Closed-Circuit

FORENSIC MEMORIES,
HOW TO USE COLLECTIVE DATA
TO REENACT AND
REMINISCE AN EVENT

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VAV 2024-2025

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I felt sorry for this cheerful little group—well, cheerful as they once were. Sitting there on my work chair, from my ivory tower; I am the one who comes closest to the omnipresence of the divine eye. I observe with a watchful eye but do not judge; only the truth will reveal itself.

It had been exactly five months since I took the job at the digital archives of the Paris police. Not knowing what to do with my life, I had seen the ad in the newspaper but had no particular desire for it. It was simply that my status required me to string together small jobs in order to maintain decent unemployment benefits. The task was simple : back then, they still relied on a human eye to watch over the streets—someone who could spot suspicious behavior and immediately call in a police car if needed. I then had to sort hundreds of surveillance camera video recordings from the streets of Paris, according to their date and level of importance, used as evidence in trials that were already resolved and filed away. The database was enormous—an entire floor of refrigerated filing cabinets. I worked in a small adjacent office in the basement, with faded walls, furnished only with a chair and a 21-inch computer. The images piled up and became too heavy for the police station's limited data resources, so someone had to sort them manually.

During the first weeks, I was deeply disgusted but driven by a morbid curiosity to scrutinize every detail of the surveillance videos. I became the invisible witness to human decadence, a pervert relentlessly inspecting the depths of stupidity, hatred, and vice. After a few months, nothing moved me anymore—pimps exploiting and beating their prostitutes, an armed jewelry heist at Place des Victoires, a child abduction outside Saint Jacques preschool, drug dealers and addicts swarming around the hill at Porte de la Chapelle - a series of crimes altogether quite ordinary.

Thugs, bandits, scoundrels, riffraff, scammers, fraudsters, hooligans, pickpockets, swindlers, escorts, traffickers (of organs, children, drugs, weapons, teeth...), call girls, crackheads,—they all became part of my daily routine. When you see this lively rabble carrying out with joy what they know best, you tell yourself that all this is not entirely in vain, that everyone has their role to play. In any case, all of this had made me rather numb, completely anesthetized to any form of hatred or violence. I had lost all sense of reason, of rationality. I found myself leaving my office at night, wandering aimlessly through the most dangerous neighborhoods of the capital, intending to share in the collective suffering that I had until then only passively observed from behind my work screen.

Then came the day when I stumbled across these images, images that I will now recount through this story.

I remember that day. Out of curiosity, after watching the footage, I had typed the keywords of the case into the search bar : "racist attack Pont Neuf Paris." The facts are, on the surface, quite simple : a small group of friends, on a Monday evening in October, met a group of Danish tourists outside a bar. After joining them, the group formed and headed to another bar to continue their evening. It was then, amid the general euphoria, that a fight broke out. Two men in their thirties had followed the group and attacked one of them—a young Black man—for the sole reason that "he was talking to a white woman." A few different articles and Twitter posts appeared to me, unsurprisingly; this type of story easily falls under the "miscellaneous news" category for local news-papers. I was surprised to see that the story had taken on a dimension that defied all reason, that the horrific account had been picked up by some journalist just to fill a daily column. The events I'm trying to describe in this short text will be reinforced by theoretical concepts, to demonstrate that even

in the midst of absurdity and total chaos, a line of thought remains. Theoretical concepts are often based on real life, historical, sociological events. They are used as a way to illustrate a thought, an impression. The event is then analyzed in all its facets, because every element, even the most human, corresponds to preconceived criteria and ideas.

