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'Don't Shoot!' Cop Watching: How Technologically Mediated Concepts of Vision Are Impacting African American Subjectivities

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ABSTRACT

Cop watch groups that film the police have arisen in part as a response to the growing awareness of police violence. High profile footage of African Americans being killed at the hands of white police officers have become emblems of resistance across the USA and fuelled the Black Lives Matter movement. Subsequently, cop watching as a visual mode of exposing police violence has amplified the profile of racial tensions in the US. Based on interviews and secondary analysis, this thesis examines how shooting citizen video can help re-conceptualise the relationships between African Americans and the police. Using the lens of surveillance and vision as a legacy of power during slavery and segregation, it explores how for African Americans cop watching is an assertion of physical presence and persecution previously veiled from the wider public. This dissertation concludes, cop watching is provoking an innovative observational engagement between African Americans and the police state that re-politicises public space as a key arena for one's right to look.

Key Words: African American, Police, Video, Visibility, Surveillance, Personhood, State.

Content Warning: Due to its contemporary and political nature, this thesis includes images and themes that some may find distressing. This includes but is not limited to explicit images of the dead and dying, extreme violence and racial persecution.

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Finally, thank you to my Mother for her leadership and drive, your passion and ambition have set a high bar that I aspire to uphold.

I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Maya Angelou

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation assesses the impact of moving images in identity and revolutionary politics. To understand a perhaps unfamiliar and contemporary issue, one must experience how the digital and visual coincide to provoke these political questions. Please play the accompanying DVD on a laptop or computer. A complementary transcript can be found in the appendix aside a link where the video can also be viewed. You will be put in the position of a citizen searching for a video. The video is footage from an African American citizen filming the assault and death of Eric Garner in 2016.

Figure 1: Phone footage Eric Garner

Cop watching is the observing and documenting of police actions (Huey et al 2016). Part of its practice involves the following and filming of police officers on duty (Huey et al 2016). Its role is to deter potential unlawful behaviour by the police, and to capture it when it does occur for the benefit of the victim (Bock 2016). The death of Eric Garner was captured on smartphone video by multiple witnesses and was one of the many videos of police brutality that went viral in the media in 2016. His dying words "I can't breathe", have become an apt mechanism to explore the feelings of suffocation and separation, particularly felt by African Americans within a racialised public sphere. Cop watchers record the victimisation of others, but how does this impact African Americans, a group who have historically been oppressed by the state? Can cop watching recreate a record of brutality against the African American body? And can this visual activism lead to legislative justice? These are some of the questions that will be explored throughout this dissertation.

Cop watching is primarily a visual practice that attempts to make visible unlawful police actions that are hidden from the general public. In 1980, Roland Barthes said photographs allow us to see our selves and access our identities (Barthes 1980). The contemporary visual cop watching phenomenon capitalises on this reference and also becomes a medium through which the surveiller and surveilled define relational identities. Chapter one will discuss with surveillance and visual theory how the state (as an infrastructure only interacted with via its representations) impact cop watching, which seeks to expose invisible action. It will also explore how these spheres of visibility result in a hierarchical relationship between the state and its citizens, fixing this analysis within an African American historical lineage

The ease, speed, and accessibility of the camera phone has enabled cop watch footage to be captured, and within seconds shared online via digital social media networks. Thus, cop watchers who utilise Facebook and Twitter reinforce contemporary cop watching

as a phenomenon that braces civic and digital spheres. Chapter two, explores how cop watching through its digital networks becomes a means of widening the notion of the perceived public and in turn intersects a performance of policing. It also documents the role of the camera in amplifying the audience's need for accountability.

Cop watching takes place on the streets, outside stores, in parking lots and on front lawns. It is a practice that like many other revolutionary protests is a statement of taking up space (Horst and Miller 2013). Thus, cop watching is also entangled within its own spatial politics. Chapter 3, investigates how cop watching as a physical act is challenging a police performance of normalcy within the bounds of public space. It also discusses how this problematises the notion of who creates the public sphere.

The final chapter, locates public space as an arena where African American identity has been formed. A place which during slavery prohibited their rights to personhood and during segregation prohibited their rights to citizenship. It argues, the proliferation of cop watch video content now existing in digital networks that transcend location, is contributing to an archive that helps maintain a social memory of violence against the African American body in public space. One that Jim Crow photographic archives in their sparsity, fail to maintain.

From slavery, to Jim Crow, to #BlackLivesMatter African Americans have used visual technology to convey their realities. This dissertation explores cop watching as a contemporary manifestation of empowerment through visibility.

Figure 2: Woman at protest

Literature Review

This dissertation merges surveillance, visual, race and spatial theory to elucidate what cop watching can articulate about contemporary African American experiences in public space. Widespread cop watching is a recent phenomenon and therefore is not well documented in anthropological research, subsequently this dissertation takes an interdisciplinary approach. This thematic review will describe how this thesis uses different academic fields to supplement arguments about the social practice of cop watching.

Visual Theory

Cop watching relies on the visual to expose the hidden acts of police brutality that occur in spaces of low visibility. It therefore can lead to explicit cop watch footage that displays the dying African American body. There is lengthy scholarship in material culture and visual studies that informs a discourse of the relationships between photography, the body and identity (Walter Benjamin 2008, Pinney 2011, Berger 1972, Barthes 1980). Yet, whilst I acknowledge the contributions of this extended literature, as a whole they fail to recognise the impacts race plays on the shaping of visual and political landscapes. This dissertation places primacy on Susan Sontag's work as a basis for analysis; due to her focus on images of the dead and dying. Sontag advocates, that which the camera frame includes also excludes, and explicit images in moments of death force the audience to acknowledge a reality outside their own (2003). Cop watching is also a medium of making real to wider American society the experiences of marginalised communities. Thus, Sontag provides a thought-provoking framework to understand the role images of death can have in igniting social change.

Sontag's work helps to understand the power dynamics within images and video representing deaths. However, she does not address how personhood and citizenship is created or collapsed through the photographic form. For this, I turn to Ariella Azoulay's book 'The Civil Contract of Photography' which interprets photography as creating a political space that deterretorializes citizenship beyond its "conventional boundaries" (2008:25). Part of cop watching concerns unifying and educating people about their legal rights in public space. In turn, cop watching provides an apt parallel to Azoualy's notion of photography as causing its own index of citizenship (2008). Azoulay's study is a useful referent within this paper, however located in Israel not the US and not in the social media spheres, the application of her research throughout is limited to theoretical ideas.

Spatial Theory

By attempting to expose what is hidden within public space, cop watching is wrapped in an assumption that public space is a site that is authored by communities. The philosopher Habermas has extensively researched the public sphere as a place for dissenting voices to reach consensus (1989). Habermas states, "The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public" (1989:27). The outreach work that cop watch volunteers conduct focuses on bringing together a unified group within a larger community. Resultantly, in cop watching public space becomes a medium that also reflects a public sphere where voices can engage. Some scholars criticise Habermas for homogenising the public sphere as a site for bourgeoisie relationships (Fraser 1990). However, while scholars attempt to reinterpret Habermas there is general consensus of his core principle, the public sphere as a discursive place for action (Fraser 1990). A Habermasian framework is useful to think about how cop watching as an imposition into

public space, creates and interrupts the expected consensus found in the public sphere. The act of taking up space is a performative one (Goffman 1978) and performance in the public arena has been a major focus of the esteemed sociologist Irving Goffman. Goffman distinguishes between different performances enacted in public and private realms, arguing each space facilitates different behaviour (1978). His analysis, is critically comprehensive and enables a structure through which to conceptualise how citizens and police perform when in the role of the surveiller and surveilled. I engage with his work to theorise how cameras in cop watching might intersect a police performance. Habermas and Goffman are valuable scholars to theorize the notion of public and explore how this intersects with the African American's historical exclusion from the public sphere and space based on race.

