

The Portrait Under Surveillance

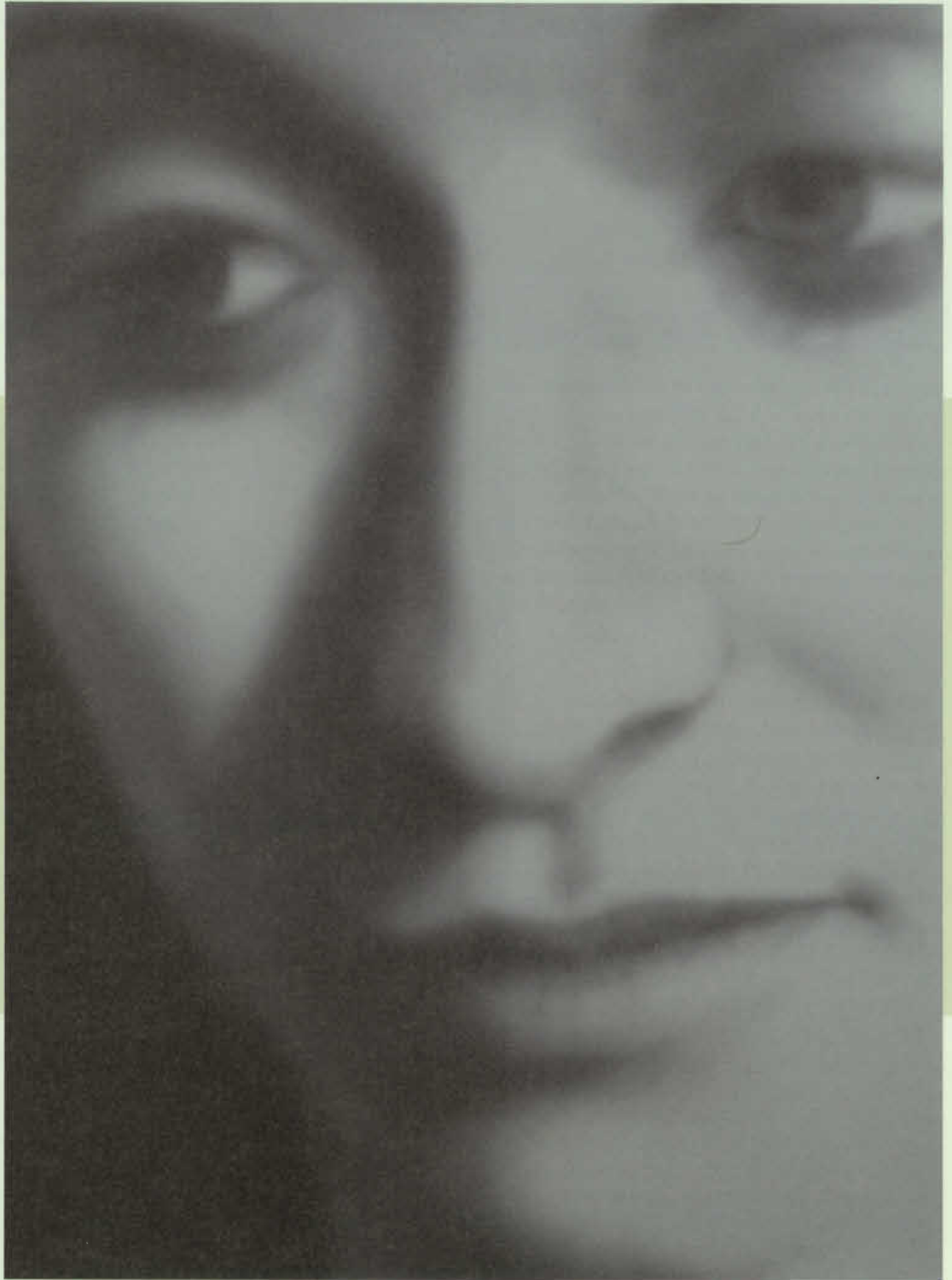
PORTRAITS BY PENELOPE GOTTLIEB

IT IS BY NAME that we are identified. But to identify the name means to identify with it. Our names are rich in association, literalization, visualization. This excess marks the spot we are in with our seeing-eye names. I see you: but only if the third person is watching too, only if we see in and through the name of this higher power, which is, ultimately, the name itself, that is, the last name, the name that lasts, only if we see, then, in the name of this name, can we begin to address the visual relation in the loftier terms of surveillance. Gottlieb: dear to God. Dearer my God to Thee. But then there was the given name, the first-name basis of the I-see-you dyad in childhood that precedes the last name, the frame of reference of the third person. The legendary constancy of Penelope, remember, requires that all her weaving be repetition of and rehearsal for the unweaving by which she serves the missing and defers—or mourns over—the merely successful, merely integrative work of mourning that substitution must ultimately always admit.



TEXT BY LAURENCE A. RICKELS

THE CLOSEST WE never came to being completely subject to an all-seeing eye was in the earliest mother-and-child dyad. But this is also when the infant first enters the realm of visibility through the projection booth that lack of motor coordination builds. The outer limits and limbs of our uncoordinated body mass in infancy can only be grasped, often as reflected back by the mother's breast, in the completely projective, identificatory, hallucinatory manner to which we are born.





THE EVIDENCE OF SURVEILLANCE belongs to the world that can be observed only with the aid of media. It belongs to a genealogy of media in which every extension of the sensorium gets ahead of itself as military advantage. Wars once were fought to exercise the visibility advantage held over the enemy. Today, wars are fought to maintain surveillance as field of reference.



AS FANTASY OR IDEOLOGY, surveillance, live transmission, pre-digital TV all suggested the possibility of a ghost-less or, in other words, transference-free transmission—but only if the record could speak for itself. Surveillance—which, functionally speaking, is the syntactic arrangement of once live or direct transmissions—first appeared realizable with the advent of tape technologies, which began completing their system during the Second World War. Only thus could the evidence of the senses become part of the record and let the recording show. But what's also on the recording, in the splitting of a second, and thus technically in time even for so-called live transmissions, is the counter-testimony of simulation, falsification, even (as in the post-WWII "Voice Phenomenon") haunting. First a certain Friedrich Jürgensen, then

Konstantin Raudive (both these founding figures of the "Voice Phenomenon" had been displaced from Eastern to Western Europe by the events of the Second World War) used the tape recorder as the answering machine of the dead. In Sweden one day, Jürgensen decided to leave the tape recorder running outside, in his absence, to capture birdsong. When he played back the tape he thought he could make out ghostly voices. He kept on playing back the tape, over and over again, until finally he could clearly hear his deceased mother's message to him.

Photography was once believed to be capable of picking up ghosts otherwise invisible to the living participants at séances. Then tape recording picked up noise that, upon repeated replay, released the audio portion of our relations with the dead.

PENELOPE COMMENCED HER series of portraits in the face of all our concerns about the everyday interventions and identifications of surveillance and under the aegis of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of faciality, according to which a face folds out from its abstract model or grid comprised of white wall and black holes that in turn models body and landscape, too, *as* facialized. But faciality also appears to break on, or break out with, a leap in logic or of faith: every face, Deleuze and Guattari conclude, is the face of Christ.

Penelope starts her portraiture process by collecting faces on the web in fact appropriated through video camera surveillance. Then she remakes or re-stages these images in her studio through photo sessions with models. These photographs she manipulates digitally and projects into larger-than-life format. The resulting photographic images are closely cropped in the manner of close-ups of cinematic icons. Finally Penelope airbrushes the portraits in at least nine layers of auto enamel until they project glittering video interference.

Look at the value-free melancholia of the portrait faces, buoyed up by a rigorous process of re-staging, reanimating, reclaiming, and preserving



these found images. Under surveillance the face, which we associate with the domain of the other—the other or mother is in our face—and, via the other, with self-esteem (as in face-saving), has been randomly exposed and reduced to a visibility that remains profoundly decontextualized and unidentifiable. Viewed from a vantage point always missing, often elevated, the face is not to face: the gaze is not returned but retained. Penelope's surveillance images assume the status of lost or departed but retained shadows of persons missing, but missing beyond identification.

PENELOPE'S EXPLORATION of what the surveillance record shows—the endless pileup of unidentified fleeting shadow faces—throws the high beam on a ruin-scape of technology, an allegorically sustained frame of reference that, functionally a failed system running on empty, takes its place next to nothing.



What does it mean to pose questions of surveillance as problems that are technologically, functionally, realistically already upon us—all over us? In the academy at least such an acceptance of or submission to a science-factual certitude about our being under supervision derives from a longer-term reception of Michel Foucault's work. Foucault reopened the reading or study of institutionalization and its subject, the seeing I or ego, which Nietzsche had already explored, but not under the aegis of realized technical controls, but instead in terms of the ruinous legacies of an otherwise consciously abandoned belief system. According to Nietzsche, from Christianity to nihilism, mankind has upheld belief in an all-seeing witness who, as we say, validates our suffering, our pain, and renders it all meaningful if only by being on record or under surveillance. The need for this witness protection or projection program struck Nietzsche as so seductive, even or especially since inimical to life, that he was moved to forecast twentieth-century wars unprecedented in history through which so-called monsters of nihilism would seek ultimate meaningfulness in mass destruction, death, suicide in the synchronization of all our deaths all together now at the same time. It was to be a late and last arrival of that old comfort: to be double *and* nothing.



I HAVE YET to encounter good reason to discard Nietzsche's view that the technical, scientific construct of surveillance is a belief system more remarkable for its ruinous failure than for any outside chance of realization. Thus one cannot but suspect that there is stowed away in current discourses of surveillance, transparency, and globalization an agenda, whether deliberate or unconscious, that is at least as old as Christianity. Derrida accordingly began referring to globalization as globalatinization, according to which the so-called new media of surveillance and liveness still ask us to believe in—have faith in—that evidence of the senses that cannot in fact be proven, that remains inadmissible as evidence, but which is nevertheless presented to us, in a flash, as the word made flesh.

ALL THE OCCULT and sci-fi figures out there double the ego's own origin as projection of the body. The identifiable body, whether in our techno-egoic culture or in the psychotic delusions studied by Freud, is lost or at a loss. To cut the loss down from the crisis proportions served when you're just too stuck on this body (as the only habitat for your narcissism), you can, for example, project the delusion of being controlled via a network of technical media, which gets you out from under the uncanny close encounter with the missing body. Under total surveillance—reduced, that is, to utter visibility—we could only be the android doubles we look like to those who, we think, control us. To make a name for yourself means to go where all selves meet on assimilation drive, the drive to be different—like those you like—to be like, the drive to become image.



FREUD WAS THE FIRST scientist to accept the testimony of delusions—and on their own terms, the terms they shared with his theorization of the states to which they refer. According to Freud, certain delusions counted as so-called endopsychic perceptions, essentially inside views of the functioning of the psychic apparatus. The two genres of psychotic delusion that make the endopsychic cut are archaeological-funereal and media-technological. These endopsychic perceptions thus line up the psychic apparatus with occult and technical media in a setting of end of the world that can be re-spelled as psy-fi: the breakdown of the reproductive immortality plan, that death-in-life that hands it all to future generations leads, now on the upbeat, to a new world order of replicational living on that extends the egoic span of retention.

Although recognizable props of religion abound in the delusions of Daniel Paul Schreber, Freud's favorite psycho, whose endopsychic perceptions are legend, the witness projection program in the Schreber case is ultimately secular, as secular as psychoanalysis itself. Schreber's world, for example, while relentlessly on record and under surveillance, in fact inhabits the stricken site of the inevitable techno failure of the belief system of surveillance as omniscience. The divine perspective of surveillance in Schreber's worldview is organized around a blind spot that won't wash or watch out: this god takes cognizance only of corpses from which he draws back up inside his greater network the nerves of them. Taken to be a corpse while melancholically playing dead, Schreber's live nerves become intertwined with and within the divine network. Schreber is now the catch in the divine plan, a catch in the throat of the disposal god, and out of their contaminating embrace sparks the outside chance that Schreber, by turning simultaneously into woman and into android, will conceive with the divine nerve rays a new species of survival. If that's not mourning—or rather unmourning—complete with the necessarily secular-suckular conditions of ongoing



relations with our dead, then I give up.