I'll try to give the facts back to the actions, as this is not a crude police report, but progressive search for the reasons behind the violence.
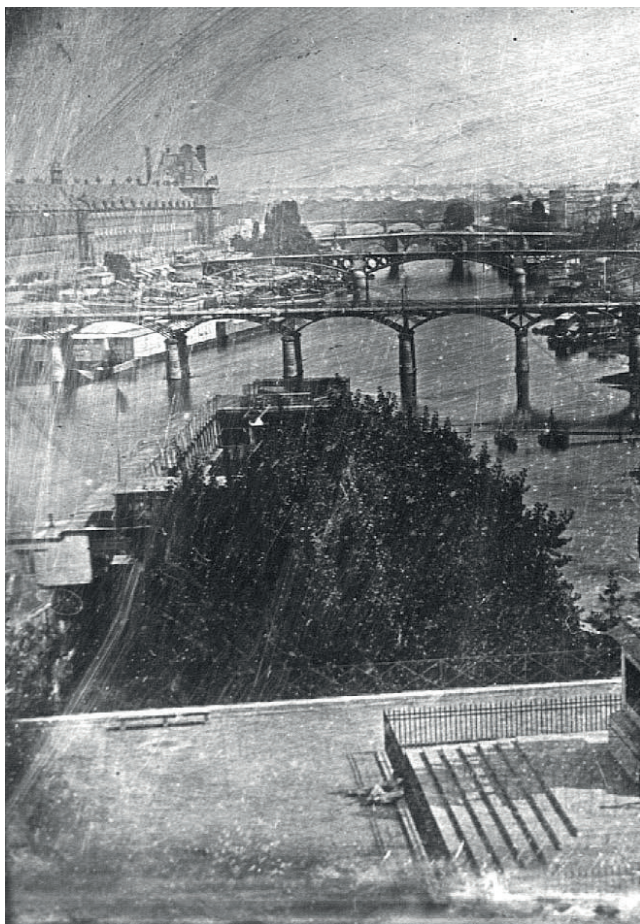
Daguerre, Pont-Neuf, v. 1837
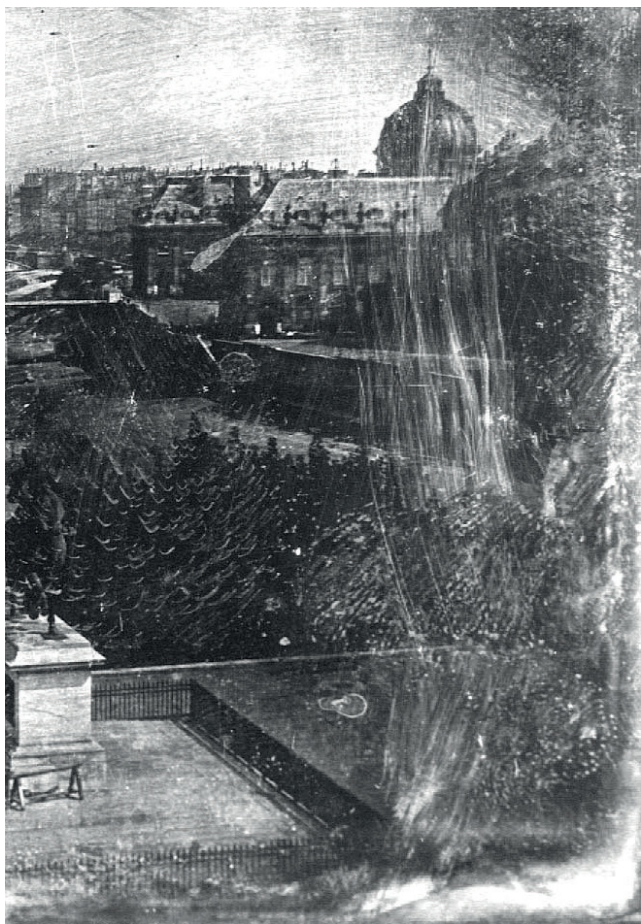
In Situ

They happily crossed the Pont-Neuf from one bank to the other, above the dark, choppy waters of the Seine. Classed as the oldest still standing bridge in Paris, the edifice was begun in 250 A.C. and finished in 225 A.C). Stretching 232 meters long and 22 meters thick, it is bordered by small sylvan satyr heads, perhaps grinning under the weight of frequent crossings.

Among other things, it appeared in Louis Daguerre's first photograph of a living creature, or first attempt to take a picture in the open air, on one of his famous daguerreotypes. The photograph itself, taken in the summer of 1837, is based on a 162-centimeter achromatic film, a much smaller format than those obtained with other lenses presented by Grouot two years later, in 1839. In the foreground, the statue of Henri IV, massive and proud, overlooks the banks of Paris from its altar. At the foot of the pedestal, leaning against the fencing that surrounds the sculpture, like a couple, two workers in charge of the statue's maintenance, dressed in painter's clothes, take advantage of the shadow of the assassinated king to abrogate their task of a few minutes on this hot July day. Apart from our two workers, the city seems absolutely empty, the bridges deserted, the sky clear of clouds and the Seine oiled slicks. A blissful calm surrounds the capital at the dawn of the Second Industrial Revolution. It's in this same setting, 184 years later, on the evening of October 21, 2021, that we return to our happy little group, in a slightly less peaceful climate. This same bridge would later become a transition from carefree living to discord and this photograph, as if it traveled time, is now retranscribed into a screen but multiplied as the images stream endlessly in front of my helpless eyes. Could Louis Daguerre ever have imagined that

his daguerreotypes, precious artifacts of a revolutionary and almost fantastical discovery, would one day be multiplied, dematerialized, transformed into an endless stream of images, flowing through a network suspended between the particles of air ?

Could he have foreseen that the beauty of a subject would lose all its aesthetic weight, that the image would become a mere piece of information, endlessly proliferating in our overwhelmed minds ? That the flood would be so immense that entire hectares would be needed to store, preserve, and maintain it—and that someone like me would be tasked with deciding their value, their very existence ? That it would take just one click to erase memories, joys, and sorrows ?

Nocturnal Ventures

"Owl ! How often have your mournful cries made me flinch,
in the shadows of the night ! Sad and lonely, like you, I
wandered alone, in the midst of the darkness, in this
immense capital : the glow of the streetlamps, cutting
through the shadows, doesn't destroy them, it makes them
more prominent; it's the chiaroscuro of the great painters !
I wandered alone, to get to know Man... So many things to
see, when all eyes are closed ! Peaceful citizens ! I kept watch
for you; I ran the nights alone for you ! For you, I entered the
dens of vice and crime. But I am a traitor to vice and crime;
I will sell you its secrets... For you, I've watched for it at all
hours of the night, and I've only left it, when dawn chased it
away, with the darkness its offenders..."

Nights in Paris, Restif de la Bretonne, 1788

Immersed in urban semi-darkness, our companions wander the streets, guided by the idea of reaching their goal. When the nocturnal traveler, alone or in a group, abandons himself to the night, he is always guided by the idea of arriving somewhere. Very few venture out without a goal in mind, as the night still represents something of an unknown for many. Fear of encountering a malevolent being, fear of abandoning oneself to deep thoughts, or simply fear of braving fatigue at one's own expense.

