

THE VIRTUAL DEPUTY:
DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE AND NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the School of Journalism and Communication
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Science

June 2013

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Title: The Virtual Deputy: Digital Surveillance and Neoliberal Governmentality

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Degree awarded June 2013

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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School of Journalism and Communication

June 2013

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This thesis interrogates the website BlueServo.net through a neoliberal framework with a focus on surveillance theory. BlueServo is a site that registers users as “Virtual Deputies” and allows them to file reports with U.S. Border Patrol on activity observed through camera feeds trained on the U.S.-Mexico Border. Employing textual analysis of the site and its attendant Facebook page, four thematic categories emerge for analysis: Labor, Entertainment, State, and Social Sorting. This thesis concludes with a discussion of the site in relation to reality TV and video game culture and the future of increasingly sophisticated and widely accessible digital surveillance as applied to social minorities.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to convey my deepest gratitude to Biswarup Sen for his unwavering commitment of time, patience, and effort as my advisor in helping me to develop and refine the ideas and mechanics of this thesis. I would also like to thank Anita Chari and Christopher Chavez for serving on the committee and contributing their tireless energy and enthusiasm to the project. Finally, I offer a most humble thank you to Petra Hagen and Sue Varani for every little and big thing that they did over the last two years to help me close the loops, reserve the rooms, get the keys, and stay cool.

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CHAPTER I

USER ANECDOTE

A man sits at his desk, the ghostly light of his computer monitor illuminating his face. Outside it is dark, almost 10pm, but this is prime time for activity—four of his last seven sightings have been at night this month. He toggles between two windows, watching for movement, any sign of the greenish white glow of people on the night vision cameras.

As the hour ticks away, he realizes he needs to start winding up, he has work in the morning—early. The alarm always comes too soon and the day drags on too long. He contemplates logging out when suddenly he sees what appear to be two figures on the shore inflating a raft of sorts with a hand pump. He leans in closer, excited, yes, it is clearly a flotation device. Now the people take their shoes off and stuff them in their lumpy packs. They wade in, pushing their tenuous craft before them, and scramble awkwardly on, pulling themselves onto their bellies to begin the float across the sluggish river.

The man acts fast, captures his screen with the push of a button, saves the image to a folder on his desktop. He pushes the red button on his monitoring screen, “Report Suspicious Activity” and proceeds to “Enter His Report”, sending it to the agents on the ground. He leans back to watch, it’s been so long since he’s seen an apprehension as a result of one his reports happen live.

Quickly he toggles to another tab in his web browser, pasting a screen shot to a Facebook page so that other deputies can join him in watching what happens next. “Getting ready to make the crossing to bad the cam dont have gun mounted on them,”¹ he writes in the caption for his screen shot that he posts. Almost immediately a few other deputies like his post. He goes back to BlueServo for a few more minutes, hoping to see Border Patrol react to his report on his screen, but they don’t show. He notices the clock, it’s getting late and he has to turn in soon. His wife is convinced that he’s as bad as their teenaged son, “playing a sort of video game” she says. She doesn’t realize that he’s keeping the country safe. Every night, after a long day at work, he is a citizen-soldier in the war on the border. There are thousands of us, he tells her, all over the country, who know that this country is under attack.

She usually just shakes her head, accuses him of finding a way to get out of helping wash up the dishes, but one day he’ll have one of his sightings featured on the home page. The big busts make it up there, to keep you going, to show what a difference Virtual Deputies are making. He officially gives up on seeing any immigration justice on Camera 3 tonight. The figures have already scuttled into the underbrush, they’ll be mistaken for boars or deer, free to wreak havoc on the economy and the security of this country he loves. He thinks back to the comment about mounted guns before he logs out, turns the monitor off. He knows that in rooms all over the country there are Virtual Deputies logged on, doing their duty, and that’s what lets him end his shift every night.

¹ BlueServo Facebook, posted January 13, 2012.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTION

The digitization of our world has created records of our existence and the ability to study those records in ways that are unprecedented. Digital surveillance today has come a long way from the early days of hand-catalogued facial measurements accompanying police mug shots, the first grainy CCTV feeds, and the various iterations of tangible credentials such as identification cards, licenses, and passports; the 21st century is being defined by facial recognition software and collections of other biometric data as a replacement for the easily lost or forged token. Blankets which record heartbeat, temperature and movement of an infant, sending the mother or nanny text message status alerts can be found on baby shower registries. Our use of the internet and our smart phones creates minute by minute a digital dossier of our likes, dislikes, movements, habits, interests—prurient and pure—that are accessible for purchase by marketing firms and political campaigns. The Patriot Act of the Bush years makes phone histories, internet searches, even our records from the public library, fair requests by the government.

BlueServo.net—a site that allows users to watch and report on activity occurring on the Texas-Mexico border—is an excellent example of the current state of digital surveillance. Users anywhere in the world may register for a free account as “Virtual Deputies” to watch streaming footage from cameras positioned along the border and file reports of suspicious activity that are relayed to Border Patrol for appropriate action. Users also gather at a public BlueServo Facebook page where they encourage each other in their responsibilities as observers, post screen shots, video, and news stories, discuss

the entertainment and frustrations of using the site, and educate each other on how to be more proficient technologically in fulfilling their duties.

A phenomenon like BlueServo can be best understood by placing it in the context of neoliberalism. Defined briefly, neoliberalism is a mode of governance where the profit maximization urge of capitalism is extended from the market into non-traditional market spheres such that even the socialized individual assumes behavior that is a reflection of market logic. Traditional functions of the state are privatized wherever possible and the main function of the state becomes to deregulate the marketplace wherever possible. In the turn to financialization of wealth as opposed to material capital measures, immaterial labor comes to the fore—a key feature of which is the dissolution of the boundary between labor and leisure time. The site of labor is not bounded by a workspace such as a factory, but rather moves into the network and is constantly accessible. In the name of profit maximization certain risks are taken by investors and corporations, the justification of which is the offloading of risk management onto the general public. The ideal neoliberal citizen is one who shoulders the responsibility, the blame, of his own existence while laboring in various capacities recognized and unrecognized to maximally strengthen the private sector of the market while accepting wholeheartedly the crumbling of the protections of the welfare state.

This thesis will examine BlueServo.net as well as its Facebook page in an attempt to fit both into the landscape of digital surveillance as an instrument of neoliberalism's desire to harness the labor of the general public as a sort of outsourcing of the defense of the state and its sovereignty through digital channels owned by a private social media company. I will offer a reading of BlueServo that shows it to be a paradigm example of

governmentalite and discipline. My analysis of BlueServo will be supplemented by a discussion of surveillance theory, especially that which relates to risk management, citizen responsibility, social sorting, and surveillance as labor and entertainment. I will also briefly discuss the history of the US-Mexico border and bring out the tensions of this particular site as they complicate a neoliberal analysis of citizen-run immigration enforcement.

I will conclude with an analysis of how a site like BlueServo creates a type of neoliberal citizen-soldier, one who is both patriotic to the state and yet simultaneously disdainful of the governmental apparatus. I will also explore the capacity of modern surveillance to induce sorting of “undesirables” by citizens in an era of irreversible globalization, and the flattening of labor and responsibility onto actuarial narratives of social risk assessment and management.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This thesis will employ textual analysis in the service of “orientational qualitative inquiry” which, according to Michael Patton, “begins with an explicit theoretical or ideological perspective that determines what variable and concepts are most important and how the finding will be interpreted.”² This method of inquiry is suited to the purpose of illustrating the connection between Foucauldian governmentality and the modern neo-liberal subject’s assumption of risk and self-discipline as exemplified in the BlueServo site and attendant Facebook community.

Further, orientational inquiry is thought to be the most appropriate method when the central question of a research project can be formulated as: “How is x ideological perspective manifest in this phenomenon?”³ In my study, the central question could be framed as, “How are neoliberalism and Foucauldian ideas of discipline and expression of governmentality manifest in the labor volunteered through the BlueServo site and in the interactions of users in the Facebook community?”

The text I study will consist of the BlueServo site as well as the BlueServo Facebook page containing more than 350 posts made since April 2010. This constitutes a purposive sample, which is “appropriate when a researcher selects unique, especially informative cases [and] when the researcher selects members of a specialized population.”⁴ I acknowledge that there are myriad sites that a question of this nature

² Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods, 2nd ed* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990), 86.

³ Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 88.

⁴ Lawrence W. Neuman, *Social Research Methods, 4th ed.* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon 2000),198.

could focus on, and that the users of this site represent a small sub-set of the population—in that not all Americans feel motivated to engage in this extra labor or to seek the company, feedback, and reinforcement of others who do so. In that sense, the BlueServo is a specialized community and my motives are congruent with W. Neuman’s recommendation regarding use of purposive sampling for cases where “the purpose is less to generalize to a large population than to gain a deeper understanding of types.”⁵ While I wish to make statements about the nature and effects of neoliberal rationality, I am directing the inquiry toward a reading of the specific digital community cultivated on the BlueServo site and the camaraderie of those who discuss their actions and effectiveness on the Facebook site. As such, though I do not propose that the BlueServo users in themselves are generalizable, their behavior is an example of a generalized rationale.

In handling the Facebook page, I conducted an initial “open sort” of the 350 posts to determine thematic categories related to my research questions drawn from the language of the posts, patterns of posts, parlance, and intra-user interaction. The fact that these comments are shared among comrades and frequent users, rather than in a formal interview or with the expectation that their words will be analyzed for research, must be a factor in the analysis. As Fursich says, “[T]extual analysis needs to establish the *ideological potential* of the text between production and consumption. The question is not how accurately does the text reflect reality but what version of reality is normalized and as a consequence, how emancipatory or hegemonic is the text.”⁶ Though BlueServo

⁵ Neuman, *Social Research Methods*, 198.

⁶ Elfriede Fursich, “In Defense of Textual Analysis,” *Journalism Studies* 10(2009): 249.

may be an extreme example it provides a valuable insight into the neoliberal mindset of the time as regards labor, leisure, and formation of nations of belonging.

