

The Performative Dimension of Surveillance: Jacob Riis' *How the Other Half Lives*

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*In **Discipline and Punish** Michel Foucault suggests that by the end of the nineteenth century the techniques of surveillance were deployed in all facets of life in order to discipline and thereby control the body as a site of opposition. Nowhere were the operations of surveillance more acute than in American cities where diverse immigrant cultures needed to be normalized in order to promote the capitalist social order. Tenement reform literature, particularly when illustrated by documentary photographs, employed surveillance techniques that discursively produced and controlled Otherness in terms of manageable categories of race, gender, and class. A critical analysis of Jacob A. Riis' **How the Other Half Lives** reveals that the activities of observing produced a rhetoric of the image that derived its ideological power from its complex affiliations with hegemonic cultural discourses. In Riis' text, self and Other are configured as functions of discourse where the forbidden zones of the dangerous classes are made public in order to be managed by New York's bourgeoisie.*

In 1890, William Dean Howells, then editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, claimed enthusiastically that "the time is coming, I hope, when each new author, each new artist, will be considered, not in his proportion to any other author or artist, but in his relation to the human nature, known to us all, which it is his privilege, his high duty, to interpret."¹ Though ostensibly addressed to writers and artists, this statement's greatest significance lies in the way it articulates a broader social, cultural and historical transformation, one in which artistic and literary representations perform a central function. "Realism," as Howells and his contemporaries termed this new attitude toward aesthetic practice, signifies new ways of seeing not only in art and literature but in virtually every facet of late nineteenth-century social life from law enforcement to pedagogy and medicine to the emergent social sciences. From the realist perspective, the artist's or writer's relation to the world was not substantially different from that of the scientist or physician—all of whom were increasingly understood as observers whose task it was to survey and document human behavior. This flattening of received distinctions between aesthetic, scientific, and other socio-cultural practices points to the ways in which art and literature actively participate in the construction of cultural meanings and social relations.

The broader implications of the realist turn are profoundly illustrated in the growing importance Americans from the mid-nineteenth century to the present ascribe to photography. On one level, new photo-reproductive technologies seemingly democratized the production of art, since nearly anyone who could

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afford to could acquire the ability to “take” pictures.² *Taking* a picture is a distinct perceptual process from *making* one. Critical theorist Walter Benjamin notes that “for the first time in the process of pictorial reproduction, photography freed the hand of the most important artistic functions which henceforth devolved only upon the eye looking into a lens.”³ Photography, as Benjamin so acutely observes, is a process of looking, of discovering a seemingly objective reality which the photographer captures. This relation between the photographer and reality erases the degree to which photographs generate the very reality they claim to discover. Throughout much of its history the authority of photographic realism has rested precisely on the ability of the photo to present images of reality seemingly free of interpretation. Yet photographic meaning comes from the complex webs of signification in which the image is embedded. Consequently, the practice of photography is best understood as a social text—a critical site where the meaning(s) of reality are constantly challenged and destabilized.

Because of the seemingly transparent relation photography bears to reality, its evidential authority and textuality has received much recent critical attention.⁴ The ability to erase its own textuality is precisely what makes photography so relevant to performance studies. Photography is above all a signifying practice that generates, rather than transmits, meaning. Its rhetorical appeal comes from its often explicit denial that any active performance of interpretation is necessary. Photographs, nonetheless, are interpretations rhetorically and poetically charged by their ability to “write” reality in ways that *appear* politically neutral.⁵ As moments of discourse, photographic texts circulate and negotiate meanings intertextually in ways that actively engage and reconfigure their socio-historical contexts. “Intertextuality,” Beverly Long and Mary Strine observe, “fosters a way of being in the world that assumes all of us bring something complex to our experiences, that we are capable of acting, of engaging others, including texts, and not simply reacting to them.”⁶ To understand photographs intertextually excavates their operations as interpretations, including the ways in which they deny themselves as interpretations.

Post-structuralists, particularly those informed by Foucault, point out that all knowledge statements are politically charged interpretations where self and Other, knowledge and power, are functions of discourse. Discursive practices generate identity as a social text continually reshaped and reformed in the performance of discourse itself.⁷ Looking at oneself and others through the camera performs these very functions by situating the viewing subject in a relation of power with the objectified Other. Susan Sontag describes this process as voyeuristic: “While the others are passive, clearly alarmed spectators, having a camera has transformed one person into something active, a voyeur: only he has mastered the situation.”⁸ The semiotic process by which we produce and read documentary photography is a performance of self identity effectuated by the unstable and politically charged representations of Otherness.

