Voicing, Looking, Perspective

Constantine V. Nakassis

What, semiotically speaking, is a perspective? Synthesizing the notions of voicing in linguistic anthropology and looking in film and visual studies with Fanon's phenomenology of racialized perception, this article situates perspective as a constitutive feature of semiosis and, vice versa, sign activity as constitutive of how perspectives evenementially and historically emerge in and circulate across events. To exemplify this process, I analyze select aspects of the 2018 trial of Chicago police officer Jason Van Dyke for the murder of a Black teenager, Laquan McDonald. I focus in particular on the contextualized courtroom use of a forensic digital animation created by the defense to provide the perspective of Van Dyke in the event of his murder of McDonald.

"Maman, regarde le nègre, j'ai peur!" Peur ! Peur ! . . . J'étais tout à la fois responsable de mon corps, responsable de ma race, de mes ancêtres. Je promenai sur moi un regard objectif, découvris ma noirceur, mes *caractères ethniques, — et me me défoncèrent le tympan l'anthropophagie, l'arriération mentale, le fétichisme, les tares raciales, les négriers, et surtout, et surtout: "**Y a bon Banania**."* (Fanon 1952:90)

"Maman, look, a Negro; I'm scared!" Scared! Scared! . . . I was responsible not only for my body but also for my race and my ancestors. I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, and above all, yes, above all, ***the grinning Y a bon Banania***. (Fanon 2008 [1952]:91–92)

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon famously narrates an event of being seen by a young white boy who calls to and clutches at his mother, terrified, pointing at Fanon while uttering a racial slur. Fanon (2008 [1952]:92) describes the experience of being so seen and of seeing oneself as always already mediated by a history of racialized vision, by the stereotypes, the "legends, stories, [and] history" of anti-Blackness, by a way of seeing that pre-sees him as the cannibal, the wicked, the monstrous.[1] As Fanon casts his own gaze at the scene of his being seen, seeing himself with the eyes of the other, he also hears and is deafened by, above all, he says, the phrase "*Y a bon Banania*," the advertising slogan for the popular chocolate-flavored banana powder Banania, a slogan that (in)famously invokes a visual image, the face of the caricatured "Senegalese" soldier that voices it, a face that looks back at Fanon as his own reflection, as how he is always already pre-seen and pre-heard by the other (fig. 1; Browne 2015:97–98).

When Fanon looks/is looked at, he hears/is heard, and when he hears/is heard, he sees/is seen. Philcox's English translation highlights this by transforming Fanon's quotation into a delocutive noun phrase, modified by the definite article "the" and the participle "grinning," a linguistic change that draws out the racialized metonymy of voice and face conjoined by slogan and image. Both are pejorative (fig. 2).

As Cécile Vigouroux (2017) has shown, the phrase *y a bon Banania* is part of a centuries-old speech chain, of the enregisterment—the sociohistorical process wherein repertoires of signs come to be conventionally grouped/differentiated, qua registers, vis-à-vis their indexing of enactable schemas of social stereotypy (Agha 2007)—of imagined, indeed, invented varieties of the "butchered" French of Africans, a process whose origins go back to the beginnings of slavery in imperial Europe. Before they heard them, however, most French first encountered Africans primarily through primitivist visual images of them, as carefree, laughing, inferior. In the nineteenth century, colonial images of Blackness also circulated through written depictions of Africans' nonstandard, "bad" speech; into the early twentieth century in France, through the work of linguist Maurice Delafosse, this repertoire of forms received a metapragmatic label: Petit-Nègre, a term that has circulated in France up to the present (e.g., in the metapragmatic verb phrase *parler Petit-Nègre*).

1. On insightful discussions of this "Fanonian moment" (Fleetwood 2011:22), see Butler (1993:17–18), Browne (2015:7–8, 97–99), Fleetwood (2011:21–28), Gooding-Williams (1993:164–167), Gordon (1997), Hall (1996:12–37), Keeling (2007:27–44), Marriott (2000:ix–x, 66–94, 2007:1–5, 184–185, 209–212, 219–222), and Sexton (2008:195–197). See Dubois (1903) for a comparable, foundational discussion of seeing oneself as (pre)seen by the other ("double consciousness," "twoness") in the post-Emancipation African American context.

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Figure 1. Smiling "Senegalese" soldier in Banania brand ads.

This speech register further spread through various media, in advertising like that for Banania, in military phrase books (designed for white officers to learn how to speak to their Senegalese subordinates; table 1), and in films and comics, such as Hergé's 1931 *Tintin au Congo*, whose Belgian author used the "*y'a bon Banania* style" to "make these black people sound like black people" (quoted in Vigouroux 2017:15).

Here, I am interested in Fanon's turn to a shibboleth of a speech register (*y'a bon*) to characterize the racial phenomenology of vision. Evincing Jonathan Rosa's (2018) pithy phrase "looking like a language, sounding like a race," these images of speech and speaker are precisely the "legends, stories, [and] history" that Fanon notes as always waiting to pre-see and pre-hear him. Earlier in *Black Skin, White Masks*, in the first chapter on language, Fanon also uses this phrase—*y a bon Banania*—to characterize the depiction of Black subjects in American films, dubbed with pidgin French, the kind of speech that Fanon tells his reader, in direct parallel with his phenomenology of vision, is heard as voiced from his mouth when he speaks (despite that fact that his French, he notes, is impeccably standard).

What Fanon is describing in both chapters is a certain looking and listening subject (Inoue 2006), a perspective that surveils and typifies what is seen and heard in racialized ways; this perspective is a virtual subjectivity projected from indexical activity as the condition of its pragmatics, as an interpretant of seeing/hearing the other that imbues such activity with meaning and force. This listening and looking subject is not a person, however, but a schema of racial differentiation (and not only a historical or epidermalized schema—sensu Fanon—but also, and as a function of these, an interactional schema), an ideological perspective of white supremacy inhabitable by those party to such events of sight and speech, whether they be Black or white or otherwise. This schema is the tripled voice, the tripled vision with which the small white boy sees Fanon, with which Fanon thus sees and hears himself, and that his text invites us to see and hear differently. Indeed, through his text, Fanon attempts to construct (and thus make available) the perspective of the looked at/listened to subject capable of looking/listening back, a perspective that is too often, he emphasizes (and as we see below), effaced and rendered invisible (Gordon 1997; Lorde 1984 [1977]).

Y'a bon, enregistered to the figure of the "Senegalese" soldier via two axes of non-standardness:

1. Non-standard but colloquially common contraction: *Il y a* —> *Y'a*
   Colloquial French: *Y'a un bon film.* ('There's a good film')

2. Ungrammaticality of the syntagm *Il y a* *[predicate]
   Standard French: *C'est bon.* ('It's good')
   **Il y a bon.* ('There's good')

Figure 2. *Y'a bon* as shibboleth of "butchered" Black French.

I begin my discussion of perspective with Fanon because in his analysis discourse and vision slur, blur into each other; a sociolinguistic history of speech is joined to a phenomenology of perception that constructs monstrous Blackness and fearful whiteness in violent encounter through the circulatability of voices and looks. I begin with Fanon because he pushes us to think of voicing and looking, enregisterment and "ways of seeing" (Berger 1972) as part of a single process (also see Chumley 2016:101–121; Das and Lee 2024; Inoue 2006). I begin with Fanon because he situates these two sides of the same semiotic coin in events of communicative activity and embodied interaction but also across them, in interdiscursive processes that imbue or enregister speech and perception with intelligibility and meaning, processes that produce and are produced by ideological perspectives.

Table 1. The (imagined/invented) register of "Petit-Nègre" actualized as the language of military command, per *Le français tel que le parlent nos tirailleurs sénégalais* (Anonymous 1916)

Some "rules"	Example	Standard French
Neutralization of gender in notionally animate nouns (replaced with adjective plus masculine-declined nouns)	*Chien femme* (dog [m.] woman)	*Chienne* (dog [f.])
Verbal tense eliminated, infinitive used; tonic pronoun (*moi, lui*) used in lieu of nominative subject pronoun	*Lui manger* (him [to] eat)	*Il mange* (he eats)
Fusion of articles with noun	*Mon latête* (my [m.] the [f.] head)	*Ma tête* (my [f.] head [f.])
Subject-verb-predicate word order	*Ça tirailleurs dix y en a bons, y a partis* (That soldiers 10 there be good, there be gone)	*Ces dix bons tirailleurs sont partis* (These 10 good soldiers are gone)

Note. Adapted from Vigouroux (2017). f. = feminine grammatical gender; m. = masculine grammatical gender.

But what are these processes? And what kind of thing is a perspective? In what medium or modality is it constructed, inhabited, lived? How does it circulate? Fanon's analysis suggests that perspectives are always (pre)figurated by *image-texts of looking-and-voicing* (Nakassis 2019, 2023*a*), that we see and hear in legends and stories, comics and films, and their "clichés" and "(official) common sense" (Keeling 2007:15, 21, 33), which invite us to see and hear *in a particular way*, through the prosthetic organs (i.e., the signs) of virtual others. To see-as (or hear-as) is to see (or hear) a text of looking(-and-voicing) and to take a stance (or footing) to such figurated, virtual subjectivities. But how are voices or looks—in a word, perspectives—so entextualized, that is, laid down in and across real-time events of semiosis? And what are the pragmatics that follow therein?

To sketch out answers to these questions, I reflect on aspects of the 2018 trial of Chicago police officer Jason Van Dyke for the murder of a Black teenager, Laquan McDonald. I focus on the defense's use of an animated video meant to provide Van Dyke's point of view in the event of shooting McDonald. Before doing so, however, I draw out the parallels of voicing and looking as discussed by Mikhail Bakhtin and Edward Branigan, respectively. I do this to introduce a semiotic vocabulary to complement Fanon's phenomenology (Smalls 2020) so as to bring both to bear on the analysis of the racial politics of the entextualization and enregisterment of perspective, of the "contested visions" (Goodwin 1994) at issue in Van Dyke's trial.

Voice, Look, Camera

Bakhtin's (1982) philosophy of language is based on the insight that language is fundamentally citational, or dialogic: when we speak, we speak through the mouths of others, and vice versa. Yet, for Bakhtin, like Fanon, the locus of such alterity and polyphony is not the biographical individual. It is, rather, the *voice*, that textual figuration of a speaking subjectivity projected by discourse. The prototypical form evincing this dialogism for Bakhtin was represented speech and thought constructions. In such explicit metapragmatic discourse, voices are zoned off into phrasal stretches of text framed by metalinguistic lexis and interclausal relations. Although, as Bakhtin showed, such constructions are simply the most lexically and syntactically explicit cases (fig. 3), with relatively more or less implicit "accents" distributed across and coloring every aspect of discourse.

Here, "voices" are incipient speaking subjectivities, possible points of view on the world; furthermore, they appear through—are projected by—the contrast between indexically juxtaposed textual swatches of discourse (say, between a matrix and subordinate clause), internally chunked as iconically self-congruent zones of discourse. The form of voicing that Bakhtin was most interested in was so-called free indirect or quasi-direct discourse, where there is a smearing and partial merger of narrating and narrated voices into each other. Such constructions blend third-person (indirect) and first-person (direct) reported speech and thought constructions. Consider an example, in English translation, discussed by Bakhtin (1982:319), taken from the 1877 Russian novel *Virgin Soil* by Ivan Turgenev (chap. 18):

> Strange was the state of his mind. In the last two days so many new sensations, new faces. . . . For the first time in his life he had come close to a girl, whom, in all probability, he loved; he was present at the beginning of the thing to which, in all probability, all his energies were consecrated. . . . Well? was he rejoicing? No. Was he wavering, afraid, confused? Oh, certainly not. Was he at least, feeling that tension of his whole being, that impulse forward into the front ranks of the battle, to be expected as the struggle grew near? No again. Did he believe, then, in this cause? Did he believe in his own love? "Oh damned artistic temperament! Sceptic!" his lips murmured inaudibly. Why this weariness, this disinclination to speak even, without shrieking and raving? What inner voice did he want to stifle with those ravings?

Here, the same swatch of discourse projects multiple voices. We seem to be "in" the character's head, voyeurs that "look in" only because we also perceive as him. The text interpellates its reader to relate to it both from the narrator's perspective,

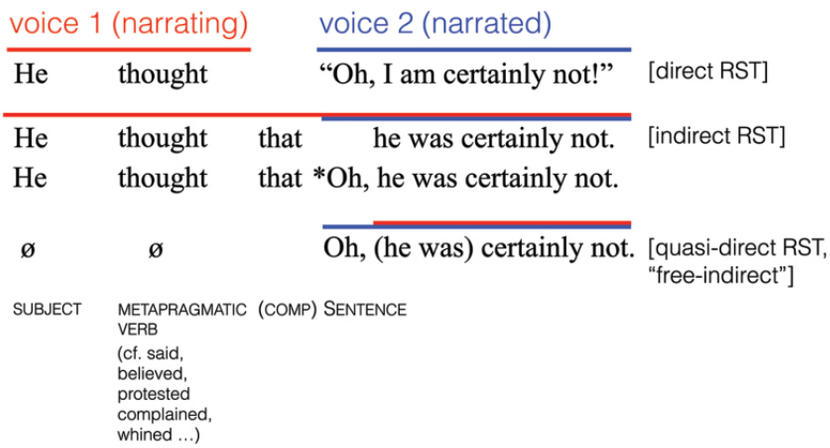


Figure 3. Some grammatical possibilities of represented speech and thought (RST) constructions in English—of the nonreported utterance "Oh, I am certainly not"—as the intersection of multiple indexical types/orīginēs (metalinguistic lexis, subordination/complementation, speaker-focal indexicals, person deixis, tense, etc.).

as third-person observers of his "state of mind" (red font in fig. 4), and also from the character's perspective, as first person (in blue font). Or rather, as something blended between the two, with the narrating frame less reporting than questioning the character—indeed, staging the character's own inner monologue, where speaker- and addressee-focal indexicals like "Oh!" and "Well?" (grammatical in English only in direct reported speech and thought constructions; see fig. 3) color the otherwise indirect, "objective" reporting style, itself increasingly colonized by the character's subjectivity as the passage unfolds.

Such voicing effects are not peculiar to novelistic narration, however, or to linguistic discourse. We find them in what Goffman (1983) called "interaction ritual," where we voice ourselves and others with linguistic and nonlinguistic signs (as in Fanon's discussion; also Silverstein 2022:68–114), and they are replete in audiovisual media—in particular, in narrative cinema. The most canonical such effect in film is the so-called

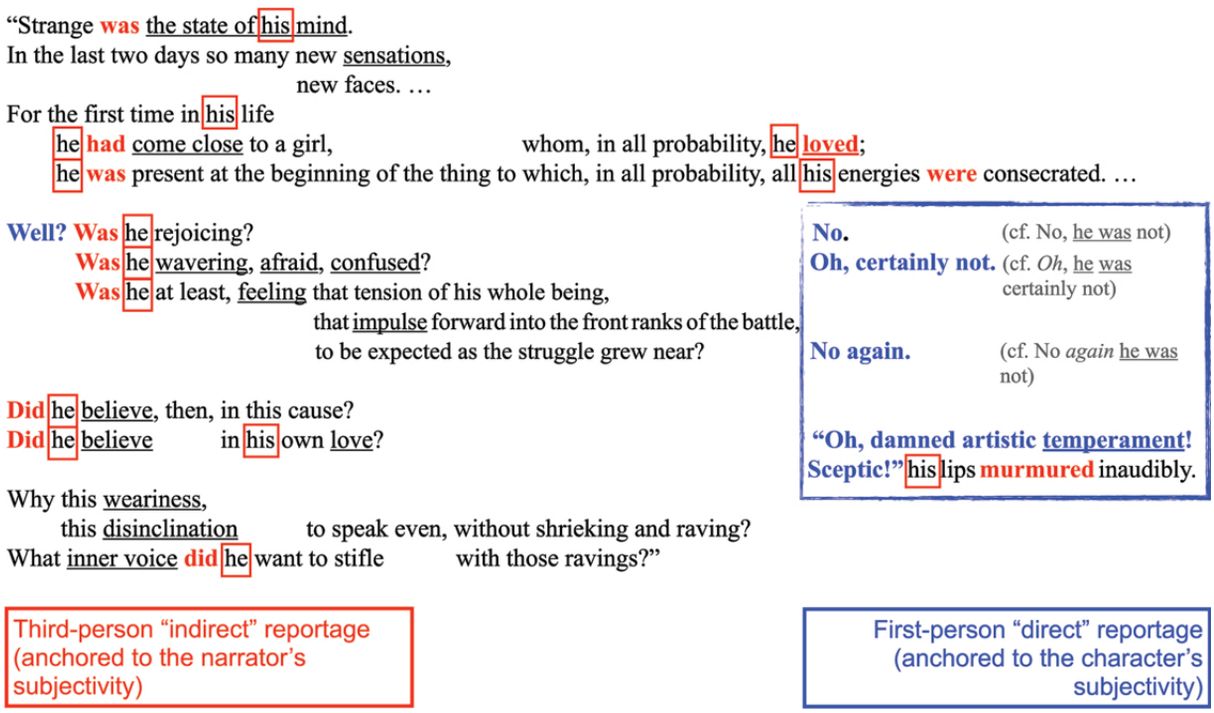


Figure 4. *Virgin Soil* excerpt, organized to highlight the poetics of voicing between third- and first-person represented speech and thought constructions as they figurate the blurring of narrating/narrated subjectivities ("free-indirect style").

point of view (POV) or subjective shot. As Edward Branigan (1984:103) writes: "The POV shot is a shot in which the camera assumes the [spatial] position of a subject in order to show us what the subject sees."

Of course, a film camera is itself a point of view—itself an aperture of visual perception that deictically shows us something from its spatial locale. Yet in a POV shot, what we see is another's vision—we come to see as another. This is in contrast to so-called objective shots: images that are not anchored to any embodied point of view within the world of subjects depicted. If POV shots suture our gaze into a narrative by asking us to see as another, "objective" shots figurate their gaze as aperspectival (itself, of course, a kind of perspective). They are openings into a narrative world from the vantage of a so-called third person (or, better, nonperson; Benveniste 1971 [1956]). And both play together to position us as voyeurs on a world that sweeps us up into a timespace other than the event of our viewing. We enter a narrative.

Yet, as Branigan notes, the phrase "POV shot" is a misnomer (as is "objective shot"), for the POV shot is not a shot at all. The canonical POV shot comprises two juxtaposed shots: (1) a shot of someone looking and (2) a shot of what is figured as seen, as from the spatial position of the subject depicted in the first shot. Figure 5 provides an example from the 2003 Tamil film *Kaadhal* (*Love*, directed by Balaji Sakthivel), where the spectator is presented with a shot of one character looking (in this case, a low-angle shot that also happens to be from the perspective of another character, his wife), followed by a cut to a shot, which, coming after the first shot, is to be construed as what that character (the husband in shot 1) sees. The POV "shot" is, thus, a diagrammatic image-text, an emergent poetic relation between different shots, a text-in-context effect of montage.

Of course, the POV shot is simply the most explicit type of looking effect, one that literalizes perspective as spatial vision in a way directly akin to direct reported speech constructions' literalization of voice as quoted speech. Looking effects, however, can be entextualized in many different ways (Branigan 1984:122–138; Mitry 1997 [1963]:215–216; Morgan 2021; Pasolini 1988; i.e., by many metapragmatic functions [Silverstein 1993]). Indeed, such effects can happen through poetic parallelisms and contrasts within a shot (as with changes in rack focus, coloring, camera movement, lens type, framing, etc.), as in the sequence from the 2011 Tamil film *Mankatha* transcribed in figure 6. Before this sequence, the protagonist of the film, Vinayak, and two of his accomplices, Sumanth and Ganesh, have robbed a local gangster, who, upon discovering the theft, has kidnapped Sumanth's wife. Fearing for her life, Sumanth reveals to him where their gang hid the money. When Vinayak and the others arrive to retrieve the money, however, they have a violent run-in with the gangster's men and escape to the train yard where this sequence takes place, at which point Vinayak discovers Sumanth's betrayal (see Nakassis [2023*b*:27–65, 158ff.] for more discussion of *Mankatha* and *Kaadhal*).