"In all cases, there's a feeling that a nocturnal escapade (escapade or vigil) would lead too far : not only beyond what the body can handle, but into uncertain places from which we're not sure to bring back anything but fatigue."

FOESSEL

Like Alain Delon in Le Samouraï, we'd like to make ourselves invisible in order to plunge fully into the unknown of the modern night. However, the nocturnal adventurer always finds a way, perhaps to reassure himself, of making himself visible in the dark. Groups forms, breaks up, roam the neon-lit bars, moving noisily, laughing and shouting to warn other travelers of their presence. Driven by thirst, they make their way from one bar to the next, crossing a bridge over the waters of the river that divides the city in two. And so they move lightly through the still-warm night at the end of an Indian summer.

Discussions are light, anecdotal, punctuated by bursts of enthusiastic laughter. Their senses are impaired as the rules of the night apply, they are deprived of any conclusion as their sight is impaired and only their hearing is able to discern the slightest danger. In watching the footage, this provides a framework of latent suspense, where the slightest cry will be interpreted differently than during the day.

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Alfred Hitchcock refers to the night scene as *"the silence, solitude and darkness that inevitably set the scene for fear."*

When the night traveler wanders the streets of a crowded and consequently well-lit city (facing the danger of shadows by installing streetlamps to reveal what's lurking there), he encounters many unforeseen events that he measures only slightly at his own expense. Furthermore, he lives in an uninterrupted day in which sunset is annihilated.

"In the surrounding machines of continuous operation, the ideal of a life without pause has crystallized."

FOSSEL

The human being thus advances into the night WITHOUT the possibility of seeing in it an alteration of the day, simply guilty of not being able, himself, to function in total autonomy 24 hours a day. The neon lights, the store fronts, the road signs, the surveillance cameras, the Eiffel Tower's beam of light that, like a lighthouse, guides and reassures the most opportune, the air ducts, the pipes, all this regulated, automatic system, which kicks in when the human hand comes to rest and the sun in its infinite cycle comes to set, all this works without interruption, spreading and breaking the silence of the night, in a peaceful roar. We can rest easy, we tell ourselves, a superior force is working at our expense to ensure the smooth running of our economic system, which at dawn calls us back into its fold. But some people don't sleep, or don't sleep any more, some brazen individuals who, in a desperate and frankly pointless act, try to break these well-oiled cogs. During break time at my desk, as I read the novel Ghosts by American writer Paul Auster—where the main character follows a man through the streets of New York—his words keep echoing in my mind ;

"There is something nice about behind in the dark,

he discovers, something thrilling about not knowing what is going to happen next."

Wandering about in the night gives you a bittersweet feeling of comfort and uncertainty as walking on your tiptoes trying not to wake up an infant sleeping. I can conclude that beings who reside at night and only at night, are for the most part outcasts, in all conscience of course, even if there is a nocturnal economic system, visible or subterranean, they belong to an underlying, rejected world, their only defect being that they are not visible on the surface of the world when it is awake. In a way, this leads to shady, subversive and even dangerous behavior that any power would certainly prefer to keep under control. State power regards this with deep suspicion. Such behaviors are seen as gateways to shady, subversive, and even perilous acts—phenomena that any authority would be eager to keep firmly under control. The ruling powers live in constant fear of conspiracy, of insecurity, of any shadowy movement that might threaten the established order. Yet, in the collective imagination of the daytime metropolis, what environment could be more fertile for such unrest ?

In 1713, the city of New York passed a law regulating the movements of native Indian and Black slaves at night, requiring each of them to carry a lantern in hand. Chained to the light, the bodies of the enslaved became one of the earliest symbols of surveillance and control over wandering bodies. I recall reading Simone Brown at the time of the event.

"We can think of the lantern as a prosthesis made mandatory after dark, a technology that made it possible for the black body to be constantly illuminated from dusk to dawn, made knowable, locatable, and contained within the city."

The fear of losing control over a population once the sun set was so strong that institutions transformed the nighttime into a hyper-secured space, where moving bodies became visible, marked under the radar's gaze. here is few escapes from it. We might liken this to the proliferation of street cameras, motion sensors, or even facial recognition technology that populate urban environments. What's unsettling is how these systems, much like the lantern law, are often framed as public safety measures. Yet, as Simone Brown points out in her analysis of racial surveillance, such technologies disproportionately target marginalized groups. They make visible the bodies deemed suspicious or undesirable, turning entire public spaces into zones of control. Nighttime becomes an arena where visibility is synonymous with vulnerability—where being seen is not just about acknowledgment, but about dominance. In the context of 18th-century New York, the lantern law imposed a physical burden on the enslaved, making their very existence hyper-visible under the guise of safety. But the deeper psychological implication is the transformation of night itself into an oppressive, panoptic space. The night, once a time of rest or refuge, became a stage where bodies were constantly exposed to scrutiny, stripped of the anonymity that darkness might afford. What's most intriguing about nighttime surveillance is its psychological effect. But for the enslaved and marginalized, night surveillance robs them of that reprieve.

It becomes a time not of rest, but of heightened visibility, transforming the very concept of freedom. The lantern law essentially turned nighttime into an extension of daytime oppression, a way to eliminate the idea of escape or sanctuary that darkness often provides.

