The CCTV image capture of Howard Bern in the Chinese embassy, *24*, episode 21, aired 9 May 2005

Interfaces of Identity: Oriental Traitors and Telematic Profiling in *24*

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The Digital Sublime: Identification Technologies in Terror Television

The following lines of speech appeared in a US Air Force commercial titled "A Changing World," aired in 2008. Intoned by a male voice over images of natural disasters, car bombings, political protests, and military men and women using computers to process surveillance images, they posit that the "watchful eye" of the networked camera can see what we cannot: the "enemies hiding among the innocent."

> We all watch the news and read the headlines. Our world has changed. The cold war has given way to cyberwar. New powers have emerged. Enemies hide among the innocent. And a crisis could happen halfway across the world overnight. As a nation, how do we respond? Our new world requires new solutions. That's why the US Air Force has created new ways to protect and defend. Today we keep a watchful eye on potential threats from outer space to cyberspace. Because today our national interests aren't just from the sea to shining sea.[1]

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Biometric imaging technologies here are posed as the "new solution" to the problems of a "changing world."

Fears of the "enemy within" are not new in the American media; however, this commercial links terrorism, "cyberwar," and new technologies of digital detection imaging, and it posits that one is the solution to the other. That is, in its glorification of networked digital visual technologies, it reprises hopes that science might solve the problem of foreign infiltrators who look, act, and can pass as loyal—that scientific techniques can provide accurate and neutral means by which to "see into" differently colored hearts, minds, and skins and correctly recognize and avert crime. Yet as the biometrics historian Simon Cole reminds us, technologies such as fingerprinting, which seemed to offer this very solution, instead "reified the very crude racial categories that helped produce it."[2] When fingerprinting was first adopted as a technology by the New York Police Department in 1922, its use gave rise to practices of racial categorization that hewed closely to traditional styles of skin color–based racism—fingerprint records were put into "black," "white," and "yellow" files. Rather than discouraging racial classification, fingerprinting recirculated it. Likewise, extremely advanced biometric technologies of recognition such as facial recognition systems (FRSs) benefit both from their novelty or "wow factor" and from their scientific origins. Playing on these factors, technophilic television programs like *24*, which create pleasure out of paranoia and drama out of identification, employ digital special effects sequences like FRSs to demonstrate the power of both cinema and science to reveal hidden identities. These identities are often racialized as Asian or Asian American in this program (though not exclusively so), partly because the concept of the Asian as the permanent foreigner has such power in US politics.

The term *terror television* has at least three different meanings. John Kenneth Muir's 2001 *Terror Television: American Series, 1970–1999* first uses the word to describe the entertainment form of horror television programs. With quite another emphasis, focusing more on media politics than pleasures, an American group called Accuracy in Media produced a DVD titled *Terror Television: The Rise of Al-Jazeera and the Hate America Media* in 2006 that criticizes Islamic

"pro-terror" video.[3] Yet however divergent these two understandings of terror television may seem, the third meaning is intimately related to both of these earlier two: popular narrative television programs like Showtime's Emmy-nominated *Sleeper Cell* (2005–6) and Fox's Emmy- and Golden Globe–winning *24* invoke both dramatic and documentary traditions—and, as I will elaborate, both the horrific and the sublime—in their narratives of detection of Islamic terrorists and counterterrorists in America. Furthermore, these narratives both rely on and revel in media technologies for their production of politics, pleasures, and even populations. That is, in these programs the horror of witnessing torture perpetrated both by and on American bodies, as well as the destruction of urban infrastructures in the US, is paired with the spectacle of the digital sublime in the form of advanced telecommunication technologies that perform the work of remote sensing and the identification of bodies and especially of faces.

The relation between these modes of televisual horror—violence against people and objects, bodies and buildings, US citizens and their built environments—and the digital sublime works as follows. The problem of correctly identifying the true and loyal "American," as opposed to the concealed Islamic fanatic, can only be solved by the deployment of highly advanced, spectacular surveillance and identification technologies, such as aerial and satellite photography, FRSs, biometrics, frame enhancement technology, infrared visioning systems, and extensive databases, and traces of informational network traffic. The program on which I focus here, *24*, demonstrates these imbrications between terrorism and informationalized late capitalism, driven in large part by the "technological revolution" in digital communications.[4] Both torture and information communication technologies (ICTs) are spectacular in the sense that they compel a fascinated gaze. *24*'s technologization of torture and its narrative precursor—digital identification technologies—foreground the ways in which the terrorist body is informationalized as a digital signal, a graphic file that can be decoded and recoded using the right kind of software-based tools. After all, the need for information is torture's ultimate justification, on this television program as elsewhere, and the use of the

informational mode of image extraction and analysis indexes this obsession.