CHAPTER IV

THEORY

Neoliberalism: Smaller State, Bigger Risks

In a lecture series published as “The Birth of Biopolitics,” Foucault traced the birth of neoliberalism in the West German Ordo-Liberals,⁷ and expressed a particular fascination with comparing the Germans to the American style of implementation of neoliberalism. American Neoliberalism was initially an economic-political idea born in the economics department of the University of Chicago in the 1960s. These ideas were put to use in the political strife and debt default of the global south in the 1970s, particularly in Chile and Mexico. By the Reagan-Thatcher decade of the 1980s, neoliberalism as a political project rather than a thought experiment had gained a firm foothold in the global north. Today there is still debate if neoliberalism is a complete political ideology on its own or simply a complimentary element of a broader system of liberal governance. Regardless, it is undeniable that the ideals of neoliberalism influence political, social, and individual outlook on a global and domestic level. Candace Smith argues that neoliberalism can be identified as focusing on three primary points: free trade in goods and services, free circulation of capital, and freedom of investments. As this directly affects globalization under neoliberalism, we observe “an emphasis placed on exchanges across national borders, financialization, and the development of international organizations as well as a transnational civil society.”⁸ Drawing down to the individual-

⁷ Michel Foucault, ed. Michel Senellart. *The birth of biopolitics: lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁸ Candace Smith, “A Brief Examination of Neoliberalism and Its Consequences,” *Sociology Lens*, October 2012, accessed March 23, 2013, <http://thesocietypages.org/sociologylens/2012/10/02/a-brief-examination-of-neoliberalism-and-its-consequences/>.

level, neoliberalism's goals are narrowed in focus to an insistent demand that rationality, individuality, and self-interest guide all actions of the disciplined individual.⁹

In such a system the social value of an individual is increasingly measured through practices of discipline, restraint, self-care, and capacity to labor. As Hamman observes, "We can recognize the vital importance of the links between Foucault's analyses of governmentality begun in the late 1970's and his interest in technologies of the self and ethical self-fashioning, which he pursued until the time of his death in 1984. His analyses of 'government' or 'the conduct of conduct' brings together the government of others (subjectification) and the government of one's self (subjectivation)."¹⁰ This is evident in the case of BlueServo whose Virtual Deputies exhibit discipline and training in their assumption of the labor of the state, galvanized by a desire to subjectify and exclude the "other", in this case the migrant from the south.

From this, one can easily see why neoliberal governmentality is all too frequently presented as "the retreat of the state." These feeds come from equipment which was installed and maintained by a private company but funded by grants from the state of Texas, and the responsibility for sovereign security and border patrol are made the purview of the Virtual Deputies. I want to argue however that this example will actually show that it is much more productive to ideate neoliberalism as a transformation of politics. Neoliberalism is not a retreat, it is a *restructuring* of power relations away from the formal techniques of the state, toward informal techniques of power which are

⁹ Smith, "A Brief Examination of Neoliberalism and Its Consequences."

¹⁰ Trent Hamman, "Neoliberalism, Governmentality, and Ethics," *Foucault Studies* 6 (2009): 38.

introduced and overseen by new, non-governmental actors.¹¹ As Wendy Brown writes in her seminal essay on neoliberalism:

“We are not simply in the throes of a right-wing or conservative positioning within liberal democracy but rather at the threshold of a different political formation... a formation made possible by the production of citizens as individual entrepreneurial actors across all dimensions of their lives, reduction of civil society to a domain for exercising this entrepreneurship, and figuration of the state as a firm whose products are rational individual subjects, an expanding economy, national security, and global power.”¹²

In practice then, the neoliberal turn is marked by intense deregulation of the marketplace, decreased welfare spending, privatization of services, financialization of wealth, and tax cuts for the very rich.

In such a regime the role of government is reduced mainly to deregulating markets and acting as the “lender of last resort” to mitigate the risk of this increasingly financialized market.¹³ According to Sim and Coleman, “[N]eo-liberal’ conditions [trend] towards multiple centres of government, autonomous forms of expertise and localized technologies and mechanics of rule. Thus contemporary forms of crime control, and more broadly social control, are understood as phenomena exercised and nurtured through neo-liberal rule within dense networks and alliances acting ‘at a distance’ from central and national ‘public powers.’”¹⁴ Foucault concluded that the distinguishing

¹¹ Thomas Lemke, “Foucault, Government, and Critique” (paper presented at the Rethinking Marxism Conference, Amherst, MA, September 21-24, 2000) 11.

¹² Wendy Brown, “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy.” *Theory & Event* 7(2003) 38.

¹³ John Bellamy Foster & Robert McChesney, “Monopoly-Finance Capital and the Paradox of Accumulation,” *Monthly Review*, October 1, 2009, accessed May 13, 2013, <http://monthlyreview.org/2009/10/01/monopoly-finance-capital-and-the-paradox-of-accumulation>.

feature of American Neoliberals was the unprecedented expansion of the economic enterprise to the entire social realm—a dynamic clearly at play in the creation and use of BlueServo. Hamman concluded from this state of affairs, “Within the reason of state of American neoliberalism, the role of government is defined by its obligations to foster competition through the installation of market-based mechanisms for constraining and conditioning the actions of individuals, institutions, and the population as a whole.”¹⁵

As a result of these new relationships between the state and forces of civil society, indirect techniques of power/knowledge are injected into the social fabric. Notably there is a shift of responsibility such that the notion of being “off work,” becomes a question of demonstrating self-discipline. John Carey called the creation of the Sabbath a form of resistance to state and market powers, it was a time to rest, to reconnect with family and community and the self under the moral auspice of piety.¹⁶ Neoliberalism eliminates a day of rest by shifting the moral center away from worship of an omnipotent and toward worship of production. In this way, the loss of leisure is not seen as an imposition, but takes on the sort of righteousness that honoring the Sabbath used to hold. The neoliberal discipline taps in to a sense of moral superiority, and notably, it is a morality that can be managed by the self and by others.¹⁷

¹⁴ Joe Sim and Roy Coleman. “You’ll Never Walk Alone” in *Surveillance, Crime & Social Control*, ed. Clive Norris and Dean Wilson (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006), 104.

¹⁵ Hamann, “Neoliberalism, Governmentality, and Ethics,” 41-42.

¹⁶ Carolyn L. Kane & John Durham Peters, “Speaking into the iPhone” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 34(2010): 122.

¹⁷ Brown, “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” 15.

Homo Economicus Proves His Worth

The active, morality-managing subject in the neoliberal ideal is an individual that is fit, flexible and autonomous. As a result, we see a rise of predictive or actuarial control, which is marked by a shift away from normativity and individual treatment and toward technicality and classificatory management.¹⁸ Where this fitness is most often measured is in the reaction and mitigation of risk. Risk, as identified by Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens in the early 1990s, is a mode of decision making based on the possibility of future dangers and negative effects.¹⁹ Risk is not defined by ignorance of threat, but rather by positive knowledge its existence; to be capable of best averting risk is to learn to see risk everywhere. “Risks are the reflection of human actions and omissions, the expression of highly developed productive forces. That means that the sources of danger are no longer ignorance but *knowledge*”²⁰ This conception of risk shares with Foucault’s notion of governmentality a preoccupation with developing control strategies that are technically efficient, and politically neutral.²¹ As a result, we see a rise of an era of predictive or actuarial control, which is marked by a shift away from normativity and individual treatment and a shift toward technicality and classificatory management.²²

In this era entire categories or classes of people become potential risks and objects of control. Threats to society are no longer seen as an action committed by *homo penalis*,

¹⁸ Deflem, “Surveillance and Criminal Statistics,” 152.

¹⁹ Mathieu Deflem, “Surveillance and Criminal Statistics: Historical Foundations of Governmentality,” *Studies in Law, Politics and Society* 17(1997): 152.

²⁰ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1992), 202.

²¹ Deflem, “Surveillance and Criminal Statistics,” 152.

²² Deflem, “Surveillance and Criminal Statistics,” 152.

the law breaker, but as embodied and theoretically identifiable in *homo criminalis*, the criminal person.²³ Through the introduction of this type, the protection of the social body is achieved through the prevention of crime in the first place— hostile elements are segregated, monitored, and excluded in the name of the greater good²⁴ and ideal self-caring, risk managing citizens aid in this monitoring and exclusion however they are able. To that end, two contemporary social processes are critical to the surveillance preformed in the name of this type of preemptive risk management: the first is the expansion of information systems, and the second is reliance on computerized technologies.²⁵

Homo economicus can be seen as a foil to *homo criminalis*. If one wishes to remain part of the social body, one must fall into a category which is deemed worthy of inclusion. According to Beck, “Even outside of work, industrial society is a *wage labor society through and through* in the plan of its life, in its joys and sorrows, in its concept of achievement, in its justification of inequality, in its social welfare laws, in its balance of power and in its politics and culture.”²⁶ As Foucault has noted, this new mechanism of power is notable then, that it permits extraction of time and immaterial labor from bodies as proof of worthiness, rather than tangible wealth and commodities as proof of capital productivity.²⁷ In such a regime the notion of a worker undergoes radical redefinition: “The primary economic image offered to the modern citizen is not that of the producer

²³ Deflem, “Surveillance and Criminal Statistics,” 157

²⁴ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 55.

²⁵ Deflem, “Surveillance and Criminal Statistics,” 176.

²⁶ Beck, *Risk Society*, 202.

²⁷ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, 104.

but of the consumer... The worker is portrayed neither as an economic actor, rationally pursuing financial advantage, nor as a social creature seeking satisfaction of needs for solidarity and security. The worker is an individual in search of meaning, responsibility, as sense of personal achievement, a maximized 'quality of life', and hence of work."²⁸ The neoliberal subject produces more than things, he produces himself. *Homo economicus* is above all an "entrepreneur of the self."²⁹

As such, the site of fascination for the power mechanism becomes less the earth or the machines of production, but the body itself as a productive, risk managing, moral entity which performs as part of a larger, seething society. In the case of digital surveillance, *Homo economicus* is literally always ready to witness, to watch, to work. The neoliberal obsession with success effortlessly dons the mantle of surveillance as discipline, in that, in the Foucauldian sense, "the goal of panoptic discipline is not just to produce 'docile bodies' but to maximize the body 'as a useful force' to amplify, to 'increase production, to develop the economy, to increase and multiply.'"³⁰ The neoliberal citizen soldier is aware he is being watched, or could be watched, but accepts the gaze as an incentive to be better—to prove his worthiness for inclusion in society, and he trusts it to weed out the unworthy. This leads to the development of a political technology of ruling that is rooted in a "misgivings-based security process." This process is embedded in the use of disciplinary technologies that strengthen the legitimacy of a

²⁸ Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 102-103.

²⁹ Andrew Dilts, "From 'Entrepreneur of the Self' to 'Care of the Self': Neoliberal Governmentality and Foucault's Ethics," *Foucault Studies* 12(2011): 136.

³⁰ Mark Andrejevic, "The work of watching one another: Lateral Surveillance, Risk, and Governance," *Surveillance & Society* 2(2005): 485.

permanent surveillance because it is supposedly targeted only at bad citizens, the other. Bigo has noted that “this technology of power unifies internal and external, individuals and collective security, and tries to recapitalize trust in the state, not by reassuring, but by worrying individuals about what is happening both at the external and internal levels.”³¹ Under these conditions, digital surveillance proves itself the natural instrument of neoliberal governmentality where both the potential to be observed and to observe enforce the values of the disciplined citizen.