In the current context of international theory experiencing its own hostage crisis with regard to the return of religiosity in the midst of global mass-mediatization, I started recognizing another subculture of psychotic break and testimony that differs from the Schreber evidence, first off by virtue of not being organized as delusional *system*. If science fiction seemed the designated pop genre to work by analogy with the new worlds of Schreber and company, for this other delusional space it appears that the bookstore-created genre of "Fantasy" performs a similar service.



IN HIS 1908 essay on "The Poet and Day-Dreaming," Freud analyzed generic fantasy (and, in the meantime, the genre of "Fantasy") in terms of the two times you get and the one time you forget. Freud's example features a boy in his early teens, an orphan, who decides to apply for a job he has just heard about. On the way to his interview he fantasizes about getting the job, then rising up the ranks of employment, until he is second in command to his boss, whose daughter he marries and whose business he inherits. The past tense belongs to a time when the boy was the beloved young child of his parents. His yearning for that past animates the fantasy, which belongs to the future. It's a fiction about the time to come that is at the same time inspired by the past that saw him better off, beloved, protected. But for the fantasy to unfold the daydreamer must precisely forget the present, his job search, his unemployed, alone-in-the-world status. The present tense that the fantasy would bypass on the past-to-future express also includes ongoing tensions, like that of the boy's unresolved or unacknowledged grief that beams in on another channel than that of his idealized past.

"WE MUST NOT SUPPOSE," Freud writes, "that the products of this imaginative activity—the various fantasies, castles in the air and daydreams—are stereotyped or unalterable. On the contrary, they fit themselves in to the subject's shifting impressions of life, change with every change in his situation, and receive from every fresh active impression what might be called a 'date-mark'" (147). This is how Freud introduces the example given above as illustration of the general importance of fantasy's relationship to time. The present tense or tension cannot be circumvented without at the same time being encompassed but displaced. The Second Gulf War sponsored a fitting image for this disposition of the present tense even (or especially) in real time: the seeing-I of the war's live transmission was "embedded," that is, included at the front of the line in real wartime but at the same time displaced, dislocated, rendered unidentifiable and decontextualized.

Before it could serve as analogy, *Star Wars*, the ultimate fantasy film, was inside the battle plans and diplomatic discourse of the wars that are still coming at us. *Star Wars* raided science fiction only to get to the wide-open outer space where conceivable populations could be as scattered or gathered together in approximation to conditions on one planet (or continent) during the Middle Ages.

When an entire planet is annihilated at one point in the first film, only a little over one million inhabitants die. This minimization of catastrophic loss, which increases the outside chances for survival, was on one dotted line with the pomo diplomacy of Reaganomics: it proved possible to calculate nuclear risk in terms of survival, even following exchanges of strikes. The techno future thus allowed a chivalric spacing of conflict in which "Jedi Knights" could assume center screen. (Space-travel suits conveniently doubled as late arrivals of suits of armor.)

The sword fight and the joust, the rituals that bind conflict in fantasy works, have increasingly become the overriding model in the new fantasy genre of warfare. In theory, a finite number of professionals meet on a four-dimensional field to struggle for a prize that does not cost or count civilian casualties. The combatant leaders are highly personalized, like in role playing, their investment in the conflict super-charged with a sense of past wrongs and a future tense of wish fulfillment (a tense that belongs not to the uncontrollable future, the time of the other, but to the anticipated or already calculated future instead). Noncombatants are asked to stay tuned to the joust's broadcast, live and in real time, but via unidentifiable, unlocatable, and yet egoic probes.