It felt as though I was within them, gently guiding their youthful steps, like a shepherd watching over his flock. In their vitality, I found a renewed sense of hope in the Noctural

Venturers, even as they navigated an unfamiliar world they had only just begun to explore. It was a brief moment of serenity, for unbeknownst to them, two figures had already been following them for some time, bloodthirsty and filled with rage.

Miriam Cahn, untitled, 2019. Pencil on paper, 37 x 105 cm.

Person One
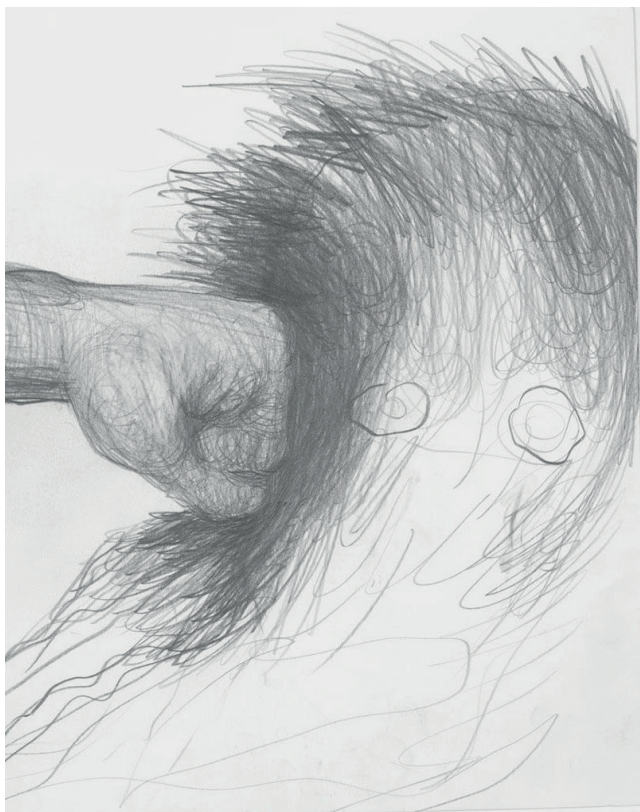
Among this group, there's the trio of good-natured city friends, still lulled by the sweet embrace of the city's heat. Among them is a future victim, who, unfortunately and unknowingly, will soon join the long, gruesome list of those marked by the fascist fist. As of now, racist attacks have nearly doubled in France. There were 1,636 reported incidents in 2022, and that number skyrocketed to 3,139 in 2023. This pattern seems never-ending; over time, it has devolved into a grim normality, reduced to a few lines in the local news. Should we conclude that the fate of Black bodies is forever entwined with persecution ? Individuals continue to be unjustly assaulted because of the color of their skin and yet we delude ourselves into thinking we are making progress toward equality. In this indivisible republic, injustices persist, along with the age-old dynamic of the oppressor and the oppressed.

I have watched long enough, etched in my memory the moment when that poor man was thrown to the ground, beaten, and insulted. I fantasized about his act of courage in rising to his feet, defending himself, fighting back against the humiliation.

"Humiliation involves a triangle : (1) the victim, (2) the abuser, (3) the witness. The humiliated person may also behold her own degradation or may imagine someone else, in the future, watching it or hearing about it. The scene's horror—its energy, its electricity—involves the presence of three : an infernal waltz."

WAYNE KOESTENBAUM

The triangle completes, and to add to the victim's humiliation, here I stand, the fourth party. The external observer, bearing witness to the final act of this humiliation process.
In completing this macabre dance, in wanting to pay homage to him, perhaps I participate in the unending degradation of his being.

It's a never-ending cycle of accumulation.

"Humiliation is a growth, a blooming. Pile up the rottenness. Stacks of it."

KOESTEMBAUM

It's interesting to look back through the many ruins of history and wonder how such humiliation has been allowed to accumulate over the ages. The Black body is always under the influence of a pernicious gaze, a destructive look—an unavoidable *"white gaze."*

"Where public spaces are shaped for and by whiteness, some acts in public are abnormalized through racializing surveillance, then coded for disciplinary measures that are punitive in effect."

SIMONE BROWN

In environments where surveillance is applied, particularly in the context of maximum security measures, like the Vigi-Pirate* counter-terrorism plan in France, individuals are categorized—mostly by gender, race, and sociological traits—into a *"categorical suspicion."* (Marx). The racist gaze continues to persist, and whether we like it or not, in our metropolis, Black individuals are confronted with asousveillance (undervigilance) imposed by institutionalized and systemic power.

I must be honest, when I first took the oath of telling this story, I wanted to be impartial on the hows of its unfolding, leaving no detail colored by bias, and ensuring that every fact is presented as it occurred, free from personal interpretation. But forgive me now, because morale has taken the lead. I must now imply my own recall and interpretation of those actions so the victims deserve their due.

Then, there is the Danish tourist group, unsuspecting of the tragic experiences they're about to witness, and who, in the end, flee at the first sign of trouble. Was their reaction legitimate ? Why attend and take part in such events ? I believe that passivity inevitably leads to a heavy weight of remorse and guilt. However, nothing will ever make me judge an individual for being passive in a situation. As I said, I view these events through the lens of a camera, transcribed onto a screen. In the 1978 film *A Butterfly on the Shoulder*, leading actor Lino Ventura plays a man shot in the middle of a busy street. The real passersby aren't mere extras; they're indifferent to the scene, even going so far as to step over the actor's body. The camera leaves us with that lifeless figure on the ground, while the spectator remains utterly passive. This all connects to a social and collective psychosis in the face of fear, numbing our minds, bodies, and words. A collective paralysis seeps into the communal psyche when confronted with anything out of the ordinary.

