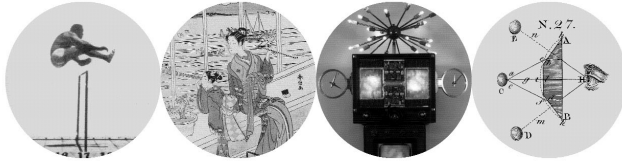# journal of visual culture

Envisioning the Homefront: Militarization, Tracking and Security Culture[1]

Jordan Crandall (in conversation with John Armitage)

Abstract

As an artist and media theorist, Jordan Crandall is concerned primarily with conceptualizing the confluences of media technologies and computerized military programs for tracking, identifying and targeting. Influenced by the writings of Paul Virilio, Henri Bergson, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on the visual, Crandall's work shares similar concerns with that of Brian Massumi, Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway. These concerns are much in evidence in his recent projects, such as *Drive* (1998–2000), *Heatseeking* (2000), *Trigger* (2002) and *Homefront* (2005). Through these and other installations, artworks and critical writings, and as an active and influential assistant professor at the University of California, Crandall's work is having a significant impact on numerous areas of enquiry, including visual culture, contemporary critical cultural theory and politics. Currently, he is investigating the relationships between movement and mediation, embodiment and representation. Here, Crandall speaks about these and related issues with John Armitage.

Keywords
control • critical strategies • drive • homefront • militarization • movement • tracking

John Armitage (JA): I would like to begin this interview by asking: how did growing up in central Florida, the sunshine state, the theme-park state, the state with no visible sense of history, impact upon the emergence of your visual arts practice?

Jordan Crandall (JC): I spent my childhood in Detroit and so I was partly conditioned by the culture of the industrial north. We moved to Florida in

the 1970s to an enormous tract home development in the midst of acres of orange groves. In my studies I developed two major strands of interest: one went through mathematics and architecture, and the other went through acting and performance. One was about structural thinking, maps and organizational systems and the other was about embodiment, improvisation and inhabiting a role. So my orientation was a combination of architecture and theater. But magazines were what ignited my interest in visual culture. In the land of no culture, magazines were my portals to the world. I was especially fascinated by *Interview*, around 1980. I decided at that time to start my own magazine. That is how I got into visual art. I started an art and culture magazine called *Splash* in 1982 and moved it to New York two years later. For that first issue, I did a big interview with Andy Warhol. In a way, Warhol helped me get to New York. I published *Splash* there throughout the late 1980s. Then I started the multimedia journal *Blast*, in 1991. Now I'm laying the groundwork for *Version*, a radically decentralized journal of art, philosophy, culture and science studies that will circulate in 'brand' space. I've always been interested in the magazine as an organizational system and as an artistic form. Much of my writing in the 1990s was theorizing about editorial relations and publication space. I learned about critical culture by researching material for these journals. So I've always worked through critical and theoretical issues in an active way. I've tried to inhabit them as if learning a sport, while concentrating on the organizational protocols, the rules of the game.

JA: You are clearly working within a modernist tradition of critical inquiry that deals with technology, representation and embodiment – an area of inquiry that is engaged with the semiotics of the image, as well as the history of imaging technologies and media forms, as they arise through embodied practices, societal forces and domains of knowledge. But your own artistic and theoretical approach is concerned with questions of militarization and movement. To what extent are these separate questions or do they overlap, in relation to issues related to tracking, for example?

JC: Militarization is a way to confront issues of power. It is a potent combination of politico-territorial logic and market-driven logic and a way to deal with assemblages of enforcement and control, whether in terms of ideology, technology, territory or economy. It's a way of dealing with ontologies of enemy and ally and with issues of constitutive antagonism, where internal solidarities cohere against external threats and therefore require such threats. It is a way of looking at how techniques of combat influence cultural forms. I'm influenced by the work that Manuel De Landa (1991) and Paul Virilio (1989) have done in theorizing the effects of military forms of organization. I'm interested in what happens to issues of representation, visuality and the body when you look through this lens; how military logic enters into the field of representation and the very structure of perception. Here you must bring militaristic issues down to the homefront, dealing with personal and psychic defenses and ground-level practices of subjectivization.

The second approach, through the scrim of movement, is intended to find a way out of the semiotic bunker. This involves breaking out of a reliance upon

discourse-based analyses and dealing with the motivational and affective dimensions of image reception. I'm interested in seeing linguistic positionality as a special case of movement or, in other words, as secondary to movement. I'm interested in processual infrastructures and in formats of coordination and alignment. I'm interested in operative rhythmics, choreographic metaphors, habits, routines. Here we have to talk also about viscerality and proprioception and issues of sensation, intensity and affect. I'm very much influenced in the work that Brian Massumi (2002) has done in *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. He is developing a new philosophy of action that works through Spinoza's (1985[1677]) *The Ethics* and Bergson's (1998[1911]) *Creative Evolution*. He works through these ideas by way of Deleuze (1988, 1991) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987), with whose work he has long been engaged. He is looking at new registers of meaning that can account for movement, sensation and incipience, new ways in which forms of passage-presence can enter into theoretical discourse.

And, yes, militarization and movement do intersect through the activity of tracking. I'm interested in a syntax of tracking and the differences between tracking and watching.

I deal with these issues on multiple fronts. I make video installations, organize discursive projects, edit a journal, teach, lecture and write. These activities involve different degrees of interpretation and engagement, poetics and politics. My video installations, for example, are often probing into a difficult psycho-erotic realm that doesn't square with my more politically oriented organizational work. And even in one arena, such as writing, I will often combine a critical approach with a more affirmative and experimental one.

JA: Perhaps we could investigate the question of militarization a little more? What triggered your concern with problems of power and hostility, of battlefield representations and militarized perception as a visual artist and theorist?

JC: I began by looking at the history of cinema and the contemporary conditions of surveillance technology. I was concerned about how logics of control entered into the field of representation, how they were internalized in new standards of perceptual and physical adequacy. Rather than entering into artistic and critical discourses primarily through the axes of economy, technology or the history of representation, I found it productive to look through the lens of militarization. This requires one to historicize, of course, and someone like Virilio (1989) is there to remind us of the role that warfare has always played in the organization of space, whether in terms of the built environment or the visual field. As we enter this territory, we have to be specific, we can't just talk of military power without situating it within a complex of factors, which includes systems of exchange, forms of institutionalized knowledge, social practices and procedures of subjectification. We can't reify military technology as a determinant, nor can we posit it as an unchanging, continuous *a priori* viewer or visual condition outside of its historical specificity. Even though he hardly mentions warfare, Jonathan Crary's (1992)

Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century is an extremely important work in this regard. Crary reminds us how problems of observation and representation must always be seen in terms of historically specific, interlocking fields of power, knowledge and practice. Striking a related note, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) remind us that a weapon is nothing outside of the combat organization with which it is bound up.

That said, there is the issue, at this moment in time, of a historic build-up of military power in the western world, on the most extraordinary scale. Whether we see it in terms of Hardt and Negri's (2000) *Empire* or Harvey's (2003) *The New Imperialism*, we are compelled to look at the factors which have given rise to a resurgent militarization and to rethink the nature of power in the new global landscape. A substantive investigation of visuality and representation will always lead you to questions of power. At its core, this is what my work is about. Issues of power can be productively addressed in terms of militarization because of the urgencies of the contemporary moment. Militarization is a field of articulation that carries its own logic of ordering the world. It runs on a productive economy of fear: the fear of an omnipresent enemy who could be anywhere, strike at any time and who in fact could be 'among us'. It also runs on an economy of desire, whether oriented around consumer products, convenience, moral good, or freedom itself. It's tied into the media and entertainment industries and very much a player in the youth-driven field of video game culture. It's a powerful rhetorical frame and a machine of territorialization, indoctrination and recruitment. But again, we're not just talking about the Pentagon.

JA: But what of the question of movement in relation to the activity of tracking as a form of strategic seeing, orchestrated with the aid of technology? What is it exactly that tracking identifies or objectifies? Is it concerned with an understanding of behavior? The analysis and codification of movement? And how, if at all, is tracking linked to issues of visual representation?

JC: When we track, we want to understand how and at what rate an object moves for the purpose of identifying it and either influencing its movement or intercepting it in some way. Tracking is an anticipatory form of seeing – a form of seeing that is always ahead of itself. Like in a sport, when you have to look past the ball, not directly at it.

We are often the objects of tracking. Tracking is a mode of vision through which we are seen and accounted for. It is easy to understand how this happens on the web or with locative media, for example. Our position, our identity, is construed through the activity of tracking our buying patterns and lifestyle choices. We are increasingly subjected to a form of being seen that knows us first and faster. We identify ourselves through its representational matrices, which move toward the status of a condition. So we are talking about something that is not unidirectional but circuitous. It is not only a form of control: it is a medium of self-reflection and self-awareness. Contrary to much political discourse, it is not always seen by us as intrusive. It can be a comforting gaze, part of a new sociality and filled with erotic charge.

This seems very different from what we think of as everyday seeing. However, seeing, again, always involves questions of technology and power. All forms of technically augmented vision are gradually incorporated by the body. As we know from Foucault (1977) and Lacan (1978) and others, we internalize and define ourselves through such technics of reciprocal seeing. To deal with the difference between seeing and tracking on a deeper level you have to move away from purely technical distinctions and confront questions of intention, agency, coercion and human–machine relations. This of course extends many investigations of modernism and visual studies. It moves away from a focus on perspective and position towards one of movement-flow; it involves questions of human–machine relations and the internalization of technological forms; it extends investigations on power, reciprocal vision and the Lacanian gaze; and finally, it foregrounds contemporary issues of control, subordination and scopophilia, especially in a post-optical sense.

JA: I am keen to explore your contention that citizens do not always perceive tracking as an intrusively politicized form of movement. Are you suggesting that the emerging security culture in the US is fueled by a need for the comforting gaze and a disciplinary father figure, a figure that not only protects but also sheaths citizens in a material-semiotic barrier against potential harm within the confines of the control society?

JC: To be watched and tracked is to be cared for and this comforting gaze carries with it an erotic charge. Being-seen is an ontological necessity; we strive to be accounted for within the dominant representational matrices of our time. We are not only talking about a gaze that is intrusive and controlling. We are talking about a gaze that provides the condition for action – the gaze for which one acts. Here, again, Lacan (1978) is prescient. The question is not only: 'Who is looking at me?', but also something like: 'Through what acts of seeing am I realized? What gaze – real or imagined – charges me, fills me, constitutes me?' This tracking-gaze is not necessarily that of the corporation or the state: it's also a collective tracking, a social matrix in which one assumes a position and becomes accounted for by one's peers in a network. It is a convenience- and security-driven network ontology that requires its own threatening other. Mobile phones will soon incorporate global positioning systems (GPS) and allow access to location-based media services. These services could become dominant players in the emerging location-aware landscape, riding the wave of security desires. In a culture of fear and paranoia, you want people to know your location in case 'something happens'. Danger is just around the corner. One can easily say that dangers are manufactured in order to sell the comforting means of their assuagement. But it is more complicated than this, because the potential of danger has a strong erotic dimension. Beneath the surfaces of decorum, danger is sought out. The unthinkable event becomes an object of fantasy. Following Zizek (2002), we have to look to the fantasmatic backgrounds that call forth the danger and which rely upon the potential of the catastrophic. When the catastrophe occurs, we are shocked not by its severity, but by the occasion of our innermost fantasy standing revealed.

Figure 1 *Drive*, 1998–2000. © Copyright Jordan Crandall.

At least in the US, the observing gaze is no longer something that one avoids; rather, it is something that one courts. We only know ourselves through media self-reflection. As Ursula Frohne (2002) suggests, the media *mise-en-scène* has become the sole authenticating construct of our time, the background against which subjectivity and social relations are formed. You may think, 'Well, tracking is not yet "media"' – that is, it does not resolve into a recognizable surface of representation. But it is incipient media, becoming-media. It is already part of the infrastructural condition of media.

It's important to take a text such as Deleuze's (1995) 'Postscript on Control Societies' and square it with the kind of self-medialization that we now find in media-rich cultures. That is, to understand control in terms of a mediology that accounts for Warhol, reality television and the new online friendship networks such as Friendster. It is important to account for the desires for such planned online applications as LifeLog or MyLifeBits, which build on the vast database called the Memex that Vannevar Bush (1996) posited in 1945. These applications are basically programs that gather every conceivable bit of information about a person's life. One would willingly archive one's entire life online and make it searchable. In this new landscape, to think about 'Big Brother' is to completely miss the mark and I don't even know that Foucauldian concepts such as panopticism do the job (especially with the advent of biometric forms of control), although it is extremely helpful to look back on Foucault's analysis of how the panoptic machinery is a trap of our own doing. A control society emerges through forces and practices – institutional forces and practices as well as social forces and horizontal practices of observation where we watch each other, where the gaze is also a self-monitoring one. Control is continually interesting because it is always something more and less than simply observation. It adds a dimension of power, a vector of power that informs the visual field. But it is never quite clear who is controlling whom and to what degree we acquiesce, or take pleasure. What is the difference between observation and surveillance? When does seeing become policing? Where does control turn into submission?

In his introductory essay to my *Drive* (Crandall, 2002a) book, Peter Weibel (2002) writes that, with the aid of security cultures and reality entertainment media, public and social life is besieged with newly-legitimized exhibitionistic and voyeuristic modes of behavior. He says that exhibitionistic and voyeuristic pleasures have moved into new zones whose gestalt is still undetermined. Morphologies of desire appear daily in new forms. I am interested in the theater of drives that exists here.

JA: Perhaps, then, this is a suitable moment to discuss your *Drive* book that was occasioned by your seven-part video installation of the same name and commissioned by Peter Weibel for the Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum in Graz in 2000. What impelled you to focus on drive as a concept, by which I mean how did your interest in looking at technological, bodily and psychic movement come together as a project?

JC: The term 'drive' was perfect for me because it references all of these. Highlighting motivational power, it references the technical machineries of

movement, the actions of the body and the psychic compulsions that initiate and register them. My approach was to look historically at the circuit of technology, representation and embodiment and to develop visual and written material that would help to situate movement – as codified, compelled and enacted – within this circuit. To this end, I wanted to integrate traditional film technology with new military-derived technologies of control. I looked at the late 19th-century proto-cinematic photography of Etienne-Jules Marey and compared it to the movement-processing techniques of the late Cold War era. I thought about the shift from presentation to processing – that is, the shift from the representation of movement understood in terms of the motorized sequence of still frames, to the strategic processing of movement, understood as codified interventions into the field of the image and the phenomenal world. I shot much of the project in 8mm and 16mm black and white film and ran certain sequences through a military motion-processing program that was originally developed for tracking missiles. You see the shift from movement as understood cinematically through the staccato of the cinematic apparatus, to movement as understood militarily through the staccato of the computational infrastructure. You don't only see it, however – you *feel* it. In other sequences of *Drive* I used a night vision lens developed by ITT, which has been the largest supplier of such equipment to the US military since Vietnam. I combined this with footage that I shot on 16mm black and white in the style of impressionist film. On another, I used a hand-cranked camera to shoot a sequence inspired by Jean Cocteau's *The Blood of a Poet* (1930) and Jean-François Lyotard's figure of the 'matrix', as interpreted by Rosalind Krauss (1993). Briefly, the matrix is a form that figures recurrence. It is a rhythmic force that underlies and undercuts the optical. These visual–rhythmic formats were held together in combinatory sequences and in the form of a 'soft montage', where they can play out across multiple screens in installation space.

My subject matter in *Drive* was taken from highly intimate scenes in the domestic imaginary. Ordinary tasks, habits, routines as they play out across ideological, fantastic and semi-mythical spaces. What do all of these combinations do? They allow me to traffic between the formal, infrastructural and psychological levels and to foreground the machineries of movement. Through their interplay, they allow me to ask: what are the agencies of movement? How is movement compelled, initiated, codified, controlled? What kinds of movement uphold, harness, or interfere with the visual? The project allowed me to historicize, embedding visual systems within regimes of observation and management. And it allowed me to foreground the libidinous dimensions of observation, which are always present. It allowed me to move beyond the purely representational or semiotic and explore vectors of desire, magnitude and intensity-meaning.

JA: How does your artistic practice connect with questions of political intervention, with issues of critical strategy and routes of action? I am aware, of course, that you are drawn to the approach of people who are doing science (rather than visual) studies, for example Latour's (1991) *We Have Never Been Modern* and Haraway's (1997) *Modest_Witness*. Haraway, for example, writes
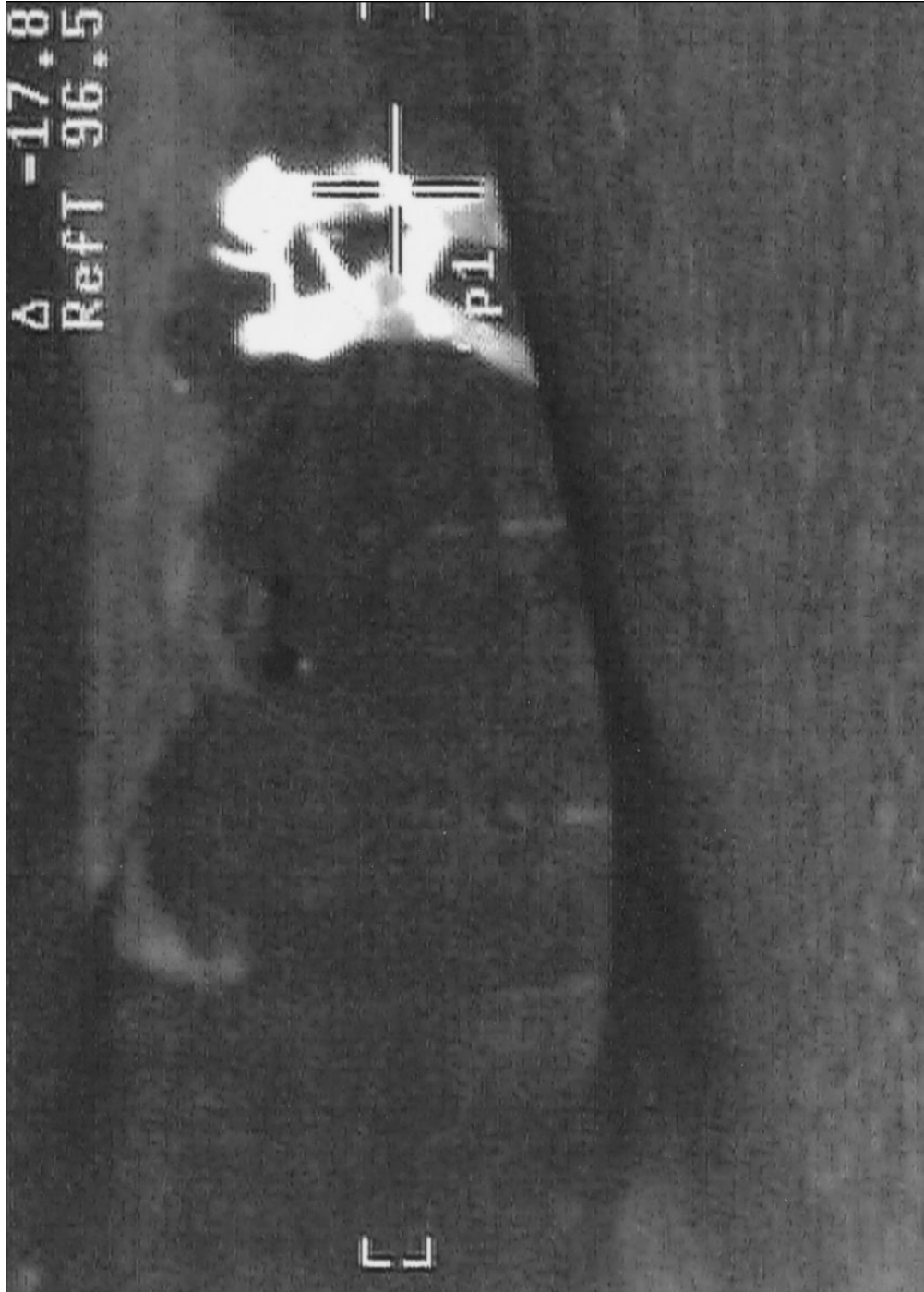
Figure 3 *Heatseeking*, 2000 © Copyright Jordan Crandall.