As Vincent Mosco writes, mythologies have always accompanied technology—they promote "what the historian David Nye has called a vision of the 'technological sublime,' a literal eruption of feeling that briefly overwhelms reason only to be recontained by it."[5] If terror television in all three of its registers provokes and depicts feelings that overwhelm reasonable thought, the recontainment of this terror in *24* is accomplished by the visual deployment of digital recognition technologies. Sensations of terror and paranoia, the horrible fear of terrorists hiding among us, are invoked and confirmed by *24*: for example, the nice, middle-class, Arab American family who lives across the street in that suburban housing development in Southern California is, in fact, a group of terrorists hiding in plain sight, as shown in seasons 4 and 6 of the program. These terrorists need to be identified *positively*, in ways that will justify their later torture in the name of national security. This identification further requires our identification with the technology itself: the spectacle of the terrorists' suffering must be instrumentalized through "neutral" technologies familiar to all of us, such as the Internet, the cell phone or PDA, the computer, the database, the interactive screen, the surveillance and satellite image, and other forms of interactive knowledge gathering. The digital sublime is thereby created by seeing these technologies mythologized as both convenient and infallible. Watching surveillance and facial image processing in action invokes and recontains strong Islamophobic feelings by redressing them with images of technological reason.

The Visual Culture of Biometrics, Race, and Networks

Much scholarship attests to the renewed fascination with and greatly increased funding for biometric technologies in the wake of the 9/11 disaster. Technologies of identification have become much more visually and socially legitimated as fears about terror—of the possibility of crimes committed on American soil—have escalated.[6] New and more rigid policies regarding immigration, US visits, and travel of all kinds have followed suit,

such that the act of air travel has become an act of visual identification, examination, and interrogation.[7] However, less attention has been paid to the ways in which biometrics create new cinematic, televisual, and digital languages, or to the ways in which biometrics work, as they always have, as technologies for racial differentiation.

The drama *24* has garnered critical acclaim precisely for its dramatic use of this new biometric language, with its visual spectacles and specifications producing both power and pleasure effects across the program's narrative. Such a narrativization of the technology might seem surprising, since, at first glance, biometric images would seem to have more in common with other forms of visual documentation—such as taxonomic slides, ethnographic films, science and nature television programs, and other forms of indexical representation—than they do with art photography, narrative films, or prime-time television dramas. Yet just as critical anthropologists and social scientists are starting to question the neutrality and truthfulness of ethnographic films, videos, and photographs taken by field researchers, so, too, ought biometric images such as mug shots and passport photographs be interrogated as culturally inflected ideological documents.[8] These technologies of visualization are never neutral; they are deeply imbricated with new forms of state power. As John Tagg has observed in regard to the rise of photography in the nineteenth century,

> The conditions were in play for a striking rendezvous—the consequences of which we are still living—between a novel form of the state and a new and developing technology of knowledge. A key to this technology from the 1870s on was photography, and it is into the working of the expanded state complex that we must pursue it, if we are to understand the power that began to accrue to photography in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.[9]

Likewise, if we are to understand the power that has begun to accrue to digital imaging systems in the first quarter of our twenty-first century, in the context of an expanding US empire and its correspondingly expanding complex of identificatory technolo-

gies, we would be well put to examine biometrics as a technology of knowledge—in particular, knowledge about race and nation. The lesson of the visual documents to which Tagg refers, many of which were used to great effect as evidence for overtly racist ideologies regarding the primitivism and inferiority of non-Western cultures, is that photographic, cinematic, and televisual representation can indeed lie, can create systems of judgment.[10] Indeed, it is largely through these media that the new racial category of "terrorist," or as Leela Fernandes puts it, "dark-skinned men (who are assumed to be of Middle Eastern or South Asian Muslim descent)," has come to signify global terrorism.[11] Digital biometrics, especially FRSs, are touted as the latest instantiation of technologies of identity. Facial recognition systems enable the rapid comparison of two digitized images, usually of individuals' faces, that are contained in a database. They also yield visual spectacles and cinematic and televisual genres that are deployed promiscuously in current visual narratives about national, racial, and ethnic identities and conflicts. Facial recognition systems might therefore be seen as an updated and particularly privileged digital instantiation of the early twentieth-century "cinema of attractions" films so cogently described by Tom Gunning—and, just as they did a hundred years ago, these "attractions" gratify "curiositas," or the desire for spectacle, sensation, and information.[12] By stressing this comparison, however, I wish to emphasize as well the *social function* of cinemas—as well as, today, of television programs—of attraction. Like the Lumière brothers' exhibition of their early silent film *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (*L'arrivée d' un train à La Coitat*, France, 1896), FRSs create an "aesthetics of astonishment" based on the foregrounding of the powers of the technological visual apparatus itself, rather than its content (124). As Gunning writes of the Lumière film, "what is displayed before the audience is less the impending speed of the train than the force of the cinematic apparatus. Or to put it better, the one demonstrates the other" (124). Facial recognition systems resemble these short cinema sequences exhibited to shock and amuse early twentieth-century audiences because they also constitute a visual trick of sorts: they are ephemeral, short, apparatus-

based, and seemingly lacking content. Indeed, Andrew Darley, Jay David Bolter, and Richard Grusin make a persuasive case that digital media, especially open-ended digital games, are revivals of the cinema of attractions.[13] In the case of *24*, FRSs form a digital apparatus whose force is employed to persuade a paranoid television viewer of the systems' own effectiveness and integrity and, by extension, of the omnipotence of US dataveillance.