"The cult of security serves as the opium for a fearful society. [...] A social psychosis of fear not only fosters a strange form of authority but also cultivates collective passivity—possibly even a general inability to function. Social paralysis."

TRYANOVA AND GIELEN

The core of those Danish tourists was truly disturbed, shaken by the illusion they held of visiting a peaceful, romanticized

city that turned out to be horrific. Our hyper-secure society (with cameras, soldiers patrolling the streets, and life insurance policies) has completely anesthetized us, rendering us insensitive to all forms of violence, hoping that some higher power can resolve these issues on our behalf.

Enters a young provincial, also lulled by outdated ideas that have just burst in his overprotected kid's mind, wanders, carefree, youthful.

He's never seen the real face of the world, or it's only just beginning to reveal itself. When he's still hesitating in which personality to dress as in the morning, that's when it's easy to fall into the trap set by frivolous theories. Freshly arrived in a city that never sleeps, in the midst of ideological contradiction, he's going to have to make a choice when faced with the ignominious reality. He was walking slightly ahead of the group, caught up in a conversation with a friend, when a sudden shout cut through the air. He turned around; the fight had already started. Without a second thought, he rushed over, grabbed one of the guys who seemed to be the aggressor, and pulled him aside with all the strength he could find. He tried to calm him down, but there was a fierce, unyielding rage in the guy's eyes—a look of someone already on edge.

He tried talking him down, but it was like he wasn't even there. Then, out of nowhere, the guy's friend appeared and hit him square in the face. The one he'd been holding broke free, landing a second punch before he even knew what had happened. Left alone, he stood there, trying to catch his breath, still stunned by the whole scene. And strangely, I felt compassion for him. When he was pulled aside and punched, attempting to break up the fight, he neither resisted nor retaliated. His innocence made him kindly naïve, and he reminded me of my own bystander role, swept along in events

I never chose to take part.

Now, the two almost thirty-somethings, obstinate, fueled by alcohol and dark thoughts. It took a certain audacity to push beyond the limits of their own ideology, to muster the guts, to take that infamous step backward. What could possibly have transpired to transform such impulses into raw, senseless violence ? First and foremost, we must try to uncover their motives. According to the police report, these two men had also been in the bar where our group first met.

One of them had taken a shine to one of the Danish women. They probably didn't trust him much; one of her friends whisked her away from them. Cut off from their momentum, the two friends found themselves alone, still drunk and desperate as they watched their targets slip away toward a younger group. In their frustration, they decided to follow the friends into the streets, amidst laughter and revelry.

Two bumps, brutish, fascist to the core, their offspring would undoubtedly inherit the same poison. Two lost souls, two losers, intoxicated by the fumes of alcohol and charged by the scent of sex. Just like that, two blind bulls, driven into a rage by a single color. The injustice lay in encountring that poor guy who hadn't asked for any of this. Centuries of hatred smashed right in his face—base, hollow, void. This is the reality that young, restless adults stumble into every day, lost and searching for justice in their miserable lives, ensnared by the sharp claws of twisted ideologies.

Research from the US National Library of Medicine suggests that men grappling with low self-esteem and psychological turmoil may resort to violence as a means of asserting or reclaiming their masculine identity. In a world where traditional markers of masculinity are crumbling beneath a shifting society, violence becomes a distorted language—a way

to carve out a semblance of power in a reality where they feel utterly powerless. It's a desperate bid for relevance in a landscape where the old rules no longer apply, leaving them adrift and searching for anchors. In racist imagery, the Black male has always been depicted as a sexual oppressor and a competitor to the White male. This racist phantasmagoria—a clearly fantasized and stereotyped fear—continues to linger through the White male gaze. In this disgraceful and shameful sadomasochistic perspective, they perceive it as a provocation.

"One who hates the Black, who experiences dread in his presence,[...] rehearses a disconcerting trauma.* "

ACHILLE MBEMBE

This trauma, born from insecurities and a fear of losing status, fuels their aggression, turning them into caricatures of the very ideals they claim to uphold. For them, it becomes unbearable to see a Black man stealing what they believe is rightfully theirs. For some White males, there exists an insidious belief that their identity and superiority are threatened by the presence of Black men, whom they see not as equals but as rivals. This perceived competition triggers a visceral response, leading to dehumanizing actions and an unquenchable need to assert dominance.
Their aggression is an attempt to reaffirm their place in a social hierarchy that seems to be shifting beneath their feet. Franz Fanon* would recalls their action towards a man they see has "a biological threat".

Mother Nature certainly didn't bestow her grace on everyone. Two prime examples of dangerous human detritus. Ah ! Poor little White males. And to think they trailed him from a distance, like two wolves stalking their prey, cut short in their sexual momentum at the sight of *"a dirty n****r talking to a white girl"* (p.3 Police record n°1543NG). What an outrage...

Fists flew and a man went down. Chaos erupted, and the Danish women made their escape. I am now left with tears and screams on a silent screen.

It is evident that these two individuals did not act alone, at least not ideologically. Their violent outburst can be viewed as the culmination of a broader set of arbitrary and dangerous theories. Unfortunately, history continues to repeat itself, and the lessons of past transgressions are too easily overshadowed by emerging ideologies.

"Inner consistency puts our common sense to sleep, which is nothing else than our mental organ for perceiving, understanding, and dealing with reality and factuality.[*]"
HANNAH ARENDT

The repetition of dangerous narratives dulls collective awareness, making it easier for such ideologies to resurface. It is crucial, as I aim to offer a detailed and faithful account of these events, to acknowledge the political context in which they occurred. At the time of the incident, the far-right party Rassemblement National (National Rally) was gaining significant growth in both regional and national elections in France. Some may argue that the political rise of this party is unrelated to the actions of these two individuals, whose violent outburst appears devoid of any explicit political motivations. However, there is a clear correlation between their rhetoric, their actions, and the broader socio-political environment shaped by the National Rally. This party, it must be noted, was founded by individuals with links to former Nazi and Fascists movements, and its influence has gradually poisoned the mainstream political discourse.

The gradual normalization of far-right ideologies, under the guise of democratic expression, has contributed to a growing

collective unconscious that accepts such ideas as legitimate. This phenomenon is particularly alarming among the younger generation, who appear increasingly susceptible to the notion that the root of France's economic and social problems can be traced to specific scapegoats particularly immigrants and minority communities. This rhetoric, propagated by the far-right, fuels xenophobia and racism, creating fertile and favorable ground for this kind of acts of violence.

Forgive me, once again I've lost the thread of my story. It's hard to stay objective and impartial, when you're dealing with two men like that. What's worse is they doubled down on their words in the back of the police car, on their one-way trip to the station. One article notes that, once the alcohol had worn off, they claimed the statements weren't theirs. *"They even took offense at being accused of racist remarks,"* sighed a police source. But thanks to surveillance footage, investigators were able to confirm the victims' version of events.

Abyss

The use of surveillance cameras in the streets, and in urban life in general, has been fully internalized by the masses.
A complete closed circuit between those who authorize the use of the camera and those who accept being filmed contributes to the existence of this mode of operation—like a kind of silent agreement on the awareness of being watched. The sole proclaimed use of this technology is as an emblem of security, meant to protect populations in these troubled times. I am one of the few who can access this kind of information on such a large scale. Aside from a handful of curious individuals from the artistic world—who could almost form their own movement—the average citizen only has access to a tiny fraction of the video streams that circulate worldwide, in open streams that are fairly easy to access.

"Whenever a surveillance camera is spotted in a public or semi-public location [...], the first thought that arises probably relates to a kind of 'any-observer-whoever' who could be sitting directly behind the computer, scrutinizing the imagery."

PAULA ALBUQUERQUE

I am the supreme eye, the *"Small Brother"* of the Parisian streets, feeding the fantasies of fear and excitement in those observed, fully aware that they are the victims of a gigantic peep show. Anyway, I wasn't the only witness; there were three. Three little bastards, tirelessly scrutinizing the depths of human stupidity, extracting the bare minimum of information. It's their fault I was dragged into this story—they literally glued my face to their screen, forcing me to watch those images, that cowardly blow to the face, the apathy, the

incomprehension. But credit where it's due—let's give praise to this system—because without them, the culprits wouldn't have been brought to justice so easily.

I will now refer to the Panopticon, theorized and designed by the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century. Initially conceived as a model for a prison where the detainees were watched without knowing it, the concept later evolved into various architectural forms. It is within a similar circuit that our characters now operate. The concept was later developed and theorized by Michel Foucault, who described panopticism *("where, in the structure of the Panopticon, the observer is external, in panopticism, the observer is internal")* as an institutional structure internalized by the observed, even when they are free to move. Knowing they are being watched, the individual obediently follows the rules of those same institutions.

Perhaps, like the "Lantern Laws" of New York City I mentioned earlier, all individuals are now under the yoke and the sharp, omnipresent eye of a watchful power. In a nocturnal environment constantly illuminated, under the gaze of surveillance cameras, the public space of the city *"transforms into the interior of an immense prison***"*. Nothing is left to chance, for fear that someone might hide in a shadowed corner; the public zone is made visible, *"full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness."* We move forward, exposed, into a gaping trap. We are caught between the desire for constant security and the feeling of being unconsciously persecuted. It is in this division and uncertainty that the hand of power insinuates itself.
Foucault's words echo in my mind—that the apparatus*
"always has a concrete strategic function and is always located in a power relation." With this in mind, I implore the reader to at least try, to attempt to break free from this incessant

surveillance, to move beneath the radar of the cameras, to maintain an identity as untouched as possible, or, like me, to simply disappear behind a screen, seeking solace in the spectacle of real life. Consciously, we must navigate life with a renewed perspective on the concept of freedom, trying to shatter this gaze that only breeds fear and paranoia.

The scene that was filmed is transported to a secondary, digitized universe where, as Haggerty describes, *"The body's first broken down, abstracted from its physical setting, only to be reassembled in different settings through a series of data flow."*

The physical body, once tangible and bruised, has been dematerialized, replaced by a myriad of fragmented information, floating in a sea of parallel, coin-sized universes. That's all that remains. Those once-battered bodies are now miles away from their wounded souls—no more bruises, no more blood, screams, or shattered glass. Pain and suffering remain suspended in an unshakable silence, leaving me alone with the faint hum of diodes and the drone of a computer. The screen, its flat brightness offering nothing but date and time, renders the image—a grainy, striped, beautyless blur—erasing everything into total banality. Though time and space are stamped on the footage, these suffering bodies are now lost, adrift, both out of space and out of time.