By the late nineteenth century, documentary photography was appropriated as a means of surveying and managing groups subordinated by race, class and gender. Drawing on the realism of photography, a new social reform literature emerged to make the surveyed Other available for dominant-class inspection.

The pivotal figure in this new activity was Jacob A. Riis, whose book of collected photographs, statistics, and highly moralized rhetoric, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, provided one of the most comprehensive images of the working classes—the “Other Half”—to his middle-class audiences. Riis’ widespread appeal came, according to Maren Stange, from the effectiveness with which his text merged photographic images with other discursive techniques: “Allowing his meanings to emerge only as photographs were appreciated in a rhetorical framework created by their interaction with captions, texts, and with his authority as presenter and narrator, Riis made each image a rich carrier of specific ideological messages.”⁹ More specifically, as Abigail Solomon-Godeau put it, Riis’ use of multiple discursive forms “could be seen to converge within a dense matrix of bourgeois social anxieties and the need to assuage them,” producing a matrix that “was constituted by the threat posed by large numbers of poor, unassimilated recent immigrants, the specter of social unrest, the use of photography as a part of the larger enterprise of surveillance, containment, and social control, and the imperatives of ‘Americanization.’”¹⁰ Riis’ effectiveness came from his ability to co-articulate race, gender, and class identities—perform them—through his text, and, by doing so, to construct a narrative of “American” identity based upon the mutually-reinforcing exclusions these categories produce.

How the Other Half Lives reveals the ways in which documentary photography, read intertextually, problematizes the politically innocent relation between documentary discourses and reality posed by modernist theories of the image. By focusing on the ways in which this text articulates its historical context, we gain greater insights into the implications of seeing social texts as performative enactments of cultural values and social struggles. Moreover, *How the Other Half Lives* provides a poignant illustration of the ways in which documentary photography and other modes of “objective” discourse are thoroughly rhetorical, in fact are rhetorically powerful because they can disguise their own rhetoricity. This essay explores the implications of photography as performance on a number of levels. First, it situates and explores the implications of documentary as a form of surveillance; second, it explores how Riis’ text co-articulates and subtly interconnects race, gender, and class identity; finally, it explicates the ways in which the voyeurism of *How the Other Half Lives* simultaneously activates and contains the human body as a site of desire and opposition.

THE POETICS AND POLITICS OF SURVEILLANCE

The realist photography of Riis and his contemporaries emerged as a representational practice during the gradual but profound transformation Michel Foucault terms the “formation of a disciplinary society.”¹¹ With the birth of modern institutions of medicine, education, law enforcement, and the “social” sciences came the development of disciplinary apparatuses that, taken together, operate to constitute humans as objects of knowledge, and, in the process, discipline, punish, and ultimately control the body as a site of opposition. The techniques, tools, or methods by which academic disciplines and other institutional discourses produce knowledge—methods such as rigorous observation, normalizing judgment, and examination—are also, simultaneously, techniques

through which power is exercised.¹² Discipline enacts and produces relations of power, Foucault adds, because "discipline fixes; it arrests or regulates movements; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways; it establishes calculated distributions."¹³ By fixing and regulating movements, disciplinary techniques construct social positions into which humans, as disciplined subjects, are located and managed. In the process, these techniques draw attention away from the power relations they construct by presenting themselves as rational, objective categories of "knowledge."

Surveillance is the primary technique through which disciplinary mechanisms exercise power. The act of observing, which simultaneously performs the discursive operations of looking and classifying, constructs the observer as subject and the observed as object, the latter "incorporeally transformed," as DeLeuze and Guattari suggest, into a thing and subjected to the power implied in the observer's gaze.¹⁴ This transformation is performed at the moment of looking where the observer assumes the right to speak for and classify the observed Other. In the performative ritual of surveillance, the surveyed Other is silenced because he or she is, Foucault points out, "seen, but he [or she] does not see; he [or she] is the object of information, never a subject in communication."¹⁵ This process of surveillance, then, produces the surveyed Other as a text, and by doing so, appropriates Otherness itself as a function of signification. As an object of knowledge, the surveyed Other is a discursive construct, whose body-as-text becomes a rich carrier of meaning.¹⁶ In this way the discourse of photographic realism literally writes the human body into a manageable system of signification that flattens human experience into categories of knowledge such as race, gender, and class.

The politics of surveillance were most concretely performed in administrative practices of industry and law enforcement where discipline became necessary in the making of productive labor and consumer forces. However, immigrants from rural areas and other countries did not assimilate quickly enough to maximize the profits of industrial corporations. Unassimilated, they could not function properly as good consumers or laborers and consequently threatened the social order of American capitalism. It was here that information-gathering techniques of the knowledge disciplines had a significant influence; for the techniques of surveillance such as the gathering of statistics, monitoring living conditions, collecting census data—in short, making immigrant and working classes visible—could transform "alien" populations into an exploitable labor and consumer force. At the same time, the accumulation of capital created a greater urgency for effective law enforcement, since private property had become essential as the basis of social order. Because the accumulation of capital depends upon exploitative class inequalities—the low pay, long hours, and horrific working conditions of the factories—the threat of labor unrest was constantly present. The Haymarket incident of 1886 and the Pullman Strike in 1894 serve as important reminders. Just as the techniques of surveillance operated to produce a docile labor force, they could provide ways of managing and controlling potential political opposition to the dominant order by observing, scrutinizing, and monitoring the working classes. The close interworkings

of surveillance thus produced an order in which "discipline is the unitary technique by which the body is reduced as a 'political' force at least cost and maximized as a useful force."¹⁷

Seen in this context, documentary photography functioned as a powerful realist rhetoric and became, Benjamin claims, "standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire[d] a hidden political significance."¹⁸ Ironically, the source of documentary photography's political power as a "realist" representational genre was its poetic force. Photographs need explanations that provide directions for reading them: they could neither speak for themselves nor refer directly to any specific context. Captions and other literary devices generated contexts from which photos derived their meanings, embedding them in complex matrices of other texts and discourses.¹⁹ In this regard, photographs are metonyms, signs whose meanings are produced only by associations with other signs. Figure 3, for example, would shock audiences only to the degree that they would fear miscegenation; for the black hand on the white woman's shoulder poses substantial problems for a culture committed, as Victorians were, to categorical and racial "purity." Hence the photograph's relation to the world it represents is by the conventions of reading only; its metonymy is based on arbitrarily derived, yet thoroughly ideological associations.

The "documentary realism"²⁰ of *How the Other Half Lives* was an attempt to provide stable, monologic images of reality through photographic and narrative portraits of urban slum life. In subtle, yet ideologically powerful ways, documentary realism poetically transformed the surveyed Other into a manageable, containable, and usable fiction who, in the process, was politically marginalized. Contained in this fiction, however, were points of instability and social anxiety, which ascribed to realism the purpose of providing, in Amy Kaplan's words, "fiction to combat the fictionality of everyday life."²¹ In its surveillance of the Other through texts like *How the Other Half Lives*, the bourgeoisie at the turn of the century performed their own identities by the strategic appropriation of Otherness—a fiction produced as an imaginary anchor for bourgeois identity.

RIIS' PERFORMANCE OF RACE/GENDER/CLASS IDENTITY

Jacob A. Riis, a Danish immigrant, first studied the tenements of New York as a police reporter for the *New York Tribune* in 1877.²² It was not until 1887 that he began to make his journeys into the tenements with a camera. From that time through the first decade of the twentieth century, Riis shot or collected hundreds of photos of tenement life in New York. In 1890, he published *How the Other Half Lives*, a compilation of photographs, statistics, demographic charts, narratives of his "adventures" in the "ghettos," and highly moralized rhetoric designed to draw attention to New York's tenements and their inhabitants. Riis also gave a series of slide lectures, often with musical accompaniment, in which he combined the book's ideological treatment with humor and melodrama to produce highly moralized entertainment for his middle-class audiences. In both of its manifestations, Riis' text provided a tour of New York's "dark continent," its "Other Half," knowledge of whom had seemed unnecessary until the time they posed a threat to social order: "Long ago it was said that 'one half of the world does not know how the other half lives.' That was true then. It did not

know because it did not care."²³ The language of this passage, as well as that of the book's title, reflects, on one level, a fear of the "Other Half" since, as Stange observes, "he recoiled from workers and working-class culture, especially when he saw that culture's potential for solidarity in opposition to the individualist and entrepreneurial values of the middle class."²⁴

On another level, however, that fear cannot be separated from the self-confirmatory function the "Other Half" performed for the middle classes. In many ways, Riis' textual construction of the Other was a subtle performance of bourgeois self identity that served to stabilize race, gender, and class sensibilities in an age when cultural diversity deeply problematized homogeneous conceptions of "American" identity. These categories of identity are simultaneously encoded in the very operations of his surveillance, a gaze whose configurations of power produce the "Other Half" in tenement inhabitants' bodies. In this way, Riis generated a narrative of "national" identity whose central features universalize middle-class values that, Anita Levy observes, "offered a model of the individual detached from social and economic circumstances, anchored instead to internal features of the self or of the body that were more amenable to educational, normalizing, or therapeutic interventions that involved little, if any, significant political or economic change."²⁵

The Disciplinary Gaze: Naturalizing Social Stratification

Much of the rhetoric of *How the Other Half Lives* expresses middle-class anxiety about the political threat of the "Other Half" but frames that anxiety in a managerial discourse that renders the Other visible for public inspection and regulation. In the conclusion of the book, for example, Riis warns his audiences that "as the crowds increase, the need of *guiding this drift into safe channels* becomes more urgent."²⁶ The highlighted language here expresses the class interests of channeling the Other into living patterns that are "safe," that is, "useful" to the middle classes. Fear punctuated the concern that New York's "Other Half" comprised the greater proportion of its population: "To-day three-fourths of its people live in the tenements. . . . We know that there is no way out; that the 'system' that was the evil offspring of public neglect and private greed has come to stay, a storm-centre forever of our civilization. Nothing is left but to make the best of a bad bargain."²⁷ While this introductory passage draws attention to the fact that the "urgency" of the "tenement problem" results from public neglect, Riis carefully channels the subsequent anxiety into a terministic frame where important political questions about the justice or morality of social inequality are deflected. The assumed permanence of the tenement naturalizes the ghetto as a transhistorical fact, hence erasing it as a political consequence of the entrepreneurial and individualist values he shares with his audience.

Making the "best of a bad bargain," as the rest of the book suggests, involved reforms based upon the middle-class conceptions of social justice that do not eliminate ghettos, but rather shape them into more useful components of the economic system. The final words of the book provide a clear sense of the urgency of treating this issue, while containing the audience's anxiety within a framework of dominant cultural values:

The sea of a mighty population, held in galling fetters, heaves uneasily in the tenements. . . . If it rise once more, no human power may avail to check it. The gap

between the classes in which it surges, unseen, unsuspected by the thoughtless, is widening day by day. . . . I know of but one bridge that will carry us over safe, a bridge founded upon justice and built of human hearts. I believe that the danger of such conditions as are fast growing up around us is greater for the very freedom which they mock.²⁸

In these lines Riis deploys the hierarchical social relations between the surveyor and the surveyed Other in ways that subtly configure the Other as an inhuman force that “heaves uneasily in the tenements” while the dominant class acts through its “human power,” a relation he punctuates in the final sentence as the danger encircling “us,” his audiences, as “they” mock the “freedom” of his own class. This passage is a clear example of what the rest of *How the Other Half Lives* rhetorically performs: the naturalization of social stratification as a hierarchal relation between human and inhuman social conditions, one between the seeing subject and the seen object. More subtly, Riis’ gaze produced a distinction between the public and private domains whereby the making of the “Other Half” publicly visible helps to protect the private interests of his audiences. Indeed, so long as the “Other Half” can be made visible, yet unable to return the gaze, their political power can be checked.

While this initial explication shows that Riis appropriated Otherness in a dialectic that defined middle-class cultural identity, closer scrutiny can explain how the textual construction of Otherness articulates that identity in multiple, yet interconnected layers of race, gender, and class. On one level, surveillance genders its relations between observer and observed. In his critical history of documentary photography, John Tagg explains that “in the terms of such discourses, the working classes, colonized peoples, the criminal, poor, ill-housed, sick or insane were constituted as passive—or, in this structure, ‘feminised’—objects of knowledge.” In this process, he suggests, when others are “subjected to a scrutinizing gaze, forced to emit signs, yet cut off from command of meaning, such groups were represented as, and wishfully rendered, incapable of speaking, acting or organising for themselves.”²⁹ By penetrating the depths of tenement experience and making it visible to the viewing public, Riis’ text ascribed a passive, “feminine” role to the “Other Half,” a role he reinforced with the attitude that “guidance into safe channels” is a benevolent paternalistic act. In this way, surveillance constructs gender roles as subject positions one occupies in the act of looking.³⁰ The objectified position women often occupy in patriarchal culture is directly analogous to the position of the colonized Other in disciplinary culture; for patriarchy and colonialism are both concrete practices of surveillance that produce the surveyed Other as a gendered, that is, passive, “feminine” object observed by an active, “masculine” subject.³¹

Surveillance simultaneously “racializes” its relations between observer and observed. Riis most clearly invoked “race” in his concern over what he characterized as the tenement inhabitants’ steady erosion of “American” identity. At one point, for example, he directly stated his concern thus: “The one thing you vainly ask for in the chief city of America is a distinctively American community. There is none; certainly not among the tenements.”³² In these moments Riis simultaneously raised a fear of cultural diversity and offered a textual strategy

for its containment. Interestingly enough, cultural diversity becomes a danger when Riis coded it as degeneration: “[Americans] are not here. In their place has come this queer conglomerate mass of heterogeneous elements, ever striving and working like whiskey and water in one glass, and with the like result: final union and a prevailing taint of whiskey.”³³ Unless clear physical and conceptual boundaries are maintained, Riis suggested here, the “purity” of what he saw as the most superior of races—“Americans”—will be destroyed, with the effect of “tainting” all of humanity. What is really at stake here is the authority upon which social inequalities are naturalized and maintained. This authority is evidenced by his scientific language, a discourse that maintains a strict social separation between the viewer (Riis and his audiences) and the objectified Other. As long as the Other remains objectified (here expressed as “elements” of water and whiskey), s/he poses little threat to the authority of Riis’ discourse and the exclusions it maintains. Seen in the context of the other passages cited in this study, the distinctive “American community” Riis envisioned was founded on a particular and inflexible set of traditions and values that worked to the advantage of particular class interests.

Thus, the disciplinary gaze with which Riis “feminized” the people of the tenements also saw the cultural differences of the tenement districts as differences in “race.” And, at the same time, differences in race provided naturalized explanations for class differences, especially when grounded in the emerging idioms of biology and heredity. Riis’ explanation for why the Chinese and laundry—a paradigm of working-class service labor—go so well together should suffice as an illustration: “[Neatness] is the distinguishing mark of Chinatown, outwardly and physically. It is not altogether by chance the Chinaman has chosen the laundry as his distinctive field. He is by nature as clean as the cat, which he resembles in his traits of cruel cunning and savage fury when aroused.”³⁴ Notice that Riis sees the connection between a person and a type of labor as a physical one, and, by implication, resemblances between the Chinese and cats is subtly reduced to a physical one. Needless to say, seeing social inequalities in this light draws attention away from their political nature: if one’s social position is biologically, not culturally determined, it does not appear to be political. In this way, Riis’ coding of working class bodies produced class distinctions as a function of biology whereby their subordinated position was doubly naturalized as they became feminized objects of a gaze that classified differences as products of “race.”

Riis’ invocation of aesthetic sensibility also converged relations of race, gender, and class, but in ways that extended and supported the evolutionary arguments his text assumes. For evolutionist discourses, aesthetic sensibility is evidence of the highest stage of social evolution, a stage that posited art and beauty as transcendence and mastery over the body.³⁵ His discussion of the superiority of Germans to the Irish provides a clear illustration and is worth quoting at length:

His garden goes with him wherever [the German] goes. Not that it represents any high moral principle in the man; rather perhaps the capacity for it. He turns his saloon into a shrubbery as soon as his back-yard. But wherever he puts it in a tenement block it does the work of a dozen police clubs. In proportion as it spreads the neighborhood takes on a more orderly character. As the green dies out of the landscape and increases

in political importance, the police find more to do. Where it disappears altogether from sight, lapsing into a mere sentiment, police-beats are shortened and the force patrols double at night.³⁶

On one level, this use of the aesthetic is disciplinary: it maintains social order without the use of force. Also, as the passage points out, aesthetic sensibility disciplines because it draws attention away from politics, thereby making the *individual* responsible for his or her own social position. On another level, it justifies the use of force on the body. Its logic is thus: police force is necessary to discipline those “races” who cannot discipline themselves.

On yet another level, this disciplinary structure depends centrally on the objectification of the body by the transcendent paternalistic gaze of the middle classes. Morality, Riis contended, transcends the body in ways that justify rigid, even violent discipline as in the best interest of the Other. Consequently, as “every blade of grass, every stray weed, every speck of green, has been trodded out, as must inevitably be every gentle thought and aspiration *above* the *mere* wants of the *body* in those whose moral natures such home surroundings are to nourish.”³⁷ People marginalized by race, gender, and class, by this logic, have not “evolved” beyond their own bodies. As Riis concludes, “tenement-houses have no aesthetic resources. If any are to be brought to bear on them, they must come from the outside.”³⁸ By implication, those subordinated by the subtle interworkings of race, gender, and class are reduced to mere bodies “naturally inferior” to white middle-class men whose duty it is to *look over* them.

Domesticating the “American” Family

Many of the images Riis associated with the tenements, both in his photos and his anecdotes, presented the working classes as subversive of what increasingly came to define dominant cultural values. These images invoked gender roles as pivotal in the maintenance of the middle-class ideal of the “American” family. In one of his photos (see Figure 1) Riis presented a portrait of what he termed “Bohemian cigarmakers at work in their tenement.”³⁹ While on the surface this image looks benign—merely a hard-working family earning its living—its metonymy contains many elements subversive of middle-class ideals.

Initially, Riis’ caption directs a reading which emphasizes the domestic sphere’s function as a comfortable environment separate from the factory: here the home is a place of labor, a rather direct extension of the factory. Such an image rubs against the grain of a culture in which the perceptual boundaries between the domestic and labor spheres were becoming rigidly guarded. For many Victorians, the home was increasingly seen as a safe environment, one that provided refuge from the toils of the workplace. This boundary is violated by the image of each member of the family involved in the production of cigars. The children, presumably, must surrender play or school time in order to help the family earn a living. Each family member participates in the same economic activity, suggesting in its subtlety that the “domestic” activities of the family are dysfunctional: the gendered roles between mother, father and children become indistinguishable from each other. In such a setting, the clearly-demarcated boundaries around gender and age roles are subverted. At a deeper level, this

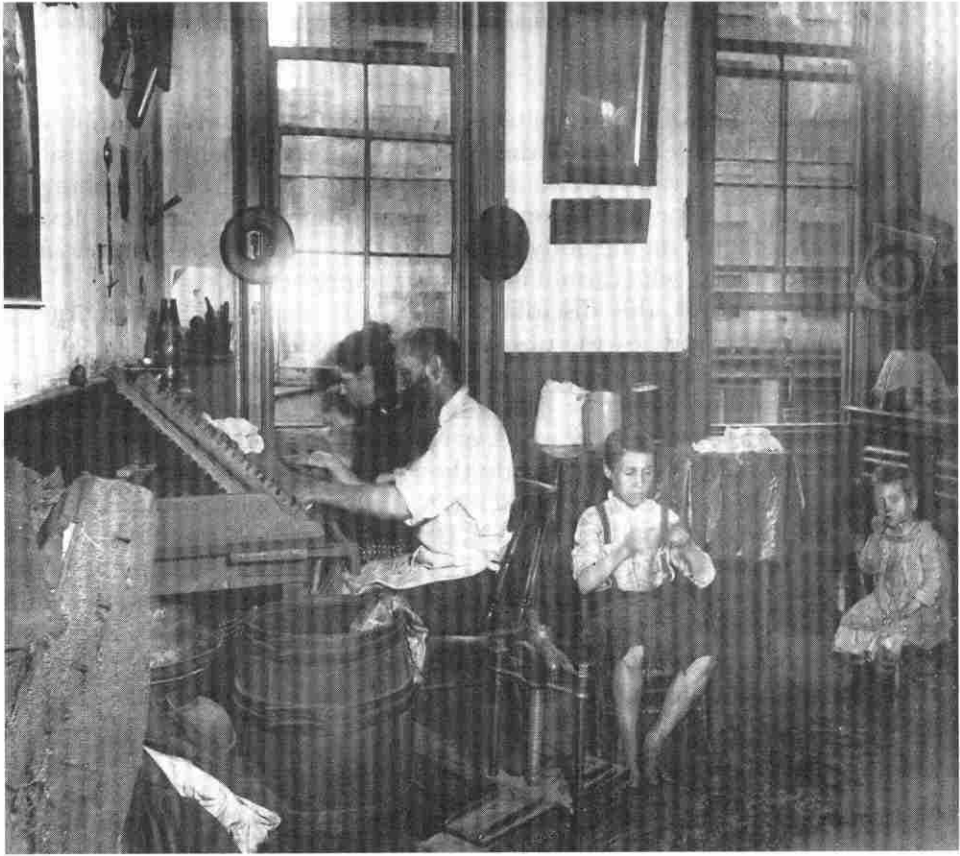


FIGURE 1

Bohemian Cigarmakers at Work in a Tenement. The Jacob A. Riis Collection, #147 Museum of the City of New York

subversion has serious consequences, primarily the subversion of "family." If the woman spends nearly every waking hour at work for money, this is done directly at the expense of the "proper" supervision of the family. In other words, this image affiliated itself to an ideology in which women's labor should remain in domestic operations, hence hidden, while men's labor provides the support of the family. Such a subversion, Riis suggested in many places, is destructive of "the family," meaning the traditionally-defined nuclear family, and is a central contributory factor to juvenile delinquency and other crimes. In this way, his "Bohemian" subjects were appropriated to naturalize the middle-class family and its attendant gender, generational, and age relations by "illustrating" the "dangers" of any subversion of it.

The rhetorical power of this image was intensified when coupled with Riis' articulation of the domestic ideology of his time. This ideology not only feared working women, but did so because it saw domesticated women as pivotal in the maintenance of social order. For middle-class audiences, Levy observes, the

ideal home of the nineteenth century revolved “around the figure of the domestic female, who becomes dependent upon the male for economic sustenance.”⁴⁰ Not only does this ideal envision women as politically and economically powerless; it posits the properly domesticated wife as the agent through which the working and living activities of working-class men could be regulated and rendered useful. For this reason, Riis claimed the Chinese could become “useful” only by domestication: “Rather than banish the Chinaman, I would have the door opened wider—for his wife; make it a condition of his coming or staying that he bring his wife with him.”⁴¹ By servicing the health and personal needs of the working man, the domestic wife makes him more productive. Hence, as Levy succinctly explains, “since bad habits and not the extremities of economic exploitation ‘curse’ the working-class population, what better place to control those habits than in the home?”⁴² In this context, the “Bohemian” wife Riis presents us is multiply subversive. She is working side by side with her husband, violating the expectation that women’s labor must remain spatially and physically separate from men’s, as well as the expectation that her labor supports, not duplicates, his. Neglecting her “wifely” duties, she was held responsible for the destruction of her family’s moral, physical, and spiritual “health.”

Even more powerful was the way in which Riis deployed the image of the “working girl.” Quoting the report of the Working Women’s Society, Riis framed his audiences’ fear of working women: “It is simply impossible for any woman to live without assistance on the low salary a saleswoman earns, without depriving herself of real necessities. . . . It is inevitable that they must in many instances resort to evil.”⁴³ While the report did provide economic explanations for prostitution, its discourse framed and located these conditions in the physiognomy of deviant female sexuality, thereby naturalizing women’s class subordination as the result of their “degenerate nature.” One explanation Riis advanced for women’s wages provides a good illustration: “The pay they are willing to accept all have to take.”⁴⁴ Since working women were seen as willing to accept low wages, they, as individuals, were responsible for their conditions. In another passage Riis pointed out that “girls with the love of youth for beautiful things, with this hard life before them—who will save them from the tempter?”⁴⁵ Taken together these statements suggest that working women’s fate was attributable to their weak natures, since, as the quote makes clear, they need external guidance in order to stay on the right path.

Here economic explanations were not as important to Riis’ text as the discourses they cued. His paternalism was grounded in the nineteenth-century assumption that women had a “natural” proclivity for prostitution because, as the “weaker sex,” women were coded closely with blacks. In this way, as Sander Gilman succinctly explains, images of prostitutes derived their ethos from subtle alignments with images of black women: “It is thus the inherent fear of the difference in the anatomy of the Other which lies behind the synthesis of images. The Other’s pathology is revealed in anatomy. It is the similarity between the black and the prostitute—as bearers of the stigmata of sexual difference and, thus, pathology—which captured the late nineteenth century.”⁴⁶ Put simply, Riis’ fear of working women naturalized their social subordination by invoking a

discourse in which women were “racialized”—“naturally” subordinated by biological traits directly connected to those of blacks. Hence the paternalism of Riis’ rhetoric drew its authority from its ability to engage a discourse in which women’s subordination is imagined as a result of their racial—that is, biological, physiognomic—“degeneracy.” Seen in this light the image of the Bohemian family in Figure 1 was dangerous to Riis’ audiences because of its textual and ideological connections with the image of womanhood presented in Figure 3. These images, when combined with the domestic ideology of middle-class Victorians, naturalized race, gender, and class subordination as an effect of individual anatomical nature. Needless to say, women with any more power than that accorded to proper domesticity could easily be seen as destructive to the “American family,” indeed of the entire race of “Americans” that middle-class audiences so vigorously guarded.

Constructing an “American” Identity

At the same time, *How the Other Half Lives* relied heavily upon classification schemes to categorize individuals into easily manageable units that, interestingly, reduce all cultural differences into racial distinctions clearly discernable by color. For example, early in the book, Riis sketches a graph of ethnicity, assigning colors to different cultures, while simultaneously commenting on the moral problem such “races” present:

A map of the city, colored to designate nationalities, would show more stripes than on the skin of a zebra, and more colors than any rainbow. The city on such a map would fall into two great halves, green for the Irish prevailing in the West Side tenement districts, and blue for the Germans on the East Side. But intermingled with these ground colors would be an odd variety of tints that would give the whole the appearance of an extraordinary crazy-quilt.⁴⁷

This assignation of colors strategically contained Otherness in two ways. First, color metaphors clarify because they arrange all differences visually on a spectral continuum. Yet, as metaphors, colors also abstract the meanings of difference by moving them to a different conceptual level and again making them “concrete” by the visual images attached to them. These metaphors become rhetorically powerful because “they do not draw attention to themselves as metaphors, and thus do not invite us to decode them consciously.”⁴⁸ This power is intensified when such meanings become commonsensical—that level of understanding we take to be natural, unquestionable, upon which we do not reflect. In this way, constructed race differences become naturalized within the conceptual framework of the dominant culture as empirically verifiable categories, in the process erasing themselves as metaphors.

Second, coloring ethnic groups produces a manageable system through which Otherness could be contained. It enables Riis’ text to put clear boundaries around the various groups that compose the “Other Half” and arrange them, first in theory, then in practice, in a social hierarchy devised by the observing class. In this way his text can easily define cultural, now racial, differences as “impurities” that “stain” the urban landscape: “. . . the black mark will be found overshadowing to-day many blocks on the East Side, with One Hundredth

Street as the centre, where colonies of them have settled recently."⁴⁹ The very language of the description constructs African-Americans as evil or degenerate, especially when the dialectical black-white metaphor is invoked. Such linguistic dehumanization further vilified African-Americans because they were reduced to a "black mark" whose "colonies" bear a closer relation to those of insects than people. By writing Otherness into this system of signification Riis' text could demonstrate his own moral, intellectual, and cultural superiority over the Other. Negation, which so clearly attends this system, was the means through which Riis and his audiences performed their individual and "American" identities. The *act* of negation simultaneously performs self affirmation, making identity a function of what it denies.

By positioning the bourgeois subject as one who "transcended" the contingencies of the body, Riis' text provided a particular lens through which his audiences could view the "Other Half." One photograph in particular illustrates the process by which Riis' text generated an "American" identity. In a picture of an Iroquois family, the truly "native" inhabitants of New York (see Figure 2), Riis somewhat ironically provided evidence for his claim that there is no "distinctively American community." In this picture is a poignant reminder of the consequences of American colonial expansion: the taking over of Iroquois land and the absorption or nullification of their own culture into that which now inhabits that land. For example, the Iroquois family performed the same laborious tasks many of Riis' pictures portray; whatever skills they had in their native culture were quickly transformed into exploitable labor while other less useful traditions and customs were nullified or marginalized. Here the Iroquois are presented for the judgment of the scrutinizing gaze, one that invades the privacy of their home without apology or explanation. They are made to appear as a "sight"—an image of the "Other Half"—posing for the camera's gaze while denied the ability to return it. While they may look back at the camera, our consumption of the image, the photograph, takes control of its meaning out of their hands. By moving all of these images freely from one context to another, Riis' text makes images exchangeable commodities whose meanings are purchased for the price of the book or the lecture. Silenced except for their status as objects, this family is appropriated as evidence for the categorical distinctions and the meanings the viewing audience ascribes to them.

But while most of Riis' subjects never looked at the camera, Mountain Eagle's daughter does—even smiles at it. If possession of the image entails looking without apology at people who, by virtue of their subordinated social position, cannot look back, how can we explain this image? For Riis' audiences, this image could be seen as both subversive and affirming of middle-class ideals: her look activates fears of women—especially women of Other "races"—with sexual and labor power, and then calls for its containment within domestic ideology. Seen next to her brother, who is reclining and playing a violin, her image would be coded as "evidence" of the laziness and lack of scruples with which Riis' audiences characterized socially-subordinated groups at the turn of the century. In this process, the power of her look is channeled into a justification for paternalistