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PIXELATED FLESH

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Abstract The pixel and the technique of pixelating faces belong to a politics of fear and a digital aesthetics of truth which shapes public perceptions of criminality and the threat of otherness. This article will draw on Paul Virilio's account of the pixel in _Lost Dimension_ in order to analyze its specific role and operation in relation to contemporary representations of incarceration. In particular, the article will consider the figure of the incarcerated informant. The incarcerated criminal or informant plays a complex role as both subversive other and purveyor of truth and as such constitutes an important example of the ways in which pixelation functions as a visible signifier of a dangerous truth whilst blurring, erasing and, ultimately, dehumanizing those "speaking" this truth. Our discussion forms part of a larger analysis of the production, framing and circulation of images of otherness, identifying Virilio as key to debates around the violence of the screen.

Keywords Virilio; pixel; mugshot; aesthetics of fear; incarceration; total war

Introduction: All the Meat is Screaming

In *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Gilles Deleuze (2005) describes Bacon's portraits, including the *Sweeney Agonistes Triptych*, as follows:

> The body is a Figure, not structure. Conversely, the Figure being a body, is not a face and does not even have a face. It has a head, because the head is an integral part of the body. It can even be reduced to its head. As a portraitist, Francis Bacon is a painter of heads and not of faces. There is a big difference between the two. For the face is a structured spatial organization which covers the head, while the head is an adjunct of the body, even though it is its top. It is not that it lacks a spirit, but it is a spirit which is body, corporeal and vital breath, an animal spirit; it is the animal spirit of man: a pig-spirit, a buffalo-spirit, a dog-spirit, a bat-spirit [...]. This means that Bacon is pursuing a very special project as a portraitist: unmaking the face, rediscovering or pulling up the head beneath the face (15).

Rediscovering the head beneath the face is key to understanding the zone of indiscernibility between that which defines the human and that which renders the figure of the human animal, meat, flesh. However, Deleuze does not consider this "unmaking" of the face as a loss. The becoming animal at work in Bacon's painting does not constitute a reduction of the human to some form of primordial being, that of the animal. Instead, it constitutes the movement towards something else. Here we need to keep in mind that this something else, this becoming flesh, becoming animal

is no less violent, no less abject or abhorrent. If Deleuze sees an intimacy in Bacon's work, it is an intimacy that refuses established points of contact - eyes, mouth, nose - and, in this respect, such intimacy forces us to confront and contest the points of reference and recognition which function as the starting point for all encounters with the other.

This "unmaking of the face" offers a way into thinking about other faces and their unmaking. A face of specific and constrained interest is that of the criminal rendered anonymous human animal via processes of pixelation. Not simply animal, meat, flesh, but a caged animal, squared meat, pixelated flesh. Today's mass media is saturated with images of criminality, from mugshots and e-fits to selfies taken by inmates using smuggled mobile phones.[1] The role of such imagery and its widespread diffusion might seem obvious both in terms of the politics and administration of fear it promotes and the age of self-surveillance it embodies (Massumi 1993; Virilio 2012). Nevertheless, to assume the function of this imagery as already given risks also accepting the discourses underpinning functionality and the forms of oppression engendered and internalized as a consequence. This article makes a case for Paul Virilio's particular critique of the relationship between aesthetics, politics and violence for thinking the implications of contemporary representations of criminality. As a key yet underacknowledged element of Virilio's critique, the pixel will constitute the central focus of our discussion via consideration of its function in relation to images of the incarcerated informant.

Acts of Framing

The pixel is not simply complicit but active in the construction of otherness and the dehumanization of such otherness. Various scholars have written and spoken at length

about the way in which otherness, the threatening, subversive figure of the other [as criminal, terrorist but also immigrant, Muslim, homosexual, woman], continue to be produced, performed, edited and framed by photographic and cinematic techniques and circulated by ever faster, further-reaching modes of diffusion and distribution. Following up on questions posed in *Precarious Life* regarding which lives are presented as more or less grievable than others, Judith Butler's (2010) *Frames of War* draws on both Susan Sontag's (2003) analysis of our reaction (and lack thereof) towards images of disaster and atrocity, and Jacques Derrida's (1987) critique of framing processes. Butler examines the complex temporal and spatial parameters of the photograph and the acts of both taking and viewing photographic images. In taking a photograph, the photographer is both outside and inside the events he or she is documenting. To what extent, therefore, does photography attest to a complicity with or, at the very least, a lack of challenge to the context, the socio-political framework which demands and permits such documentation? How is this complicity then transferred from photographer to spectator via the circulation and consumption of such images?