Visual culture research on biometrics therefore articulates with the work of Tagg, Allan Sekula, and Gunning in identifying the role of early photography and film in the creation of archives or databases of social undesirables and in their use by prisons, insane asylums, and hospitals in creating the "deviant look." Just as the early twentieth century had its fears of social pollution, urban crowding, crime, and racial "degeneration" caused by immigration, so, too, does the millennium have very similar fears regarding "unassimilable Asians," "undetectable terrorists," and "insecure data borders." These fears link visibility (or the lack thereof), information, and racialization. As Manuel Castells notes, under globalization, the amount of immigration to Western societies has not increased, but its face has changed dramatically—the new type of immigration "triggers xenophobic reactions" because it is changing the "racial and ethnic make-up of western societies."[14] Biometrics' claims to see more accurately form part of a racial formation that defines terror in the act of looking for (or at) it; just as Herbert Gans describes, biometric conventions determine which aspects of appearance are to be the salient ones in regard to criminality as well as race.[15] There is no doubt that FRSs racially profile their subjects prior to application: "As [Clive] Norris and [Gary] Armstrong have shown in their study of the operation of three closed circuit television (CCTV) control rooms, selection for targeted surveillance is, at the outset, differentiated by the classic sociological variables of age, race, and gender. . . . Nine out of ten target surveillances were on men, four out of ten on teenagers, and three out of ten on black people."[16] Like the aforementioned deviant look, these technologies thus work to create the "terrorist look," a look that works in two ways: both as the profile or the appearance of the terrorist

and as the truculent, unrepentant gaze memorialized in the FBI's "Most Wanted" photographs and deployed to "arrest" viewers in TV dramas, news, and reality programming about "perps."

Yet while digital biometrics are certainly tied to the photographic technologies that Tagg, Sekula, and Gunning discuss, digital images also seem somewhat different from analog ones in that they are unstable and modular; because they can be altered, they no longer index the truth. Scholars such as William Mitchell have written extensively on the immense cultural changes in regard to representation wrought by this premise.[17] However, from within the realm of the televisual, *24* reinstates a truth index to the digital image, establishing this truth via the security of the information network on which it travels. Just as the Fox.com Web site guarantees the authenticity of the television programs it streams on demand, while YouTube or Veoh do not, so, too, does the diegetic digital information network run by the Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) in *24* guarantee the authenticity of its mediated information. This logic of "network security" obtains across both television and new media networks, for both are vulnerable to hackers and mashup artists. Such quasi criminals can wreak havoc on these networks—networks that converge as they expose the vulnerabilities of the digital and the televisual as forms of information.

Still, we are assured that these vulnerabilities can be combated—precisely by employing the technologies themselves. Indeed, in *24* the digital is shown to remediate the televisual: "bad" images like the grainy closed-circuit television screen grabs used for FRSs become "good" enough when repaired by image enhancement software. Network ownership and security become key factors in determining the value and content of both databases and television programs. Terror television relies on purely fictitious digital effects to turn bad images into good ones, just as seemingly good citizens turn out to be terrorists and Arab Americans turn out to be members of Arab fundamentalist sleeper cells. This dynamic works prospectively to *reverse US citizenship,* another sleight of hand; it also, to once again use Gunning's term, creates a cinema of particular attraction to television audiences in this era, during the run of *24*.

Impossible Visions: The Fantasy of Biometric Images and Imaging

Identification technologies are reserved for the most shocking revelations, the highest narrative arcs, and the most impressive digital visual effects in *24*. They are the money shots of the program, and they work in this way because the postterror national culture, as depicted in this and other televisual media post-9/11, orientalizes terror in the form of mysterious others (such as *24*'s Middle Eastern immigrant family) who cannot be detected by *legitimate* means, which then justifies the technologies' spectacular use. These secret others must be winkled out using extreme and highly digitally mediated extralegal measures such as televisual surveillance, dataveillance, and image recognition software, measures that seem inevitably (even if illegally) to lead to the next step—torture. Likewise, in another of *24*'s stories, the image of the Chinese body occupying American territory is depicted as an invasion that threatens the US body politic. This demonization of the Oriental body in terror television is articulated through ICTs, in particular biometric technologies. Facial recognition technologies are used in the program both for and against the US, as weapons in identifying terrorists and as weapons used by terrorists against the government. Yet in either case such technologies represent the sine qua non of absolute identification. They work to fulfill the fantasy of absolute knowledge of an individual gained in his or her absence and in defiance of the passage of time, of history itself.[18]

These technologies rely on the ability of surveillance apparatuses to capture a sufficiently sharp and well-positioned image: full frontal of a relatively large size and with a fairly high degree of image quality. However, the exacting requirements of digital portraiture necessary to produce these images are difficult to satisfy even in ideal conditions: as Shoshana Magnet notes in her extensive research on the science of biometrics, even digital photographs taken in optimum settings (such as well-lit office buildings with the best equipment operated by trained workers) are often inadequate for the purposes of accurate biometric matching.[19] Nonetheless, cinema's and TV's visual narratives persist in depicting *all* digi-

tal facial images as usable, redeemable by apocryphal techniques such as "image enhancement filters" that can improve any image so as to make it usable by FRSs. As is amply clear, FRSs are notoriously picky about image quality and thus quite unreliable—but media fantasies of certain identification disavow this. Indeed, the recovery of personal identity from any type of digital image at all, the redemption of the bad image, is a key part of the fantasy of the digital sublime in the postterror context, just as is the irredeemability of the Oriental American. An image that appears to be a dim reflection, a blurry and partial image of a face that is barely recognizable as a face, can be miraculously transformed into a good image, one that can be used to scientifically prove identity. While, in our world, FRSs are so unreliable that British policemen searching for a bus bomber in the summer of 2005 rejected them, in the world of terror television they are infallible. In these narratives, *any* digital facial image is a good image, or at least good enough to lead to apprehension, detention, and—driven by that path of certainty—most likely torture.