Figure 4 *Under Fire*, 2004. © Copyright Jordan Crandall.

about the possibilities of active intervention into the knowledge–power practices that both inscribe and materialize the world. But she develops her analysis from a profoundly implicated position in which there is no outside. How do your recent projects, such as *Under Fire* (2004) and *Homefront* (2005), respond to the current situation where there are only new mobilizations and alignments within the networks, where we are already enmeshed as material-semiotic entities?

JC: Both Haraway and Latour are interested in kinship networks, new ways of reclaiming the imaginary and the new problematics of agency that emerge when you hybridize humans, machines and codes. It's not only who is speaking, but *what* is speaking. They move toward non-anthropocentric positions, considering objects as actors and asking what effects such objects are mobilizing. So the 'critical strategy' moves from negativity to reinvention, from distance to implication. The political project is that of generating new frames of reference for individual and collective action. We forget about how the kinds of narratives we use shape our history and the potential for category transformation that we hold, as specialists in the analysis of communication forms. In *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences*, Bowker and Star (1999) write about the role that categories and standards play in the organization of reality and hint at the political potentials of intervention within this infrastructural scaffolding. Historical classifications of disease and race, for example, lay the foundation for what is to become visible. Politically, you don't have to limit yourself to a debate on what is already visible. You can intervene within the framing mechanisms by which standards and categories are determined. This is a big criticism of the Left right now in America. It is not good at framing – it is playing by the terms that have already been established by the Right, rather than productively questioning the mechanisms by which those terms have been set. It is reactionary rather than inventive.

Can we move to a more affirmative and inventive model in critical culture, where we are called to *inhabit* as well as *interpret* cultural landscapes? This is one of the reasons that *Version* – the new 'journal' that I am founding – is working across visual, cultural and science studies. Massumi writes how the humanities could be put in a position of having to continually renegotiate its relations with the sciences. If we took on this responsibility, I wonder to what extent our orientations would change.

I'm also very much dedicated to developing projects such as *Under Fire* (Crandall, 2004), commissioned by the Witte de With center for contemporary art in Rotterdam. The aim of this ongoing project – which combines online forums, conferences, presentations and a series of books – is to explore the organization and representation of armed conflicts today. But rather than engaging participation solely from the critical and academic cultures of the West, it engages participation from individuals and groups that we can consider as having taken a different path to modernity and thus who don't necessarily work from the historical narratives of western culture. It opens up a discursive terrain whose frames have to be continually negotiated. It is a vital way of exploring the political dimension of representation in a globalized world and especially of avoiding, as we find with much discourse

around the war on terror, of miming the frames of reference that are part of the problem. For example, you find the widespread use of the term 'terrorism' without its deconstruction. It's a nebulous, unproductive and highly selective concept. Said (2001) prefers to abandon the term and focus on forms of violence that are produced by a politics of identity, for example, in a way that requires active translation among political languages and the development of a historical counter-semantics. In her book *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (2003), Susan Buck-Morss, who was one of my early collaborators on *Under Fire*, situates Islamist critical discourses in relation to the contemporary post-colonial discourses of the West. She says that we have to rethink the entire project of politics within the changed conditions of an emergent global public sphere.

One of the participants in the *Under Fire* forum, Harel Shapira, wrote that we need a politics of the everyday that is not a separate category from public political work. That is, a 'politics' that is prior to 'the political'. We say that we are demonstrating for a cause, or engaging in activist work or political action of some kind, and then we go home. But what if politics cannot be relegated to a different space? I am interested in a politics of the everyday, in this sense. This is why, in my video work, my site of investigation is always the domestic, the personal and the intimate relations between people. In *Trigger* (2002b), for example, I focused on a highly intimate combat scene between two 'domestic soldiers' who hunt one another in their own backyards. Similarly, my current project, *Homefront*, is about the dynamic between two people, a man and a woman, who traffic between identities and roles, both vis-a-vis each other and the audience. The critical strategies and political engagements have to play out within action, gesture, characterization and camera dynamic. There is a politics of the camera – in its orientation, in what it stands in for, in who sees through it. There is a politics of the interpersonal and the erotic and an exploration of the *fantasmatic supports* of the actors.