W.J.T. Mitchell's (2010) focus on post-911 forms of representation in *Cloning Terror* looks at George W. Bush's "War on Terror" as a war waged via images. The rhetoric of terror was sustained visually rather than linguistically through media saturation of images intended to promote fear amongst the U.S. population. Leaked images of U.S. led torture and abuse of Iraqi prisoners and terror suspects contributed to rather than challenged the function of such images. Such images, we might argue, feed our desire for the abject and the horrific, that which Jean Baudrillard (2005) has referred to as "war pornography." The "hooded man" who acts as the anti-hero of Mitchell's analysis is worth noting as part of the same lexicon as the pixelated

criminals who are the less sensational, but more abundantly proliferating, and overlooked, examples of this contemporary framing.

Virilio's work can be situated over against recent critical engagements on the image and the violence it captures, frames and reproduces. His vehement insistence on the relationship between technology and aesthetics, perception and truth provide two very specific and highly useful perspectives for thinking about processes of framing and diffusing images of the criminal "other." The first is the link he establishes between war and cinema. (Virilio 1989; 2005) This is a link which is historical, technological and economic in its scope and requires setting out in order to better grasp the role played by the pixel within Virilio's wider reading of contemporary media.

Virilio's (1989) founding claim in *War and Cinema* is that war is as much about perception and its distortion as it is about destruction. Thus, for Virilio, a history of warfare constitutes, first and foremost, "the history of radically changing fields of perception."[2] Technological advances to warfare have, in this respect, always been as much about enhancing perception, improving surveillance and resisting enemy detection, as they have about weaponry. Here, I would like to think more specifically about the notions of "captivating" and "capture", the need to distort the perception of the enemy, to confuse and disorient the prisoner of war as much as to destroy him (or her), and the role of technology in achieving these dual objectives. There are implicit resonances with another form of "capturing" otherness, the production and framing of madness, hysteria and criminality via newly developed photographic methods during the mid to late nineteenth century (Foucault 2008; Didi-Huberman 2004). The photographic documentation of female hysteria established and promoted by Jean-Martin Charcot in La Salpêtrière and the technique for producing

criminal mugshots invented by Alphonse Bertillon both belong to this process of "captivation" and "capture." The problematic other is not simply fixed, framed within the space of a photographic image but is required to acquiesce to this process, to perform their criminality or madness and henceforth recognize themselves in the "accusing image." (Didi-Huberman 2004)

Thus, where Didi-Huberman's (2004) account of this "invention" forces us to recognize the "catalogue of horrors" and the combination of "servitude" and "abuse" [*sévices*] embodied in the "service de photographie" at La Salpêtrière, Virilio identifies the need to think violence *on* screen alongside the violence *of the* screen. The screen is more than an empty container, blank surface or two-dimensional frame here. It does not just project images but filters them. It does not simply provide a frame but is itself implicated in the act of framing. All framing excludes as well as includes. The screen does not simply transmit scenes from the battlefield, It *is* the battlefield.

The second perspective from Virilio (1989), which is inextricably bound to the first, involves the specific focus on aesthetics running as a thread throughout his work on technology. This extends beyond the production of new representations of space such as the aerial view or thermal imaging and the interpretation of such images within a military context. Cinematic techniques developed as part of military reconnaissance were paramount in producing a new aesthetics subsequently adopted by surrealist and avant-garde filmmakers in interwar and post-war Europe.

But, there is a further dimension at work here. The images and imagery encountered on a daily basis during a time of war, in the press, on billboards and so on, play a crucial role in shaping public perception, assuring complicity and alleviating anxiety. In this way, the striptease and wartime pinups which diverted and

contained the sexual frustration of soldiers during WWI and WWII embody a moment in the history of war and perception in which images existed to reassure and placate all those involved in the war effort via diversion and concealment. Likewise, Virilio (1989) describes the heavy investment in cinema production by the Nazi regime as recognition of the public's need for visual stimulus beyond newsreels and straightforward propaganda. Today war has become its own pornography, sexual imagery no longer operates alongside images of violence. The two poles defining human existence, sex and death, have been collapsed and congealed in the images of naked Iraqi prisoners being dragged around Abu Ghraib on leashes by female U.S. soldiers. In a world of "total war", there is no need to alleviate anxiety but, rather, to ensure its perpetual presence via an aesthetics of fear and alienation. "Total war takes us from military secrecy (the second-hand, recorded truth of the battlefield) to the overexposure of live broadcast." (Virilio 1989). All cinema is propaganda henceforth.

If the role of frame and screen in producing and diffusing the spectacles of war and criminality are well documented, I now wish to explore Virilio's perspectives on technology and aesthetics further via some reflections on the "pixel" and, more specifically, processes of pixelation. Such processes form part of the "squared horizon" Virilio (2005) defines in *Desert Screen* and are themselves fully implicated in the two-fold drive to "captivate" and "capture" which in late capitalism targets everyone as potential enemy. The "digital optics" for which the pixel is the basic unit, are thus defined by Virilio as a form of "intoxication" which blurs our perception and causes us to descend into a form of "voluntary blindness" (Virilio, 1994).

Having argued for the links between Virilio's reference to "captivation" and "capture" in *War and Cinema* and the techniques applied to the framing of madness and criminality, it becomes imperative to both refine and extend the parameters of his

horizon. This then may more fully incorporate this domestic "other." Virilio's concept of "total war" is important here. We should understand it not simply to mean the perpetuity of overseas military intervention and the notion of a war industry encompassing *all* forms of industry – manufacturing, infrastructure, financial trading, PR and consultancy etc – but also consider its meaning in terms of the official, authorized forms of violence carried out within a domestic space both by the police and other law enforcement agents and, equally, through education and media representation, the "ideological state apparatuses" identified by Althusser (1971). Reagan's "War on Drugs" was not simply political rhetoric but a real declaration of violence against a specific demographic, namely the black community, an attack tantamount to a reversal of the ground gained (another reference to war) during the civil rights movements of the 1960s (Alexander 2010). The same interplay of distance-proximity that is found in the diffusion of images of war waged elsewhere, occurs in the representation and circulation of images of the domestic criminal, particularly within the context of drug-related crime.[3] Likewise, the same exclusionary tactics via the doubling of silence and saturation that pertain to war reporting are at work in the prison documentaries that dominate prime time television in the U.S. and Europe.

What is a Pixel?

My reading of the pixel is primarily indebted to Virilio's (1991) references to the pixel in *Lost Dimension*. As "micro-element" of the image, Virilio identifies the pixel in terms of a point without dimension. In this respect, the pixel is implicated in the flattening of the image both literally and symbolically. At the same time, the pixel as the smallest square unit of space on a digital image can be zoomed in or out of as

required. Hence, the pixel does not simply flatten the image but does away with human experiences of space. Such flattening occurs at both micro and macro levels as it encompasses points too small for the human eye to see and vistas too large to be contained within our field of vision. To cite Virilio here:

> Whether the pixel corresponds to the luminous point of the synthetic image of the computer-enhanced conception, or whether, in the multispectral scanning of the spy satellite, it represents a half-hectare of land, it demonstrates the same indifference, to the landscape, as actual, or as the simulated stretch of represented surfaces (Virilio 1991: 34).