Surveillance Theory

Cop watching as a practice of filming the police highlights the role visuality plays in policing. This discourse came into fruition after the surveillance scholar John Thompson's paper 'The New Visibility' (2005) located secrecy and conspicuousness as inherent within the institution of policing. His work was later built upon by the criminology theorist Andrew Goldsmith in 2010 with his follow up paper 'On the Policing of Visibility'. Goldsmith argues, the proliferation of video evidence of the police's engagement with citizens is becoming a threat to the legitimacy of their authority (2010). This debate has paved the way for a new generation of surveillance thinkers (Haggerty and Sandhu 2014, Bradshaw 2013, Wall and Linnemann 2014, Brucato 2015) to hypothesise the role of cameras on police. Cop watching is having a dramatic impact on the role visuality and visibility plays in modern policing, alongside the increasing importance of video evidence in achieving legislative justice. This is an issue recognised by the American government, with President Obama providing millions of dollars worth of funding for police body cameras in departments

nationwide (Brucato 2015). This dissertation uses surveillance theory to investigate how for African Americans video evidence plays a new role in their right to personhood within the public arena. An arena, that the police as a continuation of generations of state power continue to treat as passive in the performance of the normal.

Methodology

This is a primarily library-based dissertation. I chose against undertaking a field-based dissertation because of time constraints. Conducting ethnography or conducting more interviews would have required an extended stay in the US and deliberation over the specifics of this project limited the time available to do so. Whilst this would have enriched the analysis, to compensate this dissertation emphasises the use of primary source evidence that maximises the use of the interview form. To counter a lack of ethnographic data, I have also conducted an online analysis and two interviews which help supplement this exploration.

I conducted an online analysis of four cop watch forums and websites (CopBlock, PINAC, Copwatch.org, CopwatchNYC). This involved examining and interpreting the resources provided, content disseminated and visitor interactions. The online ethnography brought a greater understanding of the role content sharing played in these organisations. I also contacted over ten American organisations that directly engaged with the practice of cop watching by email, to see if they were available to take part in this research. Two cop watch groups agreed to participate. The interviews were with representatives from two cop watch groups based in California and New York. I have chosen to keep the identities and locations of these interviewees anonymous and I have allocated them pseudonyms. Both

interviewees were aware of the research aim and signed a consent form that guaranteed them anonymity, interviews were conducted over email.

There is a lack of ethnographic material on cop watching and surveillance of the police. Consequently, I made an attempt to locate literature that focused on video activism, citizen surveillance and focused on the dynamics between space, visuality and power. If word and time constraints allowed, I would like to further this research with an ethnographic study in the US. However due to the 11,000-word limit I felt a lack of ethnographic data would not undermine the arguments made.

I Visibility, Invisibility and Gaze

Cop watching involves the following and documenting of on-duty police officers. Cop watching has traditionally been seen as an individualised phenomenon but has become formalised through the establishment of networked groups like the non-for-profit activist umbrella 'Cop Watch' (Copwatch.org). This formalisation of cop watching relies on the camera's ability to record images and video, as its power derives from the ability to reflect the level of surveillance that is usually carried out by the state on its citizens. However, cop watching also extends beyond observation tactics, involving documenting incidents in writing, formulating reports of interesting findings and educating people about their rights in public space (Huey et al 2006). Cop watching is an act that posits a parallel between citizens and the police as representatives of the state. Therefore, to understand cop watching, one must understand the nuances between these two groups and how race affects its manifestation. This chapter will elucidate the dynamics between visibility and power as found within American government and state apparatus.

Surveillance is characterized as a general process of being under strict observation (Marx 2013). Cop watching situates itself as a form of counter surveillance or as Steve Mann terms 'Sousveillance', surveillance from below (2003:2). As sousveillance, cop watching seeks to determine and impact the behaviour of the surveilled by provoking a change in police actions (Bock 2016). This occurs similarly to contemporary state surveillance practices, which uses constant observation to prevent adversarial behaviour from its citizens (Lyon 2001). Michel Foucault evaluates the philosopher Jeremy Bentham's construction of the *panopticon* penitentiary as emblematic of contemporary state behaviour control (1977). The *panopticon* is a circular wall of prison cells surrounding a central watch tower, designed to allow a single watchman to view all

prisoners without the prisoners being able to determine when (Foucault 1977). Foucault asserts the symbolic role of the watchman is principal, as it is the perception of constant visibility in the form of surveillance, that regulates the prisoner's actions (1977). Cop watching also relies on a relationship of power over what is seen and what is prevented from view, because it attempts to expose the hidden actions of police officers through visibility (Wall and Linnemann 2014). Foucault's panoptic structures initially allowed the few (watchmen) to see the many (prisoners) (1977). But, the sousveillance of cop watching enables the political possibility of inversing the panoptic state surveillance structures to a *synopticon,* where the many (citizens) are able to judge the actions of the few (police officers) (Mathieson 1977). Cop watching aims to expose this state violence by heightening visibility (Huey et al 2006). Yet, is it possible to expose these structures if the state is merely a series of material actions and ideological constructs (Mitchell 2006)?
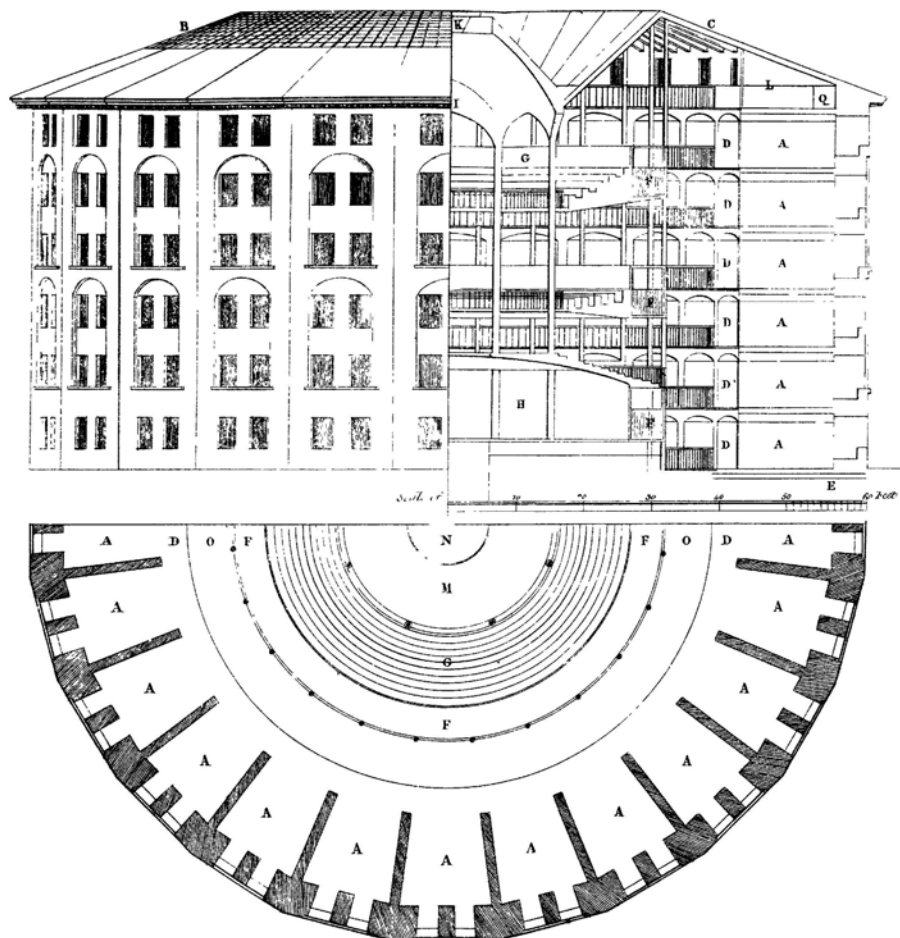

Figure 3: Interpretation of the panopticon penitentiary

The State and Visibility

Cop watching is a means of documenting the actions of state representatives and therefore directly challenges a practice of state nation building that "molds mental structures and imposes common principles of vision" (Bourdieu 1994:7). The state cannot be seen, it is not bounded or material but is perceived to be and therefore is authoritative (Mitchell 2006). Hence, its actions are in a constant state of low visibility one may even say 'invisible'. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* refers to an individual's conceptions of the external world founded in one's socio-cultural environment (1984). The state through its bureaucratic procedures can be explained as creating its own *habitus*. It is uniquely positioned to impose universal principles that influence the social world through cognitive structures that establish common understanding and national memory (Bourdieu 1994). For example, contemporary American nationhood relies on an understanding of the USA as founded on democratic values (Sontag 2003), values that leads to interventionist strategies in international affairs (Romano and Raiford 2006). If the state relies on its conceptual reinforcement for its power, then how does cop watching which seeks to introduce antagonistic narratives serve to threaten this?