JA: Yet *Homefront* also sees you working with three distinct types of contemporary visualization in the form of live action policing, video surveillance and machine vision. Is the connection between these three formats that they aim at identifying 'deviant behavior'? Or is it that they carry with them their own assumptions, their own specific ways of ordering reality?

JC: When we see through these formats, we sense that a crime is imminent. Those who are depicted onscreen are implicitly guilty. In fact, we never see video surveillance unless we are looking for the details of a crime. It documents a crime that has already occurred, for which, in reviewing the footage, we look for clues. Video surveillance is of a different temporal order than cinema. It anticipates a deviation and simply records over itself until such a deviation occurs. It builds on a future in which it is already a past. And generally, it is an unassailable past, for surveillance camera footage is seen as truthful, reliable evidence: an unbiased witness, with no human at the helm, the surveillance camera is seen to document fact. We can locate a rhetorical function of the surveillance image, which is very different from that of the cinematic image.
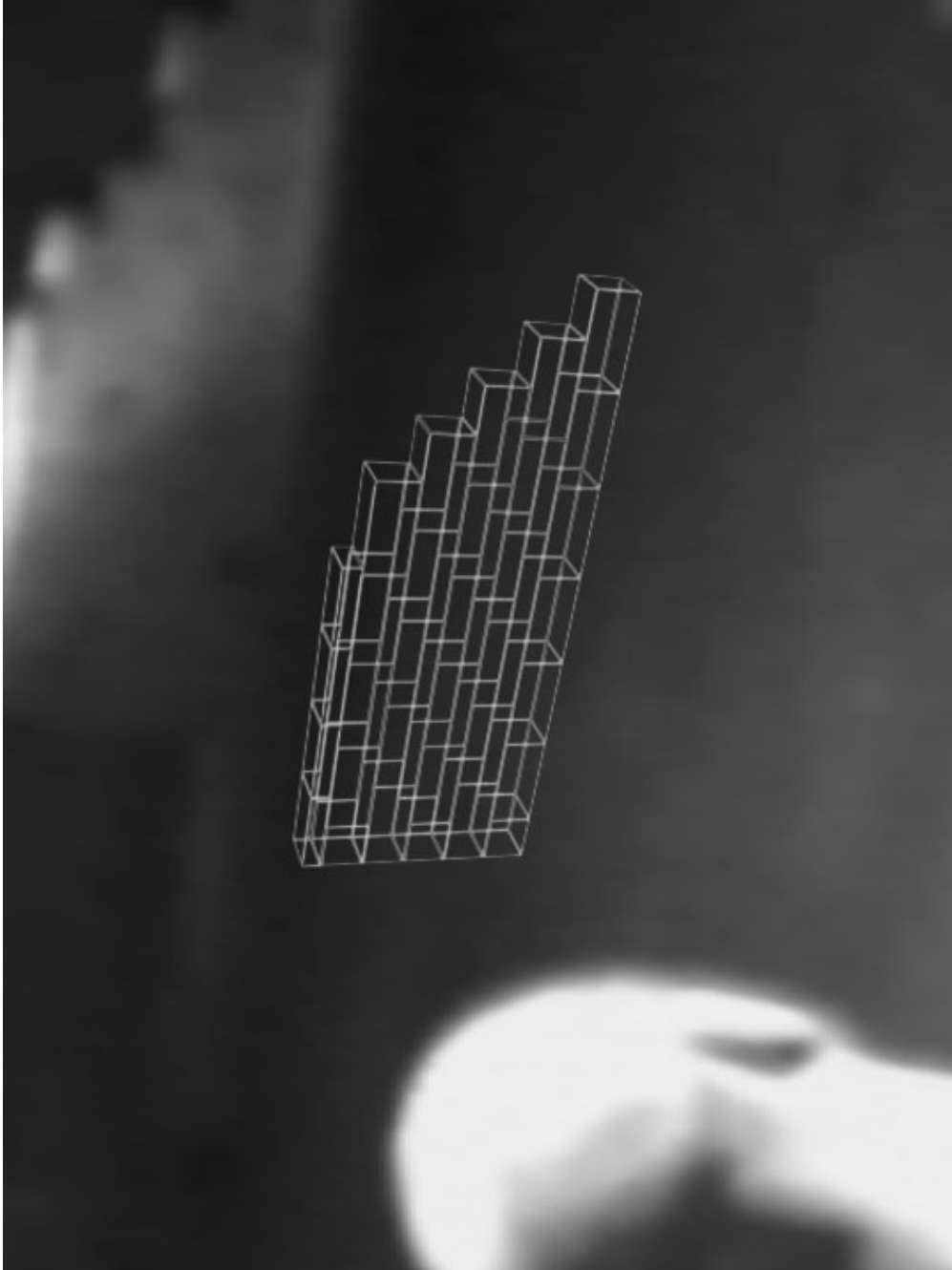
Figure 5 *Trigger*, 2002. © Copyright Jordan Crandall.

Figure 7 *Trigger*, 2002. © Copyright Jordan Crandall.

With *Homefront* I am interested in this rhetorical function of the monitoring image, whether in terms of reality shows, surveillance or machine vision. However, I do not stop there. As I mentioned earlier, surveillance, monitoring and tracking systems are not only technologies of control – they are media of self-reflection and self-awareness. If you are aware of a surveillance camera looking at you, for example, you can sense a feeling of incipient guilt. You have access to a dimension in which you could be guilty and this awareness affects your behavior. Identity coalesces through these systems and in relation to their signifying, ordering and classifying paradigms (guilt/innocence). Therefore, in *Homefront*, the conditions of the media fuel the dynamics between the two actors and within the subjective worlds of each actor. These conditions help determine the relationships that we, as viewers, have with the characters, as well as the reality–representation dynamic that these characters negotiate. The actors try to know each other and themselves in the same way that we try to know them, orchestrated within the conditions of contemporary monitoring. They suspect each other; we suspect them. In this sense *Homefront* is strongly influenced by Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966), a film that is as much about the conditions of the representational systems through which identity is orchestrated as it is about the characters themselves. In certain ways *Homefront* is a *Persona* for the post-9/11 world.

JA: But why is it so important for you to explore identifications and how friend/enemy distinctions are determined in the present post-Cold War period in *Homefront*? Is it simply because we no longer have the same kinds of territorial and ideological divisions? Or is it that we need to probe more deeply into the realm of the unconscious and into the realms of fantasy and myth, in order to see how reality is an agglomeration of multiple registers of meaning?

JC: As critics, we trap ourselves in dealing with ideology as if it were the only register. *Homefront* explores the role that desire, suspicion and fear play in the contemporary ordering of reality and the ways in which we identify and form ourselves within a culture of preventive war and presumptive suspicion. As always, identity and embodiment are about processes of incipience or becoming as much as they are about categorical distinction, and hostility arises as much out of the fear of our own dissolution as it does out of a fear of the other. As Klaus Theweleit (1989) would say, the 'front' is not only the place of violent contestation, but the site of the body's resistance to the threat of its self-disintegration. In a monitored and hypermediated culture, we are increasingly second-guessing ourselves. We say to ourselves that, if I do this, how will my actions be interpreted? Could it be taken the wrong way? (Think of the situation at an airport, where you are acutely aware of whether your actions could be read as 'suspicious'.) There is a heightened awareness of how one's actions intersect with systems of signification and of how they could be read, and this line of thinking shapes one's action in the here-and-now. New geometries of desire, fear and latent or unconscious transgression appear, prompting what Baudrillard (2002: 20) calls 'an unconscious form of potential, veiled, carefully repressed criminality'. Such a criminal unconscious is always capable of surfacing, or at least 'thrilling secretly' to

the spectacle of transgression. One unexpected outcome of the emerging security culture will be the production of *more* criminal behavior.

With *Homefront* I am keeping the torch alive, that we need to be asking new questions about the internalization of control. And with this, there is the need for the development of a new visual grammar, a new syntax of the moving image, that is able to account for the multiplicity of viewing situations and agencies that we find in a heavily monitored and mediatized culture.

JA: I'm curious as to how a project like *Homefront* is realized in practice. I realize that you always begin by drawing structural diagrams, which help you to visualize the dynamics of a project. But what is the status of these diagrams? Are they a kind of theory-writing, suggesting relations between objects, schemes, infrastructures, images, systems and conditions of viewership? Or do they come out of your combined architectural and performance background in movement, embodiment, enaction and enstagement?

JC: Yes – they function as a performative analysis. While I am developing these structural diagrams, I try to flesh out the ideas, instantiate them, in order to begin to develop actual scenarios. These sketches are the hidden substrata of the storyboards for the video. As I begin to visualize the project, there are multiple tracks to keep in play: those of characterization, architecture, rhythm and visual technology. I then finalize the storyboards and move into production on the video, beginning to assemble my cast and crew.

Casting is a big step, because you have to think very carefully about how to embody these characters. What physical qualities will they have, what is their race and gender? How will they act? I work very closely with my actors to develop their roles. Here there is no room for theory – you immediately have to weigh each concept in terms of its material clarity and its potential for embodied action. You have to translate everything into the language of character motivation. You can't quote Foucault. You have to give them workable material. Who is this character, what does she want, what is she afraid of, what does she say to her lover? How does she move? Why does she turn away at this moment? Any conceptual dialogue has to be wrestled to the ground in order to sound like something that a person would say. Anything that is too theoretical is immediately out of place, like a dead weight in the room. Here you are reminded of the enormous differences between writing and speaking, or the desktop and the stage.

In the final piece, the theory has to become something that is not determined linguistically but which arises in a complex interplay among representation, movement and intensity. You realize the extent to which theory needs to be coupled with action, or at least infused with its potential. There are so many vectors in play other than that of the purely linguistic or representational. You have to embody the theory and, in a sense, dissolve it, only to let a new kind of theoretical speech arise. You have to abandon speech only to let a new speech occur and from an unlikely place. So in this sense, I don't use video installation to argue a point. Rather, I use it to tease out content that I simply could not express otherwise.

JA: Finally, critics may say that whilst your installation projects are extremely appealing, there is however a sense that they circulate in two different environments and audiences. One environment consists of audiences that are interested in technology, networking and new media. The other environment consists of audiences who are entering into the work from a western philosophical tradition and who are interested in visual art and visual studies. Does the work function differently in both environments? For example, can the same image be seen in terms of information aesthetics on the one hand, and in terms of the history of the projected image in contemporary art on the other?

JC: Within each environment, there are different types of audiences. There are those whose orientations are determined by market value, filtered through institutions, galleries and art fairs. And there are those whose orientations are determined by the work's functions within critical and intellectual markets. Even within these categories, one has to be specific. For example, discourses of German media art theory and American art criticism rarely intersect and have completely different priorities. Some of my audience comes from architecture and urban studies – in fact my gallery in New York has been showing this kind of work for several years now. I have collaborated with many architects such as Keller Easterling, whom I worked with to develop my book *Suspension* (1997) for Documenta X. Architecture can consist of a much broader field of engagement with commercial culture and not be invested in the same kinds of critical concerns as those who are working within the tradition of modern art and visual studies.

There is also the issue of political import, which is always a problem for artwork that attempts to negotiate a politics–poetics divide. When you take this route, you end up not satisfying anyone. Basically, it can come down to this: am I 'doing' politics, or simply aestheticizing it? What further complicates matters is the fact that I am dealing with eroticism. As I mentioned earlier, my work deals with new morphologies of desire, especially in its couplings with anxiety. In his introduction to my *Drive* book, Peter Weibel wrote that geometries of terror and voyeurism, and pleasure and fear, are shaping the topology of contemporary and future society. He continues that: 'Crandall is the first artist who gives us a vision of this geometry, an insight into a dark zone of new pleasures and pains within a techno-militaristic controlled society' (2002: 8). It is extremely uncomfortable for audiences to confront their own libidinous investments in violence, and they can find in my work a difficult positioning of the dynamics behind their own voyeuristic pleasure. The work can be dismissed, or relegated to the category of the pornographic. In his review of my installation of *Trigger* at Henry Urbach Gallery, the *New York Times* critic Ken Johnson described it as a 'sermon about masculinity, sex, surveillance and violence' which is 'part soft-core pornography, part political allegory and part Modernist play with media' (Johnson, 2002). For other viewers and reviewers who approach my video work with the expectation of political potential – those who are aware of my writing on Netttime or *CTHEORY*, for example – it can be confusing and even disappointing. I can be misinterpreted as promoting that which I aim to critique – or at least,

situating myself too ambiguously within a spectrum of criticality and affirmation. In other words, if I am serious about engaging the politics of globalized, techno-militaristic culture, why am I bothering to deal with sex?

The play between art practice, viewers, patronage and critical community is difficult. As a critical artist, you have to continually ask what the measure of your success is. Audience numbers? Reviews? Purchases? Citations? Academic presence? It is a constant balancing act. All of these people constitute your audience. And among them, there are differing cultures and degrees of visual literacy: with your work, do you simply assume that viewers have access to a critical vocabulary upon which you are building? Do you assume, for example, that your audiences know certain key modernist texts, or can understand a reference to Bruce Nauman? And where is your audience – is it the public that goes to see your work installed onsite in Los Angeles, or to a screening of it at a media festival in the UK, or is it the person who reads about it in a German art magazine? Is it the unknown surfer who visits your website, the academic who buys your book, or the student who comes to hear you lecture in Tokyo? As an artist, you decide what is most important to you and you try to keep your eye on the ball. I realize that, to a large extent, I have to help build a discourse for the kind of work that I do and, with that, an audience. To a certain extent, when we create an artwork we aim to produce an audience, rather than aim for an existing one. An audience coalesces around a dynamic between texts and objects, engagement and analysis. It coheres through an interplay around work, analysis and institution.

What do I hope spectators will become aware of through my work? At the very least I hope that, even for a brief moment, one would catch a glimpse of an unacknowledged condition of one's existence. This is something that the very best art can offer. I don't want to be a deliverer of knowledge on my terms, so much as a catalyst for productive modes of reflection on my audience's terms. I am not concerned so much with finding a place for myself through my work, as I am with using it as a mirror through which others can see themselves.

Note

1. This conversation took place on email during summer 2004.

Acknowledgements

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