state that unless they are given guarantees of a living wage within the next two weeks there will be many "Walks out" during the Coronation week. Trade union membership among catering workers in London has increased 75 per cent. during the past twelve months. (D. Worker, 8.4.37)" 40.

Figure 4.4 Onlookers using homemade periscopes[337]

Figure 4.5 Crowd with periscopes on Coronation Day[338]

[337] "Coronation Periscopes: People at the back of a crowd using home-made periscopes to watch the Coronation procession as it passes Charing Cross," (May 12, 1937), *Fox Photos/Getty Images*,https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/photos/periscope?autocorrect=none&page=2&phrase=periscope&sort=oldest#license (image accessed 11/12/2018)

[338] Paul Popper, "Viewing of King George VIs, coronation procession, Trafalgar Square," (May 12, 1937), *Popperfoto/Getty Images*, https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/volume-2-page-70-picture-5-london-england-viewing-of-king-news-photo/82138108 (image accessed 11/12/2018).

Stressing the importance of visuality to this situated knowledge, the editorial hand in these sections repeatedly affirms individuals' scopic capacities. Seeing clearly or grasping the "whole picture" is repeatedly acknowledged to be challenging in spite of the officially-touted democratizing achievements of the mass media. Nevertheless, individuals find their own makeshift ways of gaining access to events as they unfold. Against the prepared press narrative and the official plans, a multitude of situated, technologically enhanced eyes aided by mirrors and periscopes gaze back [Fig. 4.4 & 4.5]. One observer reflects at length on the popularity of these devices and how they impact his own vision of the event: "I was amazed to see people who had brought out mirrors of all shapes and sizes, to enable them to see what was going on […] shaving mirrors, hand mirrors, large and small were held high and periscopes appeared miraculously. I held onto mine and with its aid saw everything quite plainly."[339] Despite being physically far away from the events, individuals are able to see them not just through the aid of the radio and the special illustrated editions of the papers, but by cobbling together everyday items to construct makeshift pictures from their own embodied vantages. Moreover, according to multiple observers, the litany of newspapers and pamphlets documenting the event from an official point of view end up trampled under the feet of the masses, layers of wet paper scraps on the streets that are abandoned in favor of more partial yet engaged participant views.

In addition to physical distance, personal feeling is another obstacle to gaining a clear vantage. However, Mass-Observation's approach also stresses the value of this emotionally skewed knowledge. For example, another observer reflects that "My seat was too far back for me to see them very well, and at moments of emotional stress such as that, it is always

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[339] *Ibid.,* 115.

hard to take scenes in quickly. I have a rather blurred picture in my mind of what I saw."[340] Being "too far back […] to see" or being left with a "rather blurred picture" does not mean one cannot claim the experience as a valuable part of knowledge construction. Distortion should not be discounted, filtered, or corrected, but instead considered meaningful; it is a tie that situates the viewer in relation to the material reality of her surroundings. Moreover, these personal emotions contain as much meaning about the coronation, if not more, than the perfectly focused professional press photographs that commemorate the event for a mass public. Distortions are immanent to the events and experiences themselves, not noise that must be filtered out. With practice and attention, the warped images that necessarily come with one's "psychic apparatus" can be read and expressively utilized to enhance understanding and communication as opposed to being dismissed as obstacles to perceiving reality.

While feeling is on one level feared for its hypnotic quality, close attunement to how affective responses influence experience can lead to more engaged and even ethically conscious viewership. Emotionally colored sousveillant stories help subjects better manage situated knowledge and affirm how these perspectives bind one to larger social entities and events. To give one representative example, in the course of documenting the festivities in London an observer who is described as "Female. Typist. Single. 39" reflects on her emotional lens:

> I must add a word about my personal feelings. I found it most enlightening to analyze my feelings, and those of other people who talked to me. I was surprised how much I responded to the atmosphere of the crowd, the cheering, etc. I felt a definite pride and thrill in belonging to the Empire which in ordinary life, with my political bias, is just the opposite of my true feeling […] Reviewing it all calmly

[340] *Ibid.,* 131.

> afterwards, one sees how dangerous all this is—the beliefs and convictions of a lifetime can be set aside so easily. [341]

The very fact of actively observing, valuing, and using these impressions as the basis of personal narrative materializes the viewer's reflective awareness of her affectively inflected perspective, which is particular to the lived experience of the event. While she muses on the dangers of the collective emotional thrill that informed her vision, these feelings were also, in the moment, what enabled her to feel part of history, be "in and of the crowd." Moreover, these dangers seem neutralized by the observer's ability to read and acknowledge them. Without dismissing the reality of these feelings, her reflection meaningfully manages them into something "enlightening." The affective and socially situated input of the subjective camera thus emerges as an embodied technology of sousveillance that simultaneously validates individuals' views and connects them to communal experiences. Its distorted lenses replace the hypnotic pull of authoritarian unity with an ethically engaged disenssus.