The quality of a digital image is defined by the number of pixels it has. Information is conveyed by pixels, and the images with fewer pixels contain less information. No type of digital enhancement can increase the number of pixels in a source file (or, indeed, on a TV screen); new pixels cannot be created without the loss of accuracy. Yet in total defiance of this basic principle of digital media, diegetic digital facial images in the narratives of terror television are routinely enhanced to an absolutely unattainable level of quality. This fantasy of digital technology's ability to produce an "impossible view"—a view around a corner that reveals a space not seen by the camera lens, a view that can see a recognizable face in a crowd on a cloudy day from several miles away, a view that sees through walls and other barriers, even a view that can look back in time or forward to the future—has been deployed in ways meant to be believable, if not now, then in the "near future."[20] Paradoxically, these technological narratives employ a futuristic yet impossible digital vision to represent a nostalgic longing for a supposedly authentic, pretechnological past—a past that may have never existed. In *24*, the impossible view is one that seeks to

recoup a pre-9/11 US history, one in which we would be able to see terrorists before they commit crimes and, if possible, before they become terrorists.

As I have discussed earlier, digital facial image enhancement and FRSs are staple digital visual effects in *24* and in other media texts, reaching all the way back to dramas such as the 1987 film *No Way Out* (dir. Roger Donaldson, US), which is set in the cold war and emphasizes the computer enhancement of a photographic image as one of its plot points. The technology is also highlighted in several TV shows, such as *Battlestar Galactica* (2004–present) and the *CSI* programs (2000–present). Indeed, a television program like *Las Vegas* (2003–8) routinely depicts fantastically infallible facial recognition sequences, as many of its plot points revolve around identifying cheating gamblers using surveillance cameras. However, in *24*, FRS's use is explicitly associated with Arabs and Chinese, depicted as hostile to American interests in the context of failed Middle Eastern and Chinese diplomatic relations. One story from *24* can serve to illustrate well these links established between information technology and racialized identifications. In the climactic season finale of season 4, Chinese computer analysts use CCTV

An enhanced image of Howard Bern from a CCTV camera, *24*, episode 21, aired 9 May 2005

images and facial recognition software to identify a Counter Terrorism Unit operative involved in a botched extraction mission in the Chinese embassy, Howard Bern (Robert Cicchini), whom they abduct and threaten to torture. The torture is never depicted, but since the program has lovingly detailed the varieties of chemical, electrical, and other hands-on old-fashioned varieties of torture inflicted by Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland) on, among others, his girlfriend's British ex-husband, we can imagine how bad it might be. Yet despite this regularity of violence, the notion of "Chinese torture" is deemed much worse—so bad that Jack sacrifices his own identity to prevent it from also happening to a member of his team. The threat that finally turns in the professional and well-trained Bern is the promise to send him on an eighteen-day trip aboard the China Queen, a container ship bound for the mainland, where he is told that he will be incarcerated in a prison near the Siberian border and stripped of his identity as an American citizen, with no possibility of escape. Indeed, in later seasons this threat is realized when Jack is himself incarcerated and, we are told, subjected to unspeakable torture in a Chinese prison.

This image of reverse immigration, of being "shanghaied" by the Chinese embassy, resonates with images from TV news of illegal Chinese immigrants crawling out of fetid containers after enduring the traumatic crossing from China to the US. While these are images that have produced sympathetic reactions from some US citizens, they have also worked to create the image of not only the Middle East or Latin America but also East Asia as a threat to US border security and a drain on US resources. In *24*, Jack's sacrifice of his own security is necessary because diplomacy prevents the use of his usual extralegal maneuvers, despite their apparent urgency in light of the threat. We are told repeatedly that the Chinese embassy (where the image of Bern was collected) is Chinese soil: even though the crime has occurred in the US, legal jurisdiction belongs to the Chinese. The paradox of diplomatic redistricting provides a turn, a loophole in the logics of surveillance and enforcement. The fear of Oriental infiltrations—of dark-skinned terrorists, un-American Americans, and cruel Chinese torturers—is contained and projected by digitally sublime

A tortured and brutalized Jack Bauer repatriated to the US by the Chinese, *24*, episode 1, aired 14 January 2007

facial recognition sequences that can fill in missing information on a television screen.