Cop watching provides an intersection to challenge panoptic structures of high surveillance and low visibility from state structures and representatives. State surveillance depends on a relationship with visuality that entails its representatives being in a state of low visibility. CCTV cameras are now an essential part of surveillance, yet its role extends beyond video capture. CCTV aims to dissuade criminality by acting as a deterrent *and* prevent recidivism by capturing adverse behaviour for legislative justice (Goldsmith 2010). This relationship suggests CCTV cameras work on the assumption that like the *panopticon*, heightened visibility enforces behavioural self-regulation. Yet, CCTV is also required to be covert in order to capture adverse behaviour without restriction. Resultantly, state

surveillance is required to be 'visible enough' to deter crime, yet 'invisible enough' to effectively capture this crime. Police officers become the focal point of cop watching because they are physical manifestations of the illusive state, and provide a face for the state structures not made visible (Bradshaw 2013). In this view, police are public figures they patrol public space and regulate public action. Their bright uniforms and ability to legally carry weapons also discriminate them from the everyday citizen they serve to protect (Goldsmith 2010). However, despite their public position the police state relies on non-public action, action that is hidden from view (Goldsmith 2010). In other words, police officers cannot catch criminals by being public all the time. Therefore, while their profession outwardly exerts a public presence, a significant amount of work depends on 'invisible' action. Thus, cop watching offers a medium to heighten the visibility of the processes that police as agents of the state abide (Mitchell 2006).

African Americans, The State, and Public Space

Cop watching can be done by people of all races, but because people of colour are disproportionately engaged with by police (Alexander 2010) it becomes another medium through which race relations manifest. For African Americans who are affected by social and economic disenfranchisement this is particularly pertinent. Michelle Alexander, the author of 'The New Jim Crow' (2010) argues "what it means to be a criminal in our collective consciousness has become conflated with what it means to be black" (198). This conception is the result of socio-historical lineages unique to African Americans, but how does the relationship between power and visibility present itself within cop watching?

African American relations with the state were introduced through the mechanism of slavery which resulted in a diminution of their personhood and politicised visuality as an

assertion of power (hooks 2003). It wasn't until 1787 that the constitution established African Americans as three-fifths human (Walton and Smith 2015). The African American identity was therefore carved into a national narrative through subjugation, a belief supported by the police state (Gates 2012). This has influenced subsequent relations between African Americans and the police who enforced this position (hooks 2003). Bell hooks suggests vision became politicised due to the denial of the 'right to look', she elaborates, for an African American to look a white American in the eye was to claim they were of equal status (hooks 2003). Visual scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff views this denial of vision as a "boundary of visuality" that negates African Americans a right to their reality and "the place where such codes of separation encounter a grammar of nonviolence" (2011:477). Today, cop watching allows African American's to document and share their unmediated experiences instantly and reasserts their right to a denied reality. Cop watching revives these tense state relations and reintroduces the politicised right to look into a contemporary American racial discourse.

African American relationships with the state emerged from a dialectic of visuality and power under slavery. However, it was later defined by their exclusion from public space under the system of segregation. Segregation was the implementation of the Jim Crow laws which divided ethnic groups in the US in public and private space to prevent miscegenation (Gates 2012). It premised that races were to be kept "separate but equal", in reality this led to the social, political and economic degradation of African Americans (Harold and Deluca 2005). Today, African Americans perceive the police more negatively than white Americans (Brown and Benedict 2002). The police force's generational use of excessive force also reflects a deep rooted issue of viewing the African American body as an embodiment of danger and threat (Butler 1993). Thus, cop watching has become a mechanism that not only physically legitimizes the African American's right to the public arena, but also instigates questions over public and private action through the lens of

visuality. Police officers have the ability to regulate public space and can restrict citizen access to public areas. In doing so, police officers define the bounds of a normal environment and determine what seeks to threaten its order (Goffman 1978, Mirzoeff 2010). Therefore, the previously segregated public sphere is a medium through which African Americans form and identify their individual and collective experiences. Space is sometimes seen as a passive backdrop to action (Tilley and Basu 1994), however it plays an active role in solidifying individual and collective identities as they manifest within public space (Tilley and Basu 1994). Cop watching occurs within a broader racial politics that has been defined *for* African Americans rather than *by* them, cop watching helps to expose this.
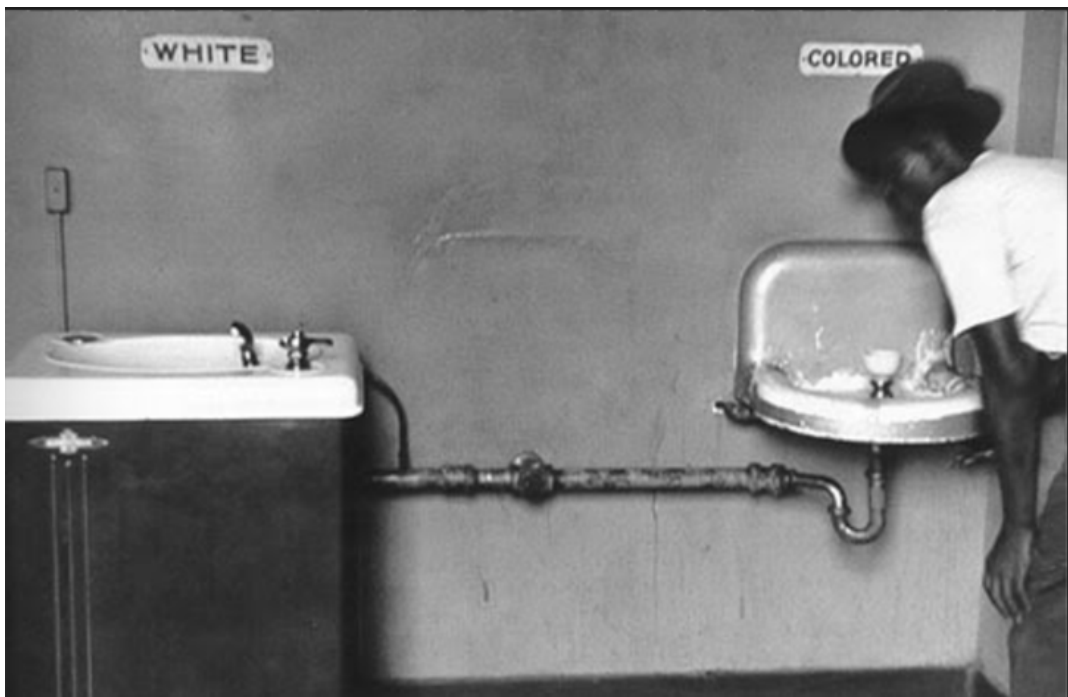

Figure 4: African American using segregated water fountain

African Americans and The Right to Look

Jim Crow Laws under segregation lasted for over 50 years (Lavelle 2015) and assumed security was provided in distance and observation from afar. Hence, uptake in formalized cop watching particularly by African Americans today necessitates dialogue over their historic and contemporary role within public space. According to visual scholar Elizabeth Abel, there is a sparse record of Jim Crow signage in photographic archives (2010). Collective memory relies strongly on visual remnants from the past (Assman 2011) and the sparsity of Jim Crow signage insinuates a transition into a post-racial era (Lavelle 2015). Cop watching as a reassertion of the right to look reintroduces the politicisation of vision in public space, yet one that moves from the static image to the moving.