"A perceptual training ground"

While *May the Twelfth* celebrates already-emergent visual literacies, M-O does not only record them from a distance; it also seeks to ensure that these capacities are nurtured and not neglected in favor of more passive mass media readership. Survey directives and diaries are one strategy. *May the Twelfth* even begins its "day survey" section by citing Pavlov's *Conditioned Reflexes*, indicating its investment in re-habituating its subjects.[342] Furthermore, the

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[341] *Ibid.,* 303-4.
[342] "It is obvious that the different kinds of habits based on training, education, and discipline of any sort are nothing but a long chain of conditioned reflexes. We all know how associations, once established and acquired between definite stimuli and our responses, are persistently and, so to speak, automatically reproduced, sometimes even although we fight against them… We know also how different extra stimuli inhibit and disco-ordinate a well-established routine of activity, and how a change in a pre-established order dislocates and renders difficult our movements, activities, and whole routine of life." *Ibid.,* 345.

survey excerpts and corresponding footnotes highlight how observation and recording influence behavior. When one survey-respondent reflects, near the end of his contribution, that "common everyday events were noted and formed impressions on my conscious mind which under normal circumstances would have aroused no interest," the editorial footnote almost triumphantly claims responsibility: "The consciousness of the observer is undoubtedly heightened by the fact that he is observing."[343] Beyond its curated publications, the movement also solicited longer reflections in the form of diaries that individuals submitted over the course of many years. Scholarship on these diaries, such as Dorothy Sheridan's analysis of the "archive as autobiography," suggests that the "heightening of consciousness" and self-awareness of situatedness within unfolding histories were the anticipated pay offs.[344] Salter emphasizes, as well, that the diaries must be understood as forms of life-writing that entail the reflective, subjective construction of the self as opposed to an impersonal record of historical facts.

Yet M-O's scalable aspirations required tapping into the potential of new technologies as opposed to simply nostalgically romanticizing the diary's older form of habitual testimony and self-reflection. It meant updating the nature of storytelling. Stressing the centrality of media networks to the project's goals Highmore suggests that, "by engaging with forms of communication distinct from state and commercial media, Mass-Observation can be seen as privileging an alternative mass media, made up of networks of communication based in pubs and clubs and in the 'gossip' networks of local communities."[345] Affirming alternate means of communication was not just the backward-

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[343] *Ibid.,* 358.
[344] Dorothy Sheridan, "Writing to the archive: Mass-Observation as autobiography." *Sociology* 27, no. 1 (1993): 27-40.
[345] Highmore, 86.

looking return to old folk knowledge he suggests, though. By contrast, M-O's work hinged on new visual media's sousveillant potentials. To better engage with this expanded environment, older networks of meaning-making needed to draw on the same technological innovations that were relaying distant events to local communities. This strategy prompted M-O's experimentation using new media devices in addition to channeling modern media imaginaries. The movement believed that strategic interaction with an actual filmic camera and its aesthetic products might help reactivate the "subjective cameras" within each individual that would otherwise languish in disuse or be overwhelmed by the pseudoenvironment's influx of information.

May the Twelfth is frequently referred to as a textual analogue to documentary film. Jennings and Madge themselves emphasized that the book was arranged "in a simple documentary manner" and Thomas Davis's recent scholarship identifies a number of filmic techniques in the text's formal composition: "Textual echoes, montage, and simultaneity all operate as techniques for finding anew in everyday life what often hides in plain sight.[346] And, indeed, film more than text opens up a multitude of possibilities for envisioning and extending sousveillant storytelling. Jennings's M-O affiliated avant-garde documentary *Spare Time* (1939) is the clearest filmic analog to the movement's textually elaborated goals.[347] Echoing Benjamin's famous claim that film could reach its true purpose by becoming a training ground for a modern population, the documentary invoked forms and techniques that could teach viewers how to creatively practice sousveillance. As Davis notes in his comprehensive study of M-O's relationship to British documentary film, the nascent

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[346] *May the Twelfth,* 347; Davis, *The Extinct Scene* 60.
[347] For more on the relationship between Spare Time and M-O see Lucy Curzon, *Mass-Observation and Visual Culture: Depicting Everyday Lives in Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

cinematic genre as a whole was invested in putting "the creative treatment of reality" in service of social change and democratic knowledge production. Founding figure John Grierson explicitly worked to foment democratic values and combat the modern media's pseudoenvironment in his artistic practice.[348] However, diverging from the Griersonian tradition, Jennings' production strives not to inform but to train audiences in applied visual storytelling. The film does not simply present powerful images but encourages audiences to find such expressive scenes and image-combinations in their everyday lives by adopting the dynamic capacities of the camera. This style fosters the audience's affective absorption into the filmic world and implicates them in the visual production of that world.[349] Jennings's approach to documentary doesn't encourage people how to *use* cameras but to mimetically adopt the devices' technologically enhanced visual capacities as their own.[350] The mechanism's generative mimetic potential could thus make it "a perceptual training ground for a technologically informed *physis*."[351]

Spare Time is as much about "leisure time" as it is about the excess "spare" creative and interpretative spaces open for individuals to join communities from their own vantages, independent of a cohesive official image. This documentary about working class industrial

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[348] Davis comments on Grierson's awareness of the idea of the pseudoenvironment, describing his skeptical appraisal of Lippman when they met in person. *Extinct Scene*, 37.

[349] It subtly emulates, in this way, the protagonization of the camera in avant-garde works like Vertov's classic *Man with a Movie Camera*. Whereas Grierson considered Vertov's classic film "ridiculous" and "a failure" because "he has given us everything of the mechanism and nothing of the people," in *Spare Time* the "mechanism" is not opposed to these humanistic goals but an essential part of them. According to Thomas, "Dziga Vertov's *The Man with the Movie Camera* and *Enthusiasm* dazzled Grierson with their avant-gardism; yet The *Man with the Movie Camera* verged on becoming 'ridiculous' while *Enthusiasm* 'failed because he was like any bourgeois highbrow, too clever by half. . . . He has given us everything of the mechanism and nothing of the people.'" (39)

[350] Jane Gaines has also examined documentary film's mimetic potential in her theory of "Political Mimesis" which locates these film's activist potential in how the embodied audience mimics physical protest (like riots) shown on screen. Jane Gaines, "Political Mimesis," *Collecting Visible Evidence* (1999): 84-102.