Indeed, across its seasons, *24* is replete with screens within screens. The program's viewers and characters scan ubiquitous digital screens for vital information about mapping and locations, profiles and identities, projections, graphs, satellite photography, schematics, mug shots, fingerprints, and other visual digital artifacts. The show's emphasis on real-time representation owes much to this arrangement in which the viewers and the character take in new information on the same digital screens at exactly the same moment, thus enhancing the program's already intense sense of televisual liveness. Witnessing information retrieval means that the viewer knows exactly what the character knows, exactly when he or she knows it. The viewer's perspective on these screens, which freely violate the laws of physics as they are always depicted in exceptionally clear resolution and without noticeable screen glare, positions her or him as an especially well-situated shoulder surfer or spectator of the computer user's interactivity. The constant network traffic between larger screens and smaller screens—viewers of the show will no doubt remember Jack's frequent demands that maps

and schematics be "uploaded to [my] PDA"—ensures that we, as viewers, know in advance what Jack will see, as we ourselves have just seen it on a larger screen in the context of the CTU headquarters in the act of its uploading. Witnessing crawling progress bars and downloads and uploads that are either just barely completed in the nick of time or rudely interrupted at a crucial moment dramatizes the action of the digital interface, a new space for suspense in televisual drama.

There is no doubt that the program's popularity has partly to do with this exceptionally effective deployment of the latest bells and whistles in digital imaging technology. Yet, in the end, *24* defines national, cultural, and racial identity through the lens of technologically mediated surveillance, identification, and torture. The current obsession with identity as a provable fact in broadcast television can be seen across several genres: *CSI* and medical dramas such as *House M.D.* (2004–present) persistently employ technoscience to establish the "true" identity of bodies. Identities are concealed, mistaken, forgotten, and stolen on a regular basis. However, in *24*, identity and technology are tied to national security in ways that they are not in other televisual narratives. While personal identity is a commodity in this program, the only identity that really matters here—the matter of racialized national identity—is established precisely by the way that governments and institutions handle the search for true identities using technoscience. The true identity of the criminal, the terrorist, the deviant, or the religious fanatic is demonstrated as transparent to the eye of digital technologies of detection and categorization. Facial recognition systems challenge the notion of identity as a personal commodity. As Mitchell Gray writes, "according to a US Supreme Court ruling, there is no reasonable expectation of privacy for our face, which the Court deems highly public."[21] In light of these tensions between publicity and privacy, between political and personal attributes, *24* incites us to question how the visual conventions of biometric and surveillant digital imaging systems employed in terror television can be used to stabilize identity in the face of increasing racialized and national paranoia.

Moments in which identification technologies are visually foregrounded in this program point to how, from within the televisual apparatus, the digital apparatus is privileged both for its ability to bolster television's power and for its own sake as a visual technology that provides guarantees of truth, connectedness, and control. As I have been elaborating, FRSs occupy pride of place in these modes of locative, identificatory, and visualizing technologies. Digital biometric technologies, especially FRSs, produce forms of visual representation that establish peculiarly strong truth claims, claims that reassure American viewers that they can trust patriots like Jack (even if not the spy-infested official governmental agency), as well as the networked technologies he needs to do his job. If computers are machines for thinking, and cameras are machines for seeing, FRSs are machines for recognizing. Facial recognition systems are deployed as spectacles and technologies that postdigital viewers, so cynical about Photoshopped images of "naked" celebrities, artificial dinosaurs, and YouTube-style mashups of "real" footage with amateur-produced images, seem strangely unable to question or to resist. While we may indeed live in an age well past believing that photographs index reality, forms of digital representation such as FRSs retain their truth claims precisely because they are not available to ordinary users but only to governmental organizations, and thus they participate in the complex of trust that citizens have in their governments. Biometrics are among the last digital imaging technologies not yet available to the retail consumer market. When they do come preloaded on a device, like the minicamera on the MacBook or the fingerprint recognition apparatus on the IBM ThinkPad, they will be framed as peripherals to enhance already existing user practices like data security and online social interaction on the microlevel, rather than as separable commodities in and of themselves. Biometrics, as they are depicted in *24* and other surveillant dramas, are part of an essentially national infrastructure, one designed to secure US borders. Indeed, Homeland Security rhetoric has consistently included pointed references to the employment of digital biometric technologies to create a "virtual border." Just as the security of the nation rests on Jack's

shoulders in the world of *24*, in our world, as covered by TV news, the security of the US rests on the foundation of ubiquitous and unavoidable biometric technologies, to be applied with or without the knowledge of its citizens and noncitizens. Jasbir Puar makes a convincing case that the "paranoid temporality" characteristic of the post-9/11 period stifles "creative critical politics"; instead, it is "embedded in a risk economy that attempts to ensure against further catastrophe."[22] Just as FRSs on TV work to turn back time, to bring us back to an image that we have already seen whole and "true," so, too, do they work to reboot a national imaginary to a time before terror, a time when terror could be definitively controlled and averted through the right kind of surveillance.