For Virilio, the pixel represents the homogenizing of all representation in the service of the digital and, more precisely, the instantaneous transmission of data. It is the speed by which data is presented and represented which has come to take precedence over its selection and analysis. However, the pixel as employed or deployed on the television screen is as much a unit of intentional selection and misinformation as it is one of ubiquitous and instantaneous information. Thus, the pixel appears to break with the indexicality of analogue film demonstrating every image can be manipulated. Yet, this break is also retrospectively engineered to unravel the analogue index.

When a section of an image is enlarged, we become aware of the pixels making up this image not as what Virilio (1991) has called "continuous field" but, rather, as "discontinuous grain" which appears distorted and blurred. Pixelation is a common technique used to disguise information or identifying characteristics the most common of these including car number plates or a person's face. Where pixelation is generally associated with protecting an individual and their privacy, this is not a neutral technique but belongs to an aesthetic of fear aimed at holding the viewer at a marked distance from the scenes they are watching. The need to mask or distort aspects of an image attest to a need to protect the framed subject. But from what or whom exactly? Surely it is the viewer first and foremost who is presented as a

threat, as a potential suspect not to be trusted with certain information. Not only does the screen frame and limit the information available to us, it also constantly reminds us of these frames and limits.

The pixel, as unit of misinformation, represents, on the one hand, a mistrust of the population, of the television audience. Despite the championing of a more autonomous, creative and interactive audience in both marketing and academic discourse on new social media platforms, it is fair to say that such hyperbole continues to be underpinned by a distain for consumers of mass media. Television audiences continue to be regarded as passive, zombified morons. Consequently, the idea of trust here concerns less a trust that has been lost, since no one has ever had faith in television viewers, and more a trust which has not yet been earned. And, as it turns out, a trust which can never fully be earned within a neoliberal society based on deferral and refusal of responsibility at all levels.[4] The pixel tells us that, as viewers, we cannot and should not be trusted with certain information.

On the other hand, the pixel is presented as a form of protection both for those on screen and also for those watching. As such it embodies another interrelated form of power endemic to Western biopolitics: pastoral power. Taking up Michel Foucault's discussion of pastoral power in his 1978 lecture series *Security, Territory, Population*, Alain Brossat (2015) has more recently identified today's dominant mode of government with an impoverished version of pastoral power as it reduces populations to flocks and individuals to lost sheep incapable of decision-making and whose health, safety and security is offset against freedom of expression, movement and action. Thus, the pixel constitutes a specific visual technique within the ongoing negotiations of freedom of information and data protection that reconfigure civil liberties and conceal the illegal and extralegal activities of global business and

government alike. The pixel indicates that someone has access to the whole picture, just not us. Someone has access and has decided to very deliberately conceal it from us in plain sight.[5]

Situated within a digital aesthetics of truth aimed at inoculating the population via a carefully regulated administration of fear, the pixel is intended to produce within us a simultaneous anxiety and desire for the truth it masks, a hunger and revulsion for information. We have always seen too much and yet, as we are constantly reminded of the cuts, edits and censorship at work, this too much is never enough. Thus, when we see pixelation at work in a news report or documentary we are supposed to be persuaded by its rhetoric. The blurred image which obstructs our visual perception of an individual signifies that a different level of truth is at work. The presence of pixelation informs us we are accessing a truth, a level authenticity which requires mediation as interference. The pixel is at once symbol of truth and gatekeeper to this truth.

The Incarcerated Informant

Focusing my discussion on the specific framings of criminality, I want to draw attention to a particular and increasingly commonplace instance of the pixel as unit of misinformation. This is a common technique used to depict the incarcerated informant. The criminal "informant" has become a regular figure and feature on prime time television now dominated by various prison documentary franchises such as MSNBC's *LockUp* series and its spin-offs. If widespread, accepted uses of pixelation attest to a bad faith exercise which claims respect and privacy whilst asserting an infantilizing politics of mistrust and fear, the pixelated face of the prison informant,

seeking protection from those on both the inside and outside, enables us to see more clearly the deliberately alienating and dehumanizing effects of pixelation.