Governmentality & Responsibilization

An explication of governmentality involves parsing the etymology of the word to see that it elegantly combines “the techniques of power” (*governing*) with “the rationality for those techniques” (*mentalities/modes of thought*).³² As a result, governmentality is more than the actions and apparatus of the state. It encompasses religious, philosophical, medical and pedagogic texts, as well as insinuating into such sites as the family, the household, the self, and the soul. In order to harness the labor power potential through these techniques of power/discipline, technology must concurrently be developed which allows one to regulate the self. This is what is important to understand about power relations—they do not always result in proscribed liberty, rather they often result in the empowerment or responsibilization of individuals to take action or make decisions.³³ As Foucault showed, power cannot always say no, or people would immediately find ways to resist orders to obey. Rather, power induces pleasure and produces things and

³¹ Didier Bigo, “Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease,” *Alternatives* 27(2002): 72.

³² Lemke, “Foucault, Government, and Critique,” 2.

³³ Lemke, “Foucault, Government, and Critique,” 5.

knowledge and discourse which make it satisfying to engage with. Power must be envisioned as a productive network which runs through the whole social body rather than singular isolated, negative, repressive instances. In that sense, technologies of power attempt to synthesize a subject's "life time" and "labor time" through organization of habits, biopower, and space. The body itself becomes politically invested in the network of governing.³⁴

Quoting La Mothe Le Vayer, Foucault identifies three fundamental types of government which emerge in modernity: First is the government of the self, which can be called morality; second is the government of the family or household, which can be called economics; third is the science of governing the state, which can be called politics.³⁵ The art of government then, the wedding of the technique with the rationality, is to establish multiple points of strong continuity between these three arenas. A citizen must come to see their roles and responsibilities in one sphere as influencing the health and success of another. Thus the economic and the political sphere are intertwined with care of the self, of individual governance, as a coherent thread running throughout.

When this coherence is achieved, modern political economics becomes a network of continuous and multiple relations between population (citizen/self), territory (politics) and wealth (economics), creating a map of indistinguishable responsibility and blame. "Instead of bending all subjects into a single uniform mass, it separates, analyzes, differentiates, carries its procedures of decomposition to the point of necessary and sufficient single units... [Discipline] regards individuals both as objects and as

³⁴ Lemke, "Foucault, Government, and Critique," 10-11.

³⁵ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, 207.

instruments of its exercise.”³⁶ The disciplinary power apparatus finally appears not exploitive, but part of the productive apparatus that individuals engage with through their participatory self-regulation of behavior, desire and risk. Governance in this sense encompasses power beyond the formal bounds of government—expanding the nexus of power to include social, cultural and corporate institutions. “[T]hrough governmentality, the citizen is viewed as an active subject laboring under ‘complex chains of constraints, calculations of interests, patterns and habit, and obligations and fear.’”³⁷

Migration & the US-Mexico Border

To begin to explain the focus on the border with Mexico in our analysis of the Virtual Deputy and his work, we must understand the history of migration into the United States from the south as one of constant fluctuations of welcome and exclusion. Born in war, “the border itself was established by military force in the Texas Revolution of 1836 and the Mexican War of 1846 to 1848.”³⁸ This was followed by what Timothy Dunn calls the Pacification Period, where overt military action was necessary to maintain the border. At the turn of the Twentieth Century, the border entered the Modern Era, which was defined less by suppression of outright rebellion and more by efforts to control the flow of immigrant labor from Mexico into the US in order to harness it.³⁹ Today, in what Dunn calls the Contemporary Period, border relations have been marked by the

³⁶ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 170.

³⁷ Elia Zureik with contribution from Karen Hindle, “Governance, Security and Technology” in *Surveillance, Crime & Social Control*, eds. Clive Norris and Dean Wilson (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 469.

³⁸ Timothy Dunn, *The Militarization of the US-Mexico Border* (Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies with University of Texas Press, 1996), 1.

³⁹ Dunn, *The Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 6-10.

increasing acceptance of a militarized border as a result of sensationalistic threats—a return to the Wild West mentality and a rejection of the economic partnership inherent in the history and proximity of the countries. Dunn comments on the militarization of the border zone, “The image of the U.S.-Mexico border region that emerges from these sorts of alarmist portrayals is that of a vulnerable zone in urgent need of numerous serious security measures—to repel an ‘invasion’ of ‘illegal aliens,’ to win the War on Drugs, and even to counter the threat of terrorism.”⁴⁰

As a result, the US-Mexico border has become increasingly closed in the last 40 years, with decreased focus on developing a diplomatic or bureaucratic system to handle the practical requirements of immigration management, and increased spending and emphasis on military and weaponized solutions to ensure the reassertion of the impenetrability of the US. In his analysis of the US-Mexico relationship, Dunn writes, “Complex international issues such as undocumented immigration and illegal drug trafficking [are] reduced to one-sided, domestic border-control problems, and framed as potential or actual threats to national security.”⁴¹ This fits with a larger trend of emphasizing borders through a political context in which social problems, such as the influx of drugs or the use of undocumented labor, is reconfigured as a problem of security.⁴² Also related to the narrative of the “terrorist threat” to sovereignty, is the idea that risks which are judged to be unmanageable through the normal techniques of social sorting as well as irreversible in their effects, “mobilize a range of precautionary

⁴⁰ Dunn, *The Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 3.

⁴¹ Dunn, *The Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 3.

⁴² Dean Wilson and Leanne Weber, “Surveillance, Risk and Preemption on the Australian Border,” *Surveillance & Society* 5(2008): 125.

technologies including war, generalized surveillance, and decisive administrative action based not on specific knowledge but on attributions of dangerousness.”⁴³ These types tend to cultivate binary categories of dangerous and belonging, foreign and domestic, even the concept of legal and illegal persons and the object comes to be assigning people to categories as quickly and superficially as possible. As such, the hysteria surrounding the perceived failure of the federal government to protect the border, coupled with sites like BlueServo, invites the participation of individual states, private corporations and private armies, and citizen soldiers to step in and take over the work of assigning categories.

BlueServo points to a contradiction in neoliberalism itself. The ramping up of border patrol in the last two decades can be traced in conjunction with the embeddedness of neoliberal values in the dismantling of the welfare state but also the ushering in of an era of free trade, notably in the form of NAFTA. Andreas addresses this policy contradiction in his book *Border Games*: “The unprecedented effort to police the boundary between the United State and Mexico is particularly striking because it came at the same time that the two countries were embracing a common vision of a border-free North American economic space. The retreat of the state in the name of market liberalization had been matched by the reassertion of state policing in the name of market criminalization.”⁴⁴

On the one hand, the outsourcing of the labor of security to citizens and private companies at the behest of individual states in the union promotes an actuarial dedication

⁴³ Wilson and Weber, *Surveillance*, “Risk and Preemption,” 126.

⁴⁴ Peter Andreas, *Border Games* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 8.

and a sense of commitment to the protection of the domestic market and Homeland Security. However, neoliberalism is also dedicated to maximizing profit and uses the state to remove restrictions and regulations which prevent capitalization of profit's interests in any arena. It is for this reason, Hamman writes, that neoliberal governmentality seeks to both minimize the state, while preserving the barest modicum of governmental and legal support necessary for a viable market.⁴⁵ By fostering a distrust of immigration, many of whom contribute to the pool of labor power, does the neoliberal state contradict its goals by creating a demand for state intervention in the labor market through immigration policy? Certainly immigration protocol is a restriction in its own right—who is the state to say who may come to labor, or that a corporation must pay that laborer some amount of money or guarantee them job security or protections?

For Hamman, the neoliberal wage earner is redefined such that “workers are no longer recognized as dependent on an employer but instead are fashioned as free and autonomous entrepreneurs fully responsible for their presumably rational self-investment decisions.”⁴⁶ In this way, exploitation, domination, and other forms of social inequality are dismissed to the extent that the individual social condition can be attributed as nothing more than the effect of their own choices and investments. The urge to protect the American worker from the effect of labor from the global south comes into conflict with the neoliberal deferral to maximum profit as the arbiter of social and economic health.

⁴⁵ Hamann, “Neoliberalism, Governmentality, and Ethics,” 42.

⁴⁶ Hamann, “Neoliberalism, Governmentality, and Ethics,” 43.

As has been seen in recent years, demands for labor that migrant populations from the global south satisfy—in the agricultural sector especially—are not easily replaced by American workers when immigrant labor has been deported or turned away, and profit often suffers horrendously because of this. Lyon addresses this tension when he writes, “Labor from the global south or from poorer countries in a given region is still required to fulfill tasks for which insufficient willing workers can be obtained in the global north. Because such foreign labor is often needed, but not necessarily wanted in the global north, the issue has become a central source of community tension.”⁴⁷ The image of the farmer in Georgia or Arkansas lamenting his overripe unharvested crop while simultaneously voting down the line for policies and law enforcement officers dedicated to filling deportation quotas and running the *sans-papiers* out of town comes to seem more coherent through this lens. “Like earlier forms of capitalist governance, neoliberal governance is complicated by tension between capital and labor and between various sectors within each about desirable level and objects of national protectionism.”⁴⁸

What we have created in this moment is a government concerned with mobility, specifically the mobility of labor as it is represented in bodies, where the bodies are brown and portrayed as undesirable socially and politically, yet are imperative agents of working class economic performance. Add to that the birth of BlueServo as an opportunity for the neoliberal citizen-subject to surveil the borders, and to observe and socially sort others into categories of desirable and undesirable based on superficial or

⁴⁷ David Lyon, *Surveillance Studies: An Overview* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 121.

⁴⁸ Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 98.

nonexistent narratives. We must now turn to the sites themselves to see the effect of this confluence of motivations, technologies and opportunities.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS

BlueServo as the Ideal Instrument

Surveillance as a social phenomenon in general is of course nothing new. Using David Lyon's definition of surveillance, "the focused, systematic and routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction,"⁴⁹ we see that the majority of social life is predicated on the regulation and development of systems of information about each other. From water cooler gossip, to the vigilant life guard at the community pool, to the content of news reports, to the ads we see on the websites we frequent, functional surveillance is a quotidian element of developing our own identities in relation to others and placing ourselves in hierarchies of responsibility, security, and power. Drawing on Giddens, Lyon writes, "Everyday surveillance is endemic to modern societies. It is one of those major social processes that actually constitute modernity as such."⁵⁰ In conjunction with a return to modernism through the development of postmodernism then, surveillance studies as a coherent cross-disciplinary field emerges in the late 20th century, as trends for monitoring people became more prominent and more sophisticated. Today surveillance studies interrogates such diverse ideas as data collection for the purposes of marketing (Fuchs, Turrow), the categorization of individuals through biometric databasing (van der Ploeg, Gates, Agamben), studies of CCTV use to regulate crowds in shopping centers and football matches (Norris, Armstrong, Sim), as well as surveillance as entertainment, the affective labor of

⁴⁹ Lyon, *Surveillance Studies: An Overview*, 14.

⁵⁰ Lyon, *Surveillance Studies: An Overview*, 14.

surveillance, and the role of surveillance in the transition from safety to security as a focus of the state (Andrejevic).

Capitalism's transformation as a result of the networked age provided fresh lenses through which to view the labor of the Virtual Deputies. This opportunity for surveillance focused on the border thus becomes the perfect instrument for the neoliberal self-caring citizen. As the capability to watch and report on others becomes simpler and more precise, the citizen is capable of doing work which was before reserved for highly specialized or trained figures of authority. Now the right to pass judgment is diffused into the citizen population, who, by participating, are also proving their adherence to neoliberalism's demands for discipline. By making surveillance activities a component of leisure time, by building communities and forums dedicated to the discussion of surveillance techniques and to improving each Virtual Deputy's individual performance capability, surveillance on BlueServo provides the theatre of action for demonstrating adherence to and embrace of neoliberal values.

The Virtual Deputy at Work

BlueServo was born at a time that proved especially ripe for neoliberal practices to take hold in. The technological development of surveillance apparatus coupled with the increase in high speed internet access both normalized and made readily available to the general public this online world of watching. The rhetoric of terrorism and attacks from a shadowy force emphasized the primacy of American sovereignty and turned attention toward the defense and security of borders. At the same time, the earliest hints of the economic downturn which would hit with full force in 2008, coupled with the bombastic language of political campaigns in the southern states had roiled a new wave

of anti-immigrant. In 2005 Janet Napolitano and Bill Richardson, then-governors of Arizona and New Mexico respectively, declared states of emergency, claiming that the federal government had failed them in assisting with border patrol. Napolitano mobilized her state's national guard, engaging them for a two-year stint on the border. In 2005, Jim Gilchrist founded the Minutemen Project, an all-volunteer militia dedicated to righting a massive government failing, in their perception, to secure the borders. The Minutemen quickly developed active chapters in California and Arizona and numbered more than 900 strong by April 2005.

Along these same lines Rick Perry made securing the border between Texas and Mexico a central plank in his 2006 campaign for governor. After a decrease of 31% in federal funds for border security was announced that same year, Perry released a statement declaring "Texas must never wait for Washington to act," and proposed the formation of the Texas Border Watch (TBW) funded with an initial \$5 million from the state coffers.⁵¹ TBW went live in 2006 from 3 November to 30 November. In that trial period the program reported 28 million hits to the site and more than 221,000 users registered.⁵² TBW was then outsourced to BlueServo, at the time a relatively small private networking site, along with a \$2 million dollar budget, and eventually rebranded as the Texas Virtual BorderWatch.⁵³ The site was made a permanent public site in October 2009 running 12 camera feeds, with Perry proposing the site's capacity would

⁵¹ Doug Tewksbury, "Crowdsourcing Homeland Security: The Texas Virtual BorderWatch and Participatory Citizenship" *Surveillance & Society* 10(2012): 254.

⁵² Tewksbury, "Crowdsourcing Homeland Security," 254.

⁵³ Hille Koskela, "Watch the Border 24/7 on Your Couch," *Surveillance in Latin America* (paper presented at Vifilancia, Seguranca e Controle Social at PUCPR in Curitiba, Brasil, March 4-6, 2009) 532.

eventually reach 200 cameras.⁵⁴ In reality, at its height the site was running 19 feeds, and after losing state funding for 2013, there are only five available today.

Upon arriving at the BlueServo home page, one is greeted with a banner illustrated with a Virtual Deputy watching at his computer, the blue light of the screen illuminating his silhouette. Moving to his right, in the middle of the banner, a trail of people eerily lit by night vision cross a desert landscape and on the far right of the banner is a shot of the Rio Grande, no people in sight, in soft sunlight to establish the geographic environment as though to convey “*This is what you are protecting.*” Below this, an ad for Amazon.com, the only company publicly advertising on the site, sells electronics—“digital cameras, MP3 players, TVs and More.” A second vertical Amazon ad runs below the login portal on the middle right of the screen.

The site begins in earnest after the top banner ad, with a string of videos from the BorderWatchSM Archives: “Actual Sightings Videos.” One can view more than 60 of these videos by clicking through to the Archives, each running between 40 and 90 seconds, and captioned with an explanation of what one is seeing. Videos almost always include a post-facto assurance that the “suspects were apprehended,” though this culmination is rarely actually shown.

Returning to the home page, one is invited to take part in Virtual Stakeouts using the Live Border Cameras. Virtual Deputies can watch two feeds at a time in a single window though, from the Facebook conversations, many admit they would maintain multiple tabs so as to toggle between as many as eight camera feeds at a time. Each camera comes with a caveat for deputies interested in monitoring its feed, instructing

⁵⁴ Tewksbury, “Crowdsourcing Homeland Security,” 254.

what phenomena to be on the lookout for specifically. Illegal immigrants are never mentioned specifically, with the language focusing more on crime, drugs, and infiltration. Today the five cameras still running are focused mainly on “Known Drug Trafficking Areas” and deputies are implored to report persons on foot with backpacks, parked vehicles, and people on the trail with packages.

In order to watch the feeds though, one must first register as a Virtual Deputy, which is a simple matter of furnishing BlueServo with your email address, age, gender, postal code, country, and then answers to the following five questions:

- Do you think the border is adequately protected from crime and terrorism?
- Do you think BlueServo’s Virtual Community WatchSM program will aid and improve Texas border security?
- Live streaming video requires a fast Internet connection, would you like to learn how to speed up your connection?
- I would like to receive email updates from BlueServo
- I agree with the terms of use.

Once logged in, a Virtual Deputy may select his preferred camera feeds and, as a registered user, now has the option to Make a Comment, Ask a Question or Report Suspicious Activity—which if one needs this last button, he is asked to “Enter Report” and then instructed to “Send the Information to Border Patrol” who, one is assured, will then take the “appropriate action.” Currently, after logging in, one is prompted immediately by a pop up window to “Donate to keep BlueServo alive.” This call for funding is a fairly recent development. As of December 2012 the site began calling on volunteers to financially support after the state funding was not renewed. These appeals were made through letters of commendation and thanks for their service which were sent to all virtual deputies. Many of the letters were scanned or photographed and proudly

posted by users on the Facebook wall, attended by lamentation that the state was foolish for shutting the service down:

“Looks like the BS site is toast – this is what happens with the gov takes over. Money donated for what –“ “Texas DPS took over and then dropped. Local sheriffs trying to hold on now. I still watch and have reported several sightings.... Please keep watching BS. I made small contribution.”⁵⁵

And so we come back around to consider our Virtual Deputy, the pinnacle of *homo economicus*. He works without the expectation of recompense for his time or labor patrolling the borders, but rather because he has come to internalize this work as part of his duty as a citizen. In order to manage the risks posed by the illegal immigrant’s attempt to violate the physical boundaries of the state, the virtual deputy utilizes the information technology of his internet connection to observe the camera feeds, protecting against the immigrant who is seen as a threat to the market and the state--a type of *homo criminalis* which is inherently dangerous to the productive functioning of the social body. In protecting his individual liberties and the health and growth of the market-state, the deputy performs “a double surveillance of space: that of local profits (private property) and remote markets (freedom of exchange).”⁵⁶ He is a soldier without a uniform, a worker without wage, a vigilante without a posse. He is part of, to use BlueServo’s term, “the virtual fence.”

BlueServo on Facebook

The site itself does not offer a place for Virtual Deputies to comment, post, or chat with each other, but this problem was solved with a the creation of a Facebook Fan

⁵⁵ BlueServo Facebook, posted October 14, 2012.

⁵⁶ John Durham Peters, “Seeing Bifocally: Media, Place, Culture” in *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, eds. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 76.

page in April 2010. With 630 likes to date—including notably the US Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force and Coast Guard—users have created a community of support and discussion around the project which reveals their motivations for participating and the deeply committed nature of many Virtual Deputies to the purpose of the site and to the community of dedicated users as well. The Facebook page especially illustrates the added phenomenon of social surveillance. The users form a community among themselves where they post their sightings, grouse over a lack of perceived response from border patrol and the state, and train each other to watch more cameras at once and to handle other technical malfunctions or confusions that arise. In that sense, the Facebook page as a hub of live interaction provides a window into motivations and the perception of service performed through the labor of watching by the committed community of Deputies.

After the initial open categorization of the more than 350 Facebook posts, I refined the thematic patterns through another four rounds of sorting to arrive at four typologies of comments for purposes of the discussion. Comments that were not included were those which merely directed others logged in to Facebook at the same time to watch certain cameras at a specific moment, ie “*cam 9*,” but without explication or comment on the events being shown.

The four categories of posts to the Facebook page which emerged with significant frequency that I will be structuring my discussion around are:

- **State/Sovereignty**
 - Federal Government
 - State Government
 - Sovereignty
 - Threat to & Protection of Homeland
 - State services
- **Social Sorting**

- labels: “Illegals” “they” “good guys” “bad guys”
- belonging
- exclusion
- unease
- **Labor**
 - training and teaching
 - informing
 - technical support
 - encouragement
- **Entertainment**
 - narrative creation
 - wildlife
 - praise for the site
 - recreation

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

BlueServo As Labor

It becomes immediately apparent that these Deputies see their use of the site, in what is ostensibly a leisure activity, as the performance of professional work which is being noticed by the authorities and is sorely needed. As the capacity for sophisticated surveillance has increased in collusion with neoliberalism, the attendant maintenance and responsibilities that come with the technology have slid from the private sector to private individuals in a form of “subcontracting of sovereign activities to the private sector.”⁵⁷ Two lines of development can be pointed to as increasing the daily participation of individuals in surveillance activities: new equipment and new arenas (ie: global communities in virtual space).⁵⁸

To make sense of this new labor force, we can introduce Jodi Dean’s concept of communicative capitalism, defined as the convergence of networked telecommunication and globalized neoliberalism.⁵⁹ Dean’s concept is related to Andrejevic’s observation that the locus of the 21st century war is the Internet mainly for its information intensive qualities as a medium. “[B]ecause the war on terrorism is an information intensive one—one in which the hallmark of so-called homeland defence is a well-informed and proactive public – it lends itself to the participatory model of information consumption associated with the internet.”⁶⁰ Dean takes this idea of information engagement on the

⁵⁷ Koskela, “Watch the Border 24/7,” 527.

⁵⁸ Koskela, “Watch the Border 24/7”, 528.

⁵⁹ Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 23.

Internet and argues that use of the network also creates the phenomenon of “communicative capitalism” where the classic model of communication (a message sent and a response received) is converted from a linear exchange into a constant circulating flow of content into which individuals contribute messages. For Dean, the effects of this convergent communication is such that efforts at political engagement are turned instead into contributions to the circulation of content, which in turn reinforces the primacy of neoliberalism’s technological infrastructure.⁶¹ This quality is exemplified at one level in the existence of the Facebook page itself, the ideal forum for the circulation of content and contribution of messages, and on another level in the posts that demonstrate the Deputies’ beliefs that their contributions of content are an impactful form of political engagement.

“i love this ... i catch people on an almost daily basis ☺SEND ‘EM BACK !!!”⁶²

“I have been a memeber[sic] of the border patrol for about 3 years online. I have help[sic] arrest about 33 smugglers.”⁶³

“I just caught 4 drug dealers hahahah. On Camera 5, too. I caught 3 drug dealers yesterday on the same camera!!”⁶⁴

One feature of this neoliberal technologization according to Dean is the creation of a technological fetish where an “innovation becomes a screen upon which all sorts of

⁶⁰ Mark Andrejevic, *iSpy: Surveillance and Power in the Internet Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 166-67.

⁶¹ Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 26-42.

⁶² BlueServo Facebook, posted June 27, 2010.

⁶³ BlueServo Facebook, posted May 9, 2012.

⁶⁴ BlueServo Facebook, posted June 25, 2010.

fantasies of political action are projected” and functions to mask a lack on the part of the subject while simultaneously acting in the place of the weakened subject, projecting the fantasy of action, efficiency and effectiveness.⁶⁵ “Arguably, the border watch rides on the culture of fear which US citizens face when trying to protect their country from a threat coming from South [sic]. It is also a perfect example of the politics in which people are encouraged to be committed in surveillance previously conducted by the authorities.”⁶⁶ The ways this site is used seem to illustrate the sense of impotence of both the individual and the state, while simultaneously providing a forum where people feel they are effective and are imbued with a sense of authority and duty through their use of the surveillance equipment.

The introduction of new surveillance technology and new equipment for access by the general public also necessitates a certain flexibility and savvy in learning to use it. We see the recognition in this through the frequent exchanges of technical training that the Virtual Deputies offer each other, in order that each Deputy performs at the peak of his or her abilities. From the mundane—disabling plug ins, debating the ideal web browser, pasting print screen captures—to the more sophisticated—watching multiple camera feeds, free software for video capture, transparent labeling for images—to the professional—discussion of camera lighting and night vision specs, even an offer to donate better night vision cameras to BlueServo from a vendor—the deputies represent a truly 21st century moment in these expressions of technological support of each other.

⁶⁵ Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 36-37.

⁶⁶ Koskela, “Watch the Border 24/7”, 526-27.

*“One more question. What can cause the white pixels on IR cams? I know there was wind this weekend and wondered if dust particles could be a cause”*⁶⁷

*“BlueServo i run my own IT Consulting Service and Video Surveillance Co. on the side from my full time job, and i would be interested in donating a few thermal day night ip cameras what kind could you use and how would i go about getting them to you guys, i figure any kind of help would be pretty well appreciated after all it will be going to a good cause...”*⁶⁸

*“At night you will see people and vehicles appear as white. Sometimes when you are looking at a camera the screen will appear to be a washed out gray but people will still appear as a bright white this is a thermal image.”*⁶⁹

*Commenting on a picture of three swimmers crossing the Rio Grande: “That one just looks like wakes to me though I could be wrong. I usually see something dark at one end of it to indicate there could be a person there. Though that does look odd.”*⁷⁰ ... *REPLY: “Thanks Ralph. As someone new to this site, I appreciated these photos on what to look for.”*⁷¹

“Hope I didn’t goof this , first time to upload :)” *REPLY: “did great.. I have to learn how now.. :o)”*⁷²

The technological sophistication and skills necessary to navigate the digital could easily leave some from an older generation behind. However the Virtual Deputies are dedicated to each other’s improvement as there is a sort of underlying understanding that they must all be as competent as possible at their jobs. The focus on developing and exercising skills signals the desire to be the best worker possible, to do this job for which they are unpaid and rarely acknowledged, with the highest level of talent that can be developed. This quality also comes through in posts where the Deputies ask each when

⁶⁷ BlueServo Facebook, posted November 28, 2010.

⁶⁸ BlueServo Facebook, posted November 24, 2010.

⁶⁹ BlueServo Facebook, posted September 5, 2010.

⁷⁰ BlueServo Facebook, posted October 19, 2010.

⁷¹ BlueServo Facebook, posted December 9, 2010.

⁷² BlueServo Facebook, posted August 5, 2010.

and where to watch to be the most use, and lament their reports which turn out to be errors, or worry that a report might waste time.

“Is it common to see a lot of people carrying white bags of stuff on the bridge on camera 8? I’ve been reporting but I don’t wanna sit here and keep reporting on it if it is something normal that doesn’t need to be reported.”⁷³

“I recently did a night watch when I saw a ‘figure’ moving on the other side of the river. It moved slowly towards the rivers edge. It reported it, as I sent the message it started to move along the bank, It was then I saw the side on view. It was a cow. I felt a bit embarrassed and sent another message saying sorry. I really don’t like to waste their time with stupid reports, but I know that time is an important factor and the sooner they receive a report the more time they have to react. It is embarrassing when you realise your report was a waste of time.”⁷⁴ REPLY: “They understand, always report suspicious object and don’t worry ☺they need us!”⁷⁵

“Just started watching these recently. Are there certain cameras that tend to be more active? Do you find certain days/times more active than others?” REPLY: “I’m retired so I get on there anytime of day or nite and pretty much see things going on around the clock. The river cams are probably the most active but all of them can be at any one time. Glad to have you aboard.”⁷⁶

In addition to the training of each other in the use of the technology, there is a fair proportion of news sharing through links to videos and articles. Users frequently post segments from local TV news channels, articles in local newspapers, YouTube videos, links to other Facebook pages and blogs for users concerned with border security, and recommend documentaries and television shows about border patrol and policing. Some users also like to post links to meteorological reports about weather and the phases of the

⁷³ BlueServo Facebook, posted October 19, 2010.

⁷⁴ BlueServo Facebook, posted July 30, 2012.

⁷⁵ BlueServo Facebook, posted August 27, 2012.

⁷⁶ BlueServo Facebook, posted January 22, 2012.

moon so that other Deputies will know if it's going to be a particularly clear or bright night to watch.

*"Most 'news' report I have seen were quoting stats from a couple or so years ago. Got the impression they were political and sort of anti citizen involvement oriented."*⁷⁷

*"Please don't forget to watch border Wars on Nat Geo wednesday night or check it out on Nat Geo's website. They show us a lot about how they work and what's going on."*⁷⁸

*"Anybody watching Border Wars? Gives a great view from the ground."*⁷⁹

*"<link>check this news station out every so often, I think you may really be surprised at all the border action that is going on, plus it shows the local weather which sometimes helps when we do out viewing."*⁸⁰

*"Good to see new postings :) Hi you-all!..back to Servo now..moon almost full & doesn't set till 6 am-cdt and cam might get some good light" at 11:08pm*⁸¹

These links seem to satisfy a dual function of informing each other and motivating each other. Andrejevic observes that, "The threat of a pervasive and indiscriminate risk underwrites the invitation to participate in the policing function by providing for the capillary extension of surveillance into households and surrounding neighbourhoods—a strategy that enlists the appeal of participation as a shared responsibility."⁸² The stories portray a threat from Mexico of cartel violence, drugs, police corruption, terrorism, invasion, and a smatter of pieces praising the work of citizen

⁷⁷ BlueServo Facebook, posted November 27, 2010.

⁷⁸ BlueServo Facebook, posted October 4, 2010.

⁷⁹ BlueServo Facebook, posted September 26, 2010.

⁸⁰ BlueServo Facebook, posted November 15, 2010.

⁸¹ BlueServo Facebook, August 22, 2010.

⁸² Marc Andrejevic, "'Securitainment' in the Post-9/11Era," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 25(2011): 168.

vigilante patrols. As such they motivate the Deputies to work harder at their job and to see their labor as in service of a greater good.

Another element of the labor performed here is the amount of encouragement the other Deputies provide for each other to keep working.

“Great observing Ralph and Dan, keep reporting!”⁸³

“Reported my first boat going across and back today.” REPLY: “Congratulations! Keep up the good work.” REPLY: “Way to go Aaron!”⁸⁴

“Didn’t make it bp was waiting.” REPLY: “Glad you’re on patrol!”⁸⁵

“Great to see 28 camera, all up and running. I’ve been on BS for 2 years and they started with 6-8 cameras. I was getting worried that they had run out of money and was going to shut down. Glad to see all is well, I wouldn’t know what to do with my time if BS didn’t exist. Thumbs up!!!!”⁸⁶

“reported it several times yall should do the same” “they just left and I missed it” “Bob, those were were the raft action was today...” “me too, that’s what we get for jaw jackin and not payin attention..lol”⁸⁷

When you consider that this is all work being performed free of charge in the service of protecting the state, then the managerial role that the Deputies take on in training, galvanizing, and praising each other is illuminating to the research questions driving this thesis. Tewksbury speaks to the implications of this role of the Deputies: “If the relationship between the state and the citizen is largely defined as the state’s attempts to maintain power through the regulation of its citizens, then it is the *material and*

⁸³ BlueServo Facebook, posted October 1, 2010.

⁸⁴ BlueServo Facebook, posted September 23-24, 2010.

⁸⁵ BlueServo Facebook, posted January 16, 2011.

⁸⁶ BlueServo Facebook, posted January 19, 2011.

⁸⁷ BlueServo Facebook, January 13, 2012.

immaterial labor of citizens themselves that provide continuity for this power dynamic.”⁸⁸ The deputies appear to have assumed their roles as immaterial laborers so thoroughly that they do not need a supervisor to stay on task. They recreate the power dynamic of managed efficiency amongst themselves. We saw this in the marked desire not to waste anyone’s time with report of activities that are “normal” or figures that turn out to be animals or people affiliated with U.S. activities. This dedication to efficiency exposes the seriousness of the task the Deputies believe they are performing and their desire to prove a worthwhile and productive part of the virtual team. It also highlights a critical dynamic of this discussion in that the view of the neoliberal citizen offered through analysis of this site is one that is always striving to improve and add to their skill set such that even leisure activities morph into opportunities for productive labor.

BlueServo as Entertainment

5:44am “YEAH!!!! Border Patrol caught them when they came ashore. WOOHOOO!!!! The remaining illegals stayed close to shore as if taunting BP. An Agent then ran out faster than they could paddle and knocked them out of their raft. One more in custody. Three now floating in the river.” REPLY: “We like this a lot! 4 still in the river.” REPLY: “The few stragglers have now wandered into camera 12 now. They are probably too cold and wet to swim back. Time to face the inevitable and surrender to BP.”⁸⁹

No form of power could be solely oppressive, thus BlueServo offers incentives to the Deputies to participate beyond mere duty. Use of the site becomes a form of entertainment as well as a portal to labor, blurring the line between labor and leisure. Logging onto to observe in place of a few hours of television or gaming or other forms of

⁸⁸ Tewksbury, “Crowdsourcing Homeland Security,” 258.

⁸⁹ BlueServo Facebook, posted January 14, 2012.

entertainment illuminates the insinuation of power into the activities of enjoyment, as well as those of responsibility. The network of watchers becomes the very image of power passing through the Foucauldian capillaries—here submission to control is not forced, labor is not coerced. Rather, effective power inserts itself into the quotidian along individualized avenues, entertainment certainly one of the most effective among them.

Andrejevic has coined a term for this phenomenon: “securitainment,” referring to the triple convergence of the (1) neo-liberal approach to security, where the public takes on some duties of law enforcement and intelligence, by (2) using the tools of communication and leisure in the service of surveillance and security, such that the third element of convergence is introduced: that (3) the activities performed are entertaining.⁹⁰

“Man my stupid iPad 2 wont let me watch haven’t been able to spot people for a year :(I’m sooo mad I got to get my a laptop soon so I can watch I love this website :)”⁹¹

“I love this site!! I wonder if they really do catch anyone. I did see a guy run out of the brush and jump on a waiting horse. My sister watches in London.”⁹²

“Lots of activity on cam 12” Everyone hurries around to different cameras to watch the scene. “Its been a while since I’ve watched thanx for the reminder ☺ I used to be Addicted !”⁹³

“I saw one literally swimming on his own, without any boat... damn he was fast. I couldn’t even find the keys on the keyboard to report him LOL I live in New Jersey, I am addicted to this website haha.”⁹⁴

“I just love watching the infrared camera’s[sic] at night. People are oblivious that they are being watched. It is a hoot.”⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Andrejevic, “Securitainment,” 165-67.

⁹¹ BlueServo Facebook, posted December 24, 2012.

⁹² BlueServo Facebook, posted August 25, 2011.

⁹³ BlueServo Facebook, posted October 27, 2011.

⁹⁴ BlueServo Facebook, posted November 15, 2010.

“Did anyone catch anybody today?” REPLY: “Just saw someone wading across where that little island type thing is in the river. Not sure if they caught them though. Seeing alot of activity lately. I’m hooked. So is my hubby LOL”⁹⁶ REPLY: “we need this covering the entire border but allow viewers to be able to AIM and FIRE.”⁹⁷

For Andrejevic, the key elements of the securitainment experience include: “the grouping together of a broad array of risks (the mobilization of the anxieties attendant upon life in an era of ubiquitous risk), the management of these risks by the professionals (and hence the management of this anxiety), the need for public education and cooperation, and finally, the forms of participatory identification that help frame potential risk (and the public contribution to their management), according to the priorities of law enforcement and the state.”⁹⁸ We can read the site itself through these elements in that it highlights the risks of immigrants bringing drugs or contraband and flouting the sovereignty of the US, yet simultaneously portrays these risks as manageable by Border Patrol and Law Enforcement with the assistance of an educated and informed community of users who are dedicated to watching the cameras and reporting efficiently and accurately. The videos at the top of the BlueServo site provide a sort of incentive to watchers, in that they are both entertaining to watch “success stories” and they provide a sense of purpose to the slow and sometimes dull business of watching the feeds through long periods of inactivity.

⁹⁵ BlueServo Facebook, posted January 27, 2012.

⁹⁶ BlueServo Facebook, posted June 22, 2010.

⁹⁷ BlueServo Facebook, posted June 27, 2010.

⁹⁸ Andrejevic, “Securitainment,” 170.

In his discussion, Andrejevic focuses on several popular reality TV shows in Australia, one of which follows immigrations and customs officials and one of which follows border patrol in the outback. He also refers to the development of the US HomeGuard website, created by Internet entrepreneur Jay Walker, which employs web cameras with heat sensors and microphones in addition to video. Walker proposed that members of the public would be enlisted to watch the camera feeds from facilities such as power plants, reservoirs, and the border and instantly alert authorities should they observe suspicious activity. “US HomeGuard was envisioned as a kind of distributed interactive reality show that allowed viewers to participate in the defence of the nation by creating a high-tech national ‘neighbourhood watch’ programme.”⁹⁹ Walker offered to sell the site to the US government for \$1—an offer which was never accepted.

However the gist of the US HomeGuard concept appears to be alive and well on BlueServo with a narrowed geographic focus trained on the U.S.-Mexico border. In line with Andrejevic’s point that reality tv “lends itself to combining entertainment with a pedagogical function,”¹⁰⁰ I see the users of this site as enjoying their work at many times through a purely entertainment lens, while simultaneously absorbing serious lessons about service to the state, who to consider threats, and how those threats affect sovereignty and the market.

“why don’t they disable the raft and see how these dudes get back across” REPLY: “because they say its in humane to force these people swim because some of them cant swim. I say oh well.” REPLY: “Oh my – did they ever think that it might keep most of them from coming over if they were afraid. Most of them aren’t scared when they come

⁹⁹ Andrejevic, “Securitainment,” 167.

¹⁰⁰ Andrejevic, “Securitainment,” 168.

*over illegally – what’s to fear, we feed them, clothe them, make sure they’re medically okay, then ship them back, free of charge to them, to enable them to return again.”*¹⁰¹

*“... Maybe the drug haulers know a lot of us are watching for them to cross the river... I am confident that our Boarder Patrol will find the new crossings too. At least they know they can’t get all the drugs passed us. We gotta keep watchin’.”*¹⁰²

*(caption added to screen capture): “amigo, when do we get our 1st welfare check?”*¹⁰³

*“The hospital I work at needs Immigration Officer standing at the entrance.”*¹⁰⁴

*“cam 19- cows pigs or poor lil freeloaders?”*¹⁰⁵

*“A little party on Cam 6 ?” REPLY: “Nice trucks! ‘Farm work’ must pay good?”*¹⁰⁶

Note however, that the point of “the game” of watching on BlueServo becomes to turn back the immediate threat of immigrants, rather than to understand the history of labor from the south, or to evaluate the reality of the threat that is actually posed, or even to inquire into the overarching effectiveness of BlueServo as a deterrent and a social policy. Securitainment does nothing “to diminish the climate of risk associated with globalization and mobility. Rather, it is to suggest that one of the functions of securitainment is to focus on the immediate problem...rather than to situate this problem within the context of broader questions of social and security policy.”¹⁰⁷ Entertainment then, as illuminated in the labor discussion, becomes a form of work but not an

¹⁰¹ BlueServo Facebook, posted December 3-4, 2011.

¹⁰² BlueServo Facebook, posted November 2, 2010.

¹⁰³ BlueServo Facebook, posted February 14, 2011.

¹⁰⁴ BlueServo Facebook, posted November 25, 2010.

¹⁰⁵ BlueServo Facebook, posted January 21, 2012.

¹⁰⁶ BlueServo Facebook, posted January 29, 2011.

¹⁰⁷ Andrejevic, “Securitainment,” 172.

opportunity for education. The churn of activity which satisfies the desire to produce and contribute must become self-fulfilling. The superficial desire to staunch immigration may be expressed, however the enjoyment of engaging with the system and the sense of purpose and entertainment that comes with watching the cameras becomes a truer reward. So the propagation the risk climate must be cultivated in conjunction with the entertaining aspects in order to justify increasingly intensive use of the site.

BlueServo and the State

“I am glad that more camera have and are being put up. We must protect our country.”¹⁰⁸

The state occupies a tricky position in this reading, and in neoliberalism in general, I would argue. It must make protection of the homeland appear an act of duty, without indicating that the weakening of the state through deregulation, underfunding, and corporatization makes following up on the work of enforcement more difficult than ever. As such, the role of the state as both a governing apparatus and in the form of actual political figures was a topic of frequent discussion in the corpus of posts. What emerges from a survey of the posts over the years is not an embrace of the state at all, rather a sort of low level disgust for the perceived failures of the government to protect its borders and its people. What takes the place of classic intuitional patriotism to galvanize the Virtual Deputies is a resurgence of nationalism and the opportunity to actively participate in the question of who belongs as part of the nation. The pride of belonging to the nation and the urge to protect her from those who are labeled as “not belonging” supplants a pride in

¹⁰⁸ BlueServo Facebook, posted May 9, 2012.

the government and its ideals and function. If any allegiance to a government is expressed with pride, it tends to be toward the individual state governments, who are positioned as acting out of disgust and frustration to empower citizens as a result of bloat, incompetence, or indifference on the part of Washington, DC.

As Douglas Tewksbury writes in his analysis of BlueServo as a crowdsourcing mechanism, “The security-industrial complex has “rearticulated” security away from preparedness toward active participation in prevention.”¹⁰⁹ We see this phenomenon not only in BlueServo, but also the rise of Minutemen militias, the Ready.gov website, and the now-ubiquitous “see something, say something” campaigns—a mentality deeply engrained in the psyche of the Virtual Deputies.

“I would report what ever the instructions under the cam are. I report airboats and all vehicles. The BlueServo Deputys know if they are ours or not and the respon accordingly (spelling). If it looks out of place report it ☺ Also you can ask questions and make comments-, sometimes it takes a day to get and but they will respond to you and answer. Please don’t be shy about reporting with red button, let them know what you are seeing ☺”¹¹⁰

“When in doubt report it”¹¹¹

Of course, the myth of the homogeneous, the pure, the deserving and anointed citizen is a fiction. Belonging is as much about quality as it is pure locational positioning—the justification of a national identity that the state has achieved through creation and maintenance of borders.¹¹² But the right to be called citizen must have more

¹⁰⁹ Tewksbury, “Crowdsourcing Homeland Security,” 258.

¹¹⁰ BlueServo Facebook, posted October 4, 2010.

¹¹¹ BlueServo Facebook, posted October 8, 2010.

¹¹² Bigo, “Security and Immigration,” 67.

dimension than mere geographic accident to be embraced. Bigo writes to the logic of the creation of the good citizen in part through creation of the dangerous non-citizen: “The political game in each country delineates the figure of the migrant by inverting the image of the good citizen.”¹¹³ It is in the state’s interest then to champion its own sovereignty while at the same time maintaining at a simmer “an ongoing mobilization and management of risk anxiety: on the one hand, the permeability of borders always represents a potential threat of otherness; on the other, the rules and their enforcers help manage the threat—hence the invitation to identify with them.”¹¹⁴

“look at it like it was your neighborhood, watch for suspicious actions...If you see any suspicious activity please report it—the deputies will judge and respond if they see need.Please use RED BUTTON for activity and please don’t be shy...”¹¹⁵

In neoliberalism, technological development pushes corporate bargaining power to the forefront, and leaves only indirect tasks for the state such as absorbing social consequences and monitoring risk.¹¹⁶ The agents of the state “mobilize security agencies of ever greater scope, call for help from citizens, and build a fantasy figure of an internal-security state (participative through vigilantism, police-made, with a proactive surveillance dimension, and punitive with its penal sprawl) whose monitoring powers have never been so mighty since the state was declared to be weakening.”¹¹⁷ The

¹¹³ Bigo, “Security and Immigration,” 70.