ICTs and Islamophobia

The first episode on *24*'s season 6 opens with a crowd of people on the street gathered to watch live television news coverage of a series of devastating terrorist attacks in major US cities. As a dark-skinned, phenotypically Middle Eastern man watches along with the others, their hostile, frightened, assessing gazes turn to him. When this same man attempts to board a city bus, the bus driver scrutinizes him through the window, clearly profiling the man as a result of the "live" broadcasting of terrorist attacks. As the driver passes him by, an action protested by the dark-skinned man as racial profiling, we see a young male East Asian passenger on the bus detonate a suicide bomb, destroying it in a huge ball of flame. The bus driver's racial paranoia has spared the Middle Eastern American would-be bus rider's life, but the ultimate message of this vignette is that racial paranoia is mistaken only in its not extending *far enough*. This slippage between the category of the East Asian and the West Asian seemingly works to criticize racial profiling, but instead it reinforces the notion that the Orient is vaster than had been thought, encompassing both Islam and the Middle East and exceeding them. In addition, television news broadcast in a public place, on the city street, feeding "live" information to the crowd, demonstrates how the televisual can

create viewer terror and terrorist profiles, images that are seemingly based on religion and politics but are made to blend with more bodily types of identities, such as racial ones.

The incorporation of the terrorist into an expanded version of the East is an ongoing part of the imperialist project described by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. In today's Orientalism, the use of biometric technologies of recognition, enhancement, and matching are uniquely necessary in regard to the figure of the terrorist, who may or may not be dark-skinned, but, as Oriental, is also marked as Islamic. As Said writes, "Orientalism carries within it the stamp of a problematic European attitude towards Islam."[23] While *Oriental* worked as a portmanteau term that included "Arab, Islamic, Indian, Chinese, or whatever" and is still commonly used in this way, "it was in the Near Orient, the lands of the Arab Near East, where Islam was supposed to define cultural and racial characteristics, that the British and French encountered each other and 'the Orient' with the greatest intensity, familiarity, and complexity" (41). This articulation of religion to race—Islam is a religion, while "Oriental" is commonly understood as a racial category—is part of the story of Islamophobia, a story under construction by both terror television and ICTs. As Junaid Rana writes, "Islam was an important feature of the early story of the race concept, offering an important insight into the incorporation of the Muslim into modern forms of racism."[24] Understanding how Muslims came to constitute a race as well as a religion enables us to see how a "heterogeneous group that could only partially be classified through phenotype and appearance" came to be visually profilable (154). As part of this work of classification, FRS sequences in television and film are spectacularly deployed in narratives rife with radical doubt regarding the technoscientific nation's abilities to combat terror and the racialized faces and bodies that it sutures to them. FRS sequences are exceptionally prominent in *24*, partly because they are identified as our only hope if we are to reverse the ongoing failure of the US to protect its citizens and public spaces. The heterogeneity of the Muslim and, indeed, of the terrorist demands the most advanced, and in this case mythological, digital imaging

technologies to resolve the problem of phenotype and appearance. Brief FRS sequences are interjected into the program's narrative along with other technosublime visual attractions that interweave interfaces of identity with a narrative of racialized detection.

This technique of interjecting or layering digital spectacles such as FRSs in narrative television again has antecedents in early film. Gunning takes pains to note that while the cinema of attractions was replaced by narrative cinema as the most popular cinematic form, it did not disappear entirely, but rather found a place in the mainstream. It successfully coexisted with narrative cinema, providing "an underground current flowing through narrative logic and diegetic realism, producing those moments of cinematic *depaysement* beloved by the surrealists."[25] And just as discrete moments of spectacle have been embedded within or layered atop more continuous narratives in these earlier examples, so, too, do FRS episodes work to create distinct moments in a medium that adheres to a new digital-televisual narrative logic. As Tara McPherson notes, television and the World Wide Web are segmented differently from film, as well as differently from each other. The Internet's "dialectic of segment and flow" produces the spatial chunking experienced by Web surfers, in contrast with the temporal chunking that characterizes television viewing. While Web users are plagued by pop-ups invading the visual field, as well as by their voluntary excursions into other interfaced windows, television viewers must contend with waiting for commercials and other temporal interruptions. However, while the program when viewed as a live broadcast is "chunked" into segments separated by commercials, viewing it in its digital manifestation as a DVD or a TiVo file puts it into a different relation to televisual flow, one closer to the "scan-and-search" logic that McPherson contrasts with the "glance-or-gaze" economy of attention associated with film and live television.[26]

Celebrating this techno-logic, *24*'s narrative is structured as scannable and searchable information in a way that parallels the use of informational interactive screens by its characters. The program's "split-screen aesthetic" includes FRSs as yet another dynamic screen within a screen, one which produces "live" on-demand truth

claims about national, ethnic, and racial identity that work to support racial profiling as a means of knowledge against the "better judgment" of rational viewers who should know better.[27] The shock of recognition that comes from seeing a familiar face emerge in the context of the digital screen, the revelation of the terrorist identity in the case of this narrative, is accomplished by the particularly privileged mise-en-scène of the computer screen as a guarantor of identity. The program also takes pains to depict the outcomes of FRSs when employed by the racialized enemy, which under the regime of post-twenty-first-century Orientalism now encompasses the Chinese as well. The notion that FRSs—which give insight, literally, into the conundrum of identity in the context of the post-9/11 period—might be appropriated by Oriental enemy hands and eyes is confronted and situated as a source of additional terror.