Take for example, the use of pixelation upon Gangster X in the documentary *Gangs Behind Bars* filmed inside Sacramento jail in California. Gangster X is an inmate who had agreed to discuss protective custody following an incident in which his mistake led to the seizure of gang information.[6] Pixelated images of gangster X are used alongside those of his silhouette in which his profile can very clearly be distinguished. Rather than film the inmate from one position, of the back of his head, for example, shots are also taken of him walking as well as close ups of his cuffed hands and wrists. While his face and tattoos are pixelated, these shots make identifying Gangster X straightforward. Here, pixelation occurs not to protect the criminal but to render him inhuman whilst retaining other identifying marks.

Thus, the pixel - as embodiment of the age of digital representation - needs to be thought alongside other theories by which both the criminal and docile body are marked, marked up, marked out. As such, the pixel constitutes what Michel Foucault (1977) has referred to as a micro-technology of power operating on and through the body. Like the branding of a criminal or a prison tattoo, the pixel visibly inscribes the transgressive body. Yet, this is a visibility defined by its unreadability. Pixelation carves up the flesh yet not necessarily into identifiable, manageable pieces. Pixelation often resembles a blurred "floating" mask which hovers over an individual's actual face. Here, it takes on a spectral or ghostly form which we might think of as the ghastly, apotheosis of Franz Fanon's (1986) white mask, a mask worn to ensure survival but a survival that comes at the cost of the violent loss of identity.

Like the assimilated subject of colonial gaze in Fanon, if the mask constitutes a way to "pass" unnoticed yet in wearing a mask, there is always a risk that one's

performance fails to measure up and that instead of “passing” unnoticed, one becomes a ridiculous parody. The pixel mask is fully visible as mask - a public statement of one’s invisibility, one’s cooperation with or containment by law enforcement and securitization techniques. It does not operate to hide a threat but instead functions very precisely in constituting the threat beneath, the existence of a dangerous identity which might escape out at any moment from behind the mask. The pixel mask produces a doubling of the screen itself which reminds us once more of the proximity of the other, of the threat of the other, we have invited into our homes, into our living room. Yet, at the same time, we are forced to recognize just how quickly, how easily we, too, can become both source and target of that threat, we too can be required to give up our identity to ensure our safety, security and privacy.

A Digital Aesthetics of Truth

As operant of fear, the pixel is essentially paradoxical – it simultaneously identifies those who are guilty, those who are ashamed and those who are afraid and, in doing so, renders these unidentifiable, reduced to faceless, pixelated flesh. It is a process which captures the docile body along with the criminal body and subjects this body to the same processes of normalization and, moreover, securitization. Yet, despite the increased development of lossless compression techniques, an image that has been pixelated and flattened cannot be rerendered without recourse to an original image. Likewise, the saturated, pixelated image from a CCTV camera or poor resolution .gif cannot be given detail and definition not originally captured. The possibilities for rerendering the poor quality, pixelated image are nevertheless mythologized in science fiction (*Bladerunner*) and crime drama (*Crime Scene Investigation*) as key to identifying a criminal. The apotheosis of this mythologizing takes the form not simply

of an enhanced surveillance image but of the enhancement of a reflection on a murder victim's retina prior to their attack.

This mythologizing is not simply cheap artistic license for viewers who are all too aware that it's lazy scriptwriting yet who are either too tired to call bullshit or too easily seduced by a digital aesthetics of truth which has been substituted for narrative. It is important to think about what is at stake in the persistence of the myth of the rerendered pixelated image along with the comparable infallibility not to mention speed of other forensic technologies such as DNA evidence as depicted on fictional crime shows like *Crime Scene Investigation*. Such shows attest to what Virilio (1994) terms "the hyperrealism of legal and police representation." Moreover, it is the fictional reimagining of forensic science, video compression technologies and global database networks that is itself impacting real court cases in far more complex and nuanced ways than simply what has been dubbed the 'CSI Effect' - the overreliance of juries on forensic data and, in particular, speculative DNA results. To assume members of a jury are incapable of distinguishing between fictional representations of evidence and the information being presented to them in a courtroom is, as various legal scholars have argued, to take a highly reductive view of the role of crime drama on public perception. However, the high level of debate here should only emphasize further the extent of the impact of crime drama upon public, intellectual and institutional consciousness alike. One also needs to take into account the way prosecutors are increasingly drawing on forensic results in order to "frame" their evidence according to this digital aesthetics of truth and the demand this is creating for larger forensic departments along with the explosion of forensic science degree programs on offer in the U.S.

Nevertheless, increased public interest in such technologies cannot but sideline other, more archaic forms of truth-gathering most notably those that provide verbal rather than visual testimony. This is the consequence of the break with indexicality produced with the advent of the digital image and forms part of what Virilio terms “the crisis in perceptive faith” (1994) which sees human perception supplanted by the “rational illusions” offered to us by “statistical images”. The eyewitness account risks becoming extraneous, since unlike scientific data, the eyewitness can be convinced that he or she is mistaken, can change or withdraw testimony under duress. Thus the eyewitness, as depicted on television, undergoes a double displacement – rendered pixel, he or she, becomes empty, invisible signifier of truth. At the same time, this truth-value remains two dimensional, indebted to the pixel for validation while the content of their statement becomes subordinated to the micro-perceptions and representations of a digital forensics.

A key observation running throughout Virilio’s work concerns our unquestioning belief in ever-smaller units of measurement resulting in the deferral of perception and experience. We no longer experience the smallest and indeed largest units of time, space, sound and light empirically but must refer to complex technological prostheses and their methods of representing such information to us in images, signs and language we believe we can understand and interpret. Yet, what is it that we are reading, understanding, interpreting? As Virilio suggests:

> The imbalance between the direct information of our senses and the mediated information of the advanced technologies is so great that we have ended up transferring our value judgments and our measure of things from the object to its figure, from the form to its image, from reading episodes of our history to noting their statistical tendencies. As part of this grand transferal, we now face the major technological danger of a generalized delirium of interpretation. (Virilio1991).

Even when a pixelated image or the set of squares and lines composing a biometric image can be referred back to an original image, a recognizable human face with all the complex ethical obligations its look, gaze, appeal evokes in us – this referral relies upon a complex set of technologies to carry out this reading, a reading which not only identifies a face but defines the parameters of our encounter and engagement with this face. Framed by pixels, biometrics and now algorithmic surveillance which identifies an individual by mapping physical movements – the events of our lives, our human histories are reduced to lines on a form, cells in a database, points on a graph. At the end of *Vision Machine*, Virilio suggests that the importance of statistical science based on the calculation and analysis of the pixel lies not simply in its art of persuasion but also its "discrimination capacities". Here, we should understand "discrimination" as never simply referring to a scientific, objective, apolitical selection and analysis of data.

Alongside our discussion of the pixel, it is also important to note how contemporary images of incarceration attest to a blind spot in much recent scholarship taken up with the image of the subversive "other." Butler (2010) is able to draw links between the veiled Muslim woman, the "suspected" terrorist held indefinitely in Guantanamo and the figure of the Western *queer* precisely because she presumes *innocence* or, at the very least, the "right to the presumption of innocence" in each case. All three are easily constructed as "victims" in Butler's narrative as a result of their parallel construction in the narratives of rightwing US media as "threatening" or "subversive" to American values. To produce a more sustained analysis of the way in which fear is mediated via images of "otherness" requires supplementing Butler's discussion with one which takes into consideration the *presence* as much as the absence of the "dangerous acts" she refers to.[7] A critique of the institutional spaces

which both house and produce criminal subjects and the framing techniques in operation within and beyond such spaces needs to be able to think about how these techniques also apply to those responsible for perpetuating a very real violence upon others. In other words, we need to think further about the framing (in its multiple senses) of rapists and murderers and not just the perceived violence of the potential terror suspects taken up by Butler or the petty drug dealers who constitute the primary focus of Michelle Alexander's (2012) study of mass incarceration in the US as the new "Jim Crow."

Thus, our consideration of the "pixel" must be situated within a broader analysis of visual representations of criminality and incarceration and the multiple techniques used to frame and diffuse such images. What is at stake in our consumption of these images of exclusion? How are those excluded encouraged and even required to "perform" their exclusion? What possibilities are there for what Michael Welch (2011) has called "reversing the optics", for tactics of counterveillance, alternative forms of representation and self-representation? And to what extent have such possibilities already been recuperated by mainstream tabloid media and intellectual left alike - all of whom are to some extent complicit in turning the prison into a themepark and those incarcerated into sideshows? The pixel is key to such debates not least in its role alongside other techniques of marking and defining the criminal and docile body.

Conclusion

While keeping sight of the pixel and its function, how might we begin to engage with some of the questions raised above concerning the forms of self-representation and their recuperation within and beyond the carceral space? In 2013, one of the featured

artworks in the Koestler Trust's "Strength and Vulnerability Bunker" exhibition at the Royal Festival Hall was an image on canvas entitled "Sorrow" by an artist, Andrew, based in HM Prison Blantyre House, Kent. The figure of a man bent in prayer, composed of hundreds of tiny grayscale squares on a green background, inspired a series of questions about self-representation, incarceration and the pixel. This is not so much a question of reversing the optics or re-rendering the image. Techniques of compression are never without loss of some kind. Instead, the work involves the reframing of the pixel and, more specifically, reframing the criminal or detainee. Thus, do we read this image as some form of acquiescence, the offender identifying and reproducing his own identity as offender? And, in doing so, is there also an acknowledgment on our part and that of the artist of a digital aesthetics – the pixel as referent of truth in its measurement and capture of threat and fear? Or, can we read something else at work here in the transferal of the pixel onto canvas, its transformation from digital to analogue, immaterial to material, fluid to static?

While it is necessary to exercise a certain amount of cynicism in relation to organizations such as the Koestler Trust and the role of its "Offender Art" in producing complicity amongst both public and prisoners with today's prison system, I also wonder whether cynicism and pessimism are too easy here. Virilio's pessimism in the face of the administration of fear and its reliance upon a digital aesthetics of truth is surely one that demands militancy rather than despondency. Might we also learn from Deleuze's reading of Bacon here? Returning to the passage which opened our discussion, how might the uncomfortable call to respond to Bacon's screaming meat alert us to a different ethical obligation, one that also arises in our encounter with the pixelated flesh of the criminal, incarcerated body?

Notes

[1] In 2008, a series of filmed images produced by inmates in Europe's largest prison, Fleury-Mérogis, using smuggled mobile phones caused outrage and scandal after they were released online. Similarly, in November 2013, an enquiry was launched after two mobile phone films of inmates doing a "Harlem Shake" in a corridor inside Montmédy prison, also in France, were uploaded to YouTube.
[2] This claim is echoed by W.J.T. Mitchell (2010) when he claims that "Every history is really two histories. The history of what happened and the history of the perception of what happened."
[3] If we also take into consideration the multiple accounts circulating as to how the CIA initially brought crack cocaine into black communities and today continue to oversee drug trafficking into the U.S., the twofold process of "captivating" both potential crack users and the U.S. public at large prior to the mass 'capture' of users and dealers becomes further apparent.
[4] Here my reading of neoliberalism in terms of a deferral of responsibility is indebted to Giorgio Agamben's "economic theology" itself a clarification and critique of Carl Schmitt's "political theology." For Agamben (2011), modern forms of Western government are not based on the notion of a "lost" sovereign authority but, rather, rely on a perpetual deferral of ultimate authority and therefore responsibility.
[5] Of course, the irony here is that no one, not even Google, has access to the whole picture.
[6] Gangster X committed the unforgiveable mistake of carrying "kites" - tiny rolls of paper filled with microscopic coded information about a gang – on his person rather than concealing these internally. Kites often contain a gang's strategies and planned hits and therefore are highly coveted by prison authorities. Such information may be put to use by penal officers in various ways, but the documentary implies the value of kites as a currency used by guards to exacerbate internal tensions within a gang more than to prevent intra-gang warfare.
[7] This is something I have discussed at length elsewhere (Fuggle 2013)

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