¹¹⁴ Andrejevic, “Securitainment,” 172.

¹¹⁵ BlueServo Facebook, posted November 7, 2010.

¹¹⁶ Beck, *Risk Society*, 202.

¹¹⁷ Bigo, “Security and Immigration,” 72.

challenge in creating this functioning “security state” becomes the animation of an adversary upon which the public can focus their attention and training. As Tewksbury writes, “If the predominant question faced by the state in the 20th century was how to defend the sovereign state against adversaries in the physical spaces where borders were drawn, the primary goal of the information age will be how to define not only the virtual or material spaces of conflict but the very nature of adversary itself.”¹¹⁸ And we can see this question at work in the discourse of the users. The watchers who are geographically proximate to the border bring their own fears and absorption of media about the illegal immigrant to the use of the site and in conversation on the Facebook page.

“Why was there no one on our side waiting for them. Hell just stand on the bank and let them know they are there so they wont cross I dont care but protect our country at all cost. Hell maybe I should just quit my job and hire a bunch of gangsters to sit on the bank of the river and pay them \$50 for each one they shoot.”¹¹⁹ REPLY: “pick me pick me.”¹²⁰

“Why do they even follow them with the camera if they are gonna do nothing about it. I think I am done with BlueServo I cant help them if they are not willing to help and I refuse to sit here and watch this stuff happen to the country I love.”¹²¹

“I have reported people that were just crossing just to get a job and they brought in the helicopters and everything but when they bring drugs to the US and then take back guns and/or money they do nothing. I don’t know about everyone else but I love my country and it really pisses me off to see this stuff happen. They better thank god I dont live near the border.”¹²²

¹¹⁸ Tewksbury, “Crowdsourcing Homeland Security,” 261.

¹¹⁹ BlueServo Facebook, posted January 24, 2011.

¹²⁰ BlueServo Facebook, posted June 19, 2011.

¹²¹ BlueServo Facebook, posted January 24, 2011.

¹²² BlueServo Facebook, posted January 24, 2011.

In the expression of this fear of impotence we see that the state and the media have done their jobs. The migration of people and the globalized circulation of goods and labor is viewed through a security prism which functions as a continuum of threats and general unease. The engagement with that continuum by many different actors who share with each other their beliefs and fears create the impression of an increasingly risky and dangerous society.¹²³ Shaping that narrative, police organizations, private corporations, organizations who control access to the welfare state, intelligence services, and some branches of the military represent “competing networks responding to many groups of people who are identified as risks or just as a source of unease.”¹²⁴ In this case, that group is the disenfranchised and employment-seeking from the global south. The watchers of BlueServo become an organization which is at once plugged into this responsive network and the narratives it generates, while at the same time becoming a contributing network of sorts, competing with the state, the military, the media, and the corporate to define those who are risks to the social body.

*“Americans are not used to having to stand up for ourselves – usually let someone else take on that responsibility. Do we know how?” REPLY: “I dont know about you but I sure as heck can stand up fort[sic] my self.” REPLY: “That is why we have the Second Amendment.” REPLY: “AMEN!!!!!!”*¹²⁵

*“This should courage better government participation. Maybe someone should invite homeland security Napolitano and obama to view.”*¹²⁶

¹²³ Bigo, “Security and Immigration,” 63.

¹²⁴ Bigo, “Security and Immigration,” 64.

¹²⁵ BlueServo Facebook, posted January 19, 2011.

¹²⁶ BlueServo Facebook, posted June 11, 2010.

“reported people carrying back packs on camera 23. car parked on the side of the road. but I guess they do not care” REPLY: “Please don’t give up reporting Mary, we all get frustrated seeing action but we have a long border and not enough ‘boots on the ground’ to cover it all.”¹²⁷

“The activation of the term *migrant* in *im-migrant* is by definition seen as something destructive.”¹²⁸ We see this as the notion of the migrant in the BlueServo social media feeds is extrapolated to encompass other contemporary fears about gay marriage, constitutional dilution or judicial activism which become part of the narrative of protection espoused by the watchers.

“Argentine woman living illegally in the US after overstaying visa won’t be deported...Apparently she married a woman in one of them states that allows that and since married to a US citizens[sic] i guess she can become a citizen.”¹²⁹

“One of the things I liked about National Guard cameras was since they were prototype they were less ‘politically correct’ and sometime they were so close you could count the points on a big South Texas buck and see the expression, on an illegals face ,when he realized he was on candid camera. My persooal[sic] opinion is that we worry too much about the constitutional right for people that don’t have any constitutional rights.”¹³⁰

Border policing becomes more than an exercise of political or military policy, deterring illegal crossings comes to stand as a symbolic representation of state authority.¹³¹ In the case of BlueServo what I think is particular interesting from the analysis is that the state of Texas comes to occupy a space of primacy in the loyalty of the

¹²⁷ BlueServo Facebook, posted January 27, 2011.

¹²⁸ Bigo, “Security and Immigration,” 67.

¹²⁹ BlueServo Facebook, posted March 25, 2011.

¹³⁰ BlueServo Facebook, posted November 21, 2010.

¹³¹ Andreas, *Border Games*, 8.

users, while the national government is often derided, mocked, or dismissed. Users from California and Arizona also comment frequently that they wish they had something like this available for their states' borders while lamenting the perception of uncaring or incompetence on the part of elected leaders to staunch the flow of immigration from the south into their own states.

“WE should have this thing in the White House and the Capitol watching the Communists and giving them reason to pack!”¹³²

“We Texans assume that every out of Stater knows all about Texas and the Rio Grande, where in reality they only vaguely know about the River from John Wayne movies.”¹³³

“What the hell is going on with this country.” REPLY: “Look whats in the White House...”¹³⁴

“...when I select my cameras the screen is dead. I hope it's fixed soon. Is this the government testing it's ability to control internet sites and video feeds, in case they want to implement the Executive Order?”¹³⁵

“I hear Janet Incompitanto is pulling the plug on the virtual fence. Is it because it's too expensive or because it works too well?”¹³⁶

The focus on the border that many theorists attribute as an action of a weakening state appears to have thrown favor to the individual state rather than reignited a sort of passionate protectionism of the nation as a whole. Of course, this can be attributed to perhaps two immediate factors: First, that President Barack Obama as an African

¹³² BlueServo Facebook, posted July 10, 2010.

¹³³ BlueServo Facebook, posted December 22, 2010.

¹³⁴ BlueServo Facebook, posted April 13, 2011.

¹³⁵ BlueServo Facebook, posted May 10, 2012.

¹³⁶ BlueServo Facebook, posted January 16, 2011.

American with an intellectualized style of address, and policies which re-embrace the values of government investiture in welfare programs threatens for some their opinions of the “traditional” image of the presidency. Second, the lack of clear policy for dealing effectively and humanely with immigration is easily masked behind this strawman of technological sophistication. Immigration control has undergone a metamorphosis since the 1990s. “The unprecedented expansion of border policing... has ultimately been less about achieving the stated instrumental goal of deterring illegal border crossers and more about politically recrafting the image of the border and symbolically reaffirming the state’s territorial authority.”¹³⁷ As such, targeting the border has immense symbolic appeal while defining the nature of the problem and limited the range of policy solutions.

The perception of the failure of the state to deliver quantifiable immigration reform and the rise of the technological capacity to privatize monitoring and deterrence leads to situations like the BlueServo site—a frantic, rather futile effort to reverse the unifying character of globalization, but a natural evolution of control technology nonetheless. Lyon addresses the emphasis on hyper-sovereignty as backlash of globalization, writing: “If globalization is rightly thought of as the process in which the world becomes one place, then it is only to be expected that borders will become increasingly porous. Mobility, both physical and virtual, is a mark of the information and communication age. Equally predictable, in an increasingly mobilized world, is that surveillance practices would evolve in parallel ways.”¹³⁸ Thus, as surveillance practices have increased and evolved, we see an increase in the management of the newly mobile

¹³⁷ Andreas, *Border Games*, 85.

¹³⁸ David Lyon, “Surveillance as social sorting: computer codes and mobile bodies” in *Surveillance as Social Sorting: Privacy, Risk, and Digital Discrimination*. ed. Lyon, David (London: Routledge, 2003), 25.

but historically undesirable. Control over mobility has always illustrated and reinforced certain power dynamics, though in the case of BlueServo, the power is transferred from the state's hands into the hands of the citizens, and so we see a rejection of the usefulness of the state entirely, and a swell of pride and confidence in more microcosmic institutions and communities, including the users of the site as a group and then the individual states in the union, rather than the country as a whole. Nationalism necessitates an identifiable, categorical, and manageable population which must be defended and whose purity can be maintained. To extrapolate this to the country as a whole becomes untenable, so we see a narrowed focus in the Deputies' definitions of belonging, both geographically, ethnically, and politically.

BlueServo as Social Sorting

In keeping with the discussion of resurgent nationalism, use of this site empowers Deputies to engage fully with the social sorting tendency of surveillance. The power these watchers feel they have to categorize or classify certain people as dangerous or unwanted blurs a line which I argue would have previously been left to the discretion of vested figures of authority—law enforcement, border patrol, immigration and customs officials, etc... “People are not just passively adjusting to surveillance but take active roles in it.”¹³⁹

“shhhhhhhh be vewy vewy qwiet I'm hunting mexican's. LMAO”¹⁴⁰

“Haven't seen any Mexicans yet! Pretty pumped about reporting my first one though!”¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Koskela, “Watch the Border 24/7,” 529.

¹⁴⁰ BlueServo Facebook, posted September 3, 2010.

The differences between the authorities and the public, outsiders and insiders, the controlled and the controllers, have become less clear.”¹⁴² This dynamic which Didier Bigo calls the “securitization of the immigrant” is a consequence of general insecurity as a result of globalization under neoliberalism, whereas a group of people do “not necessarily relate to concrete threat but to perceived unease which is channeled against ‘the Other’.”¹⁴³ Under securitization groups and spaces are understood to be dangerous and appropriately subjected to heightened surveillance in order to manage their access and general mobility. “Social integration has been replaced by zero tolerance and inclusion by exclusion.”¹⁴⁴ Hille Koskela wrote about BlueServo in 2009, “Surveillance is used in order to cope with the fears about population regarded as different or deviant: the Southern, the Mexican, the undocumented, the illegal, the unwanted, the poor. Surveillance is, indeed, used for managing and enforcing exclusion,”¹⁴⁵ which begins to show through the binary nature of terminology employed in the posts.