Conclusion

As I have suggested, on *24*, the image processing prowess available to the surveillant state is most conspicuously displayed when a grainy, partial, and altogether unrecognizable image of a human face uploaded from a surveillance camera or satellite is ported to a computer desktop screen, miraculously resolved into a clear one, and definitively matched to its owner, all in the space of a few seconds. This three-step process, composed of image capture, image enhancement, and image matching, involves the use of several different types of apparatus: CCTV cameras connected to a digital network, image processing software, and image-matching databases, all embedded in a commercial televisual apparatus that takes on heightened power through the interpolation of the digital. This dramatic "reveal" as the image is matched to another and the two come into alignment or are superimposed on each other is a familiar trope from reality-based television programs, such as makeover and talk shows.[28] However, terror television has a paranoid relation to the real that is fundamentally different from relations seen in these other genres. Terror television, which is always about the need for good information, ups the ante of the reveal; as Mitchell Gray writes, "While CCTV has the power to

'see constantly,' like the panopticon, only facial recognition can 'recognize immediately.' "[29] As image processing filters move from right to left, or up and down, scanning over the data trash of the original captured image, they leave in their wake an image that is subtly and cumulatively sharpened, brightened, and outlined in a way that, as suggested, literally turns back time, for we, as the television viewers, have seen that very face earlier, in the real time of the image capture, before the surveillance camera has seen it.

Furthermore, *24* lets us see exactly who should be able to see in this way. While many other TV programs have tried to represent what ICTs can do, *24* constantly articulates an urgent argument about *who* they ought to do it *for* and who they ought to be used *against*. In *24*, American national security exists in a perpetual state of disaster, an unending state of exception that is somehow ramped up every season, mainly as a result of ineffectual border screening, leaky digital networks, and untrustworthy individuals inside and outside governmental agencies like CTU. The American Counter Terrorist Unit's deployment of networked digital media in the hypercapable hands of the patriotic superagent Jack Bauer in *24* creates a sublime and terrible hero: one who can close these insecure borders and successfully identify, apprehend, torture, expel, or kill the intruders who ought never to have been let in. This program puts the digital in the context of the national, in the service of the national body: a white American body threatened and reconstituted by terror. This body is contrasted to the culturally unassimilable Asian body in the context of the US and is linked to the creation of terrorists as a new racial group.

As Leti Volpp writes, more than one thousand incidents of hate violence were reported in the US in the wake of 9/11, partially because "the events of September 11 facilitated the consolidation of a new identity category that groups together persons who appear 'Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim.' "[30] This identity category, which has no basis in a person's actual "race," is made in *24* to fuse with the category of "East Asian," encompassing China, Japan, and Korea, thus redeploying older and more general Orientalist tropes. As noted earlier, *Oriental* is a racial and cultural term that from its inception had been identified unusually intensely with Islamopho-

bia. Terror television rearticulates this identification by depicting *both* West Asians and East Asians as spies, permanent aliens whose loyalties are always in doubt. This is utterly characteristic of the way in which Orientalism works in the context of the US. As Lisa Lowe writes, "A national memory haunts the conception of the Asian American, persisting beyond the repeal of actual laws prohibiting Asians from citizenship and sustained by the wars in Asia, in which the Asian is always seen as an immigrant, the 'foreigner-within,' even when born in the United States and the descendants of generations born here before."[31] Terror television visualizes ICTs as solving the problem of information extraction by identifying terrorist bodies, bodies that are now made to travel under the logic of an expanded Orient. As Volpp writes, "historically, Asia and the Middle East have functioned as phantasmatic sites on which the US nation projects a series of anxieties regarding internal and external threats to the coherence of a national body."[32] Two numerical formulations—9/11 and *24*—reinforce the convergence of these two very different cultural identities.

Notes

Camera Obscura collective member Lynne Joyrich made thoughtful and thorough comments on the whole of this essay, and her contributions are much appreciated. Wendy Chun's work on identity and interfaces continues to inspire and inform, and I thank her as well for productive comments on this essay.

1. "A Changing World," US Air Force, www.airforce.com/achangingworld/, last accessed 13 July 2008.
2. Simon A. Cole, *Suspect Identities: A History of Fingerprinting and Criminal Identification* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 163.
3. John Kenneth Muir, *Terror Television: American Series, 1970–1999* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001); and *Terror Television: The Rise of Al-Jazeera and the Hate America Media* (writ. Cliff Kincaid, prod. Roger Aronoff, Accuracy in Media, US, 2006). For another example, see Coalition against Terrorist Media, www.stopterroristmedia.org/, last accessed 10 April 2008.

4. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 148.

5. Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 22.

6. See David Lyon, ed., *Surveillance as Social Sorting: Privacy, Risk, and Digital Discrimination* (London: Routledge, 2003); and Torin Monahan, *Surveillance and Security: Technological Politics and Power in Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

7. See Lisa Parks, "Points of Departure: The Culture of US Airport Screening," *Journal of Visual Culture* 6 (2007): 183–200.

8. See Luc Pauwels, *Visual Cultures of Science: Rethinking Representational Practices in Knowledge Building and Science Communication* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2006).

9. John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 63. See as well Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (1986): 3–64.

10. See Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

11. Leela Fernandes, "The Boundaries of Terror: Feminism, Human Rights, and the Politics of Global Crisis," in *Just Advocacy? Women's Human Rights, Transnational Feminisms, and the Politics of Representation*, ed. Wendy S. Hesford and Wendy Kozol (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 66.

12. Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 118.

13. See Andrew Darley, *Visual Digital Culture: Surface Play and Spectacle in New Media Genres* (London: Routledge, 2000); and Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin, and NetLibrary Inc., *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

14. Castells, *Rise of the Network Society*, 131.

15. Herbert Gans, "The Possibility of a New Racial Hierarchy," in *The Cultural Territories of Race: Black and White Boundaries*, ed. Michèle Lamont (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 383.

16. Clive Norris, "From Personal to Digital: CCTV, the Panopticon, and the Technological Mediation of Suspicion and Social Control," in Lyon, *Surveillance as Social Sorting*, 265.

17. William J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-photographic Era* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

18. As Mitchell Gray writes, "facial recognition also has the ability to reach quickly into the past for information, dramatically extending the effective temporal scope of surveillance data analysis" (Gray, "Urban Surveillance and Panopticism: Will We Recognize the Facial Recognition Society?" *Surveillance and Society* 1 [2003]: 317). Thus FRSs extend the scope of television programming's temporality, a key modification to what Tiziana Terranova claims is television's "historical legacy" as a "technology for the construction of national identities" (Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," *Social Text*, no. 63 [2000]: 46).

19. Shoshana Magnet, "Visualizing Security: Digital Surveillance and the Body" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, San Antonio, TX, November 2006). See as well Kelly A. Gates, "Biometrics and Post-9/11 Technostalgia," *Social Text*, no. 83 (2005): 35–53; Gates, "Identifying the 9/11 'Faces of Terror,'" *Cultural Studies* 20 (2006): 417–40; Gates and Shoshana Magnet, "Communication Research and the Study of Surveillance," *Communication Review* 10 (2007): 277–93; and Heather Murray, "Monstrous Play in Negative Spaces: Illegible Bodies and the Cultural Construction of Biometric Technology," *Communication Review* 10 (2007): 347–65.

20. See *Deja Vu* (dir. Tony Scott, US, 2006), which depicts electronic imaging of the near future by concatenating satellite surveillance information from several different sources.

21. Gray, "Urban Surveillance," 325.

22. Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), xx.

23. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 74.

24. Junaid Rana, "The Story of Islamophobia," *Souls: A Critical Journal in Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 9 (2007): 153.

25. Gunning, "Aesthetic of Astonishment," 123.

26. Tara McPherson, "Reload: Liveness, Mobility, and the Web," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 2002), 464. Televisual platforms matter here as well. TiVo watchers of *24* navigate the program both temporally—skipping, freezing, slowing—and spatially as they move or shuffle between interactive and viewing windows.

27. The televisual style of *24* is defined partly by its distinctive use of multiple screens. Michael Allen and Deborah Jermyn note that some of these screens are digitally surveillant ones. Allen claims that *24*'s "split-screen aesthetic can also immediately be seen as a representation of the multiscreen surveillance technologies that are central to the operations of both CTU and the enemies it is attempting to defeat" (Allen, "Divided Interests: Split-Screen Aesthetics in *24*," in *Reading 24: TV against the Clock*, ed. Steven Peacock [London: I. B. Tauris, 2007], 36). Similarly, Jermyn argues that the "multiple-image screen" embodies an "aesthetic through which some of the core (and arguably topical) themes and issues raised by the programme, such as contemporary urban paranoia, political urgency, surveillance and 'infiltration' anxieties, can be powerfully evoked" (Jermyn, "Reasons to Split Up: Interactivity, Realism, and the Multiple-Screen Image in *24*," in Peacock, *Reading 24*, 57).

28. See Laura Grindstaff, *The Money Shot: Trash, Class, and the Making of TV Talk Shows* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). It is important to note, however, that while FRSs exploit the discovery of sameness or congruence between two images, makeover shows exploit the differences.

29. Gray, "Urban Surveillance," 321.

30. Leti Volpp, "The Citizen and the Terrorist," *UCLA Law Review* 49 (2002): 1576.

31. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 5.

32. Volpp, "Citizen and the Terrorist," 1587.

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An Asian American teenager contemplates jihad, *24*, episode 1, aired 14 January 2007

<TI>Interfaces of Identity: Oriental Traitors and Telematic Profiling in 24

<AU>Lisa Nakamura

Images of biometric screens are becoming increasingly common in television and film, particularly in genres such as police procedurals, "terror" television programs, and medical dramas. Digital surveillant screens establish and produce authority and scientific truths about national and racial identity in the television program *24*. Facial recognition systems (FRSs), in particular, participate in earlier visual discourses of privileged facial imaging such as the close-up and the mug shot, and link them with forms of machine envisioning such as automated rapid facial comparison and database matching. These techniques of facial recognition evident in film and television programs relating to the recognition of the pathologized body, the terrorist body, and the racialized body bring together modes of seeing that transfer the work of profiling racialization onto seemingly neutral new media technologies. Technophilic television programs like *24*, which create pleasure out of paranoia and dramas out of identification, employ digital special effects sequences like FRSs to demonstrate the power of both cinema and science to reveal hidden identities. These identities are often racialized as Asian or Asian American. *24* conflates East Asians, Asian Americans, and West Asian ethnic groups together by representing all three as users as well as subjects of digital imaging technologies.