"The footage can be stored, allowing the watcher to be "omnipresent", not only in space, but also in time."

MAŠA GALÎÇ

Gilles Deleuze also introduces the concept of a *"dividual" body,* suggesting that people are no longer viewed as whole, singular individuals but as divisible and quantifiable parts within a system. In societies of control, people are broken down into data points, trends, and patterns that can be analyzed and

acted upon. There is a complete reversal of consciousness between the human body and the body of the camera. When an individual is filmed, even the image of their awareness is sucked through a loophole into the society of streamed images. In this disintegration—where the body is both object and subject—the camera acts as a prosthesis, transporting a moving body into the fluid dimension of a networked circuit. Stumbling across this video felt like fishing dead bodies out of a murky river.

"It is no longer an objective volume but an extendability. This dimension is actually fractal, between dimensions. Split and extend : the basic operation used to generate fractal figures. The fractalization of the body is no metaphor : the posthumanizing operation"

BRIAN MASSUMI

In the Middle Ages, to legitimize the King's power was to claim that the King's spirit had taken possession of an earthly body, thereby justifying his whims, doubts, and even his wounds. The divine spirit of the King, said to reside at the right hand of God in the heavens, was used to reaffirm the Kingdom's control over its subjects. There existed a double King. Within the mausoleum of King Henri IV, two sculptural bodies can be found : one, awake, hands clasped, enthroned atop the altar; the other, reclined—a brittle shell of the murdered King. Ernst Kantorowicz wrote of this medieval political theology and the distinctions separating the *"body natural"* and the *"body politic"*.

The *posthuman** body is no longer tied to its physical constraints; it exists both in a fractured digital space and as a tool of control, immortalized in pixels and data streams. Surveillance doesn't just watch, it dismembers. It splits our identity into something that can be stored, manipulated, and

commodified, leaving our physical selves mere vessels for a greater apparatus of control.

What we are seeing is a transformation of power, from the divine right of kings to the technological omnipresence of the surveillance state. The body politic, once embodied by the King's two-fold existence, is now scattered across screens, lost in data. This dematerialized body, fractured and abstract, no longer bleeds, no longer screams, no longer bears the marks of its suffering. Instead, it becomes data—silent, undying, interchangeable. We are not just being watched; we are being reassembled in ways that detach us from the very idea of being human.

In this new age, we, too, are part of a double system. We exist both in our fragile, decaying bodies and in the digital realm, where our every move, our every gesture, is captured, categorized, and stored. The King's body had to be fractured to justify the divine nature of his power, but now our bodies are fractured to serve the surveillance apparatus. Our physical selves become redundant, an afterthought in a world where the digital ghost of our existence floats through the endless corridors of data storage. This split existence, the body natural and the body digital, is the new paradigm of control and in this new reality, we are left with a paradox : we are more visible than ever before, yet more disembodied. We are everywhere, yet nowhere. Our suffering, our joy, our humanity, is archived and filed away, leaving us as ubiquitous ghosts haunting the machines that watch over us.

So what remains ? Perhaps the only way to reclaim our agency, our very selves, as artist Hito Steyerl suggests in her numerous works, is to disappear, to sever the connection between body and image. To slip beneath the watchful eye, to break free from the panoptic gaze. Or perhaps, as I have done, to become one

with the machine, to merge so completely with the digital truth that the distinction between human and apparatus blurs entirely. After all, in this world, where power resides not in flesh but in information, it may be the only way to survive.

Epilogue

Once again, in all honesty, I admit to having developed a powerful relationship bound to voyeurism—an attraction, no doubt unhealthy, in the joy I derive from watching these images, many of which delve into the realm of the taboo and the forbidden. Being an operator in such an all-encompassing structure that usually doesn't require human intervention, being an outsider in this automatic surveillance system has allowed me to fantasize about what I am forced to watch.

"It does not matter what animates him : the curiosity of the indiscreet, the malice of a child, the thirst for knowledge of a philosopher who wishes to visit this museum of human nature, or the perversity of those who delight in spying and punishing."

Well said, Michel. But as for me, I'm not here to punish—only to expose the rotten surface of human nature. And yet, somewhere in the depths of this compulsive watching, I wonder if I've crossed a line. The line between passive observer and active participant. When does the act of watching become complicit ? Does it even matter that I do not intervene, or has my gaze alone already altered the course of events ? By merely existing within this system, am I not reinforcing the very power structure that I claim to observe from the outside ? Perhaps I tell myself that my detachment absolves me. I am not the one pulling the strings, I am merely watching the puppet show. But there is a guilt that gnaws at me, a quiet shame that grows with each image I see. These snapshots of human nature—corrupted, degraded—begin to reflect back at me, and I wonder if I am not seeing my own distorted reflection on the glass of the screen. I cannot deny the

pleasure, the thrill of witnessing the forbidden, but it's a pleasure tainted by the knowledge that, in some way, I've become part of the spectacle.