*“was it our BP or the bad guys?”*¹⁴⁶

*“Fishing or breaching security? You be the Judge. Report it anyways.”*¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ BlueServo Facebook, posted August 31, 2010.

¹⁴² Koskela, “Watch the Border 24/7,” 529.

¹⁴³ Koskela, “Watch the Border 24/7,” 530.

¹⁴⁴ Koskela, “Watch the Border 24/7,” 530.

¹⁴⁵ Koskela, “Watch the Border 24/7,” 534.

¹⁴⁶ BlueServo Facebook, posted May 8, 2011.

¹⁴⁷ BlueServo Facebook, posted October 11, 2010.

“Just watched 10 illegals jump into this car”¹⁴⁸

“Illegals deflating raft.”¹⁴⁹

“they are quick little bastards”¹⁵⁰

“Yeah, it may be something legitimate, but makes you wonder how many of these people fishing or doing other so called legit activity’s are maybe really spotters.”¹⁵¹

“Have seen a number of those white (no green backward stripe) trucks around. Assumed they are BP but also read where bad guys impersonating the BP with look-alike vehicles.” REPLY: “Thank you Judy!!! On the way to Austin tx we met some BP people at a truckstop. The green stripe can be applied to vehic. That is why I’m turning in what I see, even airboats. Let Deputy[sic] decide if good or bad guys.”¹⁵²

This freedom to judge through grainy digital camera feed suggests social ramifications far beyond the time spent monitoring the BlueServo feeds. “Technological change and economic development are tied into the system of cultural norms, the prevailing expectation and the value orientations of people.”¹⁵³ The identity work being performed here shapes both the Deputy’s perceptions of themselves as part of the “good guys,” and the blanket assumption that those who appear to come from the global south carry the stigma of “bad guys;” they are *homo criminalis* and do not come to the social table on even ground from the beginning. The implications for this sort of habitual judgment carried out into face to face interactions carries with it real significance in identity studies. “The meaning of our embodied beings is totally derived from the social

¹⁴⁸ BlueServo Facebook, posted January 14, 2011.

¹⁴⁹ BlueServo Facebook, posted January 27, 2012.

¹⁵⁰ BlueServo Facebook, posted February 1, 2011.

¹⁵¹ BlueServo Facebook, posted December 20, 2010.

¹⁵² BlueServo Facebook, posted October 5, 2010.

¹⁵³ Beck, *Risk Society*, 201.

world, and through participation in, and connectivity with it, and through the development of habits, we learn to identify ourselves from the outside, as reflected in others, and the social categories of our respective societies through time.”¹⁵⁴ The conflation of national security with the image of the migrant which is perpetrated through this site is “particularly important in relation to the issue of migration, and specifically in relation to questions about who gets to be defined as an immigrant.”¹⁵⁵ Superficial judgment and narrative creation encouraged by remote viewing and reporting through surveillance technology too easily creates a scape goat for subtle and complicated problems, and beyond that, the nature of the posts betray a distinct dehumanization of the subjects of surveillance, from merely passive to sometimes an active wish that harm or violence would befall them.

“Im on them cams again looking weatching [sic] waiting for them to make a move and when they do I’m gonna be on em like a fly on dog poop.....”¹⁵⁶

“I agree with you Milton – I posed the question once to them about why not take their rafts from our shores so they don’t have a way to get back. they have no rights to begin since they are illegally trespassing – obviously no one responded to that one. Also, shoot some holes in their rafts, I’ll bet they’d be less likely to cross the next time.”¹⁵⁷

“Camera 6, so funny! A boat got stuck and 3 Mexicans are struggling to pull the boat out.... an hour later boat stuck again, now at least 12 of them LOL”¹⁵⁸

“It happened today and I reported each one of them.....hopefully they get arrested or sent back to where they came from”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Kirstie Ball, “Editorial: The Labours of Surveillance”, *Surveillance and Society* 1(2003): 131.

¹⁵⁵ Bigo, “Security and Immigration,” 63.

¹⁵⁶ BlueServo Facebook, posted December 10, 2010

¹⁵⁷ BlueServo Facebook, posted December 1, 2010.

¹⁵⁸ BlueServo Facebook, posted December 3, 2010.

The equation of the migrant with “the problem” precludes, as Bigo phrases it, “an urgent analysis of highly diversified processes like globalization, cities, unemployment, and birthrates... unemployment is reduced to a simple causality: a surplus of immigrants taking jobs from native population, requiring, in turn, the invention of binary categories of natives and immigrants.”¹⁶⁰ By empowering the Deputies to categorize the people they view on the cameras as threats to be acted on, use of the site flattens the human experience and the potential for education or empathy with the migrant. Migration is equated with evasion, and deterrence is equated with duty.

In this way we see use of the site as a nation at work, defending and defining itself through the labor of watching. Deputies are doing an incredible amount of work, which we can call communicative capitalism, and are motivating each other to watch longer, more often, and more efficiently. This is in part because the site encapsulates the concept of securitainment, where the need to identify and isolate risks to security is fed through a narrative of entertainment and leisure. In this way, BlueServo represents a step toward the erasure of pure leisure, but in such a benign way because it always seems to come packaged for enjoyable consumption. This labor is performed not in service of the state in the sense of the federal government, but in the service of a sense of nationalism, which in turn results actually in a rejection of the larger state apparatus in favor of smaller, citizen-powered mechanisms who are perceived to have a better sense of what is needed than the bureaucracy of Washington. What is perceived to be needed is a purification and a more

¹⁵⁹ BlueServo Facebook, posted October 19, 2010.

¹⁶⁰ Bigo, “Security and Immigration,” 79.

stringent enforcement of belonging and exclusion, which encourages social sorting based on superficial categories or justification through narrative creation by the Deputies.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

“*We need to see things not in terms of the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a disciplinary society by a society of government; in reality one has a triangle, sovereignty-discipline-government.*”¹⁶¹ –Foucault

This thesis began as an exploration of the role of neoliberalism in the use of the BlueServo site and Facebook page. While there was no doubt that there was some labor being performed by the Virtual Deputies, the question of how and why this labor related to neoliberalism drove the design of the inquiry.

What emerges is a picture of citizens galvanized by the perception of their contribution to the protection of their state, who train each other through the forum of the Facebook fan page to be more technologically adept in their work and encourage each other to watch more frequently and more efficiently, while championing each other’s sightings and reports.

The concept of the site being used for entertainment as well as duty opens another avenue of thought into the effective functioning of the neoliberal mentality in the outsourcing of labor to citizens. I argue that the notable rise in popularity, and therefore production, of reality TV at the turn of the 21st century is no accident in correspondence to the willingness and even enjoyment to engage with sites like BlueServo. James Hay and Laurie Ouellette have both written extensively on the socio-educational function of reality TV as it is cloaked appealingly in the mantel of entertainment and leisure.¹⁶² By

¹⁶¹ Andrew Barry and Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose, *Foucault and Political Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 8.

¹⁶² Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, *Better Living Through Reality TV: Television and Post-welfare Citizenship*. (Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2008). and Laurie Ouellette, “Take Responsibility for Yourself:

absorbing the characterization and the narrative formula of reality TV, the viewer internalizes a sort of ideal citizen type. The fate of characters through the lens of “reality” subtly conveys both sanctioned and unbecoming behavior for a functional family member, friend, parent, celebrity, employee, or citizen. But because the experience is veiled as leisure, the pedantic nature of the lesson doesn’t feel like work, it feels natural and enjoyable even.

BlueServo extrapolates the pedagogic function of reality TV while simultaneously placing the Virtual Deputies in a position of power greater than just the passive TV viewer’s experience—closer, but I would argue still beyond, the viewer who can text a vote from home or from the studio audience, because the stakes are so much higher than merely winning a singing competition in this case. Perhaps BlueServo occupies a new space that marries elements of video game culture with reality TV’s appeal—creating a sort of online multiplayer game where the object is to observe and report migrants. This feeling of control, of empowerment, of deciding—who is a bad guy, who is a good guy, why people immigrate and why they should be stopped—enhances the experience of using the site and drives Deputies to spend leisure time working in the service of sovereignty and working to improve each other’s individual performance.

But the empowerment to sort people based on superficial judgments or layers of self-created narrative arc must certainly have implications beyond the screen. The blending of monitoring camera feeds with other quotidian routines, the dissolution of a boundary between labor and leisure, and the frequent insinuations in the Facebook posts that citizens should use guns or violence to protect their borders, implies that there may

*Judge Judy and the Neoliberal Citizen,” in *Reality Television: Remaking Television Culture*. Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray, eds. (New York City: New York University Press, 2004).*

be a point when containing the sense of duty fostered by the use of these sites will become difficult to continually channel back into effective observation only. It is not hard to imagine that while this site is targeted at one specific marginalized group today—global immigrant labor from the south—this same concept could be turned on other marginalized groups. We also see an overt disdain for homosexuality, liberals, the government, and Barack Obama specifically, in the posts made to the site. The blending of the technological potential for observation and public distribution of images and videos, with the sense of duty and responsabilization of the neoliberal citizen subject to protect the identity of the nation opens an avenue to create more strident and public exclusions of others deemed detrimental for inclusion.

Though BlueServo was the specific example focused on in this thesis, the concept of recruiting citizens to observe and report on each other is spreading through official and corporate channels. A site in the UK, InternetEyes, allows registered users to monitor CCTV feeds for shops in order to catch shoplifters for monetary rewards. Companies are encouraged to participate in order to reduce shrinkage and increase margins!¹⁶³ Also in the EU, the chief constable of Holland has recently encouraged citizens to post photos or videos of suspects who are implicated in criminal activity, though he cautions that this should not encourage “vigilantism.”¹⁶⁴ It is this creation of the “active witness” rather than the passive observer which is cultivated by increasing digital surveillance today.

¹⁶³ Internet Eyes. “Businesses” Accessed May 21, 2012: <http://www.interneteyes.co.uk/business-crime-prevention-solution>.

¹⁶⁴ Egbert Alejandro Martina. “iSpy: The Securitization of Public Space.” Space Invaders. May 2013. Accessed May 20, 2013: <http://www.space-invaders.eu/2013/05/ispay-the-securitization-of-public-space/#more-599>.

In 2013 the United States is once again revisiting immigration as a political policy and grappling with the question of rights for homosexuals in the most public and legally binding way to date. At the same time economic stagnation has left millions of adults out of work, frustrated, and looking to place the blame somewhere or on someone, resulting in a starkly divided political polity on social and fiscal issues—not least among them at this moment the question of gun control. Add to this scene a nation that counts more often every year mass shootings and acts of suspected or declared domestic terrorism, and this site should have more relevance than ever in terms of the function of technology and surveillance in empowering citizens to pass judgment on each other, and perhaps to take action, out of fear and frustration.

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