In a historical lineage where the right to look determines the right to a reality, cop watching is enabling African Americans to make visible evidence of police violence against them. Photography is a visual medium traditionally seen as analogous to reality and has been used historically to evidence African American experience (Bekkers and Moody 2014, Harold and Deluca 2005). Perhaps, the most profound example of this is the case of Emmett Till a 14-year-old boy whose racially motivated killing in 1955 challenged the right to look. Staying with family in the more strictly segregated American South, Emmett allegedly wolf whistled at a white woman (Harold and Deluca 2005). In response, the store owner and members of the racist vigilante group Klu Klux Klan mutilated and then drowned Emmett's body (Harold and Deluca 2005). At his funeral, his mother Maime Till insisted on an open casket to allow others to see the extent of her child's injuries, crying "let the people *see* what I've seen" (Harold and Deluca 2005:273, emphasis added). Photographs taken by members of the media were circulated across the world, and were instrumental in reinforcing to wider society that violence against African American's had

not dissipated after the abolition of slavery (Harold and Deluca 2005). For African

Americans visuality has been integral in the way they have navigated their relationship

with the state system and its representatives, cop watching manipulates this.

Figure 5: Maime Till looking at deceased Emmet. By David Jackson for Jet magazine.

For African Americans visual expression of an experiential identity is bounded to

public space as an arena that through segregation was racialised as white (hooks 2003). In

1991, the motif of the image arises again when an African American man Rodney King is

assaulted by white police officers (Goldsmith 2010, Miller 2016). This time the attack is

captured on a camcorder by a witness and puts the issue of police brutality at the forefront

of American consciousness during the trial (Goldsmith 2010). Similarly, in 2016 the

shooting of an African American man Philando Castile by police, was live streamed on

Facebook by his partner as it happened (Juhasz 2016). Visuality as a social process that intersects perception and power (Brighenti 2007) has been historically integral to the way that African American's have exposed crimes against their community (Harold and DeLuca 2005, Butler 1993, Mirzoeff 2011). Cop watching is playing an interesting role in bringing these visual modes into popular debate. But, what kind of impact does video have on exposing injustice as opposed to photographs? How can smartphone cameras produce new conceptualisations of public space? And, can the emblematic power of video translate into tangible change? The next chapter will explore the impacts cop watch images have in reconceptualising how public space is used and defined today.

Figure 6: Philando Castile police shooting. Later uploaded to YouTube

II Digital Images and Expanding 'Public'

Cop watching is the monitoring of police activity and aims to deter potential police misconduct (Bock 2016). Contemporary cop watching relies on the camera's ability to accurately document these patrols and subsequently capture any police-citizen interaction that takes place. Compact smartphones enable citizen videos to be uploaded to a range of apps, forums and websites (Schaefer and Steinmetz 2013). In turn, cop watchers use private technology to amplify what is understood as the public arena, and circulate the footage to a non local audience. Public space is traditionally assumed to provide a platform where public opinion can form outside the realms of the state (Habermas 1989). However, the police have great power over the regulation of public space and subsequently define spaces of 'order', 'normalcy', and 'disorder'. Cop watching takes place in public space, but can these digital spheres be seen as a continuation of this public domain?

Maintaining the Public

The public sphere is socially produced as people inhabit it through an engagement of discourse and action (Tilley and Basu 1994). Goffman (1978) explains how an individual's actions change in public and private spheres in order to fit in with the settings they inhabit (1978). He views the world as a stage, upon which people continually negotiate their identities with a series of masks or impressions of themselves (Goffman 1978). Some of these occur 'on-stage' in the presence of and in front of others, and others occur 'off-stage' where a different type of performance is enacted (Goffman 1978). One can interpret the police's everyday action of restricting public visibility using the term "move along, there is nothing to see here" (Wall and Linnemann 2014:140), as demonstrative of the need to

performatively move between their on-stage and off-stage personas in engagement with their surroundings. Sousveillance is allowing citizens to bring what is off-stage into the public sphere and hold the system accountable for their representative's actions (Bradshaw 2013, Huey et al 2006, Brucato 2015). But, ultimately the police as state officials aim to maintain a pretence of the normal which prevents dissent and rebellion in the public arena (Wall and Linneman 2014) and in doing so, persistently attempts to keep these two stages from coinciding. In this case, the regulation of public space is itself political, because in clarifying order the police must also define disorder and risk. A Goffmanian perspective proposes the acceptance of the pretence of normal is more significant than its actual occurrence, because like Bentham's panopticon the perception of surveillance creates self behavioural regulation (1978). This suggests, because it is beneficial to the state to preserve a sense of routine, the citizen sousveillance of cop watching is a means of disrupting this police-led performance of normalcy.

In 2006, Huey et al conducted an ethnographic study based in observation, interviews and data analysis on a cop watch group in Downtown Eastside Vancouver (DTES). This area of Vancouver consists of almost 16,000 residents, most of which form a group with the lowest socioeconomic status of any urban area in Canada (Huey et al 2006). The high level of drug activity in the area has led to the DTES having a close relationship with police campaigns (Huey et al 2006). The DTES cop watch group was subsequently formed in 2002 by members of the community actively protesting this police intervention (Huey et al 2006). As a culmination of the work of three well respected surveillance scholars, this ethnographic study demonstrates the inherent political contradictions based in citizen surveillance. As a result of the lack of literature explicitly on cop watching, despite this study being based in Vancouver Canada, it is important that it is included within this analysis. The community they study is not too distant from the demography and issues

faced in many American inner cities, so I strongly advocate its role as an authoritative study is not undermined.

The foundation of cop watching for Huey et al relied on all members of the DTES team participating in "witnessing shifts", walking and following officers to record police behaviour (2006:152). Members also carried "rights cards" produced and distributed by a local organisation specialising in legal work (Huey et al 2006:153). These rights cards were designed to be a point of reference for residents to understand their lawful responsibilities and entitlements in the public arena (Huey et al 2006). Its presence suggests citizens are unsure over the legalities of their individual actions in public space, yet also implies an equivalence in knowledge with the observed officers and reduces the perceived power difference between them and the state. One team report included this passage, "By observing, recording and documenting police abuses *we* hold them accountable and send a message that *we* will not tolerate the systematic harassment and routine physical assaults on poor and marginalized people (Huey et al 2006:158). The police may control the remits of the public through their own surveillance of citizen actions, but this 'reversal of the gaze' (Mirzoeff 2011:4) implies the camera re-establishes their role as mere citizens in the public space, also to be governed by the laws they legally enforce. This notion of accountability holds with it an implication of the police officer's status as equal to the citizen rather than above.

Huey et al's (2006) study exhibits a role reversal in the perceived behaviour of the citizen and their actions within public space. The cop watchers all volunteers, take on the act of regulating what is seen in public. They do this to such an extent that Huey and his colleagues even describe their activities as "patrols" (2006:153) a phrase usually used in reference to police monitoring (Lyon 2001). One interviewee talked about the role of the police without the oversight of cop watchers, "'If we weren't there that guy's head would be under his [police officers] foot right now. Arm behind his back. He would never say

that.' But the cop would be like 'You're under arrest for possession of. You will be given the opportunity to contact a lawyer. Do you understand that you are under arrest?'" (Huey et al 2006:156). Huey's cop watchers believe that they are more powerful when they have the ability to regulate what is exposed and their "witnessing shifts" (2006:152) are representative of their efforts to make visible police activity at all times. The filming serves to increase the notion of the public and attentive audience to a scale that individual police officers cannot maintain. The numerous digital connections that cameras can make prevent 'the public' being bound to the location where the event takes place. Instead, the idea of the public is expanded to include an innumerable number of surveilling eyes. It is not the literal manifestation of the public that occurs during cop watching. Instead, the representational motif of the camera symbolises an audience which serves as an interruption in the police performance of routine. This explains, why police believed the DTES cop watchers were "always looking for conflict with the law…in hopes of recording a scuffle for a civil suit" (2006:156). The police see cop watching as an intrusion into their maintenance of public space. Without the camera police officers do not need to give justifications for their performances of order, however the presence of the camera demands this accountability.