My curiosity about this story had grown far too strong—it needed to be released. First, I did that by writing these lines, for some reader, though I doubt anyone will take much interest in my story, to discover them. But that wasn't enough. I had to know more, I had to confront the actors of this tragedy. So, I committed the terrible transgression of crossing over to the other side of the screen, breaking the fourth wall. Using contacts within the archives, I managed to get the adress of the victim—the one around whom this entire story revolved, the one who suffered, the one who had been humiliated. It may sound almost like a form of religious worship, faced with such excruciating pain and destruction, that when I saw it, I committed the sin of envy, entering a state of empathetic clarity. I, too, would have preferred to be the martyr rather than the passive observer. I pretended to be one of the witnesses to his aggression—a young man his age, wanting to write a short anonymous article for a school project. I asked him how he felt after these few years had passed. His response was simple : *"I'd rather not talk about it, it's a story from the past."* His words struck me. By erasing his memory, by refusing to recount the facts, he wanted to rid himself of this heavy wound, still freshly open.

I then felt justified in telling this story from what I had seen, because I carry none of the scars, because I am impartial, because I am neither judge nor police investigator. That's when I understood that this memory wasn't mine—and that it had never really belonged to me. This fragment belonged to someone else, rooted deep in his soul. I came to understand that my role as a chronicler was not to own this narrative, but to bear witness to its existence—to honor the suffering of the

victim without claiming it as my own. The scars of that night were not mine; they were his, the young man's—remnants that speak of the violence and injustice still lurking in the shadows of our society. I believe he spoke not only for himself, but for the others too—for those who suffer in silence. I am only trying to give shape to his pain through the limited language of my own understanding. A silent witness, a narrator in the margins. That realization brought with it a profound sense of humility. In accepting the distance between us, I found a deep respect for the silence that so often surrounds such unbearable suffering.

*"[...]And so, like a watchman who has grown numb and
blind, incredulous, condemned to a painful and futile vigil,
facing the wall upon which each day of time dissolves,
my different faces surrender and follow one another like
great pale and heavy flowers, stubbornly replaced
and lifeless."*

Somber System, Pablo Neruda, 1933

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Nota Bene

*P.19 : Vigipirate : France's national security alert system, reinforced by a counter terrorism plan. Hightened since the events of 2015, both Charlie Hebdo and Paris terrasses massacre, France security level has been historicly high calling for specific measures such has militaries patrolling in crowded public places (train stations, airports, streets).

*P.23 : Frantz Fanon was a Martinican psychiatrist, philosopher, and revolutionary thinker known for his influential writings on colonialism, racism, and liberation. His work has had a lasting impact on fields like postcolonial studies, critical race theory, and social justice movements. Born in 1925 in Martinique, then a French colony, Fanon later joined the French army during World War II and studied psychiatry in France. His experiences with racism and colonial oppression profoundly shaped his thinking and writing. His famous writings are among others, Black Skin, White Masks (1952) and The Wretched of the Earth (1961).

*P.24 : Short explantion on Hanna Arendt's positions on violence : Even tho she didn't mentionned inner consistency as an immediate result of violence, she explains that a violent response comes down to internal coherence, ideological rigidity, and a refusal to question one's own beliefs. She could define a violent behaviour as a sign of powerlessness, often stemming from an inability to communicate or persuade others. Inner consistency can sometimes lead to violence when people are unable to reconcile their internal beliefs with the external world and feel compelled to impose their views by force. She advocates for critical thinking and openness to multiple perspectives as a way to prevent the rigidities that

can lead to violence. By highlighting the dangers of ideological rigidity and thoughtlessness, she underscores the importance of being willing to reconsider one's beliefs in light of differing viewpoints and experiences.

*P.27 : The quote about transforming public space into "the interior of an immense prison" appears in, Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben's works, especially in relation to his concept of the "state of exception" and the expansion of state control over life. Agamben frequently uses this metaphor to describe how modern societies are increasingly governed by measures that suspend normal legal rights, similar to a vast, enclosed environment where individuals are continuously monitored and controlled, much like a prison. This is particularly discussed in his texts Homo Sacer (1995) and State of Exception (2003), where he critiques the extension of security measures as they erode free- doms and turn spaces into sites of implicit confinement and surveillance.

*P.27 : Surveillance apparatus : Developped by Michel Foucaults in his book, Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison (1975), referring to the complex system of political surveillance as a way to monitor, collect, and analyze data about individuals or groups where he explores how surveillance becomes a tool for exercising power over people in various institutions, such as prisons, schools, hospitals, and workplaces. This implicates issues of privacy, control and freedom. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, differs significantly from Foucault's model by emphasizing the shift from disciplinary societies to what he terms "societies of control." Deleuze explores these ideas in his essay Postscript on the Societies of Control (1992), where he argues that surveillance has evolved from institutional spaces (like prisons and schools) to a more fluid and intricate system that operates across networks and continuously monitors

individuals beyond specific locations.

*P.29 : Posthumanism : Philosophical and cultural movement that questions traditional centered postion of the human in the world and embraces the relations between humans, environment, nonhumans and technonlogy. It advocates for creating a decentralization and critique of human exceptionalism. Brian Massumi's postion, which we could link to a Deleuzian position, contributes to posthumanist thoughts by challenging the traditional boundaries of the human and emphasizing the fluidity and interconnectivity of bodies, environments, and technologies. He emphasises on movement and change rather that a static comprehension of the human mind.