In this sequence, camera angle and camera movement put multiple looks into play. On the one hand, we have a series of shots and reverse shots that depict the characters through by-degrees third-person shots ("by degrees," as they are over-the-shoulder shots), with primary emphasis on the protagonist, Vinayak (on the left). On the other hand, even as the viewer sees shots of Vinayak, the camera moves in iconic resonance with his affective state. Notice how in 0:13–0:20 and 0:23–0:30, the camera moves in as his anger explodes and out as he cools down. The frame's shakiness further entextualizes his destabilized mental state and anger, just as the image's greenish coloring, created in postproduction, entextualizes his greed (as the director and cinematographer averred to me). The effect is such that the viewer is invited to see Vinayak *and* see as Vinayak at one and the same time, this double vision the result of the montage of multiple indexical partials (camera angle/position, editing poetics, camera movement, coloring, dialogue). Just as multiple voices can speak in a single word, one and the same image-text may harbor/project multiple looks.

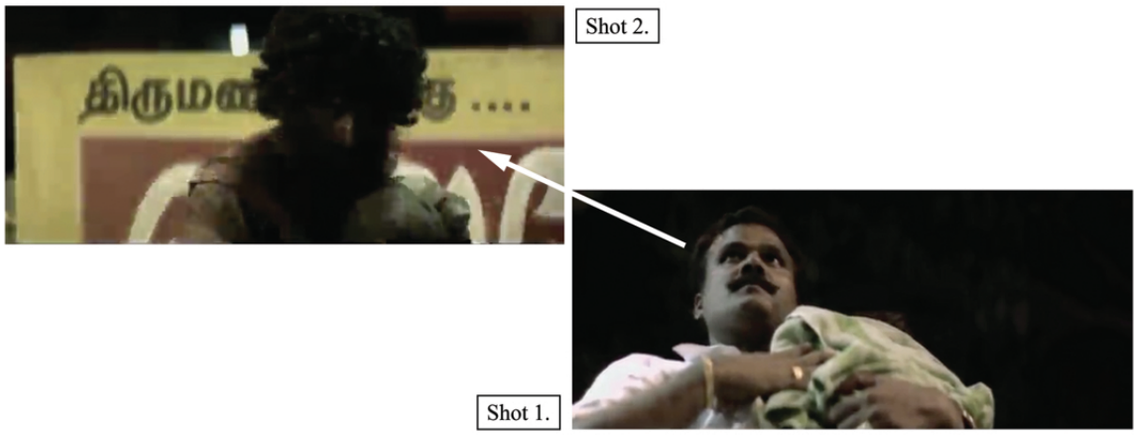


Figure 5. Point of view shot, with eyeline match, in *Kaathal* (2004, directed by Balaji Sakthivel).

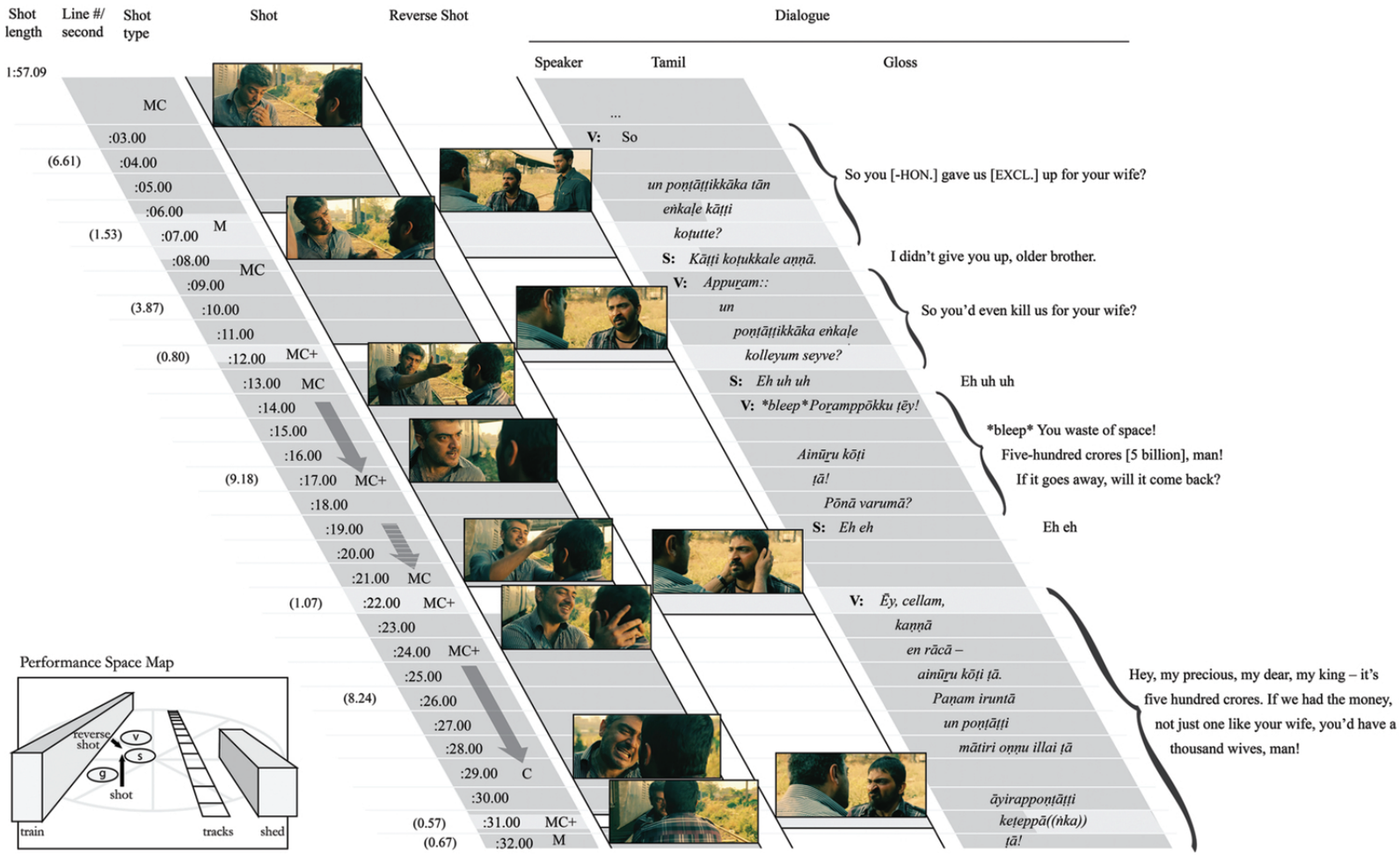


Figure 6. Slap sequence (part 1) in *Mankatha*: camera movement to/from the characters, the shakiness of the frame, and coloring stand in iconic resonance with the protagonist's (subjective) affects, even as the spectator sees him from a relatively impersonal (spatial) viewpoint. Zoom in/movement toward profilmic space is indicated with solid arrows and zoom out/movement away with dashed arrows. Cuts within dialogue are indicated by color blocks. C = close-up; EXCL. = exclusive first-person plural pronominal; -HON. = nonhonorific pronominal; M = medium shot; MC = medium close-up; MC+ = between medium close-up and close-up; S = Sumanth; V = Vinayak. Figure 6 was first published in Nakassis (2023*b*:30).

The critical point is that whatever its modality or medium, perspective is a cumulative effect; it is a composite text-in-context of sensuous qualia emergent from the intercalation and interaction of different indexicalities. Looking effects are not reducible to spatial equivalences achieved by the deictic features of a physical camera, just as voices are not reducible to explicit metapragmatic discourse (even if both are ideologically taken as prototypical of these phenomena). Rather, the physical camera and the denotational capacity of language are only two elements among many that contribute to the entextualization of perspective, to the construction of a discursive camera of subjectivity, where we come to see with and as another.[2]

But when offered such images of perspective, do we so see? While Bakhtin, Branigan, and others in literary and film studies offer powerful tools for the "reading" of particular texts, what is less clear is how we are to understand such looking or voicing structures as elements of or resources in embodied, temporally emergent events of multimodal and multimedial activity. If *voice* and *look* are figurations of or invitations to a perspective on a world of experience, how are they taken up, inhabited, lived? How are image-texts and denotational (narrative) texts wherein perspectives are drawn up and offered to us anchored to contextualized events of happening, to *interactional texts* in which voicing and looking constitute pragmatic acts—that is, where a multimodal, discursive camera participates in figurating, enacting, and realizing a way of speaking/hearing and seeing/being-seen (Nakassis 2023*c*)?[3]

Murder of Laquan McDonald, Trial of Jason Van Dyke

At 9:45 p.m. on October 20, 2014, Chicago police responded to a dispatch call regarding the theft of truck radios by a Black male who was on foot. A number of police officers began following the suspect at a distance, waiting for officers with a Taser to arrive. During the pursuit, the suspect, 17-year-old Laquan McDonald, punctured one of the squad car's tires with a small knife when it attempted to head him off. McDonald turned and walked through a parking lot, while the squad car of two officers who had arrived on the scene, Jason Van Dyke and Joe Walsh, directed him away, toward Pulaski Road. After another squad car arrived, Van Dyke and Walsh's car pulled ahead of McDonald. Walsh stopped the car in the middle of the street, and Van Dyke exited as McDonald continued to walk up the street toward a chain-link fence, coming closer to but not walking at Van Dyke. Van Dyke ordered him to drop the knife and desist. As McDonald walked past him, within six seconds of exiting his vehicle, Van Dyke shot him 16 times in 14 seconds, 12 of those after McDonald had fallen to the pavement. The Taser car arrived one minute later, at 9:58 p.m. McDonald died on the way to Mount Sinai Hospital.

The murder was recorded on the dashcams of multiple police cars, although only one video (without any audio) was released, and only over a year later, after a court order forcing the police to do so. This led to first-degree murder charges against Van Dyke. His trial began almost three years later, on September 17, 2018. On October 5, the jury returned a conviction of one count of second-degree murder (not first-degree murder, as the prosecution had asked) and 16 counts of aggravated battery (one for each bullet that killed McDonald), but not a conviction for official misconduct (concluding that Van Dyke was sincerely attempting to fulfill his duty). Van Dyke was sentenced to six years and nine months, of which he served three years and three months. The conviction was a landmark result, the first time a Chicago police officer had been convicted of murder for an on-duty shooting in about half a century.[4]

Seeing-as in the Van Dyke Trial

The central element of Van Dyke's defense was a reconstruction of his perspective. This was particularly important given that the dashcam video controverted almost all of the relevant testimony offered by Van Dyke: in the video McDonald is not

2. As suggested in the main text, my larger point is ultimately that perspectives are not modality or medium specific and thus not strictly or only visual or spatial in nature; rather, they are more broadly semiotic, whatever the media or modalities involved (and whatever the specificities of such media and modalities may be). My use of concepts like discursive camera, perspective, and image(-text) thus should not be seen as metaphorically extending or analogizing more primary ("literal") senses of perspective, camera, or image as visual, despite (or rather, precisely because of) the fact that the etymology and history of the concept of perspective (*per-* [through], *-specere* [to look]) and the ideological senses and prototypes of all three terms in English are, indeed, visual. Visualist ideologies about perspective that attempt to reduce and rationalize it to ocular optics in calculable space are part and parcel of the empirical phenomena discussed in this article and thus are themselves central to the political processes in which perspectives are entextualized and enregistered. While this might suggest the need to find a "neutral" (nonvisual) term, instead I prefer to catachrestically put pressure on such concepts. I do this, on the one hand, so as to try to keep such ideologies in clear view (!) while forcing us, as analysts, to think across phenomena that are otherwise (wrongly) siloed off as different in nature (voicing, looking; language, image; etc.) and, on the other hand, to subject often taken for granted assumptions about visuality, images, and language to pragmatic deconstruction and empirical explanation. Thanks to the three reviewers of this article, as well as to E. Mara Green, for pushing me to make these points explicit.

3. On denotational and interactional textuality, see Nakassis (2019, 2023*c*) and Silverstein (1993). My discussion of discursive cameras can be thought of alongside Keeling's (2007:19) discussion of "cinematic perception" and Das and Lee's (2024) "racial optics," insofar as both situate filmic technologies and ways of viewing as part of larger assemblages that exceed them.

4. On on-duty Chicago police murder rates, see Adler (2007), Fyfe (1982), and Knoohuizen and Fahey (1972).

seen raising a knife to Van Dyke, is not seen to be facing him, is not seen to be moving toward him in attack; furthermore, Van Dyke was not backpedaling but moving forward as he shot, and, once shot, McDonald is not seen trying to get up or moving at all, for that matter.

What the defense argued, in effect, was that what the video showed was not how it looked from Van Dyke's perspective.[5] On the one hand, the defense argued, voiced through the testimony of expert witnesses such as FBI forensic programmer Paul Rettig, that video evidence is not necessarily particularly accurate or clear—that cameras distort color and make it difficult to evaluate depth, distance, and position. In the following, Rettig is questioned by defense attorney Dan Herbert (September 17, 2018):[6]

Herbert: And in fact, cameras are- (1) **watching a camera is not the same as somebody watching with their eyes**, correct?

Rettig: That's correct . . .

Herbert: What, what are some of the, um, inherent problems with video as opposed to seeing it with your own two eyes? . . .

Rettig: There are numerous differences. Color, uh, may be different from a camera to your eye. . . . **The video system might not capture the same colors that you can see with your eye.** . . . They might be incorrect or differ from what you see with your eyes. . . .

Herbert: It's fair to say that it [video] distorts images in general?

Rettig: It may. . . .

Rettig: Yes, the image will differ on a camera than what you'll see with your naked eye. . . .

Herbert: . . . you would agree with me that one of the inherent problems with video is that **it's difficult to judge proper depths on a video? . . . And that's because it's [a video is] two-dimensional, correct?**

Rettig: Correct.

Herbert: **So distances are distorted**, correct?

Rettig: They can be.

Similarly, the defense elicited testimony from various officers that what the dashcam showed was not what they saw ("It doesn't show his [McDonald's] face. It doesn't show the look in his eye"; Leticia Velez, Chicago police patrol officer, September 26, 2018), just as Van Dyke himself emphasized under cross-examination that "the video doesn't show my perspective." As Herbert put it in his closing argument on October 4, 2018, the dashcam video "shows a perspective, but not the right perspective" (fig. 7).

As noted above, a perspective on the world is more than a physical camera—it is a discursive camera built up out of any number of media. And if a perspective is an aperture on a world of experience, to take a perspective is also a worlding—it is the narrating of a chronotope (Bakhtin 1982), a timespace filled with social types of persons emplotted through various happenings. From what perspective, *in what possible world*, then, could Van Dyke's murder of McDonald be seen/felt/heard as justified if, as the defense argued, the dashcam's was "not the right perspective"?

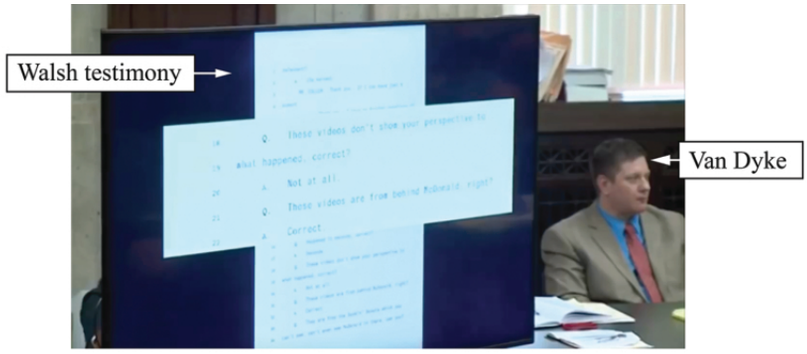
From Professional Vision of Credible Threat to Fearful Vision of Monstrous Blackness

Through both argumentation and testimony, the defense outlined what, they claimed, the dashcam video did not show. One tack was to emphasize what Charles Goodwin (1994) called "professional vision," that visual mode of attention and perception that is the authoritative preserve of certain kinds of experts—here, police officers. The defense, for example, brought a number of expert witnesses to testify that police officers like Van Dyke are legitimately trained to evaluate and use deadly force in such situations (Yolanda Sayre, attorney/academy instructor), that knives like the kind McDonald had are deadly weapons and can puncture bulletproof vests (which Van Dyke was wearing), and that someone can close a distance of 21 feet in less than two seconds (Nicholas Pappas, retired police officer)—a scenario that defense attorney Herbert and "use of force" expert Barry Brodd theatrically enacted for the jury (fig. 8).

Unavailable to an ordinary person, unrecorded by dashcam video, such professional vision saw McDonald to be a credible threat to bodily harm (to Van Dyke and others), and thus, his shooting was justified. But rather than Van Dyke's professional vision—that rational, cool way of seeing that can forensically sense threat and "escalation" (Goodwin 1994; cf. Das and Lee

5. Cf. Stein (2021) on expert forensic practices of "repudiating" evidence of state violence.

6. The following transcripts use these symbols: . . . = elided materials; acute accent = pitch stress; (#) = # second pause; (ø) = elliptical referent; - = interrupted speech; ↑/↓ = upward/downward pitch shift; [] = referent of anaphor; // = overlapping speech; italics = word stress; capitalization = louder speech; >< = faster speech; <> = nonlinguistic action. Tabbing, underlining, bolding, font color, typeface, and horizontal arrows (→) highlight elements of analytic interest or indicate parallelisms.



<Herbert reading transcript of Joe Walsh testimony [18 Sept 2018] from screen:>

Q. [Attorney] **These videos don't show your perspective to what happened, correct?**
A. [Walsh] **Not at all.**
Q. These videos are from behind McDonald, right?
A. Correct.

<to jury:> The state's ent- only evidence that they can argue with a straight face is this video. Well, the video is essentially meaningless based on all the testimony you received here. And we'll get into that.
It shows a perspective but not the right perspective.
So we can't view just that video. ...

<Puts up more of transcript onscreen, reads it aloud:>

Q. So you're looking at it from a completely different perspective than what everyone in here is seeing, correct?
A. Yes.

Figure 7. Walsh testimony read out by Dan Herbert, closing argument (September 18, 2018).

2024)—more critical in the defense's argumentation was Van Dyke's affective state, his *psychological fear*.

In its 1985 decision in *Tennessee v. Garner*, the US Supreme Court held that deadly force is justified if an officer has "probable cause to believe that the suspect poses a significant threat of death or serious physical injury to the officer or others." Furthermore, in the 1989 case *Graham v. Connor*, the Supreme Court clarified that officers' use of force was to be determined as in violation of the Fourth Amendment (or not) based on its "objective reasonableness"—that is, it "must be judged from the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene, rather than with the 20/20 vision of hindsight." Since *Tennessee v. Garner*, officers' fear for their life has been a central defense strategy in a majority of US cases of police shootings (from 33% before the ruling to 62% after; Ralph 2019), with the vast majority being ruled in favor of the police. It was precisely this defense—fear of attack—that Van Dyke's lawyers leaned on most heavily. As Herbert put it in his opening statement, Van Dyke was not "a murderer" but a "scared police officer who was fearful for his life and the life of others and acted as he was trained to do."

As part of this defense, Van Dyke's lawyers narrated a chronotope of dangerous confrontation, describing McDonald as a fearsome threat, "whacked out on PCP" and "on a wild rampage through the city." In opening and closing statements, Herbert likened the police encounter with McDonald to a "horror movie" "written, directed, and orchestrated by one person: Laquan McDonald" (opening statement),[7] a "monster movie" (closing statement) where the "villain," McDonald, looks his "victim" (Van Dyke) in the eye before attacking. In so arguing, Herbert indexed the stereotypes circulated by the "legends" and films—indeed, horror movies—that Fanon describes, both reiterating and reinvesting them with racialized meanings while projecting them onto McDonald, all so as to affectively communicate the "reasonable" fear that Van Dyke had on the scene.

Similarly, the defense elicited witness testimony attesting to McDonald's aggressiveness in previous encounters with the legal and juvenile system: how physical blows did not seem to affect him (Joseph Plaud, Cook County sheriff's deputy); how on the night in question, McDonald looked "deranged" and how "there was nothing that was actually fazing him, he was just, like, in a twilight" (Leticia Velez, Chicago Police patrol officer); or, in Van Dyke's words in his testimony: "His face had no expression. His eyes were just bugging out of his head. He

7. In closing, Herbert similarly argued that this was a tragedy, not a murder, for McDonald was in control of the situation (see Butler [1993:15, 20] for discussion of a similar rhetoric in the first trial of the police beating of Rodney King) and could have easily resolved the situation by dropping the knife (something that Herbert dramatically did in the courtroom in front of the jury numerous times). Not only was McDonald made responsible for the actions of Van Dyke, who was merely "brought into it" (Herbert), but McDonald, the actual victim, was also thereby "put on trial" (as the prosecution explicitly called out and rejected).

Figure 8. Barry Brodd and Dan Herbert coenact a discursive camera for the jury (October 2, 2018).

had these huge white eyes just staring right through me. I was yelling at him: drop the knife" and later, "Um, eyes were bugging out, his face was just expressionless." Through such descriptions, McDonald's subjectivity, and humanity, is further negated by fantastically ascribing to him an unhuman, monstrous gaze.[8]

If these are all implicitly racialized descriptions of Black faces and eyes, Herbert's comparison during closing argument rendered things relatively more explicit:

> Well, Urey Patrick [prosecution expert witness] talks about things that indicate reasonable, um, police officers that a threat may be happening. And this is important because if, if Laquan McDonald, um, did not appear to be
> **some kid whacked out on PCP acting really bizarrely**,
> if this was
> **a kid in a Boy Scout's uniform, uh, just walking down the street with a knife**
> um, and Jason Van Dyke shot him,
> yeah <shaking head> it probably wouldn't have been justified.
> But it's not (unjustified).[9]

8. These recurrent characterizations of McDonald's gaze should be thought about in relation to hooks's (1992) discussion of the Black gaze's repression through violent punishment (also Browne 2015). Here, the refusal to recognize McDonald's gaze as anything but inhuman and monstrous parallels Fanon's description of being seen by the little white boy, who does not see him looking back but can see him only as a dangerous monster. Yet, as an anonymous reviewer insightfully asked, can "McDonald's eyes plausibly be reread as a look of terror, along the lines in which Rodney King's bodily movements on the ground were read first as aggressive gestures and then, in the second trial, as writhing in pain?"

9. The sole African American juror cited this in a post hoc interview (Smith 2018) as explicitly racializing:

I felt		$that_x$ was really inappropriate.	[that = Herbert's comparison]
We're **past**		all of $that_{\sim x}$.	[that = inclusive of but more general than x]
We didn't **come**	here	because of $race_{\sim x}$.	[that = inappropriate race talk]
We **came**	here	for right and wrong.	

Note the poetics of deixis, with the distal demonstrative "that" in contrast to the deictic verb "come" (cf. "be past" [something]) and the spatial adverb "here"; this sets up a contrastive set of parallelisms that critiques Herbert's comparison: "that"–"past" (verb)–"race"–"really inappropriate" in opposition to "we"–"come"–"here"–"right and wrong." On the contrast of "good kid" vs. "thug," see Nguyen (2015:807).

All this discourse cumulates into a complex image-text, an indexical invocation and attempted instantiation of a mythic discourse, what Laurence Ralph (2019, 2020) calls the "fantasy of black predatory violence." This fantasy is anchored to a particular perspective, one related to the "legends, stories, [and] history" that Fanon describes in the French context, and is peopled by deeply enregistered social types within a particular mythic chronotope of crime: of terrifying Blackness in a dark, desolate city street—of a scary Black "villain" who dares to look and not heed the commands of fearful, trembling white officers and thus is justly killed.

This chronotope and cultural stereotype of monstrous Blackness has a long history in the United States, baked into state and parastate forms of institutional violence—from slave patrols to contemporary police and the educational and judicial systems (Baker 1993; Beliso-De Jesús 2020; Brown 2015; Das and Lee 2024; Gooding-Williams 1993; Marriott 2000, 2007; Ralph 2019)—and is recurrent in American legal and political discourse. We hear it invoked in the talk surrounding Rodney King, described in *People v. Powell, et al.* (1992) as a "PCP-crazed giant," and in Hillary Clinton's infamous "superpredator," an unfeeling criminal monster to whom one can react only with deadly violence. We also hear it in more recent trials, such as that for the murder of Michael Brown, who had, according to police officer Darren Wilson who shot him, the "most aggressive face," which looked "like a demon" and who made Wilson feel "like a 5-year-old holding onto [wrestler] Hulk Hogan" (Bonilla and Rosa 2015:11; Bouie 2014).

In the Van Dyke trial, this discourse was mobilized to entextualize a discursive camera with a particular performative structure (Nakassis 2023*a*), laminating a mythic timespace—indexically invoked by phrases like "some kid whacked out on PCP" (in contrast to a "Boy Scout") in reference to a Black youth described as a "monster"—onto a historical narration, McDonald's murder in 2014, whose counterparts were the murdered, absent McDonald and the present, sitting-in-the-courtroom Van Dyke. The defense's performative gambit swept the jury's here-and-now into a there-and-then as an instance of a naturalized cultural mythology so that they would come to see what was passing in front of them as exemplifying, even presencing, what was and essentially *is*—that is, so that the jury would see as the fearful Van Dyke and not as the machinic, photographic dashcam, whose ideological self-evidence putatively showed an "objective" event of police brutality and indifference to Black life (Marriott 2007) through the rigidly indexical image that, on at least one media ontology, does not lie.

A Digital Camera

In this context, most interesting is how the defense's discursive camera was supplemented by their production of a "digital camera," of a horror film that *they* directed and orchestrated.[10] The defense commissioned a set of animated, multimodal forensic images, moving and still, by 3D Forensic, "a forensic technology firm offering forensic analysis, expert witness testimony and courtroom animation" (https://3dforensic.com/about-us). On the defense's behalf, 3D Forensic produced an image-text of sight (and sound) presented for the jury to see (and hear), one that attempted to manifest the perspective that the defense narrated in words and embodied in courtroom demonstration. On September 25, 2018, the defense introduced the animation as exhibit 10 and invited 3D Forensic CEO Jason Fries to testify, walking the jury through this "demonstrative evidence" to help them see what this image-text of seeing was an image of.

Using "laser-based analysis," 3D Forensic laser scanned the physical space of the crime scene (fig. 9, *top left*) and took aerial drone photographs (*top right*) to measure and map out its spatial locales. Using these, they were able to "recreate the world [= crime scene] in our computer." Once reconstructed, the dashcam video and the other surveillance video were calibrated to that world so that the events and objects captured in the videos could be placed in to-scale spatial and temporal relations in the animation (*middle right*, *bottom left*)—that is, so that they could "recreate the steps" and "track everything, mak[ing] sure it fit[] the video" (*bottom right*).

This allowed them to transpose the "two-dimensional" image "data" in the dashcam and surveillance videos (which, recall, the defense criticized for distorting what is seen stereoscopically with one's "naked eye"; cf. Schwartz 2009:69) into "three-dimensional data" so as to analyze the "incident caught on video [= murder]."[11] Fries stated that they were thus able to "reverse engineer the event" and thereby create other "vantage points" within the digital world as they would have existed during the represented event, whether or not they were ever embodied. Which is to say that by modeling the event's spatiotemporal relations, they created a "camera in our digital world" that could be placed at any angle or position in that world. As Fries put it, talking over a slide titled "Creating Other Perspectives":

> So one advantage of creating everything three-dimensionally is often when you, when you are working on these cases, the only vantage point that you have is the vantage point of a video . . . but you're stuck, whatever positions, whatever perspective those cameras give, those are the only ones you have. **But when you recreate everything three-dimensionally, you're no longer stuck in those.** You can now change the views because if it matches forensically to the video from that view, that means it matches no matter what view you pick or no matter what you choose. So now, we can look, for example—often people find, to analyze an incident, uh, top down tends to be one of the, uh, uh, most useful methods. Top down gives you, gives you a sense of distance between people, between

10. The prosecution also produced its own visual image-texts (annotated maps and video), although I do not discuss them here for reasons of space.

11. Notice the register tokens of forensic science, with its affectless euphemisms and objectivizing perspective: "world" for "crime scene," "incident" area for where McDonald was shot, etc.

Figure 9. Jason Fries highlighting how 3D Forensic rebuilt the "world" by calibrating landmarks around the "incident area" and tracking the physical camera to create a "digital camera" in the "3D model."

objects, uhm. And then, often, uh, people want to understand what was the view from a witness area or somebody else. **In this particular situation, we can now put a camera over the shoulder of, in this case, Officer, uh, Van Dyke, and we can now watch it from different perspectives, [be]cause often these different perspectives will educate and give you knowledge and information that you just couldn't get from the video perspective**.

Following Fries's explanation of Forensic 3D's animation, the defense played exhibit 10 in its entirety (a little more than 3.5 minutes), without any commentary.

The slideshow begins with the dispatch call, its scratchy audio played over a slick, animated reconstruction of a bird's-eye shot of the truck yard (fig. 10). The color of the caller's text matches the pulsating yellow orange of the box highlighting the truck yard, the color recalling a warning light blinking from a vehicle, itself iconically echoing the caller's denotational text of warning and distress.

The digital camera then begins to move, following a red line representing McDonald (fig. 11, *left*), stopping at the intersection of Keeler and Pulaski, when Police Unit 815B, in light blue, appears on the scene (*right*). The animation's colors move from warning yellow orange to danger red, chromatically warranting the appearance of police blue, figurating the shift from dispatch call to "incident" in progress, and narratively anticipating the eventual encounter with and murder of McDonald. The camera continues to move, stalking McDonald,

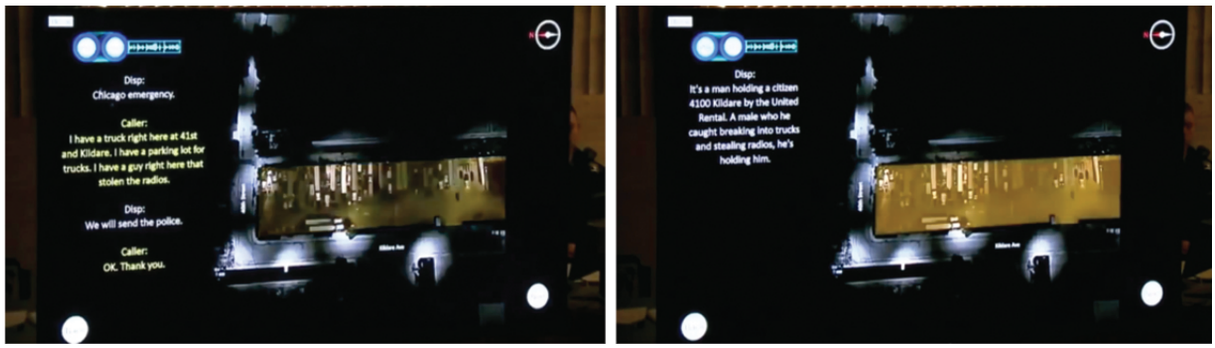


Figure 10. Exhibit 10: bird's-eye view of the truck yard, darkened and cast in pulsating yellow orange.

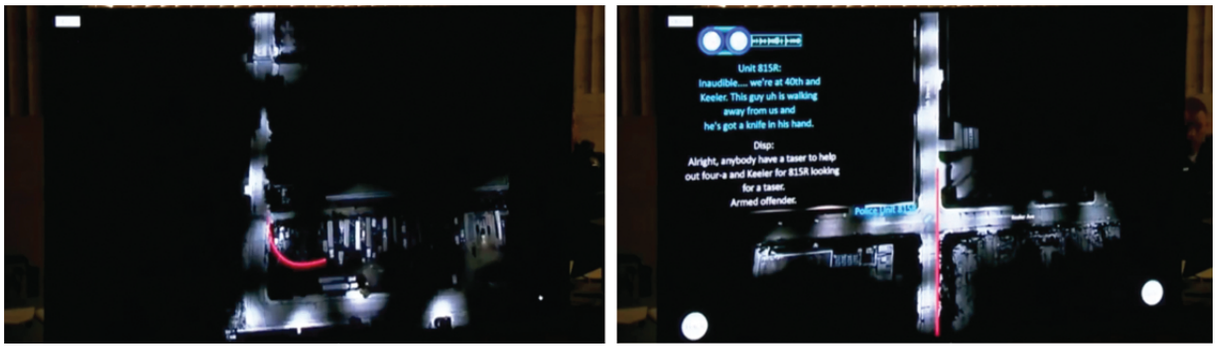


Figure 11. Exhibit 10: stalking Laquan McDonald from the truck yard to Keeler.

and begins to track in and dip with a slight tilt (fig. 12) as it anticipates coming into a lower-angle shot behind the police and McDonald.

As McDonald reaches Pulaski, more police vehicles appear (fig. 13, *top left*), and the digital camera continues to tilt in (*bottom row*). A darker blue line then appears (*bottom right*), representing the police vehicle from which the released dashcam video footage was recorded. What follows is a rapid, swooping camera movement from the tilted bird's-eye shot (fig. 14, *top left*) into a horizontal on-the-ground shot behind McDonald's red line (*bottom right*), the camera tracking increasingly closer behind the darker blue line as its anticipated telos (*bottom right*). As the camera approaches the end of the darker blue line, the line begins to appear as a square frame (fig. 15) that the digital camera enters/morphs into, its/the spectator's perspective becoming the dashcam's.

As the spectator enters the frame within the image, the blue line/square fractally breaks apart into smaller framed rectangles, webbed together with small circles that appear as digital (!) lens flares (fig. 15, third row; Ball 2017). The overall effect is the transformation of the camera and the spectator's perspective, putting the spectator into the "incident" from the spatial perspective of the animated dashcam. The camera passes *through* the frame or, rather, becomes the frame (which thus disappears; *bottom right*). From this, the digital image morphs into the analogue dashcam footage that it has modeled/displaced (fig. 16).

After the substitution of the animation by the dashcam, the image cuts back to the digital camera (fig. 17, *left*). Next to the figures of Van Dyke and McDonald then appear their names and, around their bodies, two outlines: in police blue and danger red, respectively (*right*). The animation goes on to show Van Dyke shooting McDonald from three angles (fig. 18): the original dashcam angle (looped four times when first showed to the jury; *left*), a bird's-eye angle (played once; *middle*), and then an over-the-shoulder shot of Van Dyke (played once; *right*).[12]

After presenting the animation in its entirety, the defense then re-presented each slide of the animation, one at a time, with Fries providing commentary, "highlighting" (per Goodwin 1994; Crenshaw and Peller 1993:59) and explaining each slide's relevant features. Fries and Herbert thus embedded the digital camera within an encompassing discursive camera that reframed the jury's experience and interpretation of what they had seen (already framed for them by the previous days' testimonies). Figure 19 is a typical example, evincing Herbert and Fries's collaborative co-textualization of gesture, talk, and picture that attempted to provide the jury with eyes to see what was before them.

But what does this complexly multimodal, multimedia discursive camera of audio recordings, photographic video, animations, written text, and oral discourse and gesture amount to? With this animation, the defense aimed to citationally bracket and appropriate the dashcam video, mobilizing its sense and reference (its truth functionality) to its own performative frame (unhappily and abusively; Nakassis 2013). Yet, and not without contradiction, note how the evidentiary weight of the digital animation depends on and is anchored by the photographic ontology of the dashcam video, even as its raison d'être is the latter's insufficiency and untrustworthiness. That is, 3D Forensic and the defense who hired them simultaneously contested and drew on the indexical realism of the dashcam video by encompassing it within their putatively more complete 3D "computer model," whose calculations of distance and angle were made by a computer program, Fries said with an air of scientific authority, with up to "seven decimals of accuracy." The dashcam footage—with its documentary "thereness," recorded by a putatively aperspectival, impersonal machine and rendered as a grainy, uncut, silent image—is thus embedded within and bookended by the sleek digital animation.[13] The animation sutures the unmoving dashcam video into the roving

12. A comparison to security footage from a nearby business was also quickly shown.

13. Although, of course, the dashcam was still located within the police car. Nevertheless, as presented within the court, the dashcam functioned as what Schwartz (2009:49) calls "sight without subjectivity," presented as a depiction of objects to be seen by any number of subjects rather than an image of a subject seeing-as.

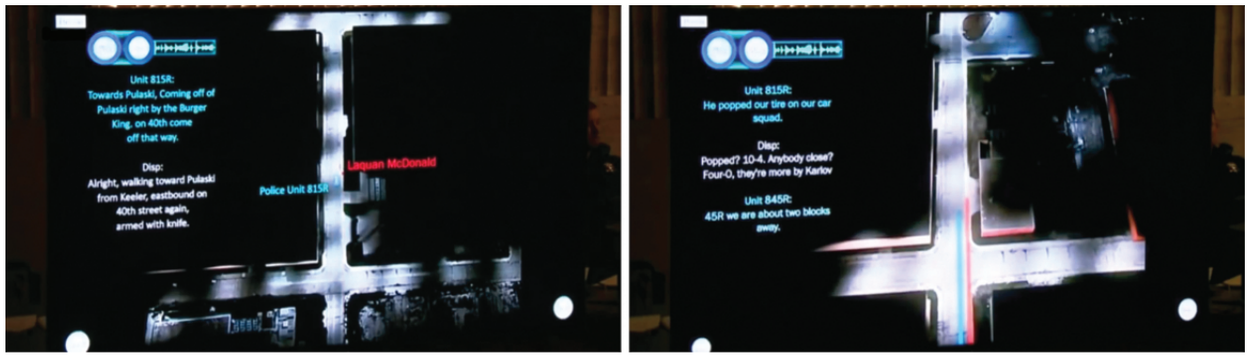


Figure 12. Exhibit 10: stalking Laquan McDonald from Keeler toward Pulaski.

perspective of its digital camera, weaving multiple viewpoints through its editing and camera movement and thereby entextualizing a coherent, continuous diegetic timespace: the "world" of the "incident." The photographic dashcam video was used to validate this "world"—the "3D model" that "recreated" the "incident"—precisely before it was displaced by its digital animation, each angle of the "incident" edited in sequence, culminating with the digital camera's over-the-shoulder, quasi-first-person POV shot of Van Dyke (fig. 20).[14]

A critical feature of this over-the-shoulder shot is the way the digital camera accelerates into a closer, tighter framing of Van Dyke in the lead-up to his first gunshot (fig. 20, rows 2–4). The intensity of the acceleration iconically amplifies McDonald's ever-closing approach as the camera simultaneously pans in synchrony with Van Dyke's turning head and then stops, centering on him right before he shoots (rows 3–4). Additionally, the shot's scaling foreshortens the image (as if shot with a telephoto lens), qualitatively exaggerating McDonald's proximity to Van Dyke and the speed of his movement. Together, these iconic signs (acceleration, panning, foreshortening) move the spectator into an increasingly (although not completely) subjective first-person shot, inviting the viewer to take on Van Dyke's eyes as their own eyes and to see McDonald as how the defense had painted him: a menace coming closer and closer (see fig. 19).

If the dashcam footage is akin to early silent film's "cinema of attractions" (Gunning 1986), with its brutal, macabre one-shot spectacles and its so-called primitive narrative structures, the defense's animation as a whole provides something closer to so-called classical narrative film, a cinematic form that historically supplanted the cinema of attractions precisely through its realist codes—continuity editing, closer framing, directional lighting, centered composition, and above all, de-/recentering of perspectives in the creation of narrative-internal, subjective viewpoints. As Miriam Hansen (1991:44) has argued, this cinema worked to create a spatially coherent diegetic world, an illusionist timespace on-screen "unfolding itself to a ubiquitous invisible observer." This is a cinema of absorption (rather than shock/spectacle), a cinema that less addresses its viewers than "positions" them as voyeurs identifying with the camera and the characters whose looks it shows them, even as it works to erase its own mediation and naturalize its spatial realism. The animation, in short, incorporates and repurposes the indexical objectivity of the videographic image so as to subjectivize its animation and draw its viewers into its narrative world by constituting them as subjects to its perspective.

The kind of spectatorship the jury was called to take on by the animation thus is not only mediated through a history of white supremacist stereotypes. It also presupposes the jury's own history of viewing commercial narrative cinema and, we should add, first-person shooter video games (themselves remediations of narrative cinema), where one does not only see as but also fantastically animates and controls the body of the shooter as prosthetic avatar; while the former brings the viewer closer to Van Dyke's perspective as a white police officer, the latter naturalizes the banality of violence (in a way that arguably, perhaps, works against the former's efforts). In both cases, however, the text invites the viewer to immerse themselves, however temporarily, into its self-contained world, into a subjectivity in that world, into a vicarious feeling. The animation asks its viewer to feel now as Van Dyke felt then and as all anti-Black subjects feel always and forever toward male Black bodies: afraid and threatened, emboldened and empowered to kill. An image-text (the qualia on the screen) manifests a denotational text (a fantasy of Black predatory violence) in an interactional text (justifying a shooting in a courtroom), reiterating and "amplifying" (Goodwin 1994:618) the performative gambit of the defense's verbal argumentation, visualized as "demonstrative evidence." And it does so by weaving the presumptions of the defense's theory of the case, its perspective, not simply into the animation's scientific/realist spatial modeling but

14. Arguably, it also captures the point of view of Van Dyke's partner Joe Walsh; notice that the digital camera is positioned behind Van Dyke but at the distance of Walsh, whose hand juts out of the frame's bottom left. Arguably, then, we have a shot that spatially entextualizes two points of view—of Walsh, by distance, of Van Dyke, by framing—and one perspective: the police's.

Figure 13. Exhibit 10: tilting from a bird's-eye view to an above-and-behind shot.

also into its aesthetic textuality: its colors, shapes, shades, tempos, and lines.

To Contest a Perspective Is to See It as It Sees

Or at least, this was the claim the prosecution took exhibit 10 to assert. In response, the prosecution attempted to defease and undo the defense's discursive and digital cameras. Calling on numerous witnesses, the prosecution presented its own chronotope and narrative: that McDonald was not a credible threat, not a monster, and that, if Van Dyke had waited (as other police officers had been doing), McDonald could have been subdued without deadly force (with a Taser, which, recall,

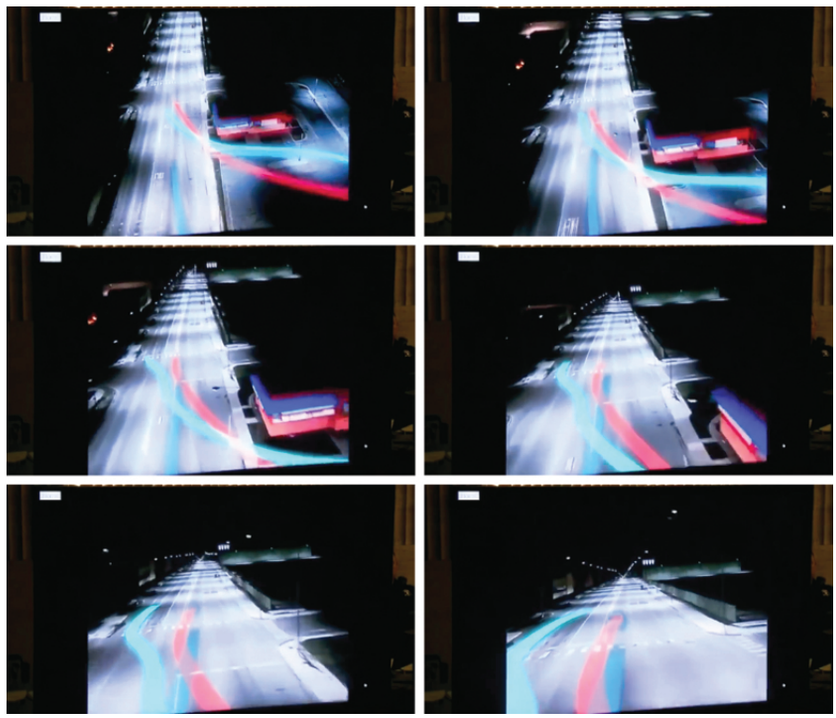


Figure 14. Exhibit 10: tracking in behind and about to become the digital dashcam/car (dark blue line).

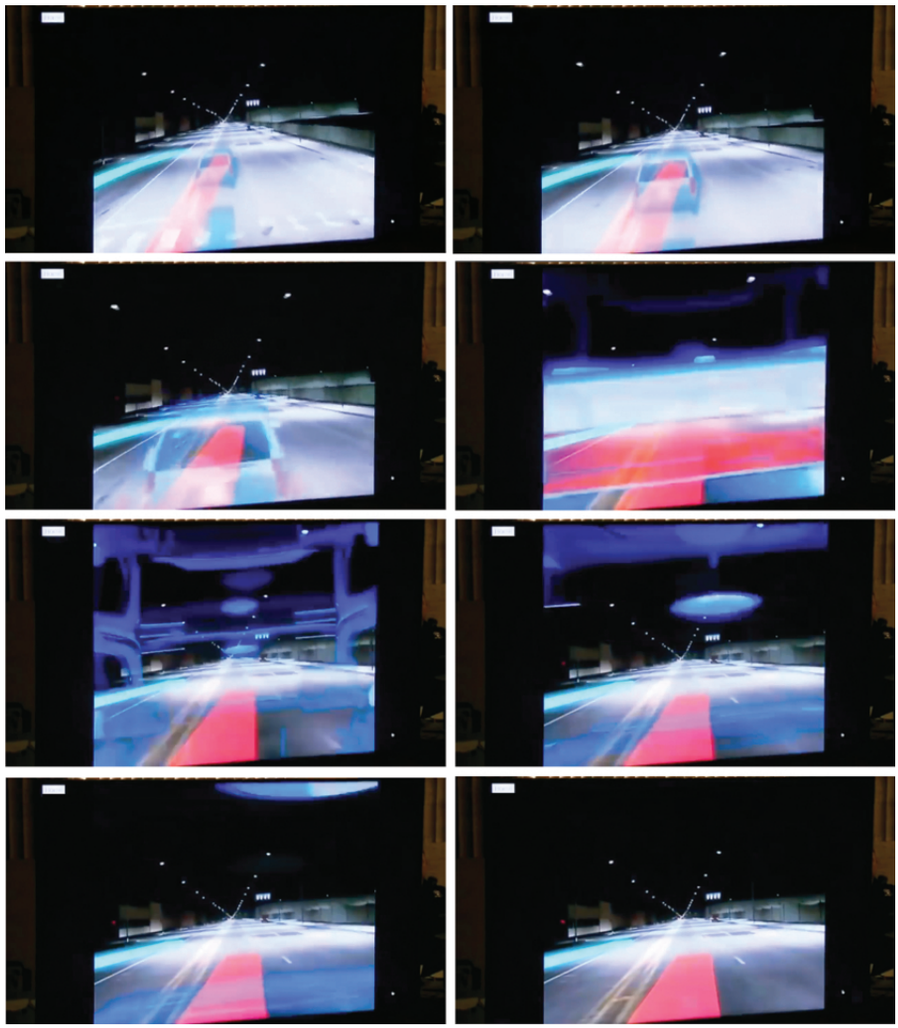


Figure 15. Exhibit 10: approaching and morphing into the digital dashcam.

arrived one minute after Van Dyke killed McDonald). The prosecution argued that Van Dyke had already made up his mind to shoot McDonald before exiting his vehicle. They cited Van Dyke saying to his partner, Joe Walsh (after they heard while driving that McDonald had popped a police tire with a knife), "Why didn't they shoot him if he was attacking them?" and "Oh my God, we're going to have to shoot the guy." As the prosecution contended, what Van Dyke saw was not a threat but a "Black boy walking down the street . . . having the audacity to ignore the police." It was this racial bias that premeditated Van Dyke's murder. And it was this bias that the prosecutors also worked to show was entextualized in exhibit 10.

The prosecution deconstructed, quale by quale, the animation video, recontextualizing its perspective by rendering bare its semiotic mediation, framing the animation not as a forensic "scientific analysis" (as Fries put it), objective and disinterested, but as a set of choices made in the defense's canny interests. In cross-examining Fries, prosecuting attorney Marilyn Hite Ross argued that while Fries's goal was to provide, quoting his curriculum vitae, "an experience at the highest levels of accuracy and forensic analysis," the animation was anything but accurate.

As seen in figure 21, Hite Ross consistently used the second-person pronoun to possess the nouns "animation" and "creation," indexically linking exhibit 10 to a nondiegetic subjectivity in the narrating world of the courtroom, Fries's and by extension the defense's, suggesting that its way of seeing was neither neutral nor objective but prejudiced and interested. (By contrast, Fries never referred to the animation with any possessed construction.)

The prosecution further argued that exhibit 10 did not simply entextualize a (partial) perspective on the events but a perspective that itself was not "accurate," in fact, not even "real." It was artificial, made. In an onomastico-ontological tussle, Hite Ross insists on "it" being a "creation," a "drawing," not a "photograph" and thus not "real." For his part, Fries insists that "it" is "just as real as a photograph" because it has been "demonstrated" by aerial photography and laser scanning. Of interest is how for both parties, accuracy and reality are measured by the ontological priority of the photographic

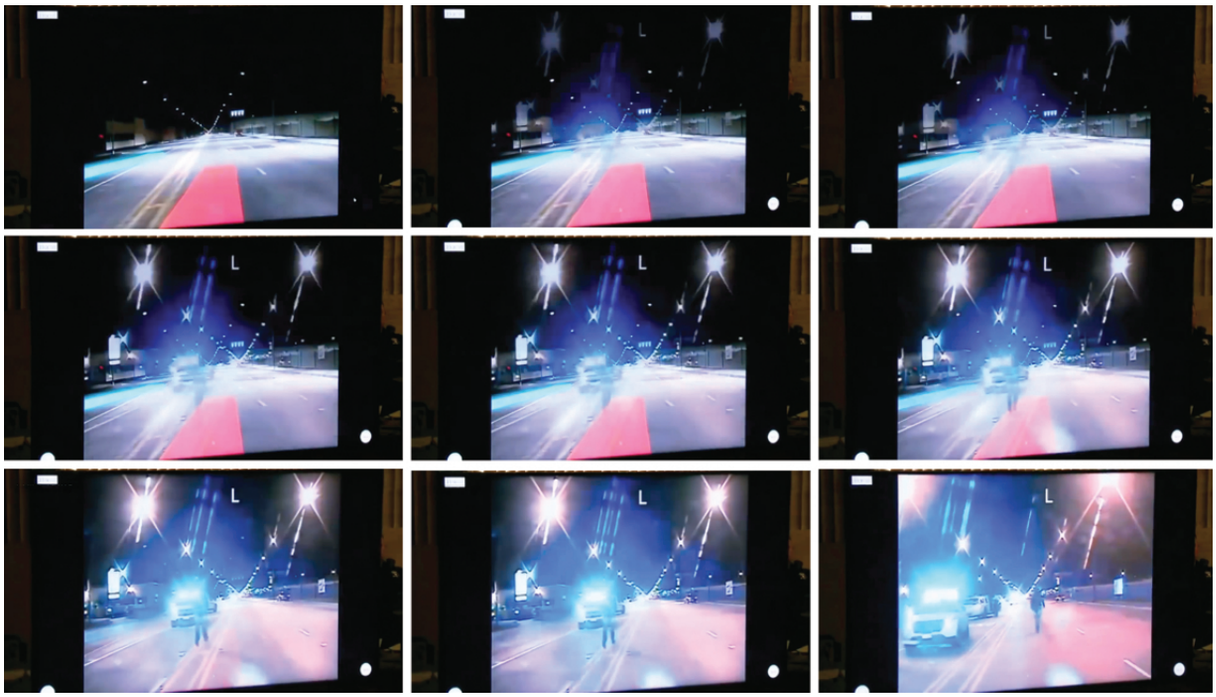


Figure 16. Exhibit 10: from the digital to the analogue dashcam.

and thus the dashcam ("an actual video" taken of "an actual area," as Hite Ross puts it), which is implicitly held up as a mirror of reality.[15]

To make this point, Hite Ross continually forces Fries, through yes-no questions, to admit that particular qualia in the animation do not correspond to the dashcam video. She begins with the lighting of the truck yard in the animation (see fig. 10) in relationship to the lighting in the dashcam video (and by supposition, its profilmic referent). She then points out that the animation omitted one Officer McEligott, on foot behind McDonald, among others on the scene. Next, she pins Fries down on the darkness of the reconstruction of Pulaski Road, which has fewer lights than the "actual footage" (fig. 22).

Hite Ross then moves on to how Fries chose to depict McDonald. She says, "this figure that you've drawn here" while pointing at the animated figure of McDonald.

Hite Ross: You have him wearing a hood over his head?

Fries: Yes.

Hite Ross: Did you see him wearing the hood in the **actual video footage** where he was shot?

Fries: Yes.

Hite Ross: Did you see his hair on his shoulders?

→*Fries:* I saw his hood on.

Hite Ross's polar questions suggest and try to get Fries to affirm the difference between the dashcam footage, where you can see McDonald's hair, and the animation, where you cannot because of a hood. After Fries's evasive "I saw his hood on," Hite Ross continues to "nail down an answer" (Matoesian 2005):

Hite Ross: Did he have on all black in the **actual video footage**?

Fries: He had dark clothes on.

→*Hite Ross:* The question is, was he wearing all black, sir, in the **actual video footage**?

→*Fries:* You need to appreciate that the video footage-

Hite Ross isn't having Fries's repeated nonanswers (note how Hite Ross turns up the metapragmatic pressure with her "The question is . . ." and the honorific "sir") and interrupts him. Shifting her footing, she addresses the judge:

Hite Ross: Objection, nonresponsive.

Judge: Sustained, answer the question.

15. See Schwartz (2009) on how these two positions on visual representation—as impartial objective record, as partial rhetorical persuasion—have been foundational to US legal thinking since the introduction of films as evidence. As Schwartz (2009:36) notes, this distinction reflects widely circulating media ideologies regarding cinema and, I would add, more basic semiotic ideologies in Western thought (Keane 2003; Nakassis 2018).

Figure 17. Exhibit 10: substituting the (authenticated and annotated) digital for the (displaced) analogue.

Fries: Could you ask the question again, please?

Hite Ross: In the ***actual*, the *real* video footage** of the shooting, was Laquan McDonald wearing all black?

→*Fries:* I don't know.

Hite Ross: But you had the **actual video**, correct?

Fries: Yes.

Fries's gauzy response ("I don't know") to Hite Ross's recycled, judge-sanctioned question constitutes a critical inflection point in this sequence, which works to get Fries on record in response to what turns out to be the minor premise of Hite's emergently syllogistic argument: the animation is discrepant from the dashcam. Hite Ross then drops the other shoe, the major premise: accurate documents do not have discrepancies. Calling back to Fries's curriculum vitae (that he aims to provide the "highest levels of accuracy and forensic analysis"), she says:

Hite Ross: And you strive to be **highly accurate** when you are recreating documents for your clients, correct?

Fries: Correct.

Having secured affirmations to these two questions, Hite Ross voices, in the form of a question, the implied conclusion: *your creation is not accurate*.

Hite Ross: So the clothing that **you are depicting** Laquan McDonald wearing in <u>your creation</u> is **not accurate**, correct?

Fries: Incorrect.

Fries again refuses to ratify. At this point, Hite Ross recycles the minor premise, tweaked, as she walks to her computer and toggles back to a still from the dashcam. Shifting from questions about past recollections to a question about present (continuous) perception, she asks, prefaced with an "OK . . ." (indexing that they still have yet to forge agreement but that she will try to do so in what follows):

Hite Ross: <u>OK</u>, in the video that is displaying, do you see white pockets on his jeans?

Fries: I see, uh, him wearing jeans, and and his pockets are- looks to be a different color than his jeans.

Fries weakly acknowledges the difference, and Hite Ross reiterates the syllogism's implied conclusion, again as a polar question, now without the negation but with a contrastive "but" and "still" and with a drop in pitch (signaling disbelief in Fries's answers):

Hite Ross: ↓<u>But</u> you still maintain that the clothing that you depict him in in <u>your animation</u> **is accurate**, correct?

Fries: Correct.

In this antagonistically dialogic, emergently coconstructed syllogism, Hite Ross forces Fries into contradiction, with Fries attempting to simultaneously maintain the accuracy of his animation even as he agrees that there are differences between it and the dashcam.

The prosecutor then hammers home this contradiction for numerous other features of the animation. She points out that the animation omits Van Dyke wearing a bulletproof vest, that his uniform is the wrong color (black, not blue), that he is missing a radio on his shoulder, and later, that the outlines that they put on McDonald made him "appear much larger" than the figure of Van Dyke (fig. 23; cf. Goodwin 1994:622).

Similarly missing, Hite Ross points out, are 11 of Van Dyke's gunshots (the video stops after shot five) and the puffs from the gunshots in the original video. Nor do we see Van Dyke after McDonald falls to the ground, nor Officer Walsh's reaction of surprise (his buckling knees) at Van Dyke opening fire. All things visible on the dashcam, Hite Ross emphasizes.

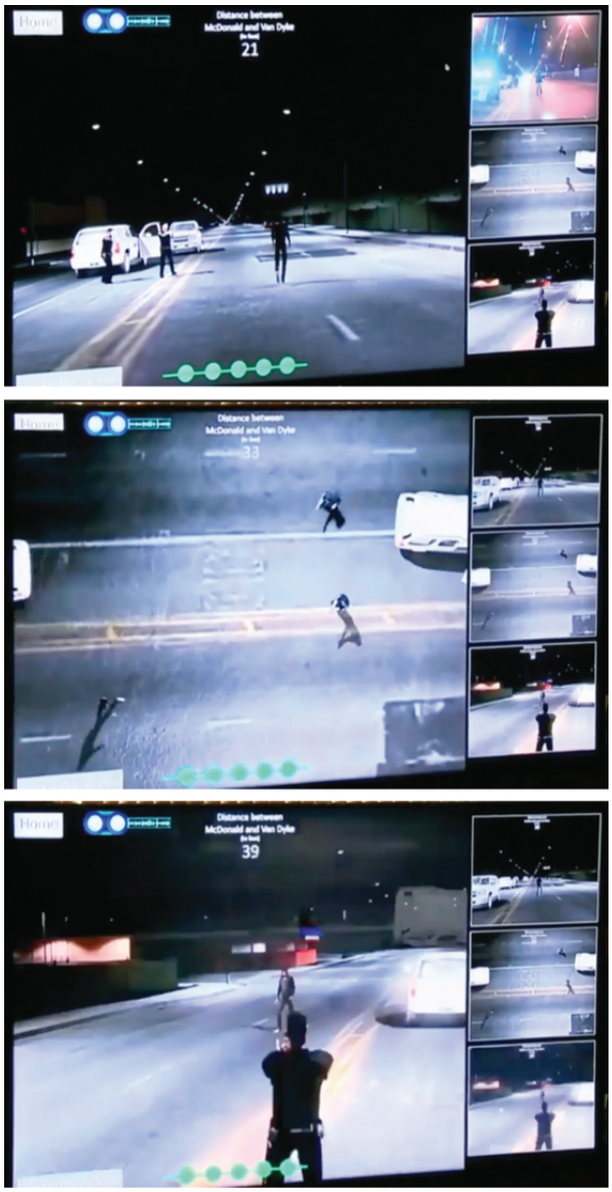


Figure 18. Exhibit 10: Laquan McDonald's murder from three angles: dashcam (*top*), bird's eye (*middle*), and "officer view" (*bottom*).

For each element of the animation, in short, Hite Ross induces Fries to admit that this or that element is not accurate according to the photographic evidence and, by presumption, its profilmic referent. And Fries, in defending the accuracy of his animation (and his reputation, we might suggest) in the face of what are rendered to be its patent discrepancies, continually attempts to deflect Hite Ross's framing of his testimony as contradictory. He does so by insisting that any such differences are irrelevant because 3D Forensic's analysis was only supposed to be, he comes to say, about modeling spatial relations. By being forced to admit that there are qualitative differences between the two representations (Hite Ross framing "your animation" as "inaccurate" vis-à-vis the dashcam footage's various elements), Fries is made to fall back and state that the animation is only designed for a limited purpose, that it is not supposed to substitute for the dashcam (i.e., it cannot encompass it evidentiarily, except with respect to quantitative space). In an amazing feat of courtroom artistry, at one point Hite Ross even gets Fries to admit that the animation is not really even designed to provide Van Dyke's vantage point at all, which, recall, was the original framing of the animation's import by the defense! Hite Ross asks, "Does it matter [for your analysis] that he [Van Dyke] had a holster with an extra clip in it [omitted in the animation]?," to which Fries responded with frustrated indignation:

> *Fries:* No, that would have <light laugh:>no bearing on our analysis.
>
> *Hite Ross:* And your analysis is to show the shooting **from Officer Van Dyke's vantage point**, is that correct?
>
> *Fries:* **Uh, no, that was not our original task**, nor was it our- what we created is more than what you just described, nor were- no- nor were we asked to do just that. We were asked to do an analysis, video reconstruction to figure out time, distance, positions during the shooting.

Under those conditions, everything but time, distance, and position is irrelevant, he goes on to say, and none of the qualia that Hite Ross raises (lighting, sizing, absence of other police officers, etc.)—which he had been made to admit differ between the dashcam and animation—mattered for their analysis or the animation video.[16]

Through this cross-examination, Hite Ross contests the vision provided by the defense, inviting the jury to refuse a way of seeing (fig. 24). Hite Ross provides a discursive camera on the image-text of perspective offered up by the defense, inviting the jury to see the way of seeing of the maker of the animation as itself attempting to prejudice their way of seeing McDonald in the courtroom by presumably, but inaccurately, showing Van Dyke's perspective.[17] Via Hite Ross's cross-examination, each difference between the animation and the video is recontextualized *not* as a sign of the animation's scientific superiority over the dashcam (as Fries would have it) but as

16. He goes on to say that they usually do not even give any kind of "skin" to human figures in their animations but use "bipeds," like crash test dummies. "In this particular case, you know, we can go back and forth, they said- you know, we said, fine, let's put a skin on them. But it doesn't affect the analysis." Note his repair from "they said-" to "we said."

17. When pushed on the fact that nothing in the dashcam or the animation corroborated his testimony, Van Dyke himself disavowed the animation: "It's not my perspective because it's showing the back of my head and not from my eye level. It's not showing what I saw. It's showing the back of my head and above me, so it's not my perspective, Miss." Note Van Dyke's rationalization of perspective as spatial.

Figure 19. Exhibit 10: Dan Herbert highlighting the shrinking distance between Laquan McDonald and Jason Van Dyke, pointing and saying: "And if I can direct your attention to the distance box, where the numbers seem to be going down. If you could explain that . . ."

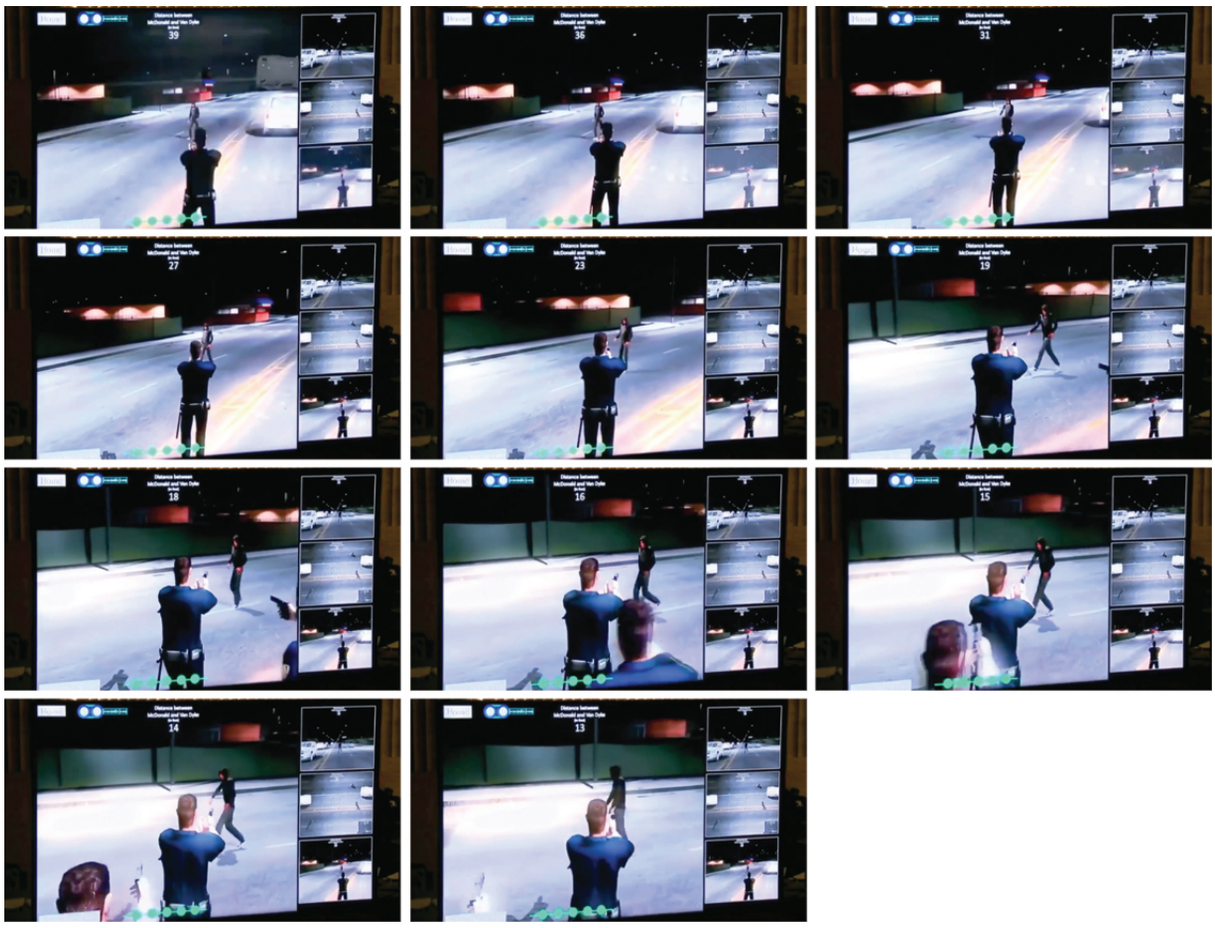


Figure 20. Exhibit 10: over-the-shoulder shot of Jason Van Dyke about to shoot Laquan McDonald.

				Ross's (HR) predications about "it$_x$" (Exhibit 10)	Fries's (JF) predication about "it$_x$" (Exhibit 10)
HR:	And the lighting conditions are not shown in the slide$_x$ that's displaying,		correct?		
JF:	No, (ø	)			
	this$_x$ is	demonstrative.		"you created it"	"this is demonstrative (evidence)"
HR:	Demonstrative meaning	*you* created it$_x$,	correct?		
JF:	Correct.				
HR:	It$_x$'s	yóur computer **dráwing**,	correct?	"your computer drawing"	(not a drawing)
JF:	It$_x$ is	(ø).			
HR:	It$_x$'s	not réal.			
JF:	<shaking his head> I don'-, I don't know what you mean by real↑			"not real"	
HR:	Well, this$_x$ isn't	an **actual vídeo** where somebody's taken a cámera of an áctual área,	right?	(not) "an actual video" taken w/camera of "actual area"	"3D model"
JH:	Well, no (ø	),			
	but it$_x$'s	**a 3D** <slight laugh as he says:> **model** that has been laser scanned uh and demonstrated using aerial photography.			
	So it'$_x$s	just as real as **a photograph,**	I guess↑	"not a photograph"	"just as real as a photograph"
HR:		Just as (ø)			
	but it$_x$'s	not **a photograph,**	is it$_x$ sir?		
JF:	No, it$_x$'s	**a 3-dimensional // diagram**			
HR:		**// drawing,**	correct?	"drawing"	"3-dimensional diagram," not a drawing
JF:	No, no				
	I would'n't call it$_x$	**a drawing**.			
	I can't draw.				
	But it$_x$ is	**a computer módel,**			
		that's, I mean, that's what		"just a computer drawing"	"a computer model"
	it$_x$ is.				
HR:	Isn't	**a computer model**			
		just a computer dráwing?			
				[NB: second-person, possessed predications]	[NB: third-person, unpossessed predications]

Figure 21. Prosecutor Marilyn Hite Ross (HR) cross-examines Forensic 3D CEO Jason Fries (JF).

an iconic index of the "distortion" of the animation and, furthermore, as a second-order index of its prejudicing effect and untrustworthiness. While Fries's on-record claim is that perspectives can be reduced to spatial position and angle—as if seeing as Van Dyke were a problem of accurately measuring and naturalistically representing distances and angles with drones and lasers—the prosecution's invitation is to see past this to the metasemiotic work of entextualizing perspective, to see it as not just a spatial phenomenon and to pay attention to those deeply and implicitly enregistered signs that indexically invoke an emplotted chronotope that would predecide and pre-see the value of McDonald's life and the impunity of Van Dyke in taking it.

And in doing so, the prosecution entextualized its own perspective on the defense's image-text of perspective. If the animation asked the jury to see as a police officer—alone; vulnerable; reasonably afraid; without backup; without a vest, radio, or extra bullets; in a dark and deserted, scary city street; threatened by an enlarged Black male in dark clothes, in a black hoodie, approaching closer and closer—the prosecution asked the jury to see the digital animation as an entextualization of the perspective of something else: white supremacy incarnate, unreasonable police brutality, anti-Blackness (cf. Butler 1993:20). Implicitly, thus, the prosecution suggested that the perspective of the digital animation, in entextualizing Van Dyke's "vantage point" in the act of murdering McDonald, is a kind of icon of it (i.e., that it *does* show his perspective!) in that they both betray, once subjected to a certain critical perspective, a racializing, and racist, way of seeing. And the prosecution did so by holding up the animation to the dashcam footage, differentiating and setting them side by side rather than embedding their perspectives one in the other, offering one up as "real" and the other as chicanery. This is exactly the "contested vision" and "counter-reading" that Goodwin (1994) and Butler (1993) write about as missing in the first trial of the LAPD's beating of Rodney King but present in the second. But note that what is being contested is not just a perspective in this particular event but a general way of seeing (Berger 1972). It is an enregistered perspective that is at issue. What was on trial in the Van Dyke trial, then, was this way of seeing Black persons through the cultural mythos that Frantz Fanon, Laurence Ralph, David Marriott, Kara Keeling, and, in the more proximate historical context of Van Dyke's trial, Black Lives Matter protesters have described and called into question, a "way of seeing" mediated and enacted through the violent semiotics of the state, by the eyes (and ears and hands) of the police, and by the numerous other speech chains, stories, and legends that continually enregister our senses.

Vision under Erasure

But if the prosecution put a perspective on trial, its argument necessarily reinscribed that very way of seeing. For to even

<Pointing at slide with dashcam video>
HR: Are you able to see the police lights, overhead lights, and headlights?
JF: Yes.

<HR changes slide to the animation video>
HR: Those are not shown in the slide that's currently displaying, is that correct?
<JF tries to evade answering…>

Figure 22. Marilyn Hite Ross (HR) highlighting the darkened digital animation by juxtaposing dashcam and animation. JF = Jason Fries.

understand what the prosecution was asking the jury to see—the racializing work of the defense's discursive and digital camera—the jury already had to see with Van Dyke's eyes, for it was the intelligibility of his perceptual judgment that they were being asked to perceptually judge, and reject. When we see as the prosecution asks us to see, we see with doubled vision, for our counterperspective to the police perspective presupposes its way of seeing—we must also already be able to inhabit a perspective that sees McDonald as a cultural stereotype while simultaneously seeing ourselves seeing in this way. And furthermore, we must take a stance on just that doubled vision (in accepting or rejecting it). Just as, as Bakhtin reminds us, one never speaks but voices, and does not simply voice but in the act of voicing takes a stance on a voice in a structured manifold of voicings—that is, because one always speaks/voices in a particular way (and not some other)—similarly, as Fanon reminds us, one never simply sees or even sees-as but sees-as in a particular way (and not some other) within a structured manifold of looks, doing so always by taking a particular stance on seeing in so seeing. Vision, too, is dialogic. This phenomenology has

Figure 23. Enlarging Laquan McDonald's body in exhibit 10.

Dashcam	Animation
Single, third-person static perspective (machinic spectacle)	Multiple, first- and third-person mobile perspectives (immersive voyeurism)
Brighter/more ambient lighting	Darker ambient lighting
McDonald in blue jeans, white pockets	McDonald in all black
McDonald's hair visible	McDonald's head covered in hoodie
No highlighting	McDonald's body enlarged by red outline, Van Dyke's not enlarged
Many squad cars and officers visible	Only Van Dyke and Walsh and their car
Van Dyke with bulletproof vest, extra clip, and radio on shoulder	Van Dyke missing bulletproof vest, extra clip, and radio on shoulder
16 gun shots with puffs of smoke	5 gun shots, no puffs of smoke
Walsh's bodily suprise (flinching)	No reaction of surprise from Walsh

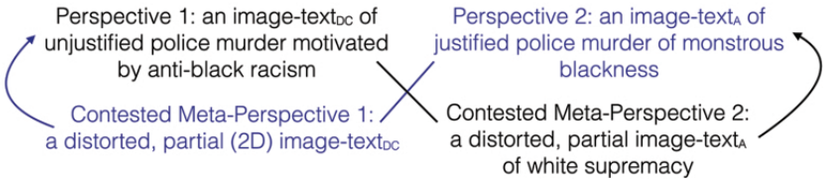


Figure 24. Contested (meta)perspectives, dashcam (DC; prosecution) and animation (A; defense).

an event-bound and event-breaching semiotics linked to histories of racialization and enregisterment (Das and Lee 2024) and their contestation.

Of course, such ways of seeing produce blindness and blind spots, just as their contestations do. Indeed, as far as I can tell, the perspective that was not sincerely or seriously explored in the trial, outside of its dehumanizing depersonalization, was that of Laquan McDonald himself. As this suggests, part and parcel of some perspectives circulating is that others do not; that for some perspectives to be entextualized and circulated, others must be erased or suppressed (Gordon 1997:73; hooks 1992; Lorde 1984 [1977]), prevented from being taken up and inhabited, reentextualized, enregistered, and made to perdure.[18]

If a way of seeing was on trial, then, the verdict rejected it. But perhaps it was more equivocal. Indeed, while Van Dyke was found guilty, it was because, as some jurors reported, they did not find Van Dyke's oral testimony convincing in light of the dashcam video (Smith 2018); that is, the co-textualization of the defense's presentation of the case and Van Dyke's testimony failed to jell, to produce a coherent metatext integrating the various denotational, image, and interactional texts that unfolded across the trial. Put otherwise, the defense failed to produce a believable discursive camera that the jury could take on as their own (meta)perspective on the case.

But which aspects of the defense's perspective did jurors reject? While they did not believe that Van Dyke was justified in shooting McDonald (that he was an immediate, credible threat), they did believe that Van Dyke was sincerely afraid. The more fundamental legal view of things—that cops can kill when reasonably afraid and that McDonald so frightened Van Dyke—stood unquestioned. This was, indeed, why Van Dyke was not convicted of official misconduct and why he was convicted of second- and not first-degree murder: jurors believed that he was afraid, just not justified in being so. The jury still saw through his eyes, from his perspective, even if they did not believe that a reasonable officer would have seen and felt as they came to see him see.

Conclusions

Social life proceeds as a succession of image-texts. Through sketching images in semiosis, social life sketches itself into being, like the M. C. Escher hand drawing the hand drawing it. And in doing so, such image-texts—projecting interactional acts and narrative worlds—necessarily inscribe perspectives on the world and its happenings, presupposing and entailing subject positions from which such images cohere (or do not).

18. We can think of this point in relationship with Audre Lorde's (1984 [1977]:42) observation that the "constant, if unspoken distortion of vision" created by racial difference in the United States simultaneously renders Black women both hypervisible and invisible through processes of depersonalization and silencing, as well as with Lewis Gordon's (1997:73) statement that "in order to see the black as a thing requires the invisibility of a black's perspective"; in the case at hand, the racializing of McDonald renders him an object to be seen only by refusing to recognize his vision and perspective as a person (cf. Baker 1993:43–45; Goodwin 1994:625). Here, we recall Fanon's phenomenology as an attempt to reconstruct just such a subjectivity and perspective, one that allows for the perception of and intervention into this historical politics. See Aushana (2019) on how such a (cinematically mediated) disregard of the other's look back is central to police modes of training vision. I thank Amanda Weidman and an anonymous reviewer for bringing these points and connections to my attention.

To entextualize is to see-as; it is to construe signs in some way or other. And to see-as is mediated not simply by visual signs but by signs in any and every modality. Furthermore, as this implies, perspective is not simply, necessarily, or primarily visual but, rather, a general feature of semiosis.

But it is not just that the unfolding of indexical signs in iconic coherences entextualizes perspectives, for indexicalities of various sorts are themselves meaningful and efficacious *because* of the perspectives taken on them (Gal and Irvine 2019). I have called this entextualization of perspective a discursive camera (Nakassis 2023*c*). A camera, following Branigan (1984, 2006), is less a piece of equipment than an aperture that opens a horizon of experience and sensibility. And this horizon may be opened in any number of ways. A perspective can be created by the tint of a picture, the shake of its frame, the acceleration of camera movement, but also by a lexical shibboleth or a subtle change in pitch. Any and every indexical sign can and willy-nilly does contribute and cumulate to produce a perspective on what is perceived and thus what is done in and by perceiving. A black hoodie in an animation (of a Black male) contributes to entextualizing a perspective (Bonilla and Rosa 2015:8; Nguyen 2015; Smalls 2020:238), just as does a lexical choice or a cut to an over-the-shoulder shot. And together, they emplot a particular perspective in a particular event of activity (e.g., a courtroom jury watching a forensic animation) but only because such signs are enregistered with indexical values—because indexicality itself is perspectival—and because their textual co-occurrence figurates and thus invokes, in the instance, "a way of seeing," itself continually being iterated, undone, and remade in and across events, in confluence and contestation with other ways of seeing, indeed, within fields of power where not all such ways are equally able to be inhabited, transformed, or undone.

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Comments

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Perspectives and perspective talk abound, from exercises in perspective taking in therapeutic practice to the short-lived anthropological perspectivism to the play of perspective as a 2D illusion of 3D space in visual media. Everyone, individual or aggregate, has a perspective. Yet, as Constantine V. Nakassis shows, seemingly disparate cases like the ones I supplied above—and the cases Nakassis discusses, from Fanonian racialized phenomenology to a racist discourse register of "African speech" to a Tamil film to a 2018 murder trial—are not so different after all but involve the active construction of a "looking and listening subject [position], . . . a virtual subjectivity projected from indexical activity as the condition of its pragmatics."

Although this is not his overt focus, Nakassis's approach offers an alternative to a common modern-colonial isomorphism between perspective and identity. If perspective is attended to as process, perspective cannot be readily reduced to "who—that is, sociologically speaking, *what*" (Silverstein 2022:12) a perspective taker is, a judgment that often relies on totalizing images (Babcock 2025) of subjectivity or personhood as an ontological status that preexists and remains unchanged by interaction. Rather, a perspective is a real-time bundle of conjectures (Nakassis 2023*c*:5–6) that happens somewhere, for some purpose, and it matters that the conjectures unfold in particular ways in particular events, even if they could have unfolded differently.

Nakassis's essay does not set out to show how a specific perspective comes to be formed. Put differently, the aim is not to show how Laquan McDonald, a Black Chicago teenager, was murdered in 2014 by a cop, Jason Van Dyke, or how Van Dyke's legal team used CGI imagery and the adversarial structure of courtroom cross-examination to attempt to justify the murder. It is to answer "what, semiotically speaking, is a perspective?" For Nakassis, it is about perspective in general, not this perspective. Of interest is how signs—including linguistic signs—mediate the doing of perspective. The approach Nakassis offers allows us to see how voicing and looking are integral to the precipitation of perspectival imaginaries that might otherwise seem to have little to do with language (like a

spectacle, a gaze, a regime of visuality) and to locate where and how perspectives precipitate multimodally at the overdetermined nexus of histories, institutions, and interactional norms (Rosa and Flores 2017:637).

But what if this perspective and perspective in general cannot be separated? What if attending to the semiosis of perspective requires that we both place "emphasis on . . . semiosis as a central modality of cultural and subjective production and . . . attend to the inhabited body (historical, raced, gendered, etc.) in semiosis" (Smalls 2024:47)—including our own inhabited bodies as semioticians? Of course, the essay does not bypass these concerns wholly or downplay the potentially life-or-death consequences of perspective. Yet I am reminded of bell hooks's (1997) essay "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination," which explores, among other things, how "white fear" interpretively obscures the functioning of the "white gaze" as the capacity to enact terror. This perspective shift allows us to ask the question differently: What if the young French boy in Fanon's account is not merely "frightened" but terrorizing? What if a cop's "fear" is not about the feeling as such but is a first-pair part in a routine for exerting white supremacist terror? How might this reformulation allow us to more centrally account for the shaping of perspectival power by compounding oppressive systems in a "broader semiotic field of anti-Blackness" (Smalls 2020:238) without analytically or materially obscuring Black aliveness and livingness—a "reverent response to queries about how it is we not only stay alive but make life," as Krystal A. Smalls (2024:237) has called for and demonstrated?

In other words, Nakassis's essay highlights the importance of following Smalls and others working to advance the telling of slow life—as Smalls has further named the approach she offers—and not just Black abjection and death. Where else might we go, then, when carrying out analyses like this one to ensure that the white terror, anti-Black dehumanization, and erasure that structure a courtroom's perspectival contestations are not the end of the story? How might we include other media, other material, and other perspectives to allow Laquan McDonald to be more than what an almost legal white supremacist killing and ensuing legal-institutional process have tried to reduce him to?

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The interest in focusing on semiotic processes involving images opens important theoretical, ontological, and epistemological issues in linguistic anthropology: it forces us to apprehend semiosis in its totality and not oriented solely toward verbal language. By proposing the notion of "perspective," Nakassis leads us to think about the relationship between the processes of "voicing" (well known since Bakhtin) and those of "viewing/looking" (through what he has called the "image-text") in that the two eminently dialogical dimensions should be jointly observed in all interactions. The succession of three visual and audiovisual scenes chosen as a corpus engages this question of dialogism, narration, and perspective in different ways: the gaze as sociopolitically determined in a Fanon narrative, the interplay of shots/countershots in a Tamil film, and the complex instrumentalization of videos (discursive or digital) in the trial of Jason Van Dyke for the murder of Laquan McDonald.

The article's highly pedagogical structure gradually reveals how the activity of putting the world into perspective—defined not as a subjective intention or point of view, but as a schema of differentiation that implies taking up a position ("footing") within very concrete situations—is not always explicit and is often even "rendered invisible" but results from a cumulative set of metapragmatic functions and semiotic effects that gives it ideological consistency. According to the author, social life unfolds as a succession of image-texts that inscribe perspectives on the world and are totally underpinned by metasemiotic activity: it is in this interweaving of the multiple activities of semiosis that perspective emerges (it is not just a visual and spatial activity but presupposes the accumulation of several dimensions: language, body, gesture, etc.), forming what he calls a "discursive camera of subjectivity."

While the author finally argues that all indexicality implies a perspective on the world ("indexicality itself is perspectival"), we may well question the necessity of adding the notion of perspective to that of indexicality, footing, and ideology. While it provides a relevant anchor for understanding the functioning of semiosis in its entirety (visuality, linguistic, etc.) and makes it possible to avoid reducing perspective to a point of view, does this mean that it encompasses all semiotic dimensions, enabling them to be unified into a single "direction" as a kind of "ideological voice/view"? Or does its importance lie in its extension to sociopolitical considerations?

In the conclusion, I would like more issues of this provocative proposition: if a film director imposes the perspective of a character on the spectator ("to see as another" thanks to a "discursive camera of subjectivity"), we can postulate that several subjective perspectives can telescope in the same situation, between a perspective that is traced out for the viewer-listener and a perspective that would, for example, make the latter refuse to enter into this mode of figuration (by looking away, commenting negatively, etc.). This interplay of meta-perspectives raises the question of subjectivity and intentionality: the forms taken by the perspectives analyzed in the last case (trial) presuppose an awareness of positioning (footing). It is indeed a will, an intention, that is highlighted by the prosecution, themselves proposing an intention to counter this (racist) worldview. Perspectives are clearly identified and put into discourse since they refer to previous ideologies (notably through well-known stereotypes and registers) actualized in situations by a multiplicity of cues.

In these very specific cases, the researcher has access to perspectives since they presuppose the already seen, already known, and already said, as the final diagram shows. The question arises,

however, about how to identify the multiplicity of perspectives in interaction outside their clear discursive and ideological forms. How can we identify the more blurred perspectives, less clearly registered in the interactions, and how can we name them if they do not correspond to clearly registered ideologies? Experimental films, for example, challenge these boundaries.

In this sense, the mention of the absent perspective (that of Laquan McDonald, the dead man) is relevant. But beyond its erasure, we could ask ourselves the question of the emergence of an original perspective (which must have interested Eduardo Kohn, e.g., for the nonhuman perspective). This question would require a better understanding of the link that this notion weaves with that of "ideology" to grasp the extent to which a perspective also modifies the conception of ideology, which is never already given but always in the process of becoming. My final question would then be whether semiotic ideologies (which are not only linguistic ideologies) are at the origin of perspectives or whether they are also elaborated by perspectives in a dynamic game that makes them construct each other.

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From the margins of *la francophonie* where Nakassis anchors his penetrating analysis of the "discursive" and "digital" cameras affecting a court case, we can hear the resounding words of Frantz Fanon mingle with those of a lesser-known Québécoise poet, Michèle Lalonde, who similarly reminds us that perspective is the pulse of power. In 1968, when Lalonde (2001 [1968]) performed her revolutionary poem "Speak White" to a rapt audience of Front de Libération du Québec supporters, the double voicedness and "double vision" of her affirmation of speaking as a member of a so-called uncultured, stammering race became poetically palpable in her swift rejoinder "but we are not deaf to the genius of a language" ("nous sommes un peuple inculte et bègue mais ne sommes pas sourds au génie d'une langue"). When, in a subsequent stanza, Lalonde uttered with disdain that to "speak white and loud" is to be an anglophone (over)lord who amasses capital and dominates provincial politics, this shift in footing instantiated an alternative historical context for proclaiming that Québécois sovereignists also stand in solidarity against the linguistic oppression of anti-Black racism. The couplet thus entextualized her call to action and embedded it in the episteme that "liberty is a black word just as poverty is black and just as blood mixes with dust in the streets of Algiers and Little Rock" ("nous savons que liberté est un mot noir comme la misère est nègre et comme le sang se mêle à la poussière des rues d'Alger ou de Little Rock").[19] Lalonde recapitulated the framework of "racial capitalism" later expressed by Jodi Melamed (2015:77) in that "capital can only be capital when it is accumulating, and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups." Nakassis's article also reinforces Fanon's and Lalonde's critiques by asking whether laws are "whitewashed" through the edifices of capitalism built on the backs of, at the expense of, and with the silencing of the racialized and poor.

Overall, Nakassis explores which critical stances to take and which were previously taken to adjudicate the crime of Chicago police officer Jason Van Dyke's killing of Laquan McDonald. In particular, he points to the "image-texts" through which voicing and looking are entextualized and enregistered as interlinked perspective and offers a revision of such sociolinguistic concepts as stance and footing by underscoring the semiotic mediation of the presumably fixed variables of speech, gaze, gesture, and bodily movement. My perspective taking, situated more firmly in Lalonde's phenomenology, seeks to foreground the moneyed interests striving to ensure that this repugnant crime is forgotten. If we are to seriously consider the myriad narrating and narrated laminations of speech events, we know that speech is not mere "voice" and gaze mere "look." Starting instead from the premise of tripled and quadrupled image-texts of a discursive camera, a lens exposes the "looked at/listened to subject [that is] capable of looking/listening back." Also, this perspective taking illuminates the perspective erasing of "digital cameras" and their dizzying array of projections upon projections. Our gaze finally falls on corporations such as 3D Forensic, which created an animation intended to visually (but not auditorily) transport the jury away from the chronotope of Cartesian realism and reorient viewers to the so-called right immersive reality of Van Dyke, the defendant. Labeled as a corrective to 2D distortions, this animation invited seeing McDonald anew by manipulating perceptions of passing time and suturing together new sequences of aerial vantages and camera shots, focusing attention on movement, size, and color.

Nakassis's incisive exposé of the dangers of conflating "discursive" and "digital" cameras confirms that dashcams cannot be unequivocally heralded as leveling the playing field between police officers and civilians. To anyone's eyes and ears trained in watching body-cam footage of police-civilian interactions, the defense strategy's exclusive reliance on dashcam footage, which can record only images and not sound, presents an opportunity to further inquire into language and semiotic ideologies and examine how the defense exploited the soundless affordances of dashcam video to authorize and drive forward racialized figurations of young Black men on the move. Hypothetically, would the use of body-cam footage (later legally mandated in Illinois in 2025) produce similar testimonies and cross-examinations that endorse an ideology elevating nonlinguistic evidence above verbal forms? If 3D Forensic were to animate body-cam footage with AI to "speak white" on behalf of McDonald or Van Dyke, would the jury acquiesce to

19. Translated by Albert Herring.

the large language model's authenticity and agree that this linguistic variety could speak for either or both persons? What would happen if the courts of law or public opinion were more receptive to the role of "moneyed interests" denying the genius of not "speaking white"? Armed with speculations and the article's expert highlighting of dueling events of perspective taking and erasure, we can envision other constraints and possibilities than those leading to Van Dyke's conviction for second-degree murder.

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In this comprehensive and accessible article, Nakassis offers a brilliant primer on the mutual inextricability of perspective taking and meaning making, an argument that remains a needed rejoinder to traditions that idealize as objective and authoritative an imagined aperspectival view from nowhere. Linguistic anthropologists have robustly tackled the dynamics of perspective (and of attempts to erase perspective) through discussions of the ideologically mediated indexicalities of voicing and listening (e.g., Agha 2005; Hill 1995; Inoue 2006; Rosa and Flores 2017; Tetreault 2009), in so doing complementing other disciplines' critical attention to gaze (e.g., Berger 1972; Browne 2015; Fanon 2008 [1952]; Mirzoeff 2011; Mulvey 1975). Rather than treat a particular sensory medium as an entry point, Nakassis's detailed analysis shows that perspective is "a cumulative effect" of various "sensuous qualia" emergent from the "intercalcation and interaction of different indexicalities."

While I greatly appreciated Nakassis's nuanced attention to the multimodal dynamics of the processes he described, I was puzzled by his invocation of only two sensory modalities in the terminology he previously coined and deployed here: "image-texts of looking-and-voicing." This wording has the potential to direct our attention away from other senses that mediate perspective taking—for example, the perspectival dynamics of the emergence of the protactile movement among deaf-blind signers (Edwards 2024) or the tactile tactics involved in subtle differences of handshake pressure in coastal Kenya, perceptible only to those shaking hands but not to onlookers (Hillewaert 2016). I wondered why a more encompassing term like "perceiving" was not used in place of "looking and voicing," as the latter may inadvertently smuggle in normative expectations around what senses are most important. That said, Nakassis is very clear that he is arguing for an understanding of perspective that is not modality specific but rather draws on "general feature[s] of semiosis."

As I often do when encountering a particularly engaging article, I read partly through what I imagined to be the potential perspectives of my students, wondering whether I might incorporate the piece into my teaching (an exercise that can, of course, be analyzed in the terms offered in this article). I admit that, in doing so, I was at first concerned that students might read the juxtaposition of analyses of the trial of Jason Van Dyke for the murder of Laquan McDonald and Frantz Fanon's accounts of being perceived through the lens of anti-Blackness with analyses of Tamil film and Russian novel excerpts as a suggestion that these examples were commensurate, the discussion of racialized violence offered dispassionately as just "another example" of the semiotic processes of interest. However, it becomes clear that the careful attention Nakassis provides to how the "looking effects" of the Tamil film scene construct a "discursive camera of subjectivity" prepares readers to unpack Van Dyke's defense's strategy in introducing a "classical narrative film, a cinematic form" in their animation of what is purported to be the officer's viewpoint. Likewise, the discussion of the excerpt from Turgenev's *Virgin Soil* sets up readers to extend Bakhtin's point that "the act of voicing" involves taking "a stance on a voice," to track how to "see as the prosecution asks us to see" entails taking a "stance on just that doubled vision (in accepting or rejecting it)." Cumulatively, then, the series of examples in this article both make clear the very consequential stakes of perspective taking and making and offer a nuanced analytic for tracking how these processes unfold.

In doing so, this article makes a valuable contribution to the literature on police surveillance and countersurveillance (e.g., Beutin 2017; Brucato 2015; Das and Lee 2024; Gonzalez and Deckard 2024; Seigel 2018; White and Malm 2020). Much of this work takes up questions of perspective, often addressing how ideologies of "visual objectivity" have undergirded "both repressive and resistive regimes of surveillance" and warning that liberal reforms that have led to funding body cameras for police have ceded additional control to police "over the angle and framing of the footage, as well as complete control of capturing it, editing and tampering with it, and disseminating it (or not)" (Beutin 2017:15). Nakassis's article provides an example of a potential outcome of that control (the animation) and reminds us that, through the metasemiotic entextualization of perspective, both efforts to construct a "view from nowhere" and efforts to encourage us to see through the subjective viewpoint of specific anti-Black subjects can be mobilized to "enregister our senses" to "the violent semiotics of the state."

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Aspectual, Perspectival, and Despective Semiosis

The article "Voicing, Looking, Perspective" by Constantine V. Nakassis examines the semiotic nature of perspective by synthesizing linguistic anthropology's concept of voicing, visual

studies' analysis of looking, and Frantz Fanon's theory of racialized perception. Nakassis argues that perspective is a constitutive feature of semiosis, meaning that acts of signification shape and are shaped by how perspectives emerge and circulate across historical and contextual events. To illustrate this, he analyzes the 2018 trial of Chicago police officer Jason Van Dyke for the murder of Laquan McDonald, focusing on the courtroom use of a forensic digital animation produced by Van Dyke's defense. This animation was designed to represent the officer's point of view (POV) at the time of the shooting, raising questions about how different media construct, validate, and contest perspectives within legal and racialized frameworks.

The article begins with Fanon's insights on racialized vision, exploring how Blackness has historically been perceived through a lens of fear and monstrosity, a legacy embedded in media, advertising, and legal discourse. Nakassis extends this by linking Bakhtin's notion of polyphonic voice and Branigan's analysis of cinematic POV shots, demonstrating how perspective is semiotically constructed through discourse, media, and institutional practices. He argues that the defense's digital animation did not merely present an alternative viewpoint but actively reshaped the courtroom's perception of the event by merging forensic, cinematic, and narrative techniques. The prosecution, in turn, attempted to deconstruct the animation's claims to objectivity, exposing its biases and discrepancies in comparison with dashcam footage. By analyzing these contestations of perspective, Nakassis highlights the broader implications of how media technologies mediate legal truth, racial representation, and ideological world making.

The article refers to the important intuition that perspective is constitutive of semiosis. Therefore, there would be no semiosis without perspective, and vice versa, there would be semiosis every time there is perspective. The article chooses a direction within the linguistic, semiotic, and philosophical field opened by this intuition. It pursues such direction with creativity and diligence. The analysis is compelling and convincing. The author dissects the semiotics of POV. It could be argued that, in so doing, he himself adopts a POV on POV. He discursively places readers in a position from which they see from a specific angle what POV does. Is it possible to turn this "POV perspective on POV" into a different, more macroscopic point of view? One that would be not a POV but a line of view or even a field of view? If semiosis is tantamount to perspective and vice versa, then probably an overview would be possible only asymptotically. In a way, the consubstantial, perspectival nature of semiosis would be such that one could not help adopting a perspective on semiosis.

Yet perhaps a wider angle is viable. It would reveal itself through going back to how Charles S. S. Peirce himself defined the sign and semiosis. One of the most famous and widespread definitions insists on the fact that "a sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" (Peirce 1960–1966: vol. 2, para. 228). There is no space here to dwell on the important difference between respect and capacity (on the relevance of the alternative conjunction "or"). Yet the focus here must be on "respect," which comes from Latin *respicio* (to have regard for). Peirce does not say that a sign is "something which stands to somebody for something in some perspective or capacity." Why? With all probability, he uses "respect" as a quasi-synonym of "aspect" (as in the common expression "in respect to"). "Aspect" is, like many important words of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries ("revolution," "conjuncture"), originally an astronomical concept. It designates the way in which planets "look at each other." Peirce therefore inserts in the primary definition of semiosis an astronomy-driven consideration of the fact that semiosis implies a particular way of looking at reality. Indeed, in semiosis, the interpretant emerges from the way the object is somehow "looked at" by the interpretant in relation to a certain ground.

"Perspective" shares part of the etymology of "respect" and "aspect": the Proto-Indo-European root *spek-* (to observe, to watch). Yet it also contains the prefix "per-" as an indication of "the ways of looking through, of looking clearly." The term goes back to the origin of optics. From this POV, it is an early scientific term, like "aspect." Yet "perspective," unlike "aspect," was "hijacked" by the technical discourse on Renaissance perspectival representation. "Aspect" is science. "Perspective" is science that becomes art. "Perspective," more than "aspect" or "respect," is therefore linked to the idea that seeing well depends on a technique and that sciences deriving from technology may lead to "seeing (more) clearly." At the same time, it is also linked to the idea that this always implies, as in Renaissance painting, a geometrical rhetoric.

What the article "Voicing, Looking, Perspective" shows well is that aspects of domination and violence may be presented as modalities of "seeing it clearly" through the new rhetoric of digital perspective. A despective look that passes itself for a perspective one. Can we think of an aspectual semiosis, purified of any perspectival violence? I am not sure, but I hope so.

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What is a perspective? Why does it matter? In "Voicing, Looking, Perspective," Nakassis answers both questions by untangling, with elegant precision, the intricate processes of creating a perspective and the profound consequences of taking a perspective. For Nakassis, a perspective is a complex semiotic achievement, a "cumulative effect," "a composite text-in-context of sensuous qualia emergent from the intercalation and interaction of different indexicalities," which are themselves perspectival. In other words, a perspective is an entextualization of many modalities in the construction of a "discursive camera": "where we come to see with and as another." Just like semiosis

itself, perspective is a site of tension and revision: perspectives can be built, contested, upended, reinforced, among other things. Perspective matters because its creation and uptake influence how we make sense of living and dying in this world. The article explores these stakes.

Nakassis weaves together an exquisite framework for exploring the semiotics of perspective: looking structures under French empire (Fanon), voicing systems in the Russian novel (Bakhtin), and filmic techniques in Tamil cinema (Nakassis). Like Bakhtinian voicing, Fanonian looking is dialogic: we do not just see or see as but see as "ways of seeing" (Berger 1972), produced through event-bound (entextualizing) and event-breaching (enregistering) modes of semiosis (Wortham and Reyes 2015). This groundwork enables a cogent analysis of how perspective was crafted in the 2018 trial of a Chicago police officer, Jason Van Dyke, for the murder of a Black teenager, Laquan McDonald. Building from Charles Goodwin's (1994) brilliant work on "professional vision," Nakassis examines how the prosecution and defense drew on two videos—dashcam footage and digital animation—as they entextualized competing perspectives that pull in other semiotic elements, from spoken testimonies to image ontologies to racial ideologies. While the defense used the digital animation to entextualize the perspective of a skilled yet frightened officer of the law, the prosecution used the digital animation to entextualize the perspective of anti-Black police brutality.

The article beautifully demonstrates how layers of reflexivity are required to produce a perspective. Doubles and triples abound in acts of seeing, being seen, and seeing as. Nakassis considers various doubled and tripled visions (e.g., you see, I see you see, I see as you see) and doubled and tripled voices (e.g., Fanon revoicing Petit-Nègre as the voice of the French imaginer, not the Martinican speaker). These multiple layers of reflexive awareness played out in the court case as the defense dismissed the dashcam on the grounds that it failed to represent Van Dyke's perspective. The defense explained that the footage did not capture crucial elements, including McDonald's face and specifically "the look in his eye." If the dashcam footage did not show how McDonald saw (McDonald's perspective), the defense argued, it could not show how Van Dyke saw (Van Dyke's perspective) or, perhaps more importantly, how Van Dyke saw McDonald see (Van Dyke's perspective of McDonald's perspective). Yet such complex layering can lead to a perspective's undoing. For example, in creating Van Dyke's perspective, the defense's digital animation built instead an excess of perspective (e.g., bird's-eye view and other angles). Is the digital animation his (partial) perspective or the (total) perspective? Although purportedly tasked with correcting the representation of distance, which the dashcam was argued as distorting, the digital animation sneaked in fabrications (hoodie, black clothing, red outline) that polluted the whole and weakened their case, but not so much as to completely fail.

This leads to another illuminating element of the analysis: how a perspective can fragment and wobble, allowing its facets to reassemble and reconstitute the entities that perceive. The defense attempted to build a perspective for Van Dyke that relied on both professional vision (he was trained) and affective state (he was scared). These two facets were harnessed to constitute the perspective of a "scared police officer who was fearful for his life and the life of others and acted as he was trained to do." Yet Nakassis reveals how the defense failed to shape this discursive camera into a coherent metatext that could unify a collection of potentially competing entexts, including, perhaps, a person who both thinks and feels. The jury accepted some aspects of this perspective but not others, believing that Van Dyke was afraid but not justified in being afraid. Although the jury "saw through his eyes, from his perspective," Van Dyke's perspective might have ended up reflecting a different person: not an officer but a man. A perspective, then, not only can be disentangled, its elements split and recombined, but also, in its fragmentation, can be potentially transformative of personhood.

Throughout the article, I found fascinating the interplay between a video (as product/text) and a camera (as vehicle/channel). As products, both the dashcam footage and digital animation share a vulnerability; each can be questioned as warped icons or likenesses, as two-dimensional copies of three-dimensional originals (or in the case of the digital animation: a copy of a copy of an original). These products can index the vehicles that caused them: the cameras or technologies themselves (their capabilities, their angles, etc.) can be pointed to for blame. Particularly in the case of the dashcam, this Jakobsonian channel is regarded as playing an active role in distorting reality but a nonrole in producing the reality it distorts. That is, the camera is seen as a passive recorder rather than as an active participant in creating action in the moment of its recording. Does the presence of the dashcam play a role in the death it records? Or rather, is it regarded as such? Perhaps less in this courtroom, but more in other high-profile murder cases, the question of the "camera participant" seems to be in increasing contention.

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I Live in a Black Body. And I See from This Body.

I remember seeing, from this body, that grainy 2014 footage of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald being shot multiple times by Chicago police. These eyes saw only the killing of a child. In addition to seeing, I also read and theorize and know from this Black body.

So it is from this "Black place of knowing," as Katherine McKittrick (2021) has laid out, that I will be responding to Nakassis's incisive analysis of perspectival politics in the trial of this Black child's murderer. In particular, I am reading this

piece through and as Black raciosemiotics. Raciosemiotics is a strand of racial semiotics born of ethnic studies and semiotic anthropology that demands attention to the racialized and racializing body and that requires deep and wide engagement with relevant race theory. It emerged from my encounter with linguistic anthropology as a Black studies student who had been intellectually fattened by Fanon and Black feminist theory and who was trying to semiotically examine racialized intersubjectivity in a way that honored my intellectual and political commitments (Smalls 2015, 2020, 2024).

In more ways than not, Nakassis's examination of Van Dyke's defense team's digital manipulation of the footage capturing McDonald's murder applies a raciosemiotics lens, with particularly high semiotic resolution, to show us how framing strategies (vis-à-vis a "discursive camera") relied on white supremacist/normative ideologies of Blackness and Black bodies to direct people in how to see. Nakassis succinctly identifies and illuminates the very reasons I turned to Fanon to reimagine the semiotic encounter as a "performative encounter" (as Yolanda Covington-Ward [2018] has described it) occurring in the historical lived world—that is, as encounters occurring in and constitutive of structural relationalities and realities. Particularly useful was Nakassis's consideration of an "entextualized perspective" and the ways it becomes part of and figures an "interactional text" in which looking and voicing pragmatically direct seeing/being seen and speaking/hearing. They describe this interaction (and the strategies deployed therein) as a request/demand/invitation to enter "into a self-contained world, into a subjectivity in that world, into a vicarious feeling." Nakassis goes on to note that, despite its ultimate failure to convince the jury that the feelings they were being recruited to feel were reasonable or justified, the animation seemed to effectively invite viewers "to feel now as Van Dyke felt then and all anti-Black subjects feel always and forever toward male Black bodies."

As a Black subject and Black studies scholar, I especially appreciate the last part of Nakassis's noticing/assertion and would like to press it further, with the help of Fanonian philosopher George Yancy, in ways that might implicate many as an "anti-Black subject." In other words, what if we imagine a subject who would not require vicariousness (or seeing and feeling as another) to access Van Dyke's baked-in fear and loathing but one who could access it via the stimulation or activation of the experience of embodied whiteness—or another racialized subjectivity that is (partially) realized through a contrastive relationality with Blackness (Yancy 2008, 2012)? Yancy's (2008:72) uptake of Fanon's sociogeny of race redirects the "lived experience" (or "facticity," depending on the translation) of Blackness to scrutinize white subject formation and the "definitive structuring" of that subject formation that renders white subjects and their actions "the effects and vehicle of white racism." In this sense, Yancy extends Fanon's application of a historical-racial body schema to white subjects (and, by extension, to those who come to know themselves through structures that are kindred or proximate to whiteness in some contexts), noting the ways in which the fearful reaction of the young white boy (from the well-cited *Black Skin, White Masks* passage; Fanon 2008 [1952]) lives not only in a social imaginary or his own imaginary or psyche but also in his body. Recalling a purse-clutching white woman that Yancy (2008:5; like so many nonwhite masculine and masculinized people) interacted with in an elevator, they say that even if she comes to "judge her perception of the Black body as epistemologically false, her racism may still have a hold in her lived-body." According to Yancy, her quickened heartbeat and tightened chest may "form part of the white bodily repertoire, which has become calcified through quotidian modes of bodily transaction in a racial and racist world" (5). If we take seriously this idea that the anti-Black enregistered way of seeing propagated by legends, stories, and histories ("mythopoetic constructions," in Yancy's terms [9]) is known not just by way of narrative and image-text but also by way of the very experiences through which one comes to know a self and/or that structure the ways that self has moved through the world/been treated/treated others (i.e., through an invisibilized but fraught whiteness), then we can attend to the ways McDonald's racialized body (or images thereof) was probably always already (or at least, easily) read, remembered, experienced, known as threat by many jurors, regardless of the indexical framings and interactional contextualization that the defense or prosecution provided. If we take up Yancy's extension of Fanon to account for the sociogeny and ontogeny of race in the racialization of white people and some non-Black people, then we must consider that for many of the 11 non-Black jurors, an embodied knowing that came by way of their own intersubjective racializations into whiteness or non-Black Latinidad or Asianness may have facilitated their ability to not only acknowledge or vicariously experience but also share and deeply know Van Dyke's fear and to therefore conclude that the murdering of the teen was not official misconduct.

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Ad Origines: Perspectivity and Its Discursive Travels

Perspectivity has concerned human reflection for a long time. Plato's (fourth century BC) ubiquitous allegory of the cave is but the most famous example of how the question of whether all our thinking and perception is perspectivized all the way down was already central in antique philosophy. As we know, Plato already drew on a tradition of perspectivism that goes back to pre-Socratic philosophy (e.g., Heraclitus and Parmenides, late sixth century BC) and particularly the Sophists (e.g., Gorgias and Protagoras; cf. Gagarin and Woodruff 2008). Since then, Western philosophy and philology have kept on asking whether and how the world we construe is determined by our points of view but also how perspectivity is inherent to and constructed by signs and sign systems (for more recent

approaches, see Köller [2004] on perspectivity and language or the social semiotics of visual perspective proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen [2006:114–153]). Perspectivity has been made central in the foundational discussions of our field. Ferdinand de Saussure (2006 [2002]:8) was adamant that the "object of linguistics" was not language but "points of view," from which our ideological constructs (of which "language" is one) emerge ("the whole of linguistics comes back . . . in fact to the discussion of valid points of view, without which there is no object"). Perspectivity fuels the fundamental theories of linguistic anthropology, such as Peirce's semiotics, which stresses the perspectivized underpinning of all our perception (e.g., Peirce on "abduction," as quoted in Sebeok [1981:16]), as well as Boas's and Whorf's theoretical accounts of how the categories we orient to are dependent on our cultural and semiotic footing. Consequently, huge parts of contemporary linguistic anthropology are all about the perspectives that determine how we use and rate language. Language ideologies are nothing other than perspectivized construals of the "semiotic flotsam" (Silverstein 2011:205) that supposedly surrounds us.

Constantine V. Nakassis thus embarks on an ambitious journey when he sets out to devise a (meta)pragmatics of perspective, connecting with a packed legacy to which, of course, he cannot do justice in the given context (although the connections with and disruptions of the received discussion could have been made more explicit). Nakassis mainly focuses on visual perspectives, thereby connecting with the original meaning of the word *perspicere* (looking closely, seeing clearly), and hence steers clear of the trap of ocular-centrism into which more general discussions of perspectivity tap easily (cf. Köller 2004:6–11).

I cannot discuss (and praise) the paper's differentiated and convincing theoretical take on perspectivity in appropriate detail. Thus, let me just highlight one central point that stands out to me: the social impact of the discursive management, calibration, and contestation of perspectivity. As Nakassis convincingly shows in the analysis of the Van Dyke trial, it is not only perspectivity itself but also its construal and contestation that affect people's lives (in quite existential ways). How people are "seen" is not merely an effect of the points of view themselves but of the way those are (metaperspectively) construed—of ways of seeing ways of seeing (or ideologies of perspectivity). As Nakassis points out, mediatization and media ideologies are crucial here. Our perspectives are often mediatized perspectives; genres (such as the ego-shooter computer game), genre ideologies, and ideologies of performance give rise to the *origines* we seem to occupy so naturally—the more "natural," the more we are able to erase their very perspectiveness. This aspect of the paper strikes me as the most original, as it makes clear how a semiotics of perspectives needs to include metasemiotic layers and account for reflexiveness, an aspect that is often neglected in social semiotic approaches to perspectivity. It also potentially opens up an important extension that is in the paper but still needs elaboration: a critical approach to (meta)perspectivity. This has arguably never been more important than in these days, when perspectives are so easily dismissed against the backdrop of allegedly "alternative" views (or "facts") that serve the interests of those who have media(tized) power. After all, as the discussion of Fanon (which opens the paper) demonstrates, perspectivities—and even more so, ideologies thereof—are intricately connected with power.

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In this riveting discussion of a police officer's trial for the 2014 killing/murder of a Black teenager in Chicago, Nakassis marshals the tools of semiotically informed linguistic anthropology to present a powerful defamiliarization of the concept of "perspective." The article shows how a perspective, far from deriving simply from moments of encounter and perception, must be constructed through a process that involves, first, the uptake and mobilization of various sensuous qualia as indexical signs and, second, the enregisterment of these indexicalities such that they become socially legible as a "way of seeing" the world. In a highly original and valuable move, Nakassis uses Bakhtinian insights on "voice" and "voicing" to show that vision/seeing, like voicing, is also dialogic: that is, shaped by and in contrast to previous/historical "ways of seeing" and shaping subsequent "ways of seeing." Like "voicing effects" that can place the voicer, the figure who is voiced, and the audience in various kinds of relation to one another, so can "looking effects," the performative effects of "ways of seeing," also accomplish similar effects of identification, distancing, respect, mockery, racialization, dehumanization, and so on.

A perspective, recognizable as such, is "an aperture on a world of experience," produced through an accumulation of ways of voicing and looking and enregistered through a multimodal "discursive camera of subjectivity" that makes it possible to "see" with and as another. As a concept, the discursive camera works to counteract the twinned assumptions that a camera is simply a technological device that objectively captures an image or event and that the meaning of the image produced is self-contained or apparent in the visual image itself. Instead, the evidence presented by the digital camera must be framed and supplemented by discourse: not just the directions for how to look provided by 3D Forensic in testimony but also a larger world of racializing discourses that make the police officer's perspective intelligible and understandable to a jury even if they do not condone his actions. Indeed, counteracting the reanimated perspective presented by 3D Forensic still required the jury to be able to see from and identify with the police officer's point of view, to empathize with his fear. For the prosecution to show how the "reality" of the encounter did not match up to the stereotypes of monstrous Blackness that the defense invoked, it needed to keep a particular enregistered, racialized way of seeing—the officer's perspective—very much in place.

How can the naturalized notion of a perspective, with its promise of unitary vision and unproblematic access, be challenged? This article offers two intriguing provocations to think with in this regard. Pushing up against the unitariness assumed in the notion of perspective is the idea of "doubled" or indeed "tripled" vision. Nakassis shows how any perspective, to be shared and circulated, must, by necessity, entail doubleness—both seeing a character and seeing as a character. In turn, challenging a perspective also entails a doubling: not, however, so as to be taken in by the smooth suturing of "seeing with" and "seeing as," but rather to "see or hear past" pretensions of realism to the artifice involved in creating and naturalizing the perspective. It follows that the critical move is not to challenge one perspective by simply gathering "different perspectives," as we so often say, but rather to cultivate multiple views of the same perspective so as to challenge the naturalized notion of perspective itself.

Nakassis's invocation of the "blind spot" likewise pushes up against the promise of unproblematic access that sneaks in with the concept of perspective. Since ways of seeing are always partial and always ideologically motivated, they are constituted by what lies outside them, by "blindness," both purposeful and inadvertent, to other ways of seeing or other perspectives—indeed, to other forms of life. What, semiotically speaking, is a blind spot? Does this concept stand up to the kind of multimodal treatment that Nakassis provides for perspective? How do visual, aural, and discursive modalities work together to produce "blindness"? If the failure to imagine, try to reconstruct, or consider Laquan McDonald's experience (let alone his perspective) is symptomatic of a blind spot, what would it entail to redress this? What kind of discursive camera would we need? This opens up onto a larger set of questions around how perspectives become entextualized and enregistered, such that some become intelligible, to be shared and inhabited by spectators/readers/audiences, while other ways of seeing/looking/voicing are never granted the status of a perspective in the first place.

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"Voicing, Looking, Perspective" analyzes a video animation produced for the trial of Laquan McDonald's murderer, Jason Van Dyke—but only as the video was entextualized in the trial, first within the "discursive camera" (as Nakassis calls it) of the defense and then by the prosecution. Nakassis describes how a racial perspective is built up as taken for granted and then torn down, deconstructed, and thus revealed in each of its details as ideological and, precisely, perspectival. The essay thus advances at once our understanding of the multimodal construction of perspective (Gal and Irvine 2019) in relation to filmic text artifacts (Nakassis 2023*a*, 2023*c*) and understandings of the multimodal constitution of race (see Smalls 2024). Where anti-Black racism has been repeatedly posed as a problem of white sight and in/visibility (a stereotype so hypervisible, it invisibilizes anything contrary to it; Gordon 2012), this essay painstakingly lays out how Black in/visibility hinges not on visual signs per se but on their continual lamination and juxtaposition with linguistic signs.

In doing so, "Voicing, Looking, Perspective" supersedes a tension between Charles Goodwin's (1994) and Judith Butler's (1993) well-known analyses of the trial of Rodney King's aggressors. Although he makes the police's racism unbearably patent, Goodwin never mentions race directly; in contrast, Butler rides the inescapability of white racist vision so hard that she leaves no way to explain the convictions obtained in the second trial or even her own critical perspective. Thanks to its central theoretical offering of perspective, Nakassis's essay tacks between these two approaches, locating racial vision precisely as an ideological perspective built multimodally in interaction.

Goodwin, too, analyzes how visual props were mobilized in the trial, but these props are markedly simpler than the computer-modeled and computer-rendered video Nakassis picks apart. Such filmic text artifacts are of a complexity that can suck analysis in, even as they may be watched in silent stillness, apparently yielding (at least in the moment) little to dig into ethnographically. The courtroom setting, however, leaves no doubt that what is at stake are the perspectives of the participants in the trial itself as interaction ritual. The video is but an element in the purposeful process of shaping those perspectives, some of which will eventually jell into a verdict.

From this perspective (!), visual and linguistic signs, as well as their yoking to mutually index perceiving subjectivities (or *origos* of semiotic uptake), emerge only within the trial as a whole, as dynamic, diagrammatic figuration (Silverstein 2004), as full-fleshed, multimodal, performative ritual (Tambiah 1981). Visual and linguistic signs are but part of this larger assemblage, as hinted at by the photographs Nakassis includes. In this sense, "Voicing, Looking, Perspective" moves us further toward an approach that can combine not just the sophisticated analysis of both complex visual text artifacts and linguistic exchange but also the multimodal study of interaction. To what extent is the scene of shooting not just embedded in the trial as a representation but calqued onto it as diagrammatic figuration? One place where this might lead is to questioning the givenness of sensory modalities, the independence of voicing and looking effects. Instead, we might ask after the thematization of modalities and their constitution out of the contrasts and juxtapositions by which they are mobilized in interaction.

In closing, it is worth emphasizing that the political evaluation that perspective renders is sober. The landmark conviction of McDonald's killer was due in part to the prosecution's successful deconstruction of the video, much as the prosecutors of Rodney King's aggressors, taken by surprise in the first trial, were able in the second trial to offer a counternarrative to the

visual evidence presented. However, as Nakassis makes clear, the outcome of Van Dyke's trial is hardly as progressive as some might imagine. If there is reperspectivizing work undertaken in the trial, "Voicing, Looking, Perspective" could be seen as attempting its own reperspectivizing act at the level of theory. Perspective is not just an analytic term; it is the police's term, part and parcel of their apparatus of "professional vision" (Goodwin 1994). If, in a project that strives beyond the segregation of sensory-cum-semiotic modalities, Nakassis keeps "perspective" despite its etymological root in "vision," despite its root in Western techniques of visual representation that wed it to then-new Cartesian forms of subjectivity (Jay 1988), this may perhaps help "put pressure," as he puts it, on that very history, help wrest from it this concept that, in the hands of the police, as of many others, has been made a lethal weapon. I would like to end by remembering Laquan McDonald.

Reply

I would like to open my reply to this rich and incredibly generous set of comments by saying "yes." I agree with most all of the critical points raised in them. And while I found myself nodding along as I read them, I am unsure whether I can properly address all of them, both because the depth of their provocations exceeds the space for my reply and because, for some of the points raised, I am out of my depth. I am not a scholar of the United States; my work has largely focused on Tamil Nadu, India. I am not a legal anthropologist or lawyer but a linguistic anthropologist and scholar of media (in particular, cinema). And while I have previously researched aspects of American law, this has been intellectual property law, not criminal law. Finally, I am not a scholar of race. That the major points of this article have resonated with my colleagues reassures me that despite all this, my article has something to add to the above areas: the anthropology of the United States, legal anthropology, media and film studies, critical race studies, and raciosemiotics and linguistic anthropology. If the caveats above are limitations and if there is still much more to say—as there certainly is—these commentaries point the way to how those limits can be, have been, and are being surpassed by other scholars, as well as what more could and should be said. With this in mind, below I sketch out some further thoughts that continue the directions laid out by my colleagues.

In his insightful commentary, Joshua Babcock is right to say that my article is interested in perspective "in general," if by that it is meant that I am interested in clarifying semiotic and political dynamics that can be generalized or used to think about other kinds of cases besides the particular ones I focus on. This is not, however, the same as the "macroscopic" perspective (on perspective) that Massimo Leone alludes to, a sort of analytic view on perspective (that aspires to be) from nowhere. As Leone notes, such an "overview" is constitutively problematic given the intrinsic "perspectivity" of semiosis (which has implications for our own work, as Jürgen Spitzmüller points out). Rather, my interest is to think laterally, not from nowhere but from various somewheres. Such an interest does not and should not imply disinterest in "this perspective," as Babcock puts it. Rather than a disjunctive either/or—one is interested in this perspective or perspective in general—my feeling is that we can and should be interested in both. One cannot think about perspective generally without thinking through specific situations and contexts in their particularity, including that of the analyst. As such, I am concerned with how a specific perspective comes to formedness, how Laquan McDonald was murdered by Jason Van Dyke, and, especially, how his legal team attempted to justify the murder through a politics of perspective. And at the same time, I am interested in how this can help us think about other kinds of processes and relations besides these (and vice versa). Given this, I agree with the implication of the question Babcock raises: "What if this perspective and perspective in general cannot be separated?" They cannot.

Yet there is more to say. On the one hand, Babcock makes a phenomenological point about the place of analysis and the analyst in relationship to embodied experience, a point also raised by Krystal Smalls in her important commentary. On the other hand, I take Babcock to be suggesting that, in this instance (or perhaps in general), there are aspects of racialization and racialized perspectives that can never be fully separated from the concept of perspective (in general).[20] If so, the intervention would also be that the article is not really about racialization and instead that—as Erika Hoffmann-Dilloway also worries—the discussion of the trial of Van Dyke is "just 'another example,'" alongside passages from (Bakhtin on) Russian literature or examples drawn from my own studies of Tamil cinema. As Hoffmann-Dilloway further notes, however, the range and order of examples work to introduce and scaffold analytic tools to more fully explain what is going on in the Van Dyke trial as a process of racialization, from which we might generalize (this also being the import of beginning with Fanon).[21]

Can, then, we separate questions of the racialization of ways of seeing/perceiving and ways of seeing/perceiving per se or in other cases/contexts? I think that this is, partly, an open question (and an empirical question) that depends on the cases/contexts in question, and I also share Rihan Yeh's concern

20. With regard to the Van Dyke trial, this is what Rihan Yeh points to by saying that "perspective" is the police's/defense's term.

21. Not incidentally, and reflecting Hoffmann-Dilloway's comments, the initial analyses of the materials in this article emerged out of my teaching (Canut's characterization of the article as having a "pedagogical structure" is spot on)—in particular, of the graduate course Language in Culture 1, where since 2021 the analysis of the Van Dyke murder trial has served as the culminating case study in a discussion of enregisterment and racialization.

that our analyses not be overdetermined by the overdetermined dimensions of our materials. However, as a general point, it seems right to me to say that they cannot be separated in this way. Our concepts come from somewhere, just as our analysis is situated somewhere. And as is evident, race is a major axis of differentiation in the "somewhere" of this article and its analyst. Perspective, in particular, is a term linked to and carrying many histories (as Leone astutely notes in his philological attention to the range of terms derived from the Proto-Indo-European root *spek-*), from the Enlightenment science of optics to Christian ontotheology to Renaissance aesthetics to Cartesian philosophy to modern anthropological relativism (as Spitzmüller also points out), all of which can and should be understood in relationship to histories of racial and gendered inequity and domination, among other things still. That our analytics carry such histories is problematic when we are not alive to this fact (as when we reproduce those histories through using them). Indeed, one of the aims of this article is to reflexively problematize the visualist, ocular-centric history of the term, to wrest it from that history by putting pressure on the concept and using it to compare cases across media and modalities, a move that I see also putting pressure, as Cécile Canut notes in her commentary, on the field of linguistic anthropology, with its own historical focus on verbal language.

But perhaps not enough pressure and perhaps not at all the right points. If a key argument of the article is that perspective should not be conceptually constrained by modality or medium, as Hoffmann-Dilloway crucially reminds us, we should also not narrow the modalities that we focus on to normatively privileged modes of perception (viz., seeing and hearing; cf. Nakassis 2023*c*:18n14; 2n above). Pushing Hoffmann-Dilloway's crucial intervention further, it is also not enough to simply multiply modalities (e.g., by taking into account tactility, although we certainly should). Even if different modalities and media have unique constraints and affordances, pulling out their common relations and processes is important precisely because long-standing semiotic ideologies that structure our disciplines have a tendency to silo off objects and avenues of study—such as divisions between "language" and "image" and between language-focused fields and visual, image-focused fields (art history, visual studies, film studies, etc.). But even more than this, we should also follow the argument in the direction Yeh indicates in her invaluable comments: namely, we need to interrogate how modalities themselves are parceled out, purified (so as to then be contrasted and juxtaposed), and stabilized and rendered as seemingly pregiven (so as to be combined).[22] How this happens is also partly a semiotic process and thus perspectival. To study this, however, requires us to think of perspective in modality nonspecific ways. This invites us to problematize the "multi-" in "multimodality," insofar as this prefix presupposes that we already know what a modality is, such that there could be multiple kinds of it that then get combined in semiosis (or in our analysis of it; Nakassis 2018:290n17).

But why perspective in the first place, especially given its potentially problematic baggage? Why not, as Canut significantly asks, other terms in the analytic register of linguistic anthropology: footing, stance, or, especially, ideology (also see Spitzmüller's helpful comments on perspective and ideology)? And if we use perspective when we might otherwise use these other terms, "does this mean that it [perspective] encompasses all semiotic dimensions, enabling them to be unified into a single 'direction' as a kind of 'ideological voice/view'?" I do not think so. If concepts are tools to pose, explore, and sort out problems of concern (of which the world has no dearth), what is needed is not a unified or single analytic or to determine the "right" analytic for all contexts, as if either thing were possible. Rather, we need a range of ways of talking and thinking about the diverse issues that demand our attention and concern, which will differ from case to case. In this article, one concern is how to think of perception, entextualization, enregisterment, and ideology together. What kind of through line can be drawn? What connections can be made across these processes?[23] Here, perspective offers one, although not the only, entry point to traverse what these different analytics denote. As such, perspective, as used in this article, is not the same as the spatialized act of perception (that we look or listen or touch from some locale), and it is also not the same as footing or stance or voice (as text-level constructs) or a relexicalization of ideology. Rather, it is a string—like that of Ariadne, designed for the maze she hoped to guide Theseus through—to thread dimensions of social life that are sometimes kept apart in our analyses of it but that can be productively thought of together.

Canut, as I hear her, is also concerned with something more fundamental: the need to remain open to the unfinalizability and multiplicity of perspective, as well as to remain open to the fact that what we typically encounter in social life, and as scientists of it, are not ossified, rigid, highly conventionalized perspectives—outfitted with names and conventionalized repertoires—but instead a blurry flux, a multiplicity, the unnamed. Canut asks: "The question arises, however, about how to identify the multiplicity of perspectives in interaction outside their clear discursive and ideological forms. How can we identify the more blurred perspectives, less clearly registered in the interactions, and how can we name them if they do not correspond to clearly registered ideologies?" This is not a problem particular to perspective(s); sociolinguists and linguistic

22. Das also nods to this point when she writes "presumably fixed variables."

23. Here, I second Canut's suggestion that we look to the "dynamic game" between semiotic ideologies and specific events of social action as the plane through which configurations of signs in events entextualize (token) perspectives through the mediation of particular type-level (enregistered) perspectives—mediated by the virtual plane of ideology (Gal and Irvine 2019)—which the former contextualize and potentially resignify, through materializing and putting them into play. See below for more discussion.

anthropologists have raised a similar point in criticizing ordinary language philosophy for reducing the wide range of ways of doing things with words to explicit and transparent metapragmatic lexemes or discussing linguistic variation beyond named varieties. Canut's (2019) own work on "Roma" people in Bulgaria is a singular example of the importance of looking for and beyond the cracks in hegemonic perspectives. We might adopt similar solutions that others (including Canut) have pressed to deal with this problematic: primary among them, a focus on processes of semiosis in context as they take place both in real time and across historical (interdiscursive) timescales, the pragmatics of such processes (their presuppositions and their entailments, how they are taken up and transformed across moments, their fractured sociological distribution), and those moments in social life when this very problem—namely, the politics of perspective—is made into an object of attention and concern, such as a courtroom trial or experimental cinema (as Canut suggests; also see Canut 2025).

But Canut's concern is not just methodological. It is also ethical and political. I hear Canut's insistence on embracing becoming, multiplicity, and heterogeneity as a principled stance that, like Bakhtin's, construes an alignment of univocity, singleness, and finality with authority and hegemony and thus is to be resisted by a conceptual insistence on emergence, plurality, indeterminacy, and the like. I am sympathetic to this, even though, as Smalls (and others, e.g., Jonathan Rosa) suggests, we should be wary of bending the stick too far (in either direction, I would add).

Here, again, Fanon is critically important. Fanon shows us that perspectives are never de novo, purely emergent, or (token-)event specific. Perspectives are the accretion of historical processes, sedimented (and built) into institutions, inscribed in habits and, as Fanon noted (and Smalls reminds us), in our bodies. At the same time, such type-level perspectives only touch down under contextualized conditions (through token-level, entextualized perspectives), a fact that opens them up to transformation and reproduction, to the "wobble" that Angela Reyes notes. How open is the gap of token and type? How much play is there between them? This is an empirical and, thus, political question. As Smalls points out, for Fanon, the indeterminacy of indexicality, when so intensely, metapragmatically regimented, as in race relations in France (or the United States), asymptotically approaches overdetermination. Hence, to recall one of Fanon's examples: no matter how standard his French, no matter what he says, his speech is heard, via a white listening subject position, as broken and primitive, as issued from the grinning face of the Banania ad. Here, the context specificity of the token event is, seemingly, always already overridden by "legends, stories, history." Smalls reasonably suggests that in the Van Dyke trial, a certain perspective—whatever else was invoked, built up, and reiterated by the defense or deconstructed and undone by the prosecution—was already available and in play. Smalls writes: "McDonald's racialized body (or images thereof) was probably always already (or at least, easily) read, remembered, experienced, known as threat by many jurors"; indeed, the defense was counting on it, and so, too, was the prosecution in asking the jury to take a perspective on that perspective. Here, again, echoing Yeh's comments, we should not see indeterminacy (or emergence) and overdetermination as opposed or feel that we must pick one side of this nonresolving dialectic or the other. Instead, we should ask how they condition, relate to, and play off each other; at what scales and when; for whom; in what ratio; and so on.

Sonia Das incisively raises a whole side of the Van Dyke trial that I do not much explore: the political economy of forensics and its imbrication in racial capitalism—as Spitzmüller puts it, "those who have media(tized) power" or, as Das writes, "the moneyed interests striving to ensure that this repugnant crime is forgotten." On the one hand, there is the important fact that forensic analyses and productions like those of 3D Forensic are big business (and animations like that of 3D Forensic are expensive)[24] and an important site for both legal and political contestations (one thinks here, e.g., of the work of Forensic Architecture).[25] On the other hand, we should recall the local political context in Chicago at the time of McDonald's 2014 murder and, later, Van Dyke's 2018 trial. In 2015, Mayor Rahm Emanuel was barely reelected for a second term, and the protests over the murder of McDonald in 2014 were one of the various reasons for his unpopularity. Following the murder, Emanuel withheld the dashcam video for more than a year (and well after his reelection). The video was released only after pressure was applied through a Freedom of Information Act request by a journalist and a community activist and, later, by a lawsuit from the same journalist. Some political commentators attribute Emanuel not seeking reelection for a third term to the 2018 result of the trial—alongside widespread anger about anti-Black police brutality in Chicago, lack of transparency and police oversight by the mayor's office, and Emanuel's mishandling of public education. While here is not the place for a political-economic analysis of the moneyed—specifically, neoliberal—interests of Emanuel or those backing him (or the Chicago police, for that matter), Das is right to point to the complex political-economic interests suppressing justice for McDonald (and the release of the dashcam video in particular). Following this line of inquiry would also take up the "important extension" that Spitzmüller crucially suggests—namely, "a critical approach to (meta)perspectivity" that would historicize perspective in an era when "alternative facts" and attacks on, and co-optations of, expertise are intimately linked to right-wing, white, nationalist projects in the United States and beyond.

24. In the opening cross-examination of 3D Forensic's CEO, the prosecution elicited from Fries how many hours he billed and at what rate; typically, he said, a case like this takes 100 hours, billed at $195–$375 per hour. Expert witnesses like Fries are also typically paid a significant hourly rate for their appearance in court.

25. Thanks to Jessica Greenberg for having drawn my attention to their work.

Another expansive line of inquiry is proposed by Reyes, who productively asks how we might further discern relations between channels and texts in processes of entextualization—and following on this, how and when such channels (e.g., the camera) become active (or passive) actants in the scenes that they record (Cody 2023; Stein 2021). This is the case, for example, in the *Mankatha* example I briefly discuss in the article, where the camera—as the cinematographer noted to me (Nakassis 2023*b*:27–65)—interacts with the unfolding scene (which, of course, took place to be recorded) as a participant in what it recorded. While this might seem less relevant with regard to the dashcam video in the Van Dyke trial materials, Reyes's question is precisely what is at issue in the courtroom: Namely, how active/artificial or passive/reflective is 3D Forensic's digital camera in framing the death that it calls for judgment on? Here, a particular media ideology hovers over the animation as the field of its contestation, where the reference standard turns out to be, ultimately and somewhat ironically (even though here, too, there is a tussle about how "accurate" the photographic dashcam can be), the putative passivity of the photographic image as a kind of objective imprint. To properly answer Reyes's question, however, requires an ethnography of police encounters, one that Das (Das and Lee 2024) and others (e.g., Aushana 2019) are engaged in. These answers demonstrate that, indeed, not just the image but also the camera (the cell phone, the body cam) that records the event can itself become the grounds for its actively partaking in and even producing and contesting what it records.

Finally, in her probing commentary, Amanda Weidman asks, "What, semiotically speaking, is a blind spot?" An initial, simple answer offered in the article is that to see (more generally, to perceive) something, something else, some area, must not be seen (or perceived), must be effaced from visibility (or perceivability). Physiologically, the blind spot denotes that area in the field of vision that corresponds to where the optic nerve articulates to the eye. In this area, there are no cells to respond to light. Yet this unseen area is itself not typically perceived by us, as we are able to interpolate optic information gathered in time and from other areas of our eyes to complete our field of vision. The blindness to the spot is thus not that we do not see some area in the visual field but also that we do not see that we do not see it. To discover this requires certain controlled conditions.[26] It requires being induced by an entextualized perspective on vision, a perspective that reflexively takes visibility and seeing as its object of focus.

This is already a semiotic process, but just as perspective does not only concern spatialized vision (mediated by rods and cones in our eyes responding to light in the environment), mutatis mutandis for blind spots. That is, if to see, we must see-as (i.e., must come to see seeing), then for this to be possible, some way of seeing must be rendered invisible or unable to be taken up, recognized, countenanced. A blind spot, thus, is not only what is not seen but also unseen seeing, that gap between how and with whom seeing(-as) happens; it is those perspectives not entextualized or put into circulation for uptake, indeed, that are rejected, erased, ignored, unconsidered.

If this is the simple answer, the more complex answer is how this actually happens empirically in those fields/relations of power that the commentators have all highlighted. For Laquan McDonald, of course, did see, and he saw with/from a perspective, terrorized and terrified by whiteness, as bell hooks points out in the essay felicitously cited by Babcock. As hooks (1997:168) writes, providing one answer to Weidman's question, "To fully be an object then [is] to lack the capacity to see or recognize reality," a form of dehumanization and terrorizing that is exacted through the "white control of the black gaze" (also see hooks 1992 and 8n above). Such control demands that the terrorized other not freely look; it also entails, hooks argues, that this look not be taken into account by the white looking subject, not be seen through, not even be contemplated. It thus entails the subject's structured ignorance that the other even sees, observes, knows, or feels, except, in a case like McDonald's, as a denial of his humanity (his look is monstrous) that putatively justifies the act of violence that took his life/look away (see 18n above). Denial, indifference, ignoring—these are cruel forms of recognition, a negative uptake of the perspective of another. Invisibility, the blind spot, here, is not just a precondition or byproduct of perspective. It is a way of seeing itself, a systematic way of not seeing how others see.[27]

I would like to conclude this reply by saying thank you to my colleagues for their engaged commentaries, which not only

26. See, e.g., https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/find-your-blind-spot/ (accessed June 19, 2025).

27. We should not take the above discussion as implying, however, that perspectives are just out there to be seen or not seen, as Weidman notes in a personal communication (June 11, 2025); rather, as I emphasize in the article, perspectives are achievements of semiosis, instated by particular signs that, because they must always be co(n)textualized in arrays of other co-occurring signs, configure text-level perspectives (viz., looks, voices) that, to be entextualized, are themselves always already regimented by enregistered (intertextual), conventionalized perspectives (and vice versa: any enregistered perspective, to be realized, must be entextualized/contextualized, and this is a process that comprises various signs that contribute their own sign-level perspectives; see discussion above and Nakassis and Costa 2025). As this implies, as Weidman notes in the same personal communication, the "social world is full of looks, gazes, hearings, sayings, vocalizations, etc. that must be taken up and bundled together to constitute 'perspectives,'" a point that Gal and Irvine (2019) similarly make in the context of thinking of abduction, perspective, and ideology together (also see Nakassis 2023*a*, 2023*c* and Reyes's commentary above). Expanding from the notion of a blind spot as an unseen way of seeing, we might further say, then, that there is a kind of generalized blindness in seeing(-as)—not "spots," but a field of latent possible perspectives that could be but have yet to be achieved or bundled, unknown and unknowable, in fact, until realized (semiotically). I thank Weidman both for pushing me with her initial question in the commentary and for a stimulating follow-up discussion over email.

point out my blind spots but also offer invitations for other, further perspectives beyond those offered in this article.

—Constantine V. Nakassis

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