The Footage: Exposing the Invisible

Figure 7: Snapshot of Alton Sterling Video

In America's history the African American body has been a controversial channel for violence and body politics (Butler 1993). For the Civil Rights activist Martin Luther King Jr, the mission of Black Power concerns challenging the objectification of the African American body to bring it into a space of legitimate personhood (Hills and Curry 2015). However, this antagonistic relationship is not largely understood by the general white population who do not share this history (Lavelle 2010). Cop watch footage exists within online networks that operate outside of public infrastructures and internal communities (Castells 2013). Websites like Google and YouTube are accessible to a wide audience that consumes its content, thus they are spaces that are limited but extensively public (McCosker 2015). Such graphic images of a single demographic are scenes reminiscent of portraits of lynchings in the early 1990's. Cop watching goes some way in exposing the

complex body politic of African Americans as moulded historically and presently by the state. African American's have been existing in the racialised public sphere for generations (Neely and Samura 2011), yet it is the amplification of this experience to a wider unknowing audience that allows the exposure of the invisible.

Cop watching is a phenomenon that aims to protect marginalised groups like the working class, poor and vulnerable from police violence. Yet, police brutality against people of colour constitutes a worrying amount of viral cop watching footage (Anthony and Thomas 2010). Many of the videos that have gone viral internationally have depicted the death of African American men at the hands of white police officers (Swaine et al 2017). Butler views the maltreatment of the African Americans at the hands of police as the production of a racist episteme that posits the police as the protectors of whiteness against violence entrenched within the black body (1993). She argues in 1991 Rodney King was "hit in exchange for the blows he never delivered, but which he is by virtue of his blackness, always about to deliver" (1993:18). Narratives of the black body predetermined as threatening are not new (Fanon and Sartre 1963) and were also echoed in the case of Emmett Till. In recent months, Emmett's accuser has admitted she fabricated parts of the events which led to Emmett's ruthless murder (Carol 2017), in this case Emmett's young presence was itself a menace to white space. Cop watching provides a medium to demonstrate how these narratives of African Americans as dangerous feed into their criminalisation, a narrative that has not escaped the police force who continue to pursue a racialised policies of policing (Alexander 2010). Today, African Americans are disproportionally affected by instances of conviction regarding 'broken window' policing and stop and frisk policies, created under the pretence of the war on drugs (Alexander 2010). Cop watching therefore also acts as evidence of the state's role in reinforcing the criminalisation of African Americans. Susan Sontag unpacks the workings of displaying images of the dying in context of war (2003). She argues, photographs have traditionally

been a medium of "making 'real' matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore" (2003:16). If to film is to make real, then to make real is also make visible. Unlike mass media outlets cop watch videos are uncensored and live within digital networks that amplify this unfiltered content, bypass traditional media and command the attention of those who refrain to look; which for African Americans is historically bound. Cop watching does not simply reflect experience it creates a reality, because it provides validity to claims of 'invisible' police brutality the African American community have declared for decades.

I conducted an interview with Eliza a representative from a cop watch organisation in New York to gain a greater understanding of the impacts of filming the police. Eliza self identifies as Black, she said "point blank, no one can ignore police brutality now. I'm so thankful for the brave individuals who've recorded some horrifying scenes and remained at them receiving more backlash and punishment than the damn cops abusing, killing people". Eliza sees cop watching as a direct response to police brutality which now "no one can ignore". Cop watching is an embedded form of activism that goes beyond mistreatment by police but a top down issue of injustice, with it "everyone is forced to look…people think this is a new issue. NO. Cops have been unlawfully killing and harassing people since their origins as slave catchers and union busters. Some people are just SEEING the issue now more than ever". Eliza reiterates police brutality in the US is not new, instead it's the ability to explicitly participate in an engagement of counter-visuality that is enabled by cop watching. Cop watch footage reminds people danger is no longer "restricted to the realm of war" (Cadava 1998:51-2) but is on the roads and sidewalks of American towns. Its very content has become crucial in bringing the violence against African Americans into the homes, phones and psyche of the general public.

For African Americans, cop watching exposes unique state-led body politics that evidence how a right to the visible dictates a right to the real. Its this presence of visibility

not confined to its locational boundaries that expands the notion of the perceived public and causes self regulation by those who define public space. As Eliza said, with cop watch footage "everyone is forced to look". The next chapter will investigate how cop watching provides a medium to dispute the notion of who authors the public sphere.

Figure 4: Promotional Image from Copwatch.com

III Contesting the Public

Chapter one established how cop watching fits into historically-determined racialised spheres of visibility. Chapter two illuminated how its digital capabilities provide it with the means to expand the perceived public and thus intersect a police performance of order. But what role does vision play in contesting African Americans right to public space? How effective is counter-surveillance for pervasive police violence? And can this reversal of the gaze lead to empowerment?

African Americans are reasserting their right to the public sphere, but they are doing so in a lineage of historically–bound concepts. The plantations of early America and the post-emancipation streets of Jim Crow relied on a vernacular of visualized surveillance (Mirzoeff 2011), cop watching also relies on this surveillance. Visual culture theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff explains, under Jim Crow it was a "violent and sexualized" act (2011:8) for a colored person to look a white person in the eye. Mirzoeff says, in 1951 an African American farmer Matt Ingram was sentenced for assault against a white woman "because she had not liked the way he looked at her from a distance of sixty-five feet" (2011:8). The legacies of slavery and segregation may seem distant, but their impacts on the status of African American's legal personhood has been profound. The segregation of housing, inequality in education and their overrepresentation in the prison system are all legacies of these events (Alexander 2010). Cop watching takes place on street corners, on the edge of sidewalks and outside supermarkets, it is a means of attempting to regulate the uncontested action of those who patrol and maintain the notion of the public, the police (Goffman 1978). Segregation re-politicised the African American role in public space, making the public sphere a disputed space for African American identities (Neely and Samura 2011). For African Americans today, cop watching offers the prospect to assert their rights within the contested public arena (Neely and Samura 2011). Nonetheless, this relationship of

visuality and power is unbalanced, although cop watchers may have authority in that moment it is temporary and unstable. Cop watching does not provide a one-way lens from the surveiller to the surveilled, power is always dubious. Cop watching may offer means to question the notion of who creates the public, but it is only momentary "sometimes it's empowering…sometimes I wonder who's got their eye on me" (Eliza, New York 2016).

Police Responses to Cop Watching

In 2015 Haggerty and Sandhu conducted a qualitative study on police officer's feelings towards new cameras technologies, they categorised the responses as 'Camera Shy' or 'Habituated'. 'Camera Shy' officers feared the potential interpretative effects of the video content from citizen surveillance (Haggerty and Sandhu 2015). Whereas, 'Habituated' officers were those less concerned about manipulation believing the footage will demonstrate justified action (Haggerty and Sandhu 2015). Whilst reducing a wide range of opinions down to two categories limits the variety of answers considered, they are useful to display the disparity in responses. One officer recognized the need for the force to be more camera-friendly saying, in training they are taught to use loud and exaggerated tone when in public environments (Haggerty and Sandhu 2015). She said, "I've been told before in training 'you're always on stage, you're always on stage' and to act that way. Like you're being recorded and everything. And what I mean is, I personally notice, I repeat myself a lot more, I'm louder with my directions, like making it very, very clear…If [cameras] were not there, I would still be saying the same stuff, I would just be saying it in a lower volume with the guy or maybe only saying it one or two times'" (Haggerty and Sandhu 2015:8). This officer's monologue provides an insight into the culture police officers are trained to exist within. A culture that recognizes the undue influence of sousveillance, but one that

responds to this by using features that enhance a performance of power, rather than democratize state-citizen relations or emphasise self-reflection. The officer's statement also lends itself to a Goffmanian analysis. If police are usually able to move between their 'on-stage' and 'off-stage' (Goffman 1978) performances without problems, is cop watching preventing this seamless transition between public and private states? Police officers are already operating with an acknowledgement and engagement with spheres of visibility that fluctuate. They are also grounded with the role of reproducing the impression of routine and a pretence of the normal (Goffman 1978). It is this paradigm of visibility that produces innovative engagements with the sousveillance of cop watching. This officer suggests that cop watchers and their cameras interrupt an "on stage" (Haggerty and Sandhu 2015:8) performance from police. Furthermore, that this crisis of visibility provokes a stronger necessity to maintain the public. This demonstrates the real power in cop watching is in its ability to make crime visible, therefore widening the parameters of the perceived public with a physical declaration of opposition.

