

A CAMERA WITH A VIEW:
JENNICAM, VISUAL REPRESENTATION, AND CYBORG SUBJECTIVITY

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Krissi Marina Jimroglou, B.A.

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SNAPSHOT

If during a nomadic surfing expedition around the World Wide Web you happen to link to “The Nose’s HomeCAMs” Web page, a site dedicated to the categorization of over 200 digital camera sites, you will find centered on the screen in italicized lettering Socrates’ statement, “The unexamined life is not worth living.”¹ While not obvious at first pass, the creator of the page imports this quote from Socrates in ironic form. The designer’s use of irony becomes apparent when you realize that at this homecam site, lives are examined, but contrary to the philosopher’s implication, the subject does not scrutinize his or her inner soul. Instead of engaging in self-reflective introspection, individuals offer up their lives for the *public* interrogation of their *private*, internal self. In the digital, ocular realm of homecams, the life *not* on display, *not* part of the realm of the public spectacle, is the life not worth living.

I begin with this citation of the Socratic quote not only because it captures the visual, spectacular nature of the medium examined in this paper, but also because in its style of playful parody, it intimates what we are observing: texts of mischief. We are bearing witness to texts of inversion and liminality and pleasure; texts that push against our social graces and our understanding of vision and subjectivity.

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of my thesis are issues at the intersection of homecam technology, visual representation, and the gendered subject. Using JenniCAM as my primary text, I examine how Jenni is integrating flesh and machine in the formation and display of a cyborg subjectivity, a hybridized identity (re)presented through the new technology of the digital camera.² I ask how the construction and display of the female body via the new technology of digital cameras contributes to our understanding and readings of gendered bodies as sites of knowledge production and pleasure. Further, I assert that JenniCAM, a digital subject created through the integration of the digital image and the Internet, exposes more than just flesh. It uncovers cultural tensions surrounding epistemological conceptions of vision, gender, and identity. In order to understand better the relationship between the text of JenniCAM, the medium through which it is delivered, and the knowledge it creates, this work takes on the mantle of many disciplines. This is done, in part, because the nature of new media requires a rethinking and hybridization of methodological techniques in order to reach increased understandings of the phenomena at hand. At times, the different theories may seem to clash with one another. Indeed, they do. However, by attempting to reconfigure the grid of inquiry and critique, the incongruities exposed in the process unveil heretofore-uncharted areas for exploration. In this document, I look at the epistemology of visual representation of JenniCAM using Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, and Roland Barthes. Then, using psychoanalysis and feminist film theory, I parse the mechanisms of desire involved within JenniCAM. Next, I consider the nature of the digital camera

as a tool of surveillance, employing and reworking the writings of Michel Foucault in an attempt to understand how power infuses this new medium. Finally, I invoke Donna Haraway's cyborg and explore if and how JenniCAM opens the door to new conversations about feminism, the female body, and the gendered subject. With such a hybrid melange of theory to use, what becomes the focus in a paper about JenniCAM? Jenni or the camera? The woman or the machine? Although it would seem logical to form such a distinction as a method of attacking the project, to create such a binary opposition is to divest JenniCAM of its intense complexity. An investigation of JenniCAM involves examining the component parts; but, more importantly, it demands an inquiry into what the synthesis of the two creates. Much like feminist interrogation of the body/mind duality of Western society, part of the project here is to challenge thoroughly the separation of body and machine in the constitution of an identity and to consider how the machine as a technology becomes indistinguishable from the subject.³ The question becomes, "What does subjectivity look like under these conditions?" This is what stands before us as the project to be tackled.

Digital Cameras and JenniCAM

Before I approach the theoretical material, an explanation of the technological processes involved in operating a digital camera as well as a brief history of JenniCAM, the Web site considered to be the first of its kind on the Internet, is in order.⁴ Costing between \$100-\$300, digital cameras work like traditional cameras in that they capture images. However, digital cameras immediately convert the image into a digital format. In other words, the digital camera instantly translates the image into binary code --

zeros and ones. This instant conversion process bypasses the need for film or scanners, making it easier to capture an image and use it on a Web page.⁵

Attaching digital cameras to the Internet has been around for approximately seven years.⁶ One of the very first was developed in 1991 by a computer scientist at Cambridge University who set up a camera to watch the department coffee machine so that he and other researchers could check on the availability of coffee before journeying downstairs.⁷ Since then, digital cameras have evolved sub-genres of cams. The genre I will be investigating is the personal cam or homecam genre. Hundreds of people have created personal Web pages that feature images of themselves and their homes captured through the technology of digital cameras. Images are uploaded regularly, often every 15 minutes to one hour, providing the effect of a “live” display. The JenniCAM Web site integrates a digital camera with the Internet and is unique in that it adopts a documentary-style presentation, claiming to present the “real life” of a young woman as seen from her bedroom.

In some instances, homecam operators have become entrepreneurs. They charge a subscription fee to viewers willing to pay for special or full access to the Web site. In most cases, the majority of images uploaded to the sites are available for public viewing free of charge, but membership to the password-protected site offers more frequently refreshed or renewed images than the “guest site.” JenniCAM “guest” images upload every twenty minutes and are available for view free of charge. To receive a new image every two minutes, a membership subscription is required costing \$15 per year.⁸

Initially begun to allow her friends to follow her life at college, Jennifer Ringley of JenniCAM has garnered national media attention for her homecam by offering those

with a Web browser (and the desire to watch) a glimpse at “whatever is going on naturally” in her life.⁹ Since its inception in April 1996, JenniCAM has blossomed into a Web phenomenon, replete with Web mythology and fan sites with FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions), old pictures, and discussion areas. The highlight of the JenniCAM site is, of course, the page that features the most current image of Jenni’s bedroom and the occurrences therein. However, the site has other components that supplement the viewer’s knowledge of Jenni and her life. Jenni has now expanded the presentation of her life by creating short online video clips called “The Jenni Show.”¹⁰ These interludes feature Jenni giving tours of her apartment or answering commonly asked questions in “real-time” audio and video. Additionally, viewers can study cropped images of Jenni’s body, read her poetry, or email her at other areas of the site.¹¹ While all of these components are not to be overlooked, they are organized around the page that publishes the images captured by the cam.

As a Web phenomenon, JenniCAM’s popularity has caught the attention of the national media, expanding the knowledge of her Web site beyond the Internet community that hails her as the “The Queen of Cyberspace.”¹² Conveniently, Jenni is self-employed and works at home as a freelance Web designer. Thus, she has availed herself to be in front of the camera for a large portion of the time. Her daily routine, as recorded by the cam, looks something like this: for the majority of the morning, she sleeps, getting up around mid-morning or noon. In the afternoon, Jenni begins to work at her computer designing Web sites, checking the 700+ email messages from fans, or chatting with friends on the phone. Every few weeks her boyfriend comes over to visit, and they spend time together. Such is the life of Jenni. According to a *Reuters* report,

“Most of the time, the photos are anything but thrilling.”¹³ In offering real life, JenniCAM replicates the ebb and flow of the everyday in spectacular form.

Jenni purports to offer the viewer a window into an unconstructed environment, claiming to represent what occurs in real life. Hence, there are images of nudity when she is nude; there is the appearance of action when she is active; and very often there is an empty room when she is not present. On her Web site, Jenni states:

I never know when the camera is going to take the picture so I have no time to prepare, and I never feel a need to hide anything going on anyway. The only time the image isn't spontaneous is when I have guests. Though I encourage all my visitors to be at ease with the camera and to ignore it as I do, there are and always will be a certain number of camera shy people in the world. When this happens, the standard is to follow whatever they're most comfortable with. If this means turning the camera away or some other compromise, so be it. Other than this, though, the camera shoots pictures spontaneously and naturally.¹⁴

The experience of watching JenniCAM simulates peeking through a keyhole and looking into a woman's bedroom, producing for many the voyeuristic pleasure involved in that kind of visual scrutiny. However, JenniCAM does not deliver sexually explicit or nude images at all times. As Jenni explains, “This site is not pornography. **Yes**, it contains nudity from time to time. **Real life** contains nudity. **Yes**, it contains sexual material from time to time. **Real life** contains sexual material. However, this is not a site about nudity and sexual material. It is a site about **real life**.”¹⁵ JenniCAM has raised more than a few eyebrows since the start of the project. JenniCAM would seem to offer the perfect heterosexual male fantasy -- a voyeuristic window into a woman's bedroom -- and could easily be dismissed as yet another example of patriarchal oppression. On the other hand, the digital window is often filled with nothing but

images of furniture -- and yet, people continue to watch. In analyzing JenniCAM, it is important not to overlook the fact that Jenni endeavors to present life as she lives it. That is, Jenni promises an unstaged display of her activity, not necessarily a fantasy. With the presentation of “real life” as the project, JenniCAM offers a text that writer Simon Firth describes as “visually fascinating, disconcertingly erotic and a provocative reflection of ourselves.”¹⁶

Surveying the Field

Analyzing JenniCAM requires as much scrutiny of the medium as of the images. Situating JenniCAM in history and in specificity mandates a discussion of the mechanics of subject production as well as the semiotic culture of images in which this subject circulates. Thus, this investigation will locate JenniCAM in a matrix of factors, one of the most significant being the culture of digital images in which the site is positioned. The knowledge produced by JenniCAM operates within a certain epistemic framework -- a framework currently in radical tension. The machine that creates the images, the digital camera, is at once an instrument of truth and a device of fiction. At the same time that the photograph serves as a discursive site of verifiable truth, it has become a malleable, unstable text.¹⁷ Part of the dynamics of JenniCAM involves a negotiation of this tension in the establishment of a rhetoric of the real. In response to Jenni’s promise to deliver “reality,” viewers demonstrate their investments in a certain type of truth in JenniCAM through email, newsgroups, and Web sites. The definition of reality remains highly elusive and contested within this field of knowledge, for it is tied up with definitions of amateur and professional and with critiques of capitalism.

Concomitant with readings of JenniCAM as a site of truth are readings of her body as a body to be watched. Michel Foucault's work on surveillance, particularly in *Discipline and Punish*, serves as a methodological tool and theoretical framework for reading the digital bodies of homecams as sites of subject construction and foci of power.¹⁸ Although as several feminist critics have pointed out Foucault does not gender his discussion of bodies within his work, his philosophical framework can be harnessed by feminists to form new configurations of knowledge.¹⁹ Foucault's works facilitate the explication of the production of homecams. More critically, however, is William Bogart's work on Foucault's treatment of the use of vision in the maintenance of social control. In *The Simulation of Surveillance*, Bogart examines how new technologies foster the fantasy promised by surveillance of total visual knowledge. From his insights, I assert that JenniCAM engages viewers in the fantasy of the ability to see everything. In doing so, JenniCAM does not operate as a tool of social control; rather, it serves as an instrument of desire.

The viewing of Jenni's body is often highly sexualized and reveals the treatment of visual representations of women. However, beyond the notion of the image of woman as the image of sexuality, an exploration of the mechanism of the camera and the way in which images are delivered to the audiences can be better understood through a psychoanalytic reading of desire. While the images themselves foster a discussion of Oedipal readings of JenniCAM through the feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's notion of the "male gaze," a pre-Oedipal reading of the function of the camera through Freud's notion of "fort-da" and the deferral of meaning allows for the pleasure of both male and female viewers while also uncovering mechanisms of human

desire. In each of these instances, the interest of feminist film theorists in disclosing the connection between vision, vulnerability, and power fosters insightful readings of JenniCAM.

JenniCAM poses a unique set of challenges to thinking about new kinds of subjectivity, and the agency and power that is implied therein. Like much feminist exploration, this work confronts the conundrum of feminist philosophers: how should the female body be treated? As a source of signification? A site of desire? A locus of agency? For feminism, the body has been the source of rich and contradictory debate. Some feminists treat the female body as either a biological barrier to access of equal rights with men or a source of special, female knowledge. Others view the body as “a biological object whose representation and functioning is political, socially marked male and female”²⁰ In this latter understanding, the body becomes a canvas across which culture paints its picture of woman or man. Distinguishing between sex and gender and demonstrating that labels of “masculine” and “feminine” are socially mediated categories of the self have been significant critiques produced by feminist theorists.

A third category of feminist scholars has raised a new set of issues. These feminists, including Judith Butler and Teresa de Lauretis, suggest that the female body should be read in its multiplicity as a way to resist Western constructs of Woman, representative of the object as well as “the very condition of representation.”²¹ They build on the theories of the body as culturally constructed but are unique in that they are suspicious of the sex/gender distinction. For them, positing any pre-linguistic bodily surface creates an essential body that exists outside of semiotic and cultural coding and

forces the debate to remain in a biologically-determined matrix. This final group of feminists does not seek to eradicate sexual difference. Rather, they seek to understand the manifold ways in which a rhetoric of biology and sociology intersect to produce a social body. Given these distinctions, this analysis of JenniCAM will be a discussion of a body “bound up in the order of desire, signification, and power” of this present historical moment.²² The objective in employing the theory of this third group is to theorize about female corporeality as well as to recognize and document a female body in action as it is situated in matrices of language and ideology. The situation becomes complicated by the fact that this project is not solely about physicality; rather, JenniCAM is as much about corporeality as it is about the machine, is as much about a woman who chooses to document herself through a digital camera. In this fusion, JenniCAM forces a rethinking of the boundaries between technology and the body. If subjectivity as a clean category is no longer unified or dichotomous as asserted by postmodern theorists, then this paper takes on the project of conceiving and describing an emergent subjectivity, one that is multiple and ironic.²³ The locus of inquiry starts with the hybridized nomination: Jenni + CAM. Both woman and machine become wedded and united in the constitution of the subject: JenniCAM. This integration of flesh and machine invokes Donna Haraway’s *A Cyborg Manifesto*, which stands as a canonical text in the study of technology and culture. This project seeks to put her definition to the physical test; to flesh out, if you will, the genesis and development of a cyborg subjectivity.

CHAPTER 1: Visual Representation and the Rhetoric of the Real

From its earliest moments, the photograph offered an image analogous to the pre-photographic referent, or reality. According to Jean-François Lyotard, photography was seen as putting the “final touch” on a project of capturing the visible that had been started during the Renaissance. Photography, and later cinema, promised to provide images that were “better, faster, and with a circulation a hundred thousand times larger” than painting or literature.²⁴ These new cultural texts were expected to take viewers beyond the visions and understandings of reality that they had previously obtained through art. The Modern fantasy was one of mastery and control, and resulted in an elevation of sight and ocularity as the apex of epistemological fulfillment. Lyotard explains that with this Modern beginning, photography comes to be adopted,

whenever the objective is to stabilize the referent, to arrange it according to a point of view which endows it with a recognizable meaning, to reproduce the syntax and vocabulary which enable the addressee to decipher images and sequences quickly, and so to arrive easily at the consciousness of his own identity as well as the approval which he thereby receives from others.²⁵

Since the Renaissance, vision has supplied the most reliable account of reality, and photography is the mechanical perfection of vision. Although working on a technically different principle than film-based cameras, the digital camera of JenniCAM stands in a long tradition of mechanical tools of reproduction.

Born of the Modern era, photography occupies an ambiguous standing as a mechanism for capturing both objective reality and subjective fictions. Operating as a

system of digitized photographic images, JenniCAM appears at a historical moment in which the verisimilitude of photographic representation is under interrogation.²⁶ Since its inception, the photograph has operated as a text analogous to reality, with the image presented in the photograph read as one that corresponds directly to the real world. However, the link between the pre-photographic object and the image that signifies that object has become highly contested as the fiction of accurate representation, particularly of electronic images but in other media as well, is exposed. This skepticism stems, in part, from the ease with which images can be manipulated through electronic technology. Under these conditions, the photographic image as a text that does not seem to lie or has no biases is often called into question despite its long history as a privileged site of knowledge production. Thus, at the same time that the digital photographic images of JenniCAM are perceived as visually representing Jenni's life with a high degree of veracity, these same images are read with suspicion.

Readings of JenniCAM as an accurate representation of life contradict the historical moment of simulacra in which this text emerges. Explaining this desire, Peggy Phelan writes, "The desire for the real is impossible to realize, Lacan believed, but that impossibility maintains rather than cancels the desire for it."²⁷ Phelan reveals in her remark the highly contradictory relationship between culture and the images it produces. The wish for concrete, unified reality can never be satiated, but its unsatiability feeds and propels the desire even further in a cycle of deferral. Susan Sontag notes, "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge -- and, therefore, like power."²⁸ JenniCAM grants viewers an access to what they believe to be

evidence, truth, and “the real” at the same time it holds reality at bay because of the culture of simulation which frames the production of JenniCAM.

Coinciding with the paradoxical text of JenniCAM is the discourse which seeks to mark, locate, and define where and how images produced through the cam can be read as representative of “real life.” Threads of praise of JenniCAM for accurately representing the real as well as condemnations of her project for altering the camera’s perspective or manipulating the viewer by charging a fee for a faster refresh rate run through viewer discourse about JenniCAM. Discussing the palpable tension detected in postmodern culture, Rosanne Stone points out that, “In the age of Xerox and TV, the presence of an infinity of instantly replicable images hasn’t (yet) managed to dislodge our stubborn sense that we exist as individual beings, fixed in space and time.”²⁹ As a photographic medium, JenniCAM divulges and, in some cases, even exacerbates the tensions surrounding the epistemic status of the photograph, or in this case, the digital image.

In offering a “true-to-life” autobiographical portrait of the life of a woman through a digital camera, the images of JenniCAM operate in a rhetorical system of what Lyotard calls “recognizable meaning,” where the image is trusted for its mimetic quality. In order to establish a text of truth, Jenni must produce the signifiers of reality. JenniCAM offers a familiar image, one that confirms what the viewer has seen before. Jenni produces a “natural” image, one that is neither staged nor anticipated. When Jenni states that she cannot prepare for the camera’s click, there is an expectation that the images produced will appear utterly un-posed, unconstructed. This is exactly what the viewer finds when watching JenniCAM. Jenni is not always in focus or in the

center of the image. Her expressions or face may not be clear if shown at all. Many times, the lighting is too dark to make out her body, her bed or the other furniture, rendering the room unintelligible except for the blue glow emanating from her alarm clock. Other times, when Jenni works at her computer, her face is unnaturally white, as if a bright light or flash is shining on her. All of this is to say that Jenni's purported lack of awareness of the camera produces images which replicate the mistakes and mishaps of photography: over-exposed images, under-exposed images, or images out of focus. Jenni allows the camera to capture her image throughout the day without preparing for the production. In other words, JenniCAM produces the familiarity of the accidental.

Concomitant with the production of these serendipitous pictures is the scientific measurement and labeling of these images in space and time, which provides a means of stabilizing the referent, as Lyotard indicates. Included at the top of every image of JenniCAM is a small bar that denotes the date, hour, and minute when the camera snapped the image. This information bar becomes the "caption" to this mechanical reproduction, a statement of authenticity. As Walter Benjamin indicates, photographs become inscribed with meaning through captions, particularly when photographs are in sequence.³⁰ The caption locates the viewer in time, providing a fixity to the image that would otherwise seem to be disconnected and de-contextualized. Captions advance the tracking of change or movement, helping to establish the narrative of JenniCAM.³¹ Captions allow the viewer to read Jenni's life sequentially, moment by moment, rather than having to infer meaning from random images she may upload to the Web without a caption. The caption assures the viewer that the image being seen is the most recent,

that the narrative of JenniCAM marches on. Without the caption, JenniCAM would deny the viewer the semiotic tools to construct a narrative -- to relate the image-parts into a series of causally related events taking place in time and space -- and, consequently, the ability to read JenniCAM as a representation of “real life.”³² In presenting viewers with what is labeled as “real life,” JenniCAM requires a chronological measurement to establish and validate the narrative of life -- the distance between events that occur at a “natural” pace.

Indeed, the pace of the events of Jenni’s life helps to establish JenniCAM as a text of recognizable truth because it does not indulge in what Fredric Jameson calls “fictive and foreshortened temporalities” of other media such as television or film.³³ Jameson explains that viewers of television and film do not experience time as contemporaneous with real life. Instead, these media employ the technique of editing to elide those events that do not help propel the narrative. Jameson explains that in video production, viewers forget that what they are witnessing on the screen is not “coterminous with the putative length of such moments in real life, or in ‘real time.’”³⁴ In an attempt to create a presentation of real life, JenniCAM does not consciously work to truncate any event of her life. Jenni does not attempt to edit her text to make it more “interesting” or “entertaining.” She goes about her business as if the camera were not there. In this environment, boredom may operate as a tool to validate JenniCAM as a text of truth because it serves as the foil to the foreshortened fictions of television and film. Consequently, boredom offers proof of authenticity.

In his discussion of photography and video, Jameson reveals that in a postmodern era, one of the appropriate responses to cultural texts may be, in fact,

boredom, which is produced in texts like JenniCAM. Jameson explains that *ennui*, the temporality of boredom, is “the ticking away of real time minute by minute, the dread underlying irrevocable reality of the meter running.”³⁵ The pace of Jenni’s life and the interpretation of it as “boring” or “spontaneous” buttresses understandings of JenniCAM as a text of reality and may explain how viewers distinguish between “performance” in other media and “reality” in JenniCAM. In television productions that are created to entertain in order to make money, boredom becomes a death sentence. If audiences are not enthralled at every moment, they change channels. In contrast, JenniCAM does not try to enthrall its audiences with glamour or sex appeal. Yet, viewers still “tune in” to check on her life. With boredom serving as the “appropriate response,” JenniCAM may be read as a text that is as much about boredom as it is about exhilaration. In contrast to the rapidly pulsating stream of images that are transmitted via television, JenniCAM often presents viewers with an empty bedroom. JenniCAM involves waiting and patience, denial and indulgence, lack and fulfillment. That it does not simply provide on-demand entertainment (sexual or otherwise) may contribute to the rhetoric of reality which surrounds its production.

JenniCAM does not seek to produce the same kind of entertainment as television or film. In fact, it defies comparison to television and film. Thus, boredom becomes a central feature of JenniCAM, functioning as a way to understand JenniCAM as a text of reality. Much of the time spent viewing JenniCAM is time spent looking at her well-made bed, her sleeping body, or her pale, often expressionless face as she types at the computer. Further, despite the fact that the digital camera offers a window in a woman’s bedroom, the promise of witnessing Jenni having sex is rarely fulfilled,

although partial nudity occurs on a regular basis.³⁶ JenniCAM aims to avoid the label of “art,” for art implies construction and premeditation. The images in TV and film represent an attempt to fast-forward through the mundane, banal moments of life. In contrast to the presentation of only the “good parts” of life provided by video, the boredom of JenniCAM discloses the tacit requirement of boredom to verify its claim to present “real life.” By showing the banal and mundane, JenniCAM validates her text as a presentation of “real life” by pushing against the limit of what is entertainment and crossing over into an aesthetic of boredom.

Jameson also defines boredom as a response to “the blockage of energies” or “situations of paralysis.”³⁷ As a paradoxical text, JenniCAM produces a certain paralysis through its asynchronicity, which is highlighted by the caption of the image. Paralysis stems from the fact that the caption reveals a particular reality at the same time it denies that reality. By this, I mean that the caption serves to concretize the image at the same time that it reminds the viewer that invariable meaning is always held at bay. In its chronometric function, the caption situates and fixes what happens at a particular moment in time. However, the caption also reminds the viewer of the unwitnessed mutability of reality as well as their inability to interact with the image that they see. Just at the moment when the viewer believes they have a fixed understanding of JenniCAM, the caption reminds them that the meaning achieved is fleeting, that it will change and is changing even as the viewer gazes upon the image. For example, by the time the viewer’s modem downloads the image, it is already a representation of the past -- never of the present reality. The way in which the digital camera of JenniCAM

functions produces a lag time in between images, an absence of representation that is highlighted by the caption.

In marking off a certain segment of recorded time, the caption reminds the viewer that the moment captured by the camera has always already passed (past), and that they are presently not watching the image in its full “reality.” That is to say that the image/caption combination produces a certain anxiety in the viewer, an anxiety not unlike that harbored by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, where he mourns the loss of his mother as he searches for the perfect photograph, the one that will revive her essence for him. Peggy Phelan explains that *Camera Lucida* acts as “an anatomy of the grief of the surviving singular I/eye.”³⁸ By this, she reveals how the eye is always “restless” and is never satisfied with the image before it. There is a continual visual quest whereby the eye (and thus the subject “I”) always finds the image upon which it gazes to be lacking in complete meaning and must keep searching, combing over the image, searching for unified signification. This same quest for stable meaning occurs in the viewing of JenniCAM. Jenni’s image is either in the process of changing to the next image, or it is a reminder of an inability to know fully the reality of Jenni’s life.

simulacra

At the same moment JenniCAM seems to provide an accurate portrait of the life of a twenty-one year old woman, there is a constructedness, a prevarication, about JenniCAM that raises questions as to the verisimilitude of her presentation of “real life.” Somehow, despite the use of the camera -- the object of Modern truth -- there is room for doubt of the images of JenniCAM. According to Jean Baudrillard, “It is no

longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself³⁹ On the Internet, images and texts circulate freely, unattached from their site of origin -- if there is an origin that can be known at all. The digital images of JenniCAM seem always just out of reach because they are always changing, always being refreshed. While each image is inscribed with the date, time, and location, the image lasts only twenty minutes at the most. Then, it vanishes.⁴⁰ As Baudrillard and others have indicated, late twentieth century culture is awash in images, images much like JenniCAM that offer very little in the way of stable meaning. Baudrillard suggests that this doubt and the onset of the loss of the real creates a certain type of nostalgia, producing a “proliferation of myths of origins and signs of reality” where a “panic-stricken production of the real and the referential” infiltrates the cultural discourse.⁴¹ JenniCAM, then, operates within this mythic discourse of origins.

The rise of multimedia software has produced the democratization of the manipulation of the image. In the digital realm, it is not only the photographer or developer who can manipulate the image; it is the consumer of the image as well. This democratizing shift contributes to the removal of the patina of “naturalism” that surrounds the image, while at the same time exposing new questions surrounding the rhetorical framing of the image. In his essay in *Electronic Culture*, Kevin Robins notes how “photography as a stable medium is giving way to a practice which celebrates instability, uncertainty, incompleteness, and transformation.”⁴² More than uncertainty, the images produced reveal the political influences and manipulations involved in producing photographs. With the advent of digital technology, images are molded to

suit particular needs. It has taken only a short while to advance from the 1982 *National Geographic* scandal surrounding the image of the Giza pyramids in which a segment of the photograph was cut out in order to fit the image into the layout, to the darkened face of OJ Simpson on June 20, 1994, and onto the polished teeth of septuplet mother Bobbi McCaughey in 1997.⁴³ Each image sparked controversy as the subconscious or conscious racist and classist prejudices of the images surfaced. However, the mystification of the image as an epistemic document seems to grant the image “increasing autonomy,” as the navigation of an image-saturated society becomes increasingly disconnected from the real.

Robins asserts, “Modern life appears to be increasingly a matter of interaction and negotiation with images and simulations which no longer serve to mediate reality.”⁴⁴ This evolution in the signifying process points to the way in which the photograph is not a neutral vessel of meaning but rather is used as a means to privilege certain subject positions. Under these conditions, suspicion is aroused whether or not Jenni is tampering with the images she is producing at the same time she and hundreds of other cam operators claim to “produce the real”. In other words, the digital camera feeds the cultural contradictions that surround the production of texts of truth. Is Jenni manipulating the camera to enhance her image so that the viewer will return to her Web site? Do viewers get the “real” Jenni if they pay the subscription fee? Hinting at the source of such doubt, Baudrillard writes, “Behind the baroque of images hides the grey eminence of politics.”⁴⁵ Jenni’s politics involve a complicated discursive mix about the natural versus the constructed.

amateur vs. professional

As part of the rhetorical frame surrounding JenniCAM, the photographer -- the implied user behind the lens -- is closely coupled with the epistemology of the photograph. The photographer's knowledge of and training in the techniques of manipulation available within the photographic process are intimately connected to the construction of the image as valid or invalid, licit or illicit. The distinction between the amateur and the professional is of great importance in the rhetoric of photography and to JenniCAM, for the characterization often frames the level of truth assigned to the picture. Amateurs are perceived as lacking the skills or knowledge to alter the images they capture and thus are positioned as producers of a more truthful representation of reality than professionals, who by virtue of their profession actively exploit the malleable aspects of film production to affect illusions or enhancement. The motives and perceived knowledge level of the person creating the image act as a means to understanding the image.

In the case of JenniCAM, discourse about her arguable status as an amateur surrounds the production. At the same time the images of JenniCAM are perceived as an index to reality and Jenni is labeled a "starving student," another thread runs through the discourse, a thread attempting to discount the credibility of JenniCAM.⁴⁶ In much of the fan discourse and on her own FAQ sheets, Jenni is positioned as a "normal" or "average" woman opening an unadulterated window into her life, and many viewers do not doubt the veracity of the images they see. Jenni herself remarks, "The point is that it's a real person doing real things."⁴⁷ However, due to the fact that at one time Jenni posed for the camera, coupled with the addition of a membership fee system to

JenniCAM, the credibility of Jenni's images is called into question because her status as an amateur, someone who uses photography for their own enjoyment rather than for profit, comes under fire. Newsgroup threads on the Internet such as "JenniCam; Cybersaint or self-serving trollop?" reveal a preoccupation by fans with her motivations as an artist or a capitalist.⁴⁸ As this type of discourse indicates, fans often label fee-based cam sites like JenniCAM as "frauds" and the creators as prostitutes or other derogatory epithets.⁴⁹

The production of alternative Web sites used to determine the status of homecam sites as legitimately amateur or professional points to the significance of formulating the amateur/professional distinction in the minds of the viewers. For them, the distinction centers largely around the operator's entrepreneurial endeavors. The thinking here revolves around a linking of the malleability of the image to notions of profit-making. Viewers believe the operators who charge a fee to see their sites are more likely to alter the images because they have incentive to increase their profits. In these instances, homecam operators come to represent visual prostitutes. The desire for the demarcation of Web sites that are amateur and professional has led to the creation of sites like HO-CAM, a site where the creator critiques female homecam sites, giving them a HO-CAM rating based on advertising, pricing structure, taste in lingerie, grammar, and "vulgar displays of blatant commercialism."⁵⁰ In this environment, professionalism, operating under the guise of amateur photography, receives strong criticism. In one assessment, the creator writes of a site, "as her prices drop, she gets just a little closer to true amateur status in my book."⁵¹ In this economy of images, the thinking goes, those who charge money have it in their best interest to create an

appealing presentation by altering the images they create. This requires conforming to an ideal notion of feminine sexuality usually not met by women.⁵² Thus, the presumption is that the image is compromised in order to produce the desired effects. Rather than present real life, “professionals” seek to entertain and to make a profit.

The HO-CAM creator defines a HO-CAM as “website, featuring mostly women, many who advertise their sites as ‘amateur’ site yet sell memberships to their audience (ooh...how exclusive!), and as opposed to the many free ‘slice-of-life’ cams out there, offer only limited free access to their sites.”⁵³ The HO-CAM site applies a rating system to these sites while providing commentary on how skillfully or poorly each woman hides the fact that she is making money off of her homecam venture.

Without specifically acknowledging the HO-CAM site, JenniCAM inoculates her project against the accusations leveled at it with the following:

The concept of the cam is to show whatever is going on naturally. Essentially, the cam has been there long enough that now I ignore it. So whatever you’re seeing isn’t staged or faked, and while I don’t claim to be the most interesting person in the world, there’s something compelling about real life that staging it wouldn’t bring to the medium.

You may notice in the scattered archives that there are sequences which are clearly staged. These are all old sequences from a different stage in my conception of the cam. There are no longer any of these “shows,” nor will there be at any point in the future. I hope you can appreciate how this lends itself to the integrity of the camera and what it shows.⁵⁴

Within this statement, Jenni gives voice to the project of the cam: to display “the real.” Having articulated this, Jenni attempts to demonstrate how she is remaining true to reality. In a more complicated fashion, she produces a rhetoric of reality for the

homecam culture. Jenni positions herself in an epistemic project whereby she demarcates and defines how her images are faithful to her promise to bring reality to her viewers. Most significantly, the enactment of the verification process involves the assertion of a state of unconsciousness on her part. The assumption being made is that if Jenni is conscious of the camera, she will perform. Hence, Jenni denies a consciousness of the cam. According to her, her images are antithetical to the simulation of what is perceived as the ultimate fashioner of fictions: television and Hollywood cinema. A state of unawareness guarantees a kind of spontaneity or lack of premeditation that does not exist in television or film. Positioning herself against the culture of simulacra, JenniCAM offers a text that is not about acting, fabrication, or artifice.

The second part of the rhetorical strategy in constructing JenniCAM as “real” involves the invocation of a comparison with other forms of media. On her FAQ sheet, Jenni addresses the *novelty* of “reality.” When she states that “there’s something compelling about real life,” she not only points to how her viewers read her text but also the environment in which she is operating. In other words, in offering “reality” to viewers, Jenni acknowledges an awareness of her viewers’ weariness with a simulated, image-saturated culture. Given the simulation overload and the incredulity of images of society, Jenni promises an escape from simulation and a certain “integrity” to her presentation as an accurate portrait of her life.

At the heart of this amateur/professional truth-creating process is the relationship between image production and capitalism. Critics of JenniCAM find it questionable that Jenni offers a window into a “natural” environment and yet charges a

fee for a faster refresh rate. The suspicion harbored by viewers resembles the deep contempt for industrial, capitalistic production of art by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. The accusations of duplicity leveled at JenniCAM are rooted in the supposed connection between the manipulation of art for capitalistic gain. In their essay “The Culture Industry,” Adorno and Horkheimer indicate how the culture industry relies not on innovation but on the promise of reality’s replication to seduce its audience. They write, “The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises.”⁵⁵ Instead of fulfilling the contract, the culture industry represses the desires of the consumer in order to reactivate them later through a product, something to buy. Adorno and Horkheimer explain how the culture industry creates and deceives consumers. It creates needs but never fills them; instead, only items to be purchased fill the void. In the same way that the culture industry manipulates desire for capitalistic ends, JenniCAM receives criticism for lying about presenting real life and for supposedly manipulating the desires of the viewers to make a profit. Adorno and Horkheimer indicate that in the culture industry, the desires of JenniCAM viewers are used to perpetuate capitalism through homogenization, or the forced uniformity of images and products. Due to the fact that Jenni is trying to make money from this endeavor, there is an expectation that she will reproduce the images of the sexualized woman that already exist. However, in order to do this, she would have to break her promise to deliver “real life” and alter reality, either through a performance of some sort or through the manipulation of the camera.

However, JenniCAM does not offer the viewer the homogenized female sexual object in the same way that a number of sexually-explicit sites on the Internet do. In

fact, the pictures produced are antithetical to the thin, large-breasted, half-naked female bodies of pornography because Jenni does not pose for the camera nor does her physique conform to the standards of the industry.⁵⁶ In contrast to homogenous production discussed by Adorno and Horkheimer, a re-negotiation of the creative subject's relationship to capitalistic society may be unfolding. JenniCAM moves toward a different way of looking at the domestic, at femininity, and at privacy that runs against the standard presentation offered by media such as film. Avital Ronell hints at the way in which "video offers a picture of numbed resistance to the unlacerated regimes of fascist media as it mutates into forms of video and cybernetic technology, electronic reproduction, and cybervisual technologies."⁵⁷ Although talking specifically about the juxtaposition of home video footage within television shows, Ronell's remarks disclose how images produced by amateurs quietly expose the manipulation conducted by the media while not necessarily critiquing or condemning the media in a formal manner. JenniCAM is not a consciously resistant text; Jenni is not a self-proclaimed performance artist trying to experiment or agitate. But in its resistance to the traditional, to the status quo, JenniCAM can be read as a text of "numbed resistance" where alternate images of female domesticity and privacy enter into the visual lexicon. In the presentation of "the real," JenniCAM embeds itself in the display of language at the same time it works to redefine that system of semiotic meaning.

CHAPTER 2: Playing with the Panopticon

The gendered dynamics of JenniCAM exacerbate the intense mistrust that surrounds visual media like digital cameras because Jenni is ostensibly “under surveillance” and the people who are doing the watching are predominantly male. In one estimation reported by *Reuters*, “there are about 75 men for every woman who subscribes” to JenniCAM.⁵⁸ The use of the word surveillance in this instance is purposeful, for the definition implies not simply just watching, but watching with intent and even suspicion. In other words, the person who is the surveillor is also invested in a type of vigilance, in the protection of something valuable. If the object being observed strays from what the watcher desires, he or she is positioned to detect that change almost instantaneously and move quickly to react. Hence, surveillance implies watching in order to be more prepared to respond. Power relations are implicit in the action of watching, as vision has been intimately linked with knowledge-production through metaphoric phrases like, “I see” meaning “I understand.” The ability to watch someone else connotes power in the way that the observer often becomes the person who names and defines whatever it is he or she is watching. Further, watching other people, particularly in their domestic space, invites the viewer to trespass over the distinction between the public and private space. William Bogart defines surveillance as “a social technology of power -- supervising, monitoring, and recording, its most common methods, are simply ways to control persons and their behavior.”⁵⁹ Surveillance affords the viewer the opportunity to observe and learn the patterns of

behavior of the object being watched and thus plan and dictate future actions accordingly.

The surveillant aspect of JenniCAM dovetails with definitions of contemporary society offered by cultural theorists such as Mark Poster as a “super-panopticon,” a system of “phone cables and electric circuitry that minutely crisscross and envelop our world,...transforming our acts into an extensive discourse of surveillance, our private behaviors into public announcements, our individual deeds into collective language.”⁶⁰ The rise of computers during the twentieth century has spawned wide-spread discussion of the resulting surveillance mechanisms embedded in electronic technologies. Cultural theorists such as Poster, Gary Marx, and David Lyon have all examined how human identity has been transformed into information that is catalogued and maintained by computers.⁶¹ Technologies such as Universal Personal Identifiers (UPIs), satellite-based observation systems, and genetic testing all contribute to an environment whereby “[p]recise details of our personal lives are collected, stored, retrieved and processed every day within huge computer databases belonging to big corporations and government departments.”⁶² The fear of the surveillance society centers around the private nature of the information gathered by these institutions, from one’s bank transactions to the coding of one’s DNA, and how the information can be used to strip away rights or privileges. Under these conditions, the threat lies in the condensation of an individual’s identity into commodified information able to be used for exploitation without the individual knowing that the information has been collected and processed.

The access to privacy associated with digital cameras raises the question as to whether or not digital cameras can be used as a means of social control. It is precisely

because the viewer-viewed relationship of JenniCAM so closely matches the descriptions of surveillance that a discussion of the historian and philosopher Michel Foucault proves salient. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault extends the exploration of the panopticon, a prison proposed by Jeremy Bentham that produced the illusion that prisoners were always under surveillance in order to maintain social control. For Foucault, the panopticon characterized the automatic, ubiquitous functioning of power - everywhere and yet nowhere. He explained that the goal of the panopticon was to “induce in the inmate a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.”⁶³ Thus, surveillance becomes transparent and more potent, as prisoners under this system would come to regulate themselves according to the instinctive awareness of being under observation.

Indeed, it is the tacit power located in watching that threatens the sensibilities of most who hear about JenniCAM. The picture painted by JenniCAM does not seem to be a pretty one. Foucault describes a panoptical situation under which “the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body.”⁶⁴ Implied in this is the notion that the productive body does not know or is not conscious of the fact that it is a subjected body. This body’s willing participation in the activities of daily life masks its subjection to power. The panopticon produces subjects who do not see themselves as subjected. Rather, they see themselves fulfilling roles in society despite the hegemonic practices involved in their performance of those roles. Jenni does not view the gaze of the Internet audience member as a disciplinary force. Instead, she welcomes the gaze of the world, stating that she believes herself to be serving as a “virtual girlfriend” for male viewers, who make up the bulk of her audience.⁶⁵ Given

the way in which the panopticon functions, what we may be bearing witness to in JenniCAM is the creation of the “spectacular subject,” someone who understands herself through her role as a spectacle, who invokes the gaze of society in order to constitute her own identity and whose need to be on display becomes enjoined with the hegemonic functions operating when such a self is constructed, just like Foucault’s panoptic subjects who gain pleasure through compliance with normative standards.⁶⁶ With thousands of Internet users watching Jenni’s daily life, one is led to believe that the authority of the panoptic gaze holds Jenni captive in a cyber-prison, where surveillance of her life results in her serving as a digital sexual toy.

Yet, despite the seemingly monolithic, invasive power of this digital “Big Brother” technology, it is critical not to overlook the ways in which JenniCAM actually resists and challenges a panoptic classification. In many ways, the fiction of “real life” portrayed by Jenni mirrors the fiction of true surveillance achieved by viewers. Although a Foucauldian critique of JenniCAM offers a compelling explanation, what may be occurring in JenniCAM is what Bogart calls the “simulation of surveillance,” a fantasy of vision without limits.⁶⁷ Under these conditions, the images of JenniCAM simulate for the viewer the dream of destroying the limits of time, distance, and corporeality by formulating anticipated constructs of the real. These images, as discussed earlier, do not have an original referent. Within the framework of this model, the knowledge gained through vision can be likened to the shadows on the wall of Plato’s cave. For the viewer engaged in the fiction of ultimate surveillance, gaining an understanding of the “real life” of Jenni functions as the mere reflection of the real rather than the real itself. Consequently, rather than situate the watched subject as the

helpless object, JenniCAM forces a reevaluation of her position as a watched subject in a culture of surveillance as the simulation of ultimate vision erodes the distinction between “virtual control and actual control.”⁶⁸

The preliminary read of JenniCAM as a technology of ultimate power represents only one way of interpreting what is taking place. While serving as a wary critique of the medium, this version of panopticism elides the nuanced characteristics of JenniCAM that work to counter the paranoid read of her project. As even Foucault himself would argue, the totality of power’s hold is never realized, for there must be ways of resistance for power to exist.⁶⁹ For example, while surveillance consists of intense observation, it also involves masking the act of watching. In order to catch the object of surveillance “in the act,” the surveillor must remain hidden, disguised, or invisible. Without a cover, the surveillor is exposed and the advantage of knowledge is lost. This requirement of invisibility and secrecy does not apply to JenniCAM, as Jenni has set up the camera. This challenges the labeling of JenniCAM as a device of surveillance and thus a device of patriarchal objectification. Rather than have her rights stripped away in a punitive, juridical imposition, Jenni knows she is being watched and, in a certain sense, can watch back. In contrast to the imprisoned body of the panopticon that has been “hard wired” into compliance with cultural standards and is utterly unconscious of its existence, Jenni has established the parameters around which she is watched. She called the shots when deciding to purchase the camera, to continue the project as long as she has, and to interact with the outside world. If she receives unfriendly email, she can respond or hit delete. If she grows weary of the camera, she can simply leave the room or, ultimately, unplug the device altogether.

In addition to her control of the camera, JenniCAM disrupts social codes because she resists the image of ideal femininity. If societies deploy panoptic devices to insure social order, then JenniCAM represents a rupture of that order that establishes in advance what women should and should not do in public. In an interview with *USA Today*, Jenni comments, “On TV, you see all these people living perfect lives with perfect hair and perfect friends, and people start to feel really inadequate. I walk around all the time with bad hair or stuff in my teeth. And I really think it makes people feel better to know they’re not the only ones not leading glamorous lives.”⁷⁰ Indeed, Jenni does not resemble an air-brushed, coifed *Playboy* bunny. Viewers witness her unshowered and ungroomed. They see her when she is sick, grumpy, and unpleasant. Further, for all of the hype surrounding JenniCAM, there is very little sex made available to Internet audiences. Viewers seeking images of Jenni engaged in sexual activity will find themselves waiting hours, even days, to receive what they want on JenniCAM. If the patriarchal fantasy of ultimate power is the observation and control of the sexualized woman, then JenniCAM renders the power of vision impotent. In her presentation of herself, Jenni repudiates the maintenance of the social standards of femininity. And yet, they still watch, some even paying for the experience. For this reason, the engagement of viewers with JenniCAM simply out of the desire for panoptic control cannot be assumed.