In the first film, Luke Skywalker's foster parents are, I would argue, in fact his parents after all, but the parents who over time only keep disappointments. The missing exalted parents belong to his family romance. The ongoing tension with his (foster) parents is elided by the murderous intervention of an enemy force that in turn forces or frees him—the force is with him—to share the fantasy of the chivalric father. But out pops Darth Vader, the "death father" or malignant superego, in the place of the idealized father. At the close of the second film, Luke tends to his dying double father: he removes the dark helmet, his echo chamber of heavy breathing. Underneath it all, we find the vulnerable father of disappointment, with whom the son now finds reconciliation. Thus the royal past of parental rule, in contrast to a present tense (or tension) of deprivation and privation, jump-cuts to the wish fulfillment along for the Jedi Knight crusade. Included in this future fantasy moment is the therapeutic breakthrough inside the father complex. While the first and second installments of *Star Wars* foster metabolization of relations with father to the point of a seemingly therapeutic termination, the same movies appear to cut Luke's relationship to his mother nothing but slack. Princess Leia is their dead mother's lookalike. She beams into Luke's affections via a recognition value that remains unconscious to both of them. The intolerable divide between the foster mother, the ineffectual mother who protests against the foster father's guidelines for their son, but then accedes to father for the sake of family harmony, and the princess (or the mother behind the princess) is doubled by the incest gap that instantly yawns between object choice and sudden sibling. Across a greater arc of doubling, extending into the second trilogy of *Star Wars* films, which are set in the prehistory of the first trilogy, the princess mother can escape the corner she is in only by recourse to a double's power to divert attention. But once diverted, everyone (out in the audience, too) is hard pressed to identify which was the double and which one the original.



date-mark: "By 1918 all but one of my close friends were dead." There are prior losses, then, which supersede the impact of current events. The ongoing tension of unresolved grief goes the way of the present tense.

In a 1967 interview Tolkien gave his child's-eye view of a contrast that his fantasy fiction kept turning up: "Quite by accident, I have a very vivid child's view, which was the result of being taken away from one country and put in another hemisphere—the place where I belonged but which was totally novel and strange. After the barren, arid heat a Christmas tree." Tolkien celebrates the other world of Christmas trees. (The area of England in which the family resided indeed included stretches of idyllic landscape but was at the same time littered with industrialization. One of the homes he grew up in backed onto a railway line. In *The Lord of the Rings*, industrial and machinic settings are punctuated by arid desert-scapes in the domains of the infernal Sauron.) And yet his early recollection/relocation, which he shares with us on an upbeat, which involved his move from South Africa, where he was born to English parents, could not but double another departure. In fact it was after and because of his father's death that he and his younger brother moved to England, while his mother and missing father returned. It was his mother who, together with her sister, subsequently converted to Catholicism. The mother was the one to lose. And before Tolkien's childhood was over, his mother died on him. As an orphan charge of the Church, Tolkien soon showed an aptitude for the dead languages he would, given time, animate through translation and, ultimately, through their replacement by fantasy languages, self-contained languages that are fully functioning—you can learn them—and *not* dead since never really alive.

PENELOPE'S SURVEILLANCE PORTRAITS excavate the embedded date-marks that our Fantasy Sensurround would disavow or escape. The embedded moment is the blind spot along for Fantasy's drive for super-vision—so super as to be dead, or rather dead-dead, eternally alive. The embedded moment is the spot this vision is in with the ruinous materiality that the near miss or the leap of faith of its overdrive leaves behind. In the words or worlds of Fantasy, the deposit of the other's loss has redemption value and, thus valorized, redeemed, can be let go as happy ending. But the embedded ongoing record, which cannot speak for itself, is not redeemable, at least to the extent that it is, technically perhaps, certainly psychically, unstoppable. There's the fantasy face that is Christ's face. But then there's the embedded about-face: and we catch sight of the other—or more precisely and emphatically, the loss of the other—in our faces.



PENELOPE GOTTLIEB is a graduate of Art Center College of Design and UC Santa Barbara. She lives and works in Santa Barbara, California. LAURENCE A. RICKELS teaches at UC Santa Barbara. His most recent publication, *Nazi Psychoanalysis* (2002), concluded the trilogy of "Unmourning" that began with *Aberrations of Mourning* (1988) and continued with *The Case of California* (1991). "The Portrait Under Surveillance" was a mixed-media performance/installation by Laurence A. Rickels and Penelope Gottlieb that took place at the Contemporary Arts Forum in Santa Barbara, California on October 21, 2003. The exhibition was funded by a Visual, Performing and Media Arts Award from the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Gottlieb's solo show at Michael Kohn Gallery in Los Angeles, titled "Reading Faces," was up from July 17 to August 24, 2004.