Saran, the interviewee from a cop watch group in California used an interesting concept to explain the relationship cop watchers have with the police. In response to questions regarding the emotional and physical effects of cop watching she says, it is a "dance of staying safe while asserting our right to watch". For Saran, cop watching is about controlling "those bodily responses to stress to both get the best, unbiased evidence and deescalate the situation for the person being arrested/detained". Its about controlling the extended body in the public sphere in order to reach the desired outcome. Saran then begins to outline this "dance" is "different for different people". "As a young white woman, I find I can get closer to the police without fearing for my safety than others might…[but] Cop watching most directly affects the people of color who are overwhelmingly targeted by the police". Saran's "dance" is similar to the officer's notion of being 'on stage', both exude a notion of performativity in the public sphere. Cop watching is a physical expression of

resistance and because of this holds with it a declaration of the rights of the public. This implies to have power is to perform well, thus when challenged the performance is heightened. Cop watching in its practice is an assertion of the "right to watch" within the public sphere, but it relies on an intricate set of steps.

Police officers as agents of the state have historically had issues with the formation of counter narratives that may be damaging to their reputation (Thompson 2005). After all, while they may seem highly visible the nature of their work requires that they operate within spheres of low visibility (Goldsmith 2010). In 2010 a spokesperson from the International Union of Police stated, "Our problem is not so much with the videotaping as it is with the inability of those with no understanding of police work to clearly and objectively interpret what they see. Videotapes frequently do not show what occurred before or after the camera was on, and the viewer has no idea what may have differed the incident or what transpired afterwards". (Slocumb and Roberts n.d.). This spokesperson makes clear that his issues lie in the ability for the public to show unauthorised images of power. In effect saying images that reinforce a positive narrative of the police are welcomed, but those that do not are inflicted with bias. In 2013 CopBlock a resource hub stated, "the police are waging a war on cameras" (Wall and Linnemann 2014:134). After notorious shootings like that of 22-year-old Oscar Grant in 2009, witnesses claimed police officers were confiscating cameras that filmed the event (Wall and Linnemann 2014). Correspondingly, in 2012 with the shooting of Manuel Diaz, sources claim the police offered to buy the mobile phone footage from the family of the deceased (Wall and Linnemann 2014). While these examples may be few and far between, they are perhaps demonstrative of the symbolic and literal power of the video to destabilize the police as an institution of truth and security, and to interrupt a police presentation of order.

Cop Watching: Interrupting performance

The Ferguson Interview Project is a set of interviews with members of the community, conducted within the two weeks following the shooting of 18-year-old unarmed African American Michael Brown. The death of Brown dramatically heightened the Black Lives Matter movement and led to civil unrest across the country (Brucato 2015). These interviews provide a glimpse into community and police relations at the peak of racial tensions, and help to unpack some of the intricacies within relationships between community members. The next interview is part of this collective of work.

David Whitt is an African American electrician by trade and resident of Ferguson, Missouri (Birch 2015). He explains he has watched the police informally his entire life but formally began cop watching after the death of Brown (Birch 2015). On its effectiveness he said, "Honestly, the police have changed their way of behaving in our community. From the moment we put that thing out that we were out here watching the police, police have begun to change" (Birch 2015:36). Like Eliza from New York, Whitt believes that it is the legitimacy of watching the police, assuring people of their rights, and exposing invisible police action that interrupts the police-led performance of power. His answers suggest cop watching is more than filming the police, it is fulfilling a civic duty concerning collective action and participation. It is as much about educating people of their rights in public space as it is criticizing the police's actions within it. He clarifies, all of these actions alongside watching the police "acts as a deterrent…. They're not harassing people out in Ferguson right now. They try to get away with it when nobody is watching" (2015:36). Whitt's responses reiterate the power of the visual, where the police want to persist in spaces of low visibility but persistent cop watching continues to make their actions visible. Whitt highlights the temporality of power during cop watching, when occupying the public the police modify their public performance, but when they feel they are in traditional spaces of

low visibility transgression occurs. Whitt suggests in order to maintain police actions in the public sphere cop watchers must constantly widen the perceived public to deter injustice "They try to get away with it when nobody is watching". This indicates cop watching's power can be found in the appearance of constant sousveillance rather than its actual configuration, much like the surveillance society Foucault envisaged (1977). Perhaps, suggesting that sousveillance has the potential to enforce a self-regulation of the police that changes their conduct over time.

Like Saran and David Whitt make clear, the sousveillance of cop watching is integral in reopening the dialogue of how African Americans fit into understandings of the public and private. Cop watching involves the physical opposition of citizens with officials of the law (Huey et al 2006) and puts the surveiller in a physically compromising position within public space (Huey et al 2006). However, historically African Americans have been subject to rules regarding their individual actions in public space. Segregation was able to control and racialize public space as a place of whiteness, and in doing so influenced the ways African Americans continue to engage with it (Lavelle 2015, Bindas 2010, Romano and Raiford 2006). This explains why Whitt sees cop watching as a formalized version of police sousveillance he has done throughout his life, because as an African American he has had to exist as foreign within a white public sphere (Neely and Samura 2011). Cop watching interrupts the "on-stage" performances by police and forces them to engage in a "dance" that enables the surveiller to co-opt the surveillance techniques for their own gain. The notion of the public for the people of Ferguson according to Whitt has become communalizing, reinforcing a shared notion of public space belonging to and created by the people of the city, not the mechanisms of the state. This is a part of their rightful claim to the public, they are therefore acting out their rights as a citizen to the public arena, and reasserting their rights to citizenship and personhood within a racialised public sphere. Whitt also typifies how sousveillance co-opts Foucauldian disciplinary techniques to resist

the power of the gaze and counter oppressive tactics by the state. This prospect of counter-visuality is one that was just not possible during other revolutionary periods of African American history (Mirzoeff 2011, Harold and Deluca 2005, hooks 2003). Perhaps, in the era of YouTube and Facebook cop watch videos are playing a large part in reconstructing African American narratives of truth and persecution. Cop watching is integral in fashioning a process of counter-visuality with state agents that directly asserts their right to the public sphere and impacts police performance. It challenges the right to look exposing the spheres of low visibility that police officers comfortably work within and thus becomes an effort to change the nature of policing in the process.

The American public sphere still operates on the contestation of the African Americans role through a racialised dialogue (Romano and Raiford 2006). Yet, cop watching has the capability to alter the behaviour of state officers in the space that they are employed to maintain. Cop watching provokes an inter-reliant relationship between African American citizens and the state who both use similar disciplinary techniques, ideas and concepts to contextualise notions of justice and protection. Cop watching is redefining the notion of who creates and sustains the public and for African Americans like David Whitt reaffirming their role within it.