[351] Susan Buck-Morss develops this argument further by labeling "cinema as a prosthesis of perception." Concretely she suggests that the mass's capacity to visualize itself as a mass was cultivated by cinema, which then helped generate energy behind early twentieth century revolutionary movements "The cinema screen as prosthesis of perception: A historical account," *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (1996): 45-62.

Britain begins with a faux-objective frame that is subsequently complicated and undermined throughout, opening the film up to creative reconfiguration and critical participation through active visual engagement. Sparse, unemotional narration frames the images on the screen, but heterogeneous and distorted imagery repeatedly challenges the authority of this imposed meaning. Like the official mass media discussed in the publications, this voiceover purports to communicate a neutral image of the world to its viewership with objective facts. For example, the film simply begins: "This is a film about how people spend their spare time." However, its seemingly objective, unmarked vision of the world (that literally sweeps in from an aerial perspective) is troubled soon after. The narrator is immediately ambiguously situated in relation to the environment he describes, arbitrarily switching between the subjects "they" and "we," and thus leaving this relational positioning to the spectator's own interpretation. The individual reader must judge of how much the narration either speaks with, against, or over the documented subjects, while also reflecting on her own positioning in relation to them.

Beyond the introduction, the voiceover adds only a few sentences throughout the rest of the film. These caption-like interjections offer the audience very little meaningful information and sometimes even subtly contradict the content onscreen. Since it is impossible to rely on this "factual" version, viewers are invited to make their own meanings to supplement, or even directly contrast, the narrator. For example, while the film is purportedly about defining a homogenous working class, the visual juxtapositions undermine this view of the collective in favor of dissensus. Crowds are repeatedly abstracted into single mass ornaments or unified spectacles: at a football game, a boxing match, a dancehall, an amusement park. But these clips are interspersed with shots of individuals involved in entirely decontextualized activities (a man letting doves loose, a boy fixing his

bike, a girl eating and laughing at something off screen) that seem to oppose the solid cohesion of the crowds. Additionally, both individuals and crowds are often conspicuously presented in the process of gazing, as if to activate the viewers' own critical seeing practices.

In one iconic scene nationalist collectivity is represented by a uniformed kazoo band performing "Rule Britannia" in the middle of a field. The participants are serious and completely focused despite their strange costumes and task, which involves hoisting a living, helmeted personification Britain above them. The mass becomes an absurdist, but unified spectacle in their uniforms and coordinated choreography—in many ways the opposite of the Lambeth Walk. Yet the subsequent montage prompts the film's viewer to read critically and affectively as opposed to either remaining disinterestedly amused from the outside or accepting the performed consensus of this patriotism. The diegetic transgression of one of the players who looks directly at the camera emphasizes the power of the individual gaze and acknowledges the relational implication of the reader's interpretation [Fig. 4.6]. This moment immediately triggers a quick cut to a circus poster, then to a caged tiger, next to close-ups of the two girls who watch the animal from outside, before cutting back to the cage (now containing a lion) and ending with an energetic long-shot of a crowd at a boxing match. This rapid sequence captures personally situated feelings, experiences, and energies that cannot be easily assimilated into the masses they are juxtaposed with, like this mock nationalist collective. Collective and individual coexist here, bound by the skillful and unsettling movements of the camera's vision.

Figure 4.6 Moments from the sequence of Spare Time *described above*[352]

Without any explanatory resolution to these scattered scenes, the reader must use her own position in relation to all of these disparate images to create the narrative that can bind them together. Her socially situated gaze, trained by the camera's sousveillant capacities throughout the documentary, is recruited to sensibly manage this world of images. Alignment with the filmic apparatus, as in Metz's theory of primary identification with the camera, encourages the individual to become proficient in managing her own internal mechanism and aware of her body's capacities as a powerful subjective camera.[353] The film's deft combination of elements, which might not typically be noticed or naturally connected together, activate her ability to observe the coexistence of unlike objects and perspectives that still belong to the same reality and community. The mass and the individual, the press view and the sousveillant gaze all emerge as real, partial, and coexisting knowledges that together tie the documentary frame and its subjects together. Moving these trained practices

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[352] Humphrey Jennings, *Spare Time* (1939), British Film Institute, https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-spare-time-1939-online (accessed Oct. 17, 2018) (5 screenshots compiled in power point)
[353] Metz, "Imaginary Signifier," See Chapter 2 page 70 for more elaboration.

outside of the theatre, the spectator's own physical body and its everyday experiences also become collage-like elements. Claiming this individual perspective in relation to other collectives and knowledges is a form of active meaning-making, a practice of visual storytelling like the film's montage structure; it integrates the reader into a community of dissensus without dissolving her specific point of view.