Moreover, the surveillance involved in cam technology is not one-way. Through the technology of “cookies” or hidden markers that capture information about visitors to a Web page, Jenni can know and watch in a general fashion the patterns of her observers. She can track patterns of viewing, even capture electronic identities of

viewers. The irony is that many new Internet users may not even know they are the ones being watched. Finally, the element of interactivity involved in JenniCAM (the fact that she requests email correspondence and does, in fact, respond to a large portion of her email), suggests that JenniCAM ruptures the monolithic power of the panopticon. Again, by acknowledging that she is being watched, Jenni undermines the notion that the viewer is obtaining “secret” knowledge.

Further, fissures in power reveal contradictions that are often sutured by fantasy, which is precisely what JenniCAM provides. As a text that promises to deliver continuous images of real life, JenniCAM represents a fantasy of vision, a dream to push the limits of surveillance to the extreme. As William Bogart explains, simulation technology, of which JenniCAM is just one aspect, is “a fantastic dream of seeing everything capable of being seen, recording every fact capable of being recorded, and accomplishing these things, whenever and wherever possible, prior to the event itself.”⁷¹ In other words, the simulation of surveillance operates as an illusory system of control. It creates a mirage of the power associated with surveillance but does not deliver any of the substance behind the power. While viewers of JenniCAM may feel they come to know her intimately and gain a sense of control from watching her, the distance inherent in the technology of the Internet greatly impedes any sort of imposition of power upon the viewed subject.

The situation is one quite analogous to the 1993 James Bulger crime, where the abduction and murder of a two-year old boy by two ten-year old boys was captured on surveillance video. As feminist critic Sarah Kember describes, “Surveillance technology in this case seemed to offer us no control over the surveilled.”⁷² Underlying

the discourse on the case was the terrifying notion that surveillance technology -- technology employed to see, react, and prevent -- had failed. What remained was the record not only of the murder, but of the camera's impotence as well. For JenniCAM, the lesson to be learned from the Bulgar case is this: watching from afar may prove, in the end, to be more paralyzing than empowering. For example, in one instance, viewers saw Jenni curled up in the fetal position on her bed. Sensing that Jenni might be suffering from possible illness or injury, some viewers called the local police and had them contact her to make sure she was all right.⁷³ This behavior on the part of fans demonstrates the helpless position of the surveillor of JenniCAM. Unable to interact or contact Jenni themselves, fans had to rely on third-party involvement in order to assuage their fears.⁷⁴ In this way, JenniCAM flouts the notion that surveillance abets totalitarian power. She announces what William Bogart describes as the "erosion and disappearance" of privacy and resolves the tension through a simulation of the distinction of public and private.⁷⁵ As Bogart explains, "On the Net, in simulation, in virtual spacetime, everything and nothing is a secret, everything and nothing is seen. In systems where both celebrity and isolation are constructions of simulation, we really cross over to a new game."⁷⁶ Bogart's assesment underscores the paradox of surveillance in JenniCAM. For it is at once both a reinstallation and destruction of the boundaries of visual representation and power.

CHAPTER 3: Freud/Fetishism/Fort-da

There are long-standing fears attached to the ability of burgeoning media to present and display what society deems indecent. In many ways, the anxieties surrounding the content of the Internet mirror the suspicion that engulfed cinema in its earliest stages, when it threatened to cross over from a form of public entertainment into the “realm of forbidden pleasure, of pure, unbridled sexual looking.”⁷⁷ During the early moments of the Internet’s popularity when it was just entering common parlance, there were immense fears -- which still persist today -- about the availability of sexually explicit materials and the link between the availability of these images and their consumption in an isolated, private space. Due to the fact that Jenni is female and that JenniCAM supplies images of her partially clothed, naked, or engaged in sex at various moments, the dispute arises as to whether or not JenniCAM is pornographic.⁷⁸ While the intentions and goals of this paper do not lie in defining what is and what is not pornographic, I bring up this inquiry in order to beg the question of how human sexuality and desire function in JenniCAM.

In order to answer this, the tools and lexicon of psychoanalysis and the writings of feminist film theorists such as Laura Mulvey, Gaylyn Studlar, and Mary Ann Doane provide a framework for uncovering the multiple ways in which human desire operates in JenniCAM. The often contradictory ways in which desire has been theorized demands an explanation of JenniCAM not as a monolithic text, but as a text of diverse pleasures. Examining the Oedipal desires at work in JenniCAM and then moving into

the pre-Oedipal desires of this text dramatizes the contradictory nature of desire. The use of psychoanalytic conceptions of the unconscious highlights the relationship between visual representation, pleasure, and control or mastery as well as the polysemous nature of JenniCAM. The desire fostered in the Oedipal unconscious is rooted in the wish for mastery and control. The long-standing tradition of feminist film criticism that regards vision as the desire for Oedipal control places JenniCAM into a historical tradition of objectification of women's bodies. In a different psychoanalytic reading of desire, the pre-Oedipal stage of development demonstrates how the mechanism of the medium, the confluence of the digital camera and the Web, fuse to produce the pleasures created through the simulation of the "fort-da game" described by Sigmund Freud. Here, control is given up in order to achieve pleasure. The two psychoanalytic readings of JenniCAM reveal the multiple, often contradictory ways desire works, whether it be through the Oedipal fetishization of Jenni's body or the treatment of her body as what feminist film theorist Gaylyn Studlar calls the *maternal imago*, the site of pre-Oedipal unity and wholeness, in the fort-da game. In combination, these two different mechanisms of desire offer readings of JenniCAM that account for both male and female viewers. Moreover, the structure of the JenniCAM site itself speaks to an awareness of the mechanisms of desires and a playful manipulation of pleasure.

fetishism

The process involved in the production of spectatorial pleasure and knowledge derived from sites like JenniCAM is far from simple, but the connection between the

visual and gender becomes quite apparent when placing JenniCAM into a larger genre of homecams. The dynamics of the homecam genre immediately throw into relief the stratified, hierarchical nature of the new medium. That is to say that it comes as no surprise to find out that there are gendered inequalities in the distribution of power and access to knowledge circulating in cam culture, just as in real life. Even the Web surfer can gather that the vast majority of homecam sites feature women and that men, by and large, are the consumers of these images.

Given that JenniCAM is produced and made available through language, these images cannot exist outside the realm of the patriarchal binary of male and female; masculine and feminine. Consequently, the knowledge produced is not neutral. Western society has a long history of objectifying of women, whether it be in frescos or .jpegs. The “problem” of representation brings to the fore the struggles within feminism to find a satisfactory solution. Feminist film theory provides a compelling understanding of the way in which the female body always operates within a discourse which is not its own. Within this, women inhabit the traditional exhibitionist role and understand themselves to “connote to-be-looked-at-ness.”⁷⁹ The female body always signifies the Other. Particularly in photographic media, the situation has become one where, as feminist film theorist Mary Ann Doane notes, “The simple gesture of directing a camera toward a woman has become equivalent to a terrorist act.”⁸⁰ Is this the case in JenniCAM? For feminists, the critique of the dominant discourses of gender through psychoanalysis continues to provide productive readings of material hegemony.

In psychoanalytic theory, the marked status of the female figure is explained as representing the threat of castration because her body reveals an absence or lack of the

phallus. Marked as such, women continually signify castration anxiety. According to feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey, the male unconscious adopts two strategies for reconciling this castration anxiety:

the preoccupation with the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object...or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous.⁸¹

The first avenue, that of the preoccupation with the female body, introduces the notion of the voyeur. Rooted in the definition of a voyeur is the implication that what is being watched is somehow private. For Freud, that takes place when people “look on at excretory functions”⁸² The voyeur is someone who likes to cross boundaries, someone who takes pleasure in subverting the delineation between public and private. In this subversion lies a certain type of knowledge, obtained through the visual, which provides the voyeur with enjoyment. In fact, the voyeur takes pleasure not only in what they are witnessing but in the process of breaking the public/private distinction. Hence, in the instance of JenniCAM, there is a voyeuristic pleasure derived from the study and analysis of the body and life of a female subject, the Othered body. In addition, the site of observation, Jenni’s boudoir, invokes the most private of spaces. Thus, the voyeur has crossed over into a once-secret space in an attempt to “demystify the mystery” of woman.

Further, Jenni’s body as a “natural” body” becomes the fetishized object. In contrast to the air-brushed images of the pornographic Web sites easily found on the

Internet, Jenni's "natural" body becomes the fetish, the sexualized object. That is, much like the use of the "accidental" to verify JenniCAM as a text of truth, Jenni's body as an imperfect body, whether in size or shape, becomes the object of desire. Once again, notions of the real are imported and mapped onto Jenni's body, this time as a means to obtain pleasure. Instead of a specific part of her body substituting for sexual pleasure, Jenni's flaws operate as the fetish.

The second method of escape from the fear of castration involves the fetishization of the woman in order to transform her into something pleasurable and thus repress the notion that the woman is linked to the threat. This disavowal fosters fetishistic scopophilia, wherein certain objects not necessarily connected to sexual pleasure come to stand in for the erotic. JenniCAM plays with the notion of the fetish through the development of an auxiliary feature on the JenniCAM site. On the "Anatomy One-oh-One" portion of the Web site, Jenni segments her own body by cropping images of her face and torso into smaller and smaller areas. Singular Web pages highlight isolated parts such as her eyes, toes, tongue, and feet. In addition, Jenni writes a short paragraph on each featured body part. For example, when supplementing an image of her eyes she writes:

I've been told (though you wouldn't know it by looking at this picture) that my eyes look like sunflowers: there's a dark blue outside ring, like the sky. There's a green middle ring, like the leaves. And in the middle is a bright yellow spot, like the petals with the iris at center. My eyelashes are a light brown color. And in school (elementary, that is) I could always cross my eyes better than anyone else. That's talent for you. Maybe I'll have to include a cool video of the really neat trick I can do - it usually grosses people out, but it seems worth it, doesn't it?⁸³

In an excessive and overt manner, Jenni breaks apart the image of her unified body and offers it to her viewers as a way to get to know her. The conversational discussions of her body act as a means to study and scrutinize Jenni's body, but also help viewers learn about her history, her opinions, and her personality. Jenni embraces the reading of her body as a fetish as a means to introduce herself to her viewers, to convey her identity.

In this example, the hegemonic portrait of the female body as fragmentary offered by Jenni is positioned next to an autobiographical description of the fetishized object. In contrast to the body part in isolation, these body parts are supplemented with a caption written by Jenni herself. This auxiliary, explanatory text allows Jenni to author a discourse about her own body, to frame the photo, at the same time that she formulates the fetish. This autobiographical fetish reveals how Jenni reads her body as a text across which others write meaning. She does not start out by saying, "I think my eyes look like sunflowers." Rather, she uses the phrase, "I've been told..." This reference to the description of her body by others, which occurs in other descriptions of body parts as well, points to how Jenni focuses on the reading of her body by others.

Building on the authoring of her body by the viewers, at the "Name that Curve!" portion of the site, Jenni uploads indiscernible pictures of her body parts and viewers guess what part of her body is featured for the week. At the end of the week, Jenni divulges the body part as well as the winners -- those who guessed what the image featured correctly as well as those who came up with catchy phrases for her body, like "Achilles Jendon" for her Achilles tendon or "Lobe E Won Kenobe" for her ear.⁸⁴ If the viewer would like to "study" before taking the test of trying to figure out the body

part, there is a link connecting him or her back to the “Anatomy One-oh-One” site. JenniCAM announces and even contributes to the reading of Jenni’s body as a fetish. Simultaneously, the fetishized object serves as a means through which the viewer can learn more about the subject, Jenni. This integration of objectification with the creation of a subject “I” forms a complicated text that pushes the traditional readings of the female body as an object.

Fort-da

Although the reading of JenniCAM through voyeurism and fetishistic scopophilia is quite useful, to give the impression that desire operates through a singular mode in JenniCAM is to do an injustice to the multiple ways in which pleasure manifests itself in human experience and to make monolithic judgments about the demographics of JenniCAM spectators. In fact, this reading of JenniCAM leaves out the pleasure that female viewers may receive from watching Jenni. Since Laura Mulvey’s ground-breaking essay, other feminist film theorists have sought to expand the notion of desire at work in film. Building on the concept of desire as that which cannot be obtained, feminist film theorists writing after Mulvey rethink the grounding of desire in the wish for control and look to the search for the return of pre-Oedipal unity as a motivation of desire.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud develops a theory of desire from his observations of his grandson’s engaged play with a ball attached to a string. By watching his grandson’s joy from throwing a ball away from his body and then retrieving it by pulling on a string, Freud conceives of his grandson’s wish for the

Mother's return. The figure of the Mother, the source of pleasure and unity, was lost in the establishment of the infant's subjectivity through the entrance into Language. The entrance into Language inaugurates the infant in the world of the symbolic. At this moment, the profound loss of the pre-linguistic, unified Mother commences what Jacques Lacan would characterize as the continual wish to return to the earliest stage of secure meaning. Instead, language hails the endless metonymic system of deferral where one object is endlessly substituted for another. Freud believed this object (for his infant grandson, the ball) to stand in for the memory of the unified Mother. He theorizes that in the game, the terror of loss is endured and even repeated in order to bring about the pleasure generated by the return of the object. According to Freud, the ball-as-Mother serves as reminder of a time prior to the establishment of the symbolic order, to a moment of stasis and wholeness.⁸⁵ Psychoanalytic theorist Juliet Mitchell explains the invention of this game by the infant as a means "to overcome the trauma of its Mother's necessary departures...The baby's need can be met, its demand responded to, but its desire only exists because of the initial failure of satisfaction."⁸⁶ While the continual deferral of meaning is frightening, it also operates as a source of pleasure, which is derived from that which is just out of reach, a situation that mirrors the viewer's engagement with JenniCAM in certain ways. Terry Eagleton remarks that, "For Freud, it is a desire to scramble back to a place where we cannot be harmed, the inorganic existence which precedes all conscious life, which keeps us struggling forward: our restless attachments (Eros) are in thrall to the death drive (Thanatos)."⁸⁷ In other words, the pre-Oedipal unconscious propels and motivates the repetition of

certain acts in order to gain pleasure from the fort-da, the back and forth, of loss and return of objects which signify a memory of the Mother.

Hence, the formation of the relationship of fort-da offers an explanation of the pleasure of the repetitive in contrast to the theories of desire centered around control and mastery. If an object is endowed as a site of meaning and wholeness, the continual disappearance and reappearance of that object can be a source of intense pleasure, despite the fact that the wish for a return to wholeness is never fulfilled. In Gaylyn Studlar's work *In the Realm of Pleasure*, she uses this theory and articulates the undertaking of the fort-da game in terms of the Marlene Dietrich films directed by Josef von Sternberg. For her, the viewing pleasure in these films is fundamentally connected to the desiring mechanism of the fort-da game, which she labels as a masochistic pleasure. Studlar charges that by "returning to fantasies that have their origin in the prephallic, prelinguistic, pregenital stage of development, the masochistic aesthetic suggests that all of film may be capable of forming spectatorial pleasures divorced from castration fear and sexual difference defined exclusively as feminine lack."⁸⁸ Studlar points out that much like the dependent stage of infancy, the masochist gives him or herself over to the female body and gaze. In the pre-Oedipal stage, the Mother is the object of the child's affections and fascination. As a figure who feeds the narcissism of the child by the giving over a part of her being, the Mother is also the source of unified pleasure. Through both her gaze upon the child and oral fulfillment, the Mother becomes the *maternal imago* - a source of plenty and wholeness. Studlar argues that a reassessment of the power linked with masochism and the Mother helps to bring into

focus the discrepancies within psychoanalytic film theory based solely on Oedipal conceptions of pleasure.

Serving as the centerpiece of the masochistic aesthetic, the fort-da game reveals the desire in both men and women to return to a state of secure pre-Oedipal unity. It is the process itself, the repetition of the loss and return of an image thought to reconnect the viewer with the earliest stages of static unity, that is the source of pleasure rather than any sort of engagement with notions of the Oedipal phallus. Moreover, because this pleasure does not originate out of a relationship to the phallus, but rather from the pre-Oedipal, this type of pleasure privileges neither male nor female viewers because their gendered subjectivity is formed only after they enter into Language. Both men and women can derive pleasure from the system of fort-da, as it is not dependent on the establishment of an ego. In the framework of the masochistic aesthetic, Studlar argues that “gender identity is transmutative and triumphantly bisexual.”⁸⁹ Thus, the masochistic aesthetic becomes a way to read desire before the entrance into Language and the Law of the Father.

The mapping of the fort-da game onto the functionality of JenniCAM yields a background for understanding the pleasures of such a text. Structured remarkably like the fort-da game, JenniCAM engages the viewer in the back and forth, presence and absence, of not only Jenni’s body but of the JenniCAM image itself. Extending the metaphor of the game, Jenni’s body is conceived as the *maternal imago* of the masochistic aesthetic, disappearing and reappearing at random. Her corporeality operates as a metonym of meaning. JenniCAM images are uploaded to the Web and replace the old in a continual cycle of refreshment. From one clip to the next, the image

has the potential to radically change from, for example, a picture of Jenni sleeping in her bed to one where her bed is made and she is no longer present. Jenni's body is not a fixed symbol within the text. It changes and moves, disappears and reappears. In fact, the promise of witnessing Jenni's body is often not met either because she is physically not present or because the image is blurry. Continuing the analogy, the viewer, like the infant playing with the ball, takes pleasure in the disappearance and return of the image. Its loss and return, just like that of the ball, brings great pleasure to those engaged in the game. The pleasure of repetition does not originate in mastery over or control of the object (Jenni's body/the ball); rather, it stems from a search for unity, a return to a past that cannot be retrieved.

No matter how a viewer hears about JenniCAM, their first glimpse of the site may or may not involve the display of Jenni's body. There is the risk that Jenni will be on vacation, out shopping, or in another room, creating the terror of the potential of her absence. What is critical, however, is that despite the fact that Jenni's body is not necessarily present in the production of JenniCAM, the site does not make sense without a notion of her body, her being. Thinking back to the hybridity of the name (Jenni + CAM), the synthesis requires at the very least the promise of a corporeal Jenni. Within the psychoanalytic framework of the fort-da game, it is this promise of her return that propels the viewing of JenniCAM. Further, her expected return can be anticipated. Although this seems insignificant, the gratification derived from anticipated pleasure should not be underestimated in JenniCAM. Aided by the caption, which in this case functions as a timer that allows for the calculation of the next anticipated reload, the JenniCAM viewer can wait with relish to see what happens in

the next sequence. Even if Jenni is not present, there is always the promise of the next reload, whether in twenty minutes or two minutes. Without the concept of Jenni's body, whether supplemented with a visual representation of Jenni or not, JenniCAM does not make sense. Conceptualized in this light, Jenni's body functions as the locus of meaning, as the site of plenitude, as the *maternal imago* of JenniCAM.

The email correspondence and fan sites that are produced in order to keep track of Jenni's presence on camera buttress the concept that Jenni's body serves to provide meaning for JenniCAM. Her viewers send emails to friends or listservs to alert each other when something exciting or new is occurring on camera. For example, short emails like, "Jenni is naked on jennicam.org just now!!!!!" are dispersed to inform others of the goings-on of JenniCAM.⁹⁰ Through this type of behavior, fans demonstrate the value they place on the corporeality of JenniCAM. Instead, their excitement surrounds the possibility of witnessing Jenni's body in action, and part of the game becomes trying to catch Jenni in motion, to freeze her in time and space in the hopes of gaining knowledge of the "real" Jenni.

In another instance, a fan from the United Kingdom developed a "JenniCAM Activity Graph" to allow viewers to know when Jenni is most active. At this Web site, a graph charts Jenni's movement patterns over the previous 24 hours, measuring the fluctuation of motion in between clips. This Web site's internal mechanism "attempts to assign an activity rating to the current image, telling us just how much is going on between images. The graph shows [her activities over the course of] the last hour and the last day."⁹¹ This site also gives users the option of opening another browser of the graph, customized to the size of the graph, so that viewers can be conscious of Jenni's

movement while doing other work. Fan activity like this points to the deep investment viewers have in witnessing Jenni's presence. Whether naked or not, Jenni's body and, moreover, her activity, is of extreme interest to viewers. Although the first example signals a preoccupation with Jenni's body as a sexual object, the second seeks to track Jenni to know when she is animate. In both cases, the implication stands that without the embodied subject, JenniCAM provides little meaning to viewers. It is the presence of Jenni that viewers desire. Thus, Jenni, much like the *maternal imago* of the masochistic aesthetic, "transcends castration fear. Rather than relegating the woman to a position of lack, it exalts her to an idealized wholeness imitated in the son's fetishistic wish to restore identification and oneness with her."⁹² Studlar, contesting Mulvey's claim that the female body represents the fear of castration, introduces a method for analyzing desire that not only allows for both male and female viewers in their positions as gendered subjects, but she also opens up a space for conversations about desires not rooted in mastery and control but in the wish for unity.

Further, the premise on which viewers pay for access to JenniCAM also supports the use of fort-da pleasure in explaining the behavior of viewers of JenniCAM. "Guest" viewers receive a new image every twenty minutes without a fee while "Members" receive a new picture every two minutes by connecting to a password-protected site. The membership access does not provide anything more than a faster refresh rate. It does not provide a secret archives of nude images of Jenni made available when one signs on and pays fifteen dollars. That is to say, what the membership provides is the opportunity to cycle through the fort-da system at a faster rate. The tensions of whether or not the *maternal imago* will return are more quickly

confirmed or quelled. Thus, subscribers, fearing an increased separation from the source of pleasure, pay a fee in order to reduce the length of time required to wait for the next return of the image. Viewers waiting twenty minutes to have the image renewed risk missing events of particular interest, namely the sex act.

The apparatus of the digital camera in combination with the two psychoanalytic readings of JenniCAM offer identificatory positions for both male and female viewers. The viewers of JenniCAM cannot be conceived as a monolithic group, particularly given the global nature of the Internet. Offering multiple ways that pleasure functions in JenniCAM addresses this plurality. Earlier in this paper, I hinted at the conundrum of feminist engagement with the visual. Stating that any act of visual representation is an “act of terrorism,” acknowledges the deeply embedded inequalities of language, but also threaten to create an essentialism that forces women to abdicate or yield their place in a social, visual system of representation. In its capacity to address various kinds of viewers, JenniCAM demands an investigation into not only the images produced but the mechanism involved in the creation and deliver of those images.

CONCLUSION: Toward a Cyborg Subjectivity

JenniCAM suggests a subjectivity that is constituted by fusing together disparate entities: the corporeal and the mechanic. In *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway defines a cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as creature of fiction.”⁹³ Haraway’s cyborg counters the notion of the unified subject because it is a compilation, a combination of parts rather than a singular organism or machine. In the combination of flesh and hardware, a dynamic and unique entity arises. Cyborgs are material creatures as well as manifestations of the fantastic, and the cyborg is “resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity,” qualities also found within JenniCAM through the integration of organism and machine, through the playful negotiation of a subject/object position, and through its presentation of the private.⁹⁴ Under this frame, Jenni exists as a cyborg. This is accomplished through the moments at which JenniCAM disrupts boundaries and resists the monolithic. Just like Haraway’s cyborg, JenniCAM embraces aggregation rather than unification. In splitting dichotomous boundaries such as body/machine, private/public, and real/fiction, JenniCAM forces a rethinking of roles of the female subject in relation to each binary opposition.

Haraway takes on the challenge of using irony and feminist principles to envision and forge a new, transformative understanding of gender and subjectivity. In her *Manifesto*, Haraway repeatedly stresses the need to disavow the monolithic. The ontology of the cyborg is the ontology of the fragment, of flux. Haraway’s conception of the cyborg holds an ontological map through which JenniCAM, in its fragmentary

mobility, can be read, providing discussion of new forms of subjectivity. Haraway writes in her *Postscript*:

Feminist embodiment, then, is not about fixed location in a reified body, female or otherwise, but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for difference in material-semiotic fields of meaning. Embodiment is significant prosthesis.⁹⁵

When thinking about JenniCAM as an emergent subjectivity, as a hybridity without a clear analog, it is helpful to recall what Haraway teaches about old paradigms of analysis. She asserts that these critical systems may very well be anachronistic at the same time they are constitutive, particularly given the continual mutability of the hybrid subject. JenniCAM emerges as a particular type of cyborg subjectivity, one that seems to require and yet simultaneously resist certain traditional readings of female embodiment.

The constitution of the cyborg subject in JenniCAM through hybridity rather than through monolithic unity offers a means to redefine or resignify what has once been normative. The definition of the cybernetic being originates from the Greek meaning “steersman” and was adapted by Norbert Wiener to describe both the steersman and the ship, two entities that together composed a cybernetic organism.⁹⁶ On the most fundamental level, the combination of what has been conceived of as living (organism) and dead (machine) confuses the boundaries of what it means to be human. Cyberfeminist Sadie Plant writes that once the concept of the cyborg was introduced, “Life and death were not longer absolute conditions, but interactive tendencies and processes, both of which are at work in both automatic machines and organism.”⁹⁷

Returning to Haraway's definition of a cyborg, to be composed by and in social reality as well as fiction is to be both "interpolated" by social, material means and to divulge the "consensual hallucination" that produces those means.⁹⁸ The images of Jenni offered by the camera oscillate between a female body disconnected from her machine to the blurring of the distinction between woman and machine. When Jenni is in her bed, getting dressed, or on the phone, viewers can readily discern her body from that of the keyboard or computer. However, when Jenni is at her computer, one has the sense that she has "plugged in" and connected to the mechanics. The image of Jenni at her computer becomes an icon for that fusion. JenniCAM's invitation for interactivity with her viewers is, in essence, an invitation for viewers to join her in the writing of the "social fiction" by which she is shaped.

The erosion of the line between the private and the public composes part of the fascination with and abhorrence of JenniCAM. For many, Jenni is making a spectacle of herself, a "specifically feminine danger," by transgressing across notions of bourgeois femininity that uphold the woman as the guardian of morality.⁹⁹ Cultural politics have maintained a certain set of rules for the display of the female body. JenniCAM flouts these rules and offers herself to be looked at as both a public and a private subject. All of the world can see her in her private space, her boudoir. Then again, this is nothing new. As Rebecca Schneider notes, "The feminine is emblematic of the private sphere - the home, the family, and consumption - while the sphere of production bears gender as a masculine domain."¹⁰⁰ The image of a woman in a bedroom is, in many ways, a cultural norm, a "habitation."¹⁰¹ What is unusual in this

instance is that it is not only the woman in front of the camera, but it is the woman who is behind the camera, as well. Jenni is both seer and seen.

One of the most common questions asked of Jenni is, “Why are you doing this?”¹⁰² People find it puzzling, peculiar, and perverted that someone would expose him or herself in such a graphic, public way. Descriptions of the JenniCAM phenomenon often garner remarks of astonishment and disgust. As one Washington, D.C. news anchor stated in reaction to a story on JenniCAM, “Lotta strange things on that Internet!”¹⁰³ The aversion to JenniCAM lies in its “profane” nature, the way in which it pushes against the boundaries of signification, particularly of private and public. That JenniCAM provokes such charged responses suggests that Jenni’s presentation of identity transgresses normative expressions of subjectivity. Through a new means of representation, JenniCAM confounds and confuses “the domains of political and linguistic ‘representation’” that have “set out in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed.”¹⁰⁴ That is, the anxieties centered around JenniCAM suggest a breakdown in normative practices in how subjects are constituted. By acknowledging and repeating traditional representations of women, JenniCAM reiterates normative standards regarding gender. Yet, it also discloses the ideological rules that govern binary oppositions by evincing tensions and de-naturalizing the formation of subjects. Here, I employ Judith Butler’s definition of subject construction as something that “not only takes place *in* time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms.” For Butler, identity-forming categories, such as sex, are “both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration.”¹⁰⁵

Jenni's representation of her identity stabilizes and yet disrupts the process of subject formation by repeating yet resisting cultural norms.

The discourse fashioned by viewers and critics of JenniCAM as well as Jenni herself attests to these cultural tensions. One of the most contested areas of discussion that surrounds JenniCAM is its assertion that it is an example of "real life." Running parallel with one another are contrasting claims of JenniCAM's artifice and its reality. The dialogic engagement surrounding this negotiation reifies and yet deconstructs a rhetoric of the natural. Jenni reproduces and repeats a familiar image for viewers in order to validate her claims to delivering reality. It is through this rhetorical process, the building and deconstructing of epistemic understandings of the visual, that JenniCAM forms a subject that is performative, that is, as Rebecca Schneider says, "like a ghost in a body-suit, donned and wielded in a show of social and political significances, manipulating and bent on exposing the historical mechanisms of a social drama which has parsed its plays, by bodily markings, into subjects and objects."¹⁰⁶ In forming such a subject, JenniCAM remains devoutly "improper." No longer positioned as a Modern subject, JenniCAM makes explicit the "guise," the tools of the construction, as it uses those tools to redefine the subject's relationships to the visual.

References to JenniCAM in the media invariably mention the "voyeuristic" elements of the phenomenon. As used by Freud, "voyeurism" involves seeing what should not be seen. The object of the voyeur's gaze does not know it is being watched. Yet, Jenni anticipates and even invites the gaze of the world into her bedroom. She situates herself in front of the camera as well as behind it. Again, this dual position of seer and seen uncloaks the performativity involved in the production and reproduction

of JenniCAM. By tempting the viewer with the fantasy of complete vision, of total knowledge, JenniCAM forces a reevaluation of the term “voyeur.” In doing so, JenniCAM uses its own images to rewrite a new relationship between the camera, the photographer, and the viewer by announcing the status of Jenni as an object yet refuting and resisting the traditional representations of objectification. By “investing” the object with vision, with a camera, the multiple subject of JenniCAM inhabits a space of plurality and abundance. Never pinned to positions of either subject or object, Jenni snaps her own picture, oversees her own viewing.

JenniCAM’s display of the weaving and unweaving of epistemological categories serves as “technological drag” in the same way that Judith Butler talks about how dressing in drag undermines the naturalization of the categories of male and female.¹⁰⁷ Jenni embraces a playfulness, an ironic stance in this subject/object position. At the same time that Jenni creates and sees, she announces her awareness of her position as something to be seen. She acknowledges her objectification through Web pages like “Anatomy One-oh-One,” where she posts images of specific fragmented body parts, such as her eyes, along with a narrative about her eyes. As Haraway writes, the cyborg is “[n]o longer structured by the polarity of public and private.”¹⁰⁸ The cyborg has no ties to protecting aspects of itself from the social, for the cyborg exceeds the boundaries by making explicit the link between “sexuality, vulnerability, and power.”¹⁰⁹

It is significant to point out that Jenni is not consciously engaged in redefining gendered subjectivity by dressing in drag or even exploring what it means to be male or masculine. However, Jenni’s combination of the World Wide Web and her digital

camera confuses ideological rubrics, categories that implicitly bear the mark of gender. Jenni does not represent the pre-discursive “I” that critiques and resists social construction. Rather, in its hybridity, JenniCAM suggests a type of “subversive reterritorialization” of the semiotics of visual representation of gender contemporaneous with the process of subject formation and evolution.¹¹⁰ By pushing against categories such as private/public, Jenni tacitly redefines what it means to be female within a given binary classification. In other words, Jenni may not be using the traditional tools of drag -- her clothing, her make-up, etc. -- to push against notions of gender, but in the production of JenniCAM, she forces a questioning of the arbitrary boundaries through which identity is constituted, repeated, and naturalized.

Still, in many ways, JenniCAM anticipates an audience that is male. While JenniCAM confuses traditional boundaries, it remains rooted in a particular dialectic, one that centers around binary tensions. In order to imagine a new discourse, the visionary descriptions of feminist film theorists offer clues to redefining the terms of representation and subjectivity of JenniCAM. In the final chapter of *Technologies of Gender*, Teresa de Lauretis proscribes the invention of not only new strategies or texts but also conceiving of an entirely new “social subject.” She suggests that the project of feminist filmmakers ask “how to effect another vision: to construct other objects and subjects of vision, and to formulate the conditions of representability of another social subject.”¹¹¹ The challenges faced by feminist filmmakers to envision and imagine new relationships provide a window through which to see the potential of the medium of the digital camera. Jennifer Ringley may not have an overt, articulated feminist agenda, but those who follow in her footsteps may expand the uses of the digital camera as a tool

for political change. The potential to stretch the definitions of vision and representation and to reconceive of the position of the object as well as the subject that is suggested by JenniCAM may prove fruitful as a tool of feminist transformation. By offering a new type of social subject, JenniCAM serves as a cairn, a memorial to the past as well as a signal of things to come. We can only wonder what new configurations of vision and gender the realm of digital cameras will bring.

JenniCAM highlights the way in which the vision of the viewer does not produce stable knowledge. Jenni is always on the move, never allowing for a final reading yet inviting the viewer to use her body as a canvass for the creation of meaning. In the way in which Jenni pushes against definitions of private and public as well as the way she exposes the shifting meanings of bodies, JenniCAM muddies our understanding of the power of watching and the privilege of sight. In closing, what I'd like to suggest is that despite its seeming hegemony, JenniCAM is a text filled with play and complexity. In doing so, JenniCAM offers an ironic cyborg subjectivity, one that uses the historical traditions of vision to tinker with the semiotics of representation.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ George Buce, "The Nose's HomeCAMs." Online. Internet. 21 Apr. 1998. Available: <http://www.homecams.com/>.
- ² Jennifer Ringley, "JenniCAM Guests" Online. Internet. 25 Apr. 1998. Available <http://www.jennicam.org/guests/index.html>.
- ³ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).
- ⁴ Simon Firth, "Live! From my Bedroom." *Salon|21st*. (January 1998). Online. Internet. 12 Jan. 1998. Available http://www.salonmagazine.com/21st/feature/1998/01/cov_08feature.html.
- ⁵ The technical explanation for the workings of the cam are described by Jenni on her Web site as follows: "I have two computers, one Mac and one linux box, networked together through an ethernet hub, connected to my ISP via modem. My linux box uses NFS mount to mount the JenniCam server. Then, my Mac uses MacWebCam to take a picture from my Connectix QuickCam every minute (to keep the picture fresher). Every two minutes, a cron job connects to my mac using ftp and uploads the new picture to my linux box, into the NFS mounted directory. Complicated, yes, but much faster and more reliable than the old method I was using. And more secure. And once the picture is up here, the server ships it out to you!" on Jennifer Ringley. "JenniCam - Frequently Asked Questions" Online. Internet. Available <http://www.jennicam.org/faq/tech.html>.
- ⁶ Firth.
- ⁷ Quentin Stafford-Fraser, "Trojan Room Coffee Pot Biography." Online. Internet. 17 Apr. 1998. Available <http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/coffee/qsf/coffee.html>.
- ⁸ Jennifer Ringley, "JenniCam - Frequently Asked Questions" Online. Internet. Available <http://www.jennicam.org/faq/general.html>.
- ⁹ Jennifer Ringley, "JenniCam - Frequently Asked Questions" Online. Internet. Available <http://www.jennicam.org/faq/general.html>.
- ¹⁰ Jennifer Ringley, "JenniSHOW" Online. Internet. 25 Apr. 1998. Available <http://www.thesync.com/jennishow/>
- ¹¹ Jennifer Ringley, "Jennifer: Nisi Nirvana" Online. Internet. 25 Apr. 1998. Available <http://www.jennicam.org/~jenni/index.html>.
- ¹² Barbara Hagenbaugh, "Woman puts herself and her apartment live on Internet." *Reuters*. (17 Sept. 1997) Online. Internet. 18 Feb. 1998. Available http://www.nando.net/newsroom/ntn/info/091797/info7_22171_body.html.
- ¹³ Barbara Hagenbaugh.

¹⁴ Jennifer Ringley, "JenniCam - Frequently Asked Questions" Online. Internet. 25 Apr. 1998. Available <http://www.jennicam.org/faq/general.html>.

¹⁵ Jennifer Ringley, "JenniCam - Frequently Asked Questions" Online. Internet. 25 Apr. 1998. Available <http://www.jennicam.org/faq/general.html>.

¹⁶ Firth.

¹⁷ For scholarship on photography, see Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Doubleday, 1977); Tagg, *The Burden of Representation* (London: Macmillan Education, 1988); Tomas, "From the Photograph to Postphotographic Practice: Toward a Postoptical Ecology of the Eye," in Timothy Druckrey, ed., *Electronic Culture* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1996), pp.145-53.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977).

¹⁹ Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, "Introduction" in Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, eds., *Feminism & Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988).

²⁰ Grosz, p. 16.

²¹ Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 10.

²² Grosz, p. 19.

²³ See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

²⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, "What is Postmodernism?" in Charles Jencks, ed., *The Post-Modern Reader* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 144.

²⁵ Lyotard.

²⁶ See *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Cambridge: Polity Press; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

²⁷ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), p. 14.

²⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), p. 4.

²⁹ Roseanne Stone, "Preface" in Timothy Druckrey, ed., *Electronic Culture* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1996), p. 7.

³⁰ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," trans. Harry Zohn in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 226.

³¹ David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson define narrative as "a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space" in *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), p. 90.

³² David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, p. 480.

³³ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 74.

³⁴ Jameson.

³⁵ Jameson, p. 75.

³⁶ Jennifer Ringley, "JenniCam - Frequently Asked Questions" Online. Internet. 25 Apr. 1998. Available <http://www.jennicam.org/faq/general.html>.

³⁷ Jameson, p. 71.

³⁸ Phelan, p. 34.

³⁹ Baudrillard, p. 166.

⁴⁰ Jenni does not archive pictures, although fans do capture and organize old images. Jennifer Ringley. Personal interview. 17 Feb. 1998.

⁴¹ Baudrillard, p. 171.

⁴² Kevin Robins, "The Virtual Unconscious in Postphotography" in Timothy Druckrey, ed., *Electronic Culture* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1996), p. 166.

⁴³ In the February 1982 issue of *National Geographic*, a photograph of the pyramids at Giza was digitally altered so that the image could fit the front cover layout. The June 20, 1994 issue of *Time* magazine featured the darkened mug shot of OJ Simpson on its cover, a process which many interpreted as a racist move to demonize him. Finally, *Newsweek* magazine took the liberty of altering the teeth of Bobbi McCaughey on the front cover of the December 1, 1997 issue to make them appear more even and white.

⁴⁴ Kevin Robins, "The Virtual Unconscious in Postphotography" in Timothy Druckrey, ed., *Electronic Culture* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1996), p. 156.

⁴⁵ Baudrillard, p. 170.

⁴⁶ Anonymous, "Re: JenniCam; Cybersaint or self-serving trollop?" *apcmag.com* 'Features Discussion Area'. 25 Dec. 1997. Online. Internet. Available <http://apcmag.com>.

⁴⁷ Hagenbaugh.

⁴⁸ Anonymous, "Re: JenniCam; Cybersaint or self-serving trollop?" *apcmag.com* 'Features Discussion Area'. 18 Mar. 1998. Online. Internet. Available <http://apcmag.com>.

⁴⁹ Anonymous, "Re: JenniCam; Cybersaint or self-serving trollop?" *apcmag.com* 'Features Discussion Area'. 25 Dec. 1997. Online. Internet. Available <http://apcmag.com>.

⁵⁰ "HO-CAMs." Online. Internet. 25 Apr. 1998. Available <http://www.castboy.com/hocam.html>.

⁵¹ "HO-CAMs."

⁵² For more feminist scholarship on body image, see Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

⁵³ "HO-CAMs."

⁵⁴ Jennifer Ringley, "JenniCAM" Online. Internet. Available <http://www.jennicam.org/faq/general.html>.

⁵⁵ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" in Simon During, ed., *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 40.

⁵⁶ See Wolf.

⁵⁷ Avital Ronell, "Video/Television/Rodney King: Twelve Steps Beyond The Pleasure Principle." in Peter D'Agostino and David Tafler, eds., *Transmission: Toward a Post-Television Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 1995), p. 113.

⁵⁸ Hagenbaugh.

⁵⁹ William Bogart, *The Simulation of Surveillance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 8.

⁶⁰ Mark Poster, *The Second Media Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 87.

⁶¹ For more scholarly work on surveillance, see Poster, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); David Lyon, *The Electronic Eye* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

⁶² David Lyon, *The Electronic Eye* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 3.

⁶³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977), p. 201.

- ⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, p. 26.
- ⁶⁵ Jennifer Ringley, Interview. *The Today Show*. NBC. WRC-TV, Washington, DC. 17 Mar. 1998.
- ⁶⁶ Bogart, p. 19.
- ⁶⁷ Bogart.
- ⁶⁸ Bogart, p. 9.
- ⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1980), pp. 70-5.
- ⁷⁰ Bruce Haring, "Net Cameras Put Intimacy Online." *USA Today* (08 Apr. 1998): D5.
- ⁷¹ Bogart, p. 4.
- ⁷² Sarah Kember, "Feminist Figuration and the Question of Origin" in George Robertson, Melinda Marsh, Lisa Tickner, John Bird, Barry Curtis, and Tim Putnam, eds., *Future Natural* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 261.
- ⁷³ Jennifer Ringley, Personal interview. 17 Feb. 1998.
- ⁷⁴ Jennifer Ringley, Personal interview. 17 Feb. 1998.
- ⁷⁵ Bogart, p. 125.
- ⁷⁶ Bogart, p. 141.
- ⁷⁷ Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 1.
- ⁷⁸ Jennifer Ringley, Interview. *The Today Show*. NBC. WRC-TV, Washington, DC. 17 Mar. 1998.
- ⁷⁹ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in Constance Penley, ed., *Feminism and Film Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 62.
- ⁸⁰ Mary Ann Doane, "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body" in Constance Penley, ed., *Feminism and Film Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 216
- ⁸¹ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" p. 64
- ⁸² Sigmund Freud, "The Sexual Aberrations" trans. James Strachey, ed., *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Basic Books, 1975), p. 23.

- ⁸³ Jennifer Ringley, "Anatomy One-Oh-One" Online. Internet. 25 Apr. 1998. Available <http://www.jennicam.org/~jenni/tour/>.
- ⁸⁴ "Achilles Jendon" is a play on Jenni's name. "Lobe E Won Kenobe" is a play on the *Star Wars* character Obe Won Kenobe.
- ⁸⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 160.
- ⁸⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality* trans. Jacqueline Rose, Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, eds., (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), p. 6.
- ⁸⁷ Eagleton, p. 161.
- ⁸⁸ Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 29.
- ⁸⁹ Studlar, p. 32.
- ⁹⁰ JP May, "nice!" futurec@uafsysb.uark.edu (10 Mar. 1998).
- ⁹¹ Scott Manley, "JenniCAM Activity Graph." Online. Internet. 2 Feb. 1998. Available <http://szyzyg.arm.ac.uk/~spm/meter.html>.
- ⁹² Studlar, p. 43.
- ⁹³ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 149.
- ⁹⁴ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, p. 151.
- ⁹⁵ Donna Haraway, "Postscript" in Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, eds., *Technoculture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 23.
- ⁹⁶ Sadie Plant, *Zeros and Ones* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), p. 156.
- ⁹⁷ Plant, p. 161.
- ⁹⁸ Here, I use Louis Althusser's definition of interpolation from "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" eds., Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle in *Critical Theory Since 1965* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), pp. 239- 250. I also employ William Gibson's definition of cyberspace from *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984).
- ⁹⁹ Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 53.
- ¹⁰⁰ Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 72.

¹⁰¹ Schneider, p. 73.

¹⁰² Jennifer Ringley, Interview. *The Today Show*. NBC. WRC-TV, Washington, DC. 17 Mar. 1998.

¹⁰³ Jennifer Ringley, Interview. *Eleven o'clock News*. WRC-TV, Washington, DC. 17 Mar. 1998.

¹⁰⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ Schneider, pp. 180-181.

¹⁰⁷ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*.

¹⁰⁸ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, p. 151.

¹⁰⁹ Schneider, p. 77.

¹¹⁰ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p. 19.

¹¹¹ de Lauretis, p. 135