Figure 5: Black Lives Matter 'Die-In' Protest

IV A Record of the Real

This dissertation has explored the contradictions of visuality founded in the relations between African Americans and police officers. It has demonstrated how cop watch footage demands the attention of those who refuse to *see* African American maltreatment by making visible police behaviour. It also locates the act of cop watching as a physical assertion of African American personhood and right to the public space. This final chapter explores how cop watch evidence in its pervasiveness is enabling the creation and maintenance of a record of violence against the black body that is difficult to detract from national narratives and memory. It also explores how the creation and collection of this archive relies on the co-option of disciplinary tactics already used by the police state but for an oppositional type of epistemic justice.

The Archive

Cop watching is based in a digital space that dismisses locational indices and allows people across the USA to contribute to a record of African American experience. Videos are uploaded to websites and social media which provide a platform for them to be stored. Consequently, individuals partake in the creation of an archive for African American experience in public space. Visual scholar Elizabeth Abel argues, Jim crow signage presents its own type of archive of African American treatment in the public sphere, yet one that is severely undocumented (2010). She reasons, even for photographers Jim Crow signage was seen as "too disturbing or not disturbing enough" to allow a more complete record (Abel 2010:103). Memory is an embodied social process that relies on perception and movement built upon sensory and semiotic images (Merleau-Ponty and Lefort 1968, Assman 2011). These mental images of visual division are no longer endemic across the

American landscape and their demise suggests racial prejudice has declined alongside it. The lack of photographic evidence documenting decades of segregation is contributing to a particular sanitised archival memory of the past. However, recent digital advancements have resulted in what Derrida calls 'archive fever' (1996:5) an uptake in the use of the database form that has amplified a societal persistence to record in order to preserve. Hence, as the internet is proliferated with citizen footage documenting police misconduct, its digital traces become an archive for violence against the African American body and reinterpret a fractional collective societal memory.

Figure 6: Discarded Jim Crow Signs

Cop watching situates itself within a visual landscape that has historically underrepresented African American experience in the public sphere. Consequently, the images that it produces are significant in constructing a record and bringing into national memory the literal and structural violence against African Americans. In 2015 Kristen Lavelle examined how elderly Americans recollect memories of segregation and view its resonance

in contemporary race relations. Lavelle claims her respondents actively take part in "whitewashing" (2015:178) the negative impacts segregation by devolving guilt and renouncing accountability (2015). John an interviewee said, "Slavery was probably one of the most dastardly, *horrid* things man has ever done to man, but stop and think…George Washington Carter or Martin Luther King…where would *they* be today? They would've probably never been born if it *hadn't* been for slavery bringing their ancestors – forefathers to this country" (Lavelle 2015:171). Ideas of nationhood rely on impressions of past cultural models including photographs that are seen to be emblems of truth over time (Anderson 1991). The absence of visual records of African American treatment in the public sphere has produced a particular impression of nationhood that feels it has overcome racial issues. John acknowledges the inhumanity of slavery nevertheless proposes a positive interpretation of the history, condemning activists like Jesse Jackson who "won't let the past lie" (2015:171) for continuing to deny a transition into a post-racial era. Cop watching footage enters into a visual landscape where African American experience has been historically omitted or erased from archives (Abel 2013). While the visual remnants of segregation have in large part been destroyed, cop watch videos exist in an infinite space. Their digital mediations enable them to be produced, replicated and shared innumerable times. Therefore, cop watch footage is partaking in the creation of a new archive of African American experience in the public sphere, one that is harder to erase from national memory.

Recreating the Record

Cop watchers are integral in the creation and dissemination of their footage within digital networks. YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter all now have functions that allow users to create video content through these platforms and then share them to a non-local audience (Schaefer and Steinmetz 2013). News outlets even use cop watch footage uploaded to YouTube to re-present stories of police-citizen interactions across the US (Anthony and Thomas 2010). Social media offers a place to produce and maintain cop watch content, and cop watch websites offer resources to help maximise the effect of this content. This ranges from how-to guides to suggesting apps and recommending cameras. Cop watch websites create support networks for those who want to "capture the truth" (Copwatch.org), one even stating "the camera is the new gun" (Copwatch.org). Cop watch websites create databases of archival footage that work similarly to a criminal database, requiring detailed information before entry. One website requires a five step application before a video can be archived, stating "if you want the offending officer to receive more than a slap of the wrist treat this questionnaire like a college entrance exam" (Copwatch.org). Once again cop watching find empowerment in the co-option of police observation tactics. Thus even in digital spheres, cop watchers and the police engage in a "dance" of who can maximise their platforms for their conceptions of justice. The lack of Jim Crow photography may hide the literal and structural violence of history but cop watch content plays a role in reopening a dialogue and pursuing justice. Cop watching is a visual form of activism that puts exposing maltreatment and violence at the front of its agenda (Huey et al 2006). Accordingly, cop watching is allowing citizens to contribute to a visible record of undeniable African American experiences unfettered by the state.

Figure 7: Copwatch.com database page

Saran and Eliza representatives from the cop watch groups in California and New York, reaffirm this required detail in trying to collect the most effective evidence to help the victim. Saran in California says "USB [enabled technology] has given us the ability to upload footage quickly and share". Saran stresses the ability for technology to provide high quality images is key to producing footage that can be used as evidence in the courts to achieve justice. The video footage becomes part of a series of accounts including using "clipboards to document scenes in writing". She demonstrates how technology and its ability to go beyond a peripheral locale is extremely beneficial to cop watch groups, and extends the ability to monitor different aspects of police activity. The reproduction of similar patterns from videos across the US reinforces a similar African American experience in the public sphere, and is a belief capitalised on by the Black Lives Matter movement (BlackLivesMatter.com). The practice of cop watching contributes to defining a sense of communal African American struggle. Eliza in New York concurs, she argues

technology has not created cop watching but cop watching is being carried out differently because of new technology. Eliza said, "I know folks at Facebook NEVER thought someone would use [Facebook] Live to share with the world someone being killed by the cops in front of their child in broad daylight. So I know we as a people we will ALWAYS work with what we have". One aspect of cop watching is to heighten visibility and reverse the panoptic structures of surveillance. One method of challenging the pervasiveness of surveillance is to counter it with the proliferation of citizen content. It is this mass of cop watch content played and replayed, copied and stored across the USA that contributes to showing a different type of African American experience in the public sphere.

Cop watching brings together a group with shared interests to represent their communities (Huey et al 2006). However, the explicit and viral nature of its content reinforce and reawaken a relationship of power between the African American community and the police (Anthony and Thomas 2010). Recreating a fractional photographic archive of historical exclusion from the public sphere with images from the present is provocative, and for African Americans reinforces a struggle for civil rights in the present not just the past (Anthony and Thomas 2010). Filming the police is one aspect of cop watching that ultimately seeks to educate and unify the community. Correspondingly, it contributes to a new record of African American collective struggle "we will ALWAYS work with what we have". By uploading videos of police brutality to networks like YouTube and Facebook cop watchers are partaking in the creation of an archive that allows *anyone* to trace police violence digitally. In this sense, cop watching content continues to contribute towards a record that provokes social action, seen in the aftermath of high profile police brutality cases caught on citizen video, Rodney King (1996), Oscar Grant (2009), Walter Scott (2015), Philando Castile (2016) and Eric Garner (2016). Still, footage alone is not enough to achieve legislative justice because as videos gain in popularity their authenticity is demanded and verified by the laws they aim to subvert.

So What Next?

It is easy to claim the rise of new technologies have within them the inherent ability to bring about democratizing effects (Juris 2012). But, cop watching more explicitly raises the issue of what should and should not be seen in the public. Saran from California says "police officers are opting to wear body cams, which are expensive and not objective – but judges may prefer body cam documentary evidence over cop watching documentary evidence. We will organize and maintain the right to watch". One way police have reacted to this ubiquitous sousveillance and claims of malpractice is through a recent increase in camera-enabled technology (Brucato 2015). This has raised questions regarding which video footage represents reality better, serving to produce a greater hierarchy of filmed content. Consequently, the relationships that the police have with fields of invisibility and visibility are changing quickly and are not homogenous. Technology companies that provide police units with camera equipment like body and taser cameras are now attempting to rearticulate the relationship the police have with visibility. Their stance is particularly noteworthy because it positions the concept of visibility (traditionally a hindrance for the police force which operate in spheres of low visibility), as a positive attribute of modern policing (Brucato 2015). These companies acknowledge widespread citizen sousveillance and argue visibility from the perspective of an officer brings with it greater legitimacy, context and by extension truth. This implies visibility in the hands of the state as an accurate portrayal of reality and exposure in the hands of the citizen as exploitative and misleading.