(Re)Situating Sousveillance

Distorted as the individual's map of a social totality may be, M-O's work affirms these subjective lenses as potent tools for active expression, understanding, and communication as opposed to the enemy of participatory democratic publics. A given era's visual media forms offer imaginaries that can encourage embodied sense making and generatively redistribute the sensible. While at times valuing seemingly antiquated structures of storytelling, the movement's theorization of sousveillance radically remediates the oral narrative traditions that Benjamin gravitated towards by refiguring them in relation to a changing modern world and its new media ecologies. M-O's experimental, user-centric, relational, and affect-laden version of sousveillance therefore aligns this critical term with an expanded, distributed, and situated storytelling practice that cultivates communities of dissensus while still preserving the specificity of individual bodies as resources for ethically relating to the world.

Although technological innovation is central to Mann's vision, this chapter's engagement with M-O shows that sousveillance's disruptive visual power is much more than a technological appendage; it is also a mode of engaging with the world. What the contemporary usage of the term has often overlooked, in its fetishization of the inevitably democratizing cyborg assemblage, is the importance of a socially situated seer/storyteller

that directs the camera's gaze and constructs these alternative world-building imaginaries. Furthermore, this creative visual mode of engagement can do more than challenge overt abuses by the institutional gaze or state surveillance. The widespread adoption of such practices has the potential disrupt the imposition of totalizing authoritative orders, while still maintaining a connection between self and community composed of intersecting subjective pictures. More than just redefining a theoretical keyword, this re-orientation offers a new glimpse into how digital technologies intersect with the formation of participatory democracies. It prompts new ethically engaged, embodied, and technologically enhanced pathways of sense-making that might manage the crisis politics of an increasingly polarized media environment.

Considering citizen engagement in a digital context is as much about the habits of looking that new technologies might encourage as it is about particular digital products or platforms. Underscoring again its relation to Benjamin's ideals of storytelling, this version of sousveillance looks strikingly similar to Jean Burgess's much-referenced formulation of digital storytelling as vernacular creativity:

> Digital storytelling therefore works to remediate vernacular creativity in new media contexts: it is based on everyday communicative practices—telling personal stories, collecting, and sharing personal images—but remixed with the textual idioms of television and film; and transformed into publicly accessible culture through the use of digital tools for production and distribution. Through this process of remediation, it transforms everyday *experience* into shared public culture. Above all, digital storytelling is an example of creativity in the service of effective social communication, where communication is not to be understood narrowly as the exchange of information or 'ideas' but as the affective practice of the social.[354]

Burgess's description resonates deeply with M-O's theories and practices, mirroring its aspirations to encourage everyday expressive and communicative habits through sousveillant

[354] Jean Burgess, *Vernacular Creativity and New Media* (PhD Dissertation, Queensland University of Technology, 2007): 198.

seeing. Yet the movement uncouples the engaged "affective practice of the social" from specific media objects and from hierarchical, institutionally-managed participatory storytelling projects. Instead it emphasizes a vernacular creativity mediated by quotidian vision and interpersonal interaction. The situated knowledge that sousveillance provides is located firmly in the embodied subject even as technological imaginaries enhance her habitual observational practices and enrich her stories of the everyday.

This revised vision of sousveillance also provides a different means of disturbing power and challenging hegemonic narratives than "tactical media" has typically been associated with. M-O shares a number of similar approaches and goals with this digital movement, which as Rita Raley summarizes, "signifies the invention and disruption of a dominant semiotic regime, the temporary creation of a situation in which signs, messages, and narratives are set into play and critical thinking."[355] Just like M-O the tactical media that began in the 1990s aimed to use new technologies to create dissensus and to teach "a new way of seeing, understanding, and (in the best-case scenario) interacting with a given system."[356] However, M-O's sousveillant forward a much more ambivalent or "weak" mode of integrating "the people" into politics. While tactical media tend to be fully antagonistic to the dominating world order of global capitalism, M-O's strategies sought not to undermine official narratives but to point to their partiality and cultivate alternative stories. *May the Twelfth* is about facilitating a connection between the body politic and the sovereign, not mobilizing a revolution to overthrow him. By contrast, in the words of tactical media

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[355]Rita Raley *Tactical Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009): 6.
[356]Critical Art Ensemble, *Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactical Media* (New York: Automedia, 2001), 7.

practitioners, David Garcia and Geert Lovink, "Tactical media are media of crisis, criticism, and opposition."[357]

Of course tactical media are not homogenous. Notably, Andrew Galloway's reading 1990s cyberfeminism suggests the existence of more ambivalent tactical media projects that work within a given protocol or system without completely destroying it.[358] However even this movement is much more brash and confrontational than M-O documents ever even remotely approach.[359] Although these tactics work within existing protocols, they still assert their opposition to those protocols and act in viral ways that chip away at the system's original integrity. M-O, by contrast pitches a purely additive form of intervention, which creates change through the accumulation and intermingling of situated stories.

M-O's project might therefore be located somewhere in between institutional digital storytelling programs and tactical media. While perhaps a seemingly "lukewarm" political orientation compared to Mann's original jarringly revolutionary ideas, this conception of sousveillance forwards an ideal of political change that doesn't attack the scaffolding holding society together but instead alters the relationship between individuals and dominant authorities in ways that subtly impact what counts as knowledge. Sousveillance thus forwards a "weak" theory of participatory politics as opposed to radicalism and revolution. Although this strategy does raise clear concerns about complicity, especially in the context of wartime violence and atrocity, Gianni Vattimo's theorization of *pensiero debole* proposes that weakness is not just debility. And, as Paul Saint-Amour recently synthesizes, "weak thought" does not entail abandoning the possibilities of social change, but can be a means of cultivating

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357 David Garcia and Geert Lovink, "The ABC of Tactical Media," *Nettime*, May 16, 1997, https://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9705/msg00096.html (accessed 5/23/2019).
358 Alexander R. Galloway, *Protocol: How control exists after decentralization*,(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).
359 The VNS Matrix Cyberfeminist Manifesto that Galloway cites, for example, proclaims that the "clitoris is the direct line to the mainframe." qtd. in *Ibid.*, 192.

compassion for the stories left out of official narratives such that "weakness would be the strait gate through which newness would enter."[360]

Seeing sousveillance as subjective, socially situated storytelling might a way of seeing contemporary sousveillance and its political potential at all. From this new vantage digital sousveillance looks less like monitoring Facebook's violations of individual privacy and more like individuals' multimodal narratives that exceed or contradict the normalized affordances of a Facebook timeline, that transgress the lines between virtual and material. Sousveillance is also not necessarily a bombastic challenge to dominant or hegemonic structures, just a reconfiguration of power relations, the authority to create knowledge, and the distribution of the sensible. It is furthermore—like real time and filters—an orientation towards experience and meaning, not a particular device. No single platform will ever guarantee its adoption because stories must necessarily overflow the bounds of particular protocols and mediums in order to truly constitute a view from below.

Taking the burden off of concrete technologies and platforms to offer participatory, democratic utopias re-opens the questions that M-O addressed in its own moment. Where does sousveillance organically exist in the everyday? How might new technologies interface with this nascent creativity to further distribute and cultivate this form of participatory seeing? What role do visual habits play in enabling individuals to plot meaningful narratives that validate partial, distorted, and embodied experiences? And how might sousveillant activities encourage progressive political collectives, even without fully undermining the stable sociopolitical structures that currently bind these communities together and without dismissing the possibility of a shared reality? While the answers to these questions hinge on

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360 Paul K. Saint-Amour, "Weak Theory, Weak Modernism," *Modernism/modernity* 25.3 (2018), 437-459.

particular cultural and historical contexts, Mass-Observation's situated, narrative theorization of sousveillance asserts the value of asking them in the first place.

Distortion, Crisis, & Fake News

Were researchers to pose the same question in 2019 America that Britain's Mass-Observation movement did eight decades prior—"Is your interest in Crises increasing or decreasing?"—the results would likely be similar. Survey research conducted between February and March of 2018 on 5,013 individuals found that 68% had "news fatigue" and were "worn out by the amount of news."[361] Bombarded by always available online information and a 24/7 news cycle, withdrawing from engagement is enticing in this twenty-first century context. Moreover, just as in the interwar period, this tendency is amplified by a deep distrust in the media to provide reliable, useful information that resonates with one's own experience even if one does manage to tune in. Another recent Pew research survey, for example, indicates that 58% of Americans "do not feel like news organizations understand people like them" and that 56% "do not feel particularly connected to their main sources of national news."[362]

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[361] Jeffrey Gottfried and Michael Barthel, "Almost seven-in-ten Americans have news fatigue, more among Republicans," *Pew Research Center,* June 5, 2018, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/06/05/almost-seven-in-ten-americans-have-news-fatigue-more-among-republicans/ (accessed 11/17/2018).
[362] Jeffrey Gottfried , Galen Stocking, and Elizabeth Grieco, "Partisans Remain Sharply Divided in their Attitudes about the news media," *Pew Research Center*, September 25, 2018, http://www.journalism.org/2018/09/25/most-americans-think-their-news-will-be-accurate-but-are-less-confident-that-news-organizations-will-admit-mistakes/ (accessed 11/17/2018).

Figure 4.7 A situated view of 2018 [363]

However, the twenty-first century media ecology has a different set of affordances than M-O first grappled with in 1937. When individuals withdraw from the mainstream news today, it is unlikely that they stop reading altogether. Many popular alternative accounts of current events flourish on social media and other online platforms, and communities frequently form around those narratives. The rise of the alt-right, with its emphasis on affective impact and "alternative facts" over authoritative objectivity, seems like a case study in how M-O's ideals of ground-up knowledge-making can turn into dystopia as opposed to democracy. Indeed, "fake news" might be an exemplar of what it looks like for alternate accounts to flourish and challenge the mainstream media's informational hierarchy. Drafting and revising this chapter in the years immediately following 2016 U.S presidential election, I began to feel unsettled about this interwar source material and the claims it kept leading me back to. Even without idealizing M-O, my own historical context seemed like proof that the

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[363] "View of U.S. Capitol from inside protest," (10/4/18), taken by author on Motorola ONE mobile phone HD camera with Android "Vista" filter applied.

movement's particular approach and theories of participatory media were not just inherently flawed but outright dangerous in a digital age.

Reflecting further, though, the interpretive habits that M-O wanted to distribute in the 1930s are quite different than those that flourish in the dark corners of the twenty-first century internet. And this dissonance between the alternative storytelling of sousveillance and of the alt-right contains insights about how the distorted perspectives that emerge from below become amenable or hostile to democratic communities—whether they generate a politics of hate or, in Haraway's words, "loving care." Most notably, while the alt-right's meme culture, for example, is suffused with vernacular creativity, it is utterly detached from embodied experience. These communicative practices may create intensely affective experiences in readers' material offline bodies and may enact real world change. However, their own logic of sense-making is not situated. It is dependent instead on an insular, reactive online language that is disconnected from everyday, offline, heterogenous negotiations of the world. As Angela Nagle writes in *Kill All Normies,* "Every bizarre event, new identity and strange subcultural behavior that baffles general audiences when they eventually make the mainstream media, from otherkin to far right Pepe memes, can be understood as a response to a response to a response, each one responding angrily to the existence of the other."[364] This media output does create an alternative expressive public, yet its stories spin in self-referential circles, parodies, and inside jokes that have long been detached from any material

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[364] Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars From 4Chan And Tumblr To Trump And The Alt-Right* (Alresford, Hants: John Hunt Publishing, 2017), 7.
Other digital scholars have also commented on this aspect of self referentiality. Whitney Philips calls it "spinning endlessly" in her study on trolling. In a different context, Limor Shifman's foundational work on meme culture emphasizes that memes themselves are dependent on intertextuality with other memes and internet phenomena.
Whitney Phillips, *This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping The Relationship Between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).
Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).

connection to the outside world and that do not acknowledge their own partial nature. The alt-right does not take ethical responsibility for what it has learned to see and how it teaches other to look. Vision and knowledge are dislocated from corporeality, and the consequent discourse is not just disengaged but cruel to the vulnerable physical bodies outside of this sealed-off virtual collective.

The sousveillant vision of distorted subjective cameras does not entail this ugly disintegration or the complete relinquishing of a shared official narrative. But seeing these other possibilities that new media imaginaries offer, beyond the extreme vacillations between the alt-right's dystopia on the one hand and the supposedly inevitable utopia online participatory politics on the other, might mean taking a step back from particular platforms and devices. Twenty-first century political communities cannot be understood solely by considering how digital technologies network individuals, but must also take into account how they teach individuals to connect themselves to the world and to others in everyday life offline. Sustaining quotidian reading and storytelling habits into the future, regardless of how media forms continue to evolve, is not just about importing conventional narratives or oral histories onto online platforms, sharing blogs, or distributing 24/7 lifestreaming capabilities. It is about learning from the practices of reading, seeing, and understanding that digital media can train. These new capacities are not only useful as tools for creating digital content, but as lived strategies for making sense of the material world and relating to others. Contemporary digital culture is suffused with creative energy that offers myriad

opportunities to rethink human vision and imagination that reach well beyond concrete technological products and interfaces.[365]

Of course generative communication does already happen online and not all digital communities are hateful. As the political gains made by #blacklivesmatter and #metoo in recent years attest to, social media is frequently a productive political tool and a means by which previously marginalized perspectives can rise to the surface. However, these initiatives are only successful when there is a feedback loop between online rhetoric, offline realities, and embodied subjects who are repeatedly ethically encountered through their situated stories. This is not only the case for concrete political action like protests, but extends to the politics of navigating and seeing the world, of "grasping towards stabilizing form" on an everyday basis.[366] Moreover, perhaps counterintuitively, weak interventions like the ones sousveillance promises might be key to pushing change that can remain anchored in the body, the material present, and faith in a shared reality as opposed to spinning into radical, polarized abstractions and antagonisms. Against the strong accusations of "fake news" and the growing confusion of fact, belief, and opinion, a multiplicity of continually intertwining situated and partial knowledges might begin to choreograph a compassionate, relational middle space.

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[365] In considering digital vernacular creativity, Burgess cites Mark Deuze's taxonomy of digital participatory practices: "Mark Deuze (2006) argues that the emerging practices of participation in new media contexts have three important implications for the extent and ways in which individuals engage with media; in fact reconfiguring the relations between media texts, producers and consumers. He summarizes these three new configurations or modes of engagement as 'participation, remediation and bricolage'. First, Deuze argues, individuals become 'active agents in the process of meaning-making' (participation); second, 'we adopt but at the same time modify, manipulate, and thus reform consensual ways of understanding reality' (remediation); and third, 'we reflexively assemble our own particular versions of such reality' (bricolage)." Burgess, 66.

[366] Sasha Costanza-Chock has made this case in relation to activist campaign in his work on transmedia organizing –that social media campaigns need to be networked with a range of other media on and offline in order to be effective. Or, in summary, "the revolution will be tweeted –but tweets alone do not the revolution make." *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: 2014), 9.

But it would be a mistake to think that this kind of interpretive knowledge production happens naturally, that human capacities for democratic participation will automatically positively progress as technology evolves. M-O's labors are a reminder that these abilities must be intentionally cultivated and practiced. Recent campaigns to combat the increasing dissociation between the news media and everyday experience have rightly focused on education as the key site of political intervention. RAND's much publicized 2017 report on "truth decay," for instance, stresses the need to educate the population in civics, statistics, and critical thinking in order to build media literacy.[367] But sousveillance offers another pedagogical orientation with more potential for intuitive, creative, and distributed development—one that is more generative and less reactionary. It is not only about teaching individuals to ward off dis/mis-informational chaos as "responsible readers" but about contributing to new vibrant democratic communities of dissensus. Just as critical thinking needs to be practiced and encouraged, so too do imaginative and situated means of seeing and creating stories, even about one's own quotidian experience. When addressing troubling evolutions that move from media to the body, like the transference of online trolling into hate crimes and fascist rallies, it is not sufficient to combat these trends only through the media or to withdraw entirely into the "unmediated' body. An ethical, socially-oriented response must address these pressures at the nexus of body and media together, acknowledging the importance of technologically evolving structures of feeling. Seen through the lens of M-O's subjective cameras, sousveillance offers a means of using the compassionate weakness of situated visions to shift the stories we tell about ourselves, society, and one another.

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[367] Jennifer Kavanagh and Michael D. Rich, *Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018).

Loose Ends:
Lessons in Recognition

> *Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.*
>
> - *Walter Benjamin (1940)*

Early into this project's development, I described its major aim as "showing how new visual social media networks in the 1930s alter the way people perceive their own bodies and the bodies of others." At this very preliminary stage I framed the dissertation's scholarly story most concisely as "a prequel to N. Katherine Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman*." Given how my background in modernism has made me both familiar with and skeptical of rupture narratives, I wanted to consider the break between the human and posthuman as slippery and uneven—much like the break between modernism and postmodernism. How was the evolving analog visual media ecology of the 1930s impacting imaginations and perceptions of the human body before digital technologies arrived and, in Hayles's account, devalued material flesh by trading the presence/absence paradigm for pattern/noise? British late modernist texts seemed like an ideal place to look for these fragile and frayed connections across crisis. Especially given the prevalence of bodies imperfectly interfacing with new media in the art and theory of the period, this era's cultural artifacts promised to provide a portrait of pre-post-human technogenesis in process.

History, however, frequently resists progress narratives. It was not so easy to hold onto a continuous evolutionary trajectory from Freud's troubled 1930s prosthetic gods to Hayles's post-45 posthumanism and onto twenty-first century iterations of the digital cyborg. My chosen texts thwarted these efforts at multiple turns. Yet their resistances suggested alternative ways of reading history that embraced discontinuity over causality and that linked past and present together in generative instants of encounter. Instead of providing a clear view of the past from the outside, they kept summoning my own blurry, situated vision, refusing to let me forget that I was necessarily reading them through the warped lens of my own era, navigating their meanings through its particular structures of feeling. Moreover, as time passed, I became aware that this process of reading the past was altering my lived perception of twenty-first century technogenesis in ways that I couldn't quite name.

My intention to use late modernism to write a theoretical prehistory of the posthuman body was also complicated by the traumatic ruptures that marred the interwar era and the painful ghosts haunting its texts. The material assaults that bodies suffered in the 1930s—with the aftereffects of WWI, the rise of fascism in Europe, and the beginning of WWII—made it clear that grappling with corporeality and human responses to others' feelings was even more intensely politically and ethically charged than I had anticipated. While the body had been the project's anchor from the beginning, it became evident that this initially conceptual corpus couldn't be abstractly dissociated from the soldiers assaulted by the modern war machine, the thousands murdered in Nazi camps, the British civilian population caught in the expanded battlefield of total war, and so many others.

These challenges and reflections shifted the project's trajectory. In addition to considering how media transform bodies in pre-posthuman terms, my research began posing questions about how to approach the emergent, always ongoing processes that bind media to

the physical body across historical periods. Moreover, it became increasingly invested in finding contextually specific but non-deterministic methods to engage with the affective fascia linking technology and corpus. Sitting with late modernism's "space between" has offered lessons about how to linger in relational, middle spaces that provide privileged vantages from which to access structures of feeling that are still dissolved in their social substrate and to see technogenesis as a continual embodied process of retrojection. These precarious vistas pushed me towards a version of media history that foregrounds feeling and flesh through strategic transhistorical juxtapositions.

Each of the dissertation's chapters has ended with a very brief, unfinished gesture at a specific lesson in media historical methods that its particular central texts prompted. And in the rest of this conclusion I want to very quickly recapitulate these three incomplete loose ends, not to fully explicate them or to tie them off but to meditate on the ways forward they leave open. If the introduction grounded the project in a safety net(work) of terms, the conclusion leaves a new makeshift glossary untethered in the midst of emergent critical processes. These keywords point towards strategies of positioning oneself as a reader and critic, of recognizing the structures of feeling that "flit by" in past and present alike before they "disappear irretrievably."

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Chapter 2 examined how the 1930s picture press's new conditions of circulation and its increasingly immediate, indexical cultural imaginary, created a modern form of real time. My argument slowed down this media ecology's temporal mechanisms to interrogate real time reading's affective consequences, offering a glimpse of its melancholic patterns of attachment that glitchily divert energy from subjects' participation in the present. I followed the ways in which these feelings could condition historical responsibility and modes of

witnessing that led readers to stand-by even in the face of violence. Additionally, I claimed that by placing the reader ambiguously on the margins of the novel's fictional environment and the "real world," Waugh's *Vile Bodies* offered a strategic vantage from which to see real time's melancholic imaginary, revealing the repeated losses of loss that pushed characters to the sidelines of the present.

This slightly offset doubling in Waugh's text can be approached as a **parallax** given how it simultaneously offers two different lines of sight toward the same object—a view of the photographable present from the position of fictional characters and from a "real" reader outside of the novel. Inspired by *Vile Bodes,* I also see parallax as analytic tactic that can be exported into cultural criticism. This premise is embedded in my dissertation on a fundamental level because its methodology relies on juxtaposing two different periods—two trajectories toward the same concept—without leaning on causality or equivalency to smooth out their awkward incongruencies or to close the divergence between them. The evident displacement of a phenomena like "real time" that results from pairing these two offset vectors of vision from two different historical origin points sheds light on that phenomena in both eras by, at least momentarily, making its position in relation to the critic/reader palpable.

Chapter 3 used the unstable and shifting positionalities of Lee Miller's photographic practice to reveal the impact of algorithmic image filters on the flesh. It argued that new photographic technologies' glamourous armoring processes helped codify modes of readership and interaction that pre-emptively anesthetized the body against feeling and contingency. Miller's **chiastic** oscillation between photographer and photographed subject, which helped make the material impacts of this standardized shield visible, offers the second tactic for media historiography. Constantly moving back and forth between inside and

outside, subject and object, perceiver and perceived is a means of occupying an intermediary and relational space between two historical moments without relying on either's dominant paradigms. The "temporal core" of an era becomes most legible not simply by describing it through terms of another period as Benjamin suggested, but by swiveling continuously between eras to illuminate their reciprocities. Through this **chiasmus,** which makes the experience of any historical moment one of simultaneously perceiving and being perceived, structures of feeling can emerge in their essentially relational forms without being artificially precipitated or confined to a linear timeline.

Finally, in Chapter 4 I argued that Mass-Observation's conceptualization of the subjective camera as a means of community building and political empowerment can revise recent theorizations of sousveillance in digital culture. In its interwar context, sousveillance functions as an active mode of subjective storytelling as opposed to a particular image of the world that particular devices make possible. Applying Donna Haraway's notion of situated knowledge to M-O's work revealed the ethics of care and responsibility that inhere in sousveillant practices of narrating the world. Her theorization of **feminist objectivity** also signals how subjective, affectively laden distortions valuably contribute to scholarly knowledge-making. As these lenses cannot be simply pushed away in service of neutrally objective academic research, critical methodologies must take them into consideration. Not clearly isolatable, namable, or avoidable, the critic must embrace situated knowledge and attune herself to its inevitable affective contortions instead of futilely attempting to bracket them.

Parallax, chiasmus, and feminist objectivity are generative critical tactics in part because they are not distanced analytic modes. They emerge from these interwar texts because they are strategies derived from the era's structures of feeling that individuals used

to understand their own moving and unstable experiences, their own glitchy technogenetic processes. While not usually as clearly demarcated or identifiable in everyday life as in the above syntheses, the preceding chapters, or the particular aesthetic objects I have chosen, these tactics are nevertheless embedded in quotidian habits of reading and storytelling. Such practices are especially visible in the late modernist texts I have engaged with over the course of the project because, from the margins of mass popular culture, they provide glimpses of what Kracauer called the "daydreams of society" in the period. As opposed to reifying more grand fantasies of technological immunity and prosthetic gods, they reveal subjects' minor affective strategies of "grasping towards stabilizing form" and the many glitches inhibiting their assimilation into the interwar media ecology. The precarity of this archive in the unsettled interwar moment functions much like Benjamin's allegorical ruins, forcing a critic to dwell with a discontinuous and elusive view of history.

While not a premise of the project at the beginning, the value of my minor archive now seems impossible to dissociate from a feminist orientation to media history. It affirms the perspective of the "little shopgirls" that Kracauer caricatures and seriously attends to frequently trivialized and feminized texts like tabloids, fashion magazines, and diaries. In Jean Gallagher's account of *The World Wars through the Female Gaze*, women were also often viewed as distant non-participants in the conflict who do not "see combat," while at the same time being "construed as the primary spectators of war."[368] Particularly in the context of total and mediated war, women were anxiously viewed as the primary targets of propaganda campaigns—unsophisticated readers who could be easily swayed by enemy rhetoric. Given these circulating cultural imaginaries, female readers were perhaps unusually

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[368] Gallagher, *World Wars through the Female Gaze*, 3.

attuned to the fungibility of home front and front line, and of the popular picture press's implication in the interpretation of war. Additionally, the female gaze of the period provides especially deep access to glitchy structures of feelings given how it frequently counters the "specular totality" of patriarchal militarism with "alternative model[s] of fragmented or indirect visual apprehension."[369] Building from these premises that Gallagher so compellingly elaborates, my dissertation has claimed the importance of attending to minor female genres that are frequently dismissed as frivolous and to the implication of the female body (not just the masculine soldier body) in questions of war and as a prime site where the ethics of regarding pain plays out. This archive's strategies of reading can be exported beyond this particular context, but are inextricably tied to the female gaze and, on some level, remain feminist methods of writing media history.

The affective habits embedded in this late modern archive also point towards similar strategies for negotiating media's retrojective impact on the body in the present. The reading tactics that the fans developed to express emotion on Tumblr and that have spread through popular culture are similarly ways of "grasping towards stabilizing form." This project's feminist approach strives to adopt users' own tactics to linger in the shifting, ragged space between technological environments and the flesh that finds itself in flux. Another lesson from this project, though, is that there are no straight lines directly from the feels to contemporary structures of feeling that don't artificially solidify or precipitate them. Accessing "the temporal core" of one's own moment will always require not just the terms of another period, but a tangle of historical detours and visual diversions. Thus, although double vision (parallax), vertigo (chiasmus), and distortion (feminist objectivity) may initially

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[369] *Ibid.,* 6.

appear to be disabling glitches, they are actually ways of seeing structures of feeling. These situated strategies offer glimpses of the dynamic and always emergent media histories that necessarily exceed particular devices and particular moments in time. They reveal technogenesis and the transition *from prosthesis to aisthesis* as a messily embodied, affective, and retrojective process by which habits of reading enter into the flesh, shape aesthetic encounters, and relationally join bodies together. These loose end are thus the beginning of lessons in recognition that not only bring the transient, threatened images of the past fleetingly into focus, but also the present's own furtive, phantasmatic feels.

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