The archive of brutality that cop watching is creating has the instrumental power to mobilise, however it has not reduced the power of the state infrastructures it serves to expose (Huey et al 2006). On social media cop watch videos are interpreted as the most accurate account of the observed events, as the narrator is often uninvolved in the scene

(Schaefer and Steinmetz 2013). Cop watch videos have also become significant in impacting and engaging with an online community (Schaefer and Steinmetz 2013), but this sense of validity and truth does not necessarily continue when offered as evidence in police cases (Noble 2014). The police and legal systems assess visual evidence in a way that carries an implicit politics that reinforces insular notions of validity and protects the actions of 'habituated (Haggerty and Sandhu 2015) officers. One which hinders the transformative potential of cop watching of capturing the real, because the real must be validated by the state. Cop watching can be seen to be exposing police actions through visibility but the state ultimately determines the status of this visibility in a court of law, a space traditionally slow to respond to the legitimacy of African American personhood.

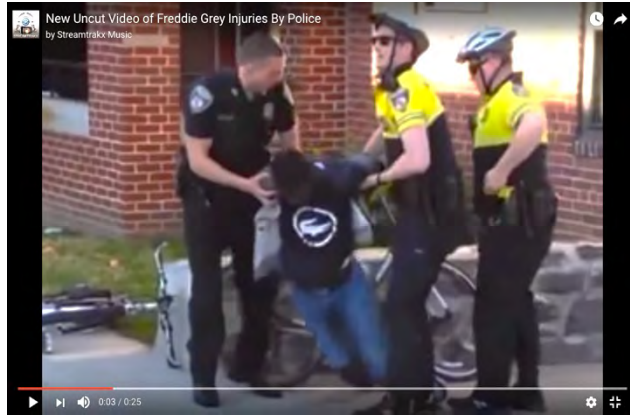**Oscar Grant (2009)**

Kajieme Powell (2014)

Phillip White (2015)

Walter Scott (2015)

Freddie Grey (2015)

Alton Sterling (2016)

Philando Castile (2016)

Eric Garner (2016)

Figure 8: Tiles of Cop watching footage

CONCLUSION

This dissertation, has demonstrated how cop watching intersects with notions of the public and elucidated how it might inform our understanding of contemporary American race relations. It has analysed the trajectory of cop watching from the physical assertion of presence in public space to its storage and replication within digital networks. In doing so, it reconceptualises socio-historical understandings of African American and police interactions in relation to an emerging visual public sphere, where both simultaneously employ disciplinary tactics performatively. For African Americans cop watching is momentarily altering the bounds of public and private space, by creating the facility to make visible what is often hidden from view, and enabling a demand for accountability directly from the state (Gates 2012). Subsequently, cop watchers and the police are reliant on remaining in a "dance of staying safe" where visibility however unstable is power. Thus, for African Americans the public sphere and space continues to be a place where their identity is shaped, performed and qualified.

These findings are in line with surveillance research that views the police as working within particular dynamics of visibility (Goldsmith 2010, Thompson 2005. Haggerty and Sandhu 2014, Bradshaw 2013). However, this dissertation differs significantly by analysing how this visibility interacts with historical boundaries of vision in the African American community, and their relationships to the public sphere. This dissertation informs debate about how historical structures of division continue to reappear in contemporary American racial politics. However, these findings should not be taken as evidence to represent an all-encompassing African American experience, as African American identities are multifarious and diverse.

Further research exploring the phenomenon of cop watching with the backdrop of these ideas would be promising. In the era of President Trump and a global movement to

the right, it is more important than ever to consider how structures that we take for granted are constructed through a historical lens. It is also vital that anthropological methods are used to find ways to overcome divisive politics and see commonality when there is some. Sontag asserts, "photographs of the suffering and martyrdom of a people are more than reminders of death…they invoke miracles of survival" (2003:78). Cop watching in practice and content can be seen to represent a "miracle of survival" (2003:78), empowering communities' to document their own victimisation, uncorrupted, at that moment, from the dominance of the state.

Figure 13: Times Magazine Cover May 11th 2015

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Non-Textual References

Figure 1.   Phone Footage Eric Garner. (2016). [Image] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpGxagKOkv8&t=287s [Accessed 19 Oct. 2016].

Figure 2.   *Young Woman at Protest*. (2017). [Image] Available at: http://wearenotmad.com/i-cant-breathe [Accessed 19 October 2016].

Figure 3.   Abel, E., (2010). African American using segregated water fountain [Image]. In *signs of the times: the visual politics of Jim* Crow pp. 293

Figure 4.   London School of Economics. (2017). Panopticon Penitentiary [Image]. *Available at:* http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/03/03/transcribe-bentham-open-publications/ [Accessed 19 October 2016]

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Figure 6.   Jet Magazine., (2017). Emmett and Maimie Till [Image]. Available at: http://jetcityorange.com/emmett-till/ [Accessed 19 October 2016].

Figure 7.   *Snapshot of Philando Castile*. (2016). [Image] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxyQtvv_1i8 [Accessed 19 October 2016].

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Figure 12.   Promotional image copwatch.com. (2015). [Image]. Available at:

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Figure 13.   *Assortment of stills from video footage.*

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Appendix

Transcription of Video from figure 1 (2:20-5:50 minutes)

The video can also be accessed via this link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7iTwgDc8n0&feature=youtu.be

Sunday 17th July 2016
Approximately 3:30pm
202 Bay Street Tompkinsville, Staten Island, New York.
In front of a beauty products store.

Garner: Every time you see me, you want to mess with me. I'm tired of it. It stops today…Everyone standing here will tell you I didn't do nothing. I did not sell nothing. Because, every time you see me, you want to harass me. You want to stop me tell me I'm selling cigarettes. I'm minding my business, officer, I'm minding my business please just leave me alone. I told you the last time, please just leave me alone. I did not do anything, if I was selling cigarettes I wouldn't be sitting right here.

[Muffled speech]

Garner: Go, go, go! I did nothing. I did nothing. I did nothing.

[Muffled speech]

Garner: Do not touch me. Do not touch me please. Please, don't touch me. Do not touch me.

[Four officers wrestle Garner to the ground]

An officer: Put your hands behind your back!

Garner: I can't breathe. I can't breathe. I can't breathe. I can't breathe. I can't breathe. I can't breathe. I can't breathe.

Interview Questions

- I've looked at the ████████ Copwatch website but can you tell me in your own words what ████████ cop watch are aiming to do?

- What motivated you to get involved with the organisation? Is this similar for many others?

- Have there been any major changes in the practices of ████████ cop watch since it began?

- How often do you engage in cop watching?

- How many people are involved in ████████ cop watch? How did you get to know each other?

- How does it feel to cop watch? Have there been any unexpected consequences of cop watching for you?

- What do you think the effect of the racial identity of cop watchers is on cop watching itself and how it is understood?

- What has the effect been on those African Americans who engage in cop watching?

- What role do you think cop watching plays in race politics in America today?

- What technologies do you use for cop watching.? What has and has not worked well while cop watching? Has this changed?

- How do you see cop watching developing in the future?

- Are there particular ways in which you think technology will limit or extend cop watching in the future?

- What do you think the main effects of cop watching have been?

- Does anyone benefit from cop watching, if so who?

- How have the police responded to your cop watch patrols?

- How aware are police that they are being watched?

- How do you decide which police to target?

- Have you had to face any legal issues about using and circulating the images?

- If you have had legal issues with your content how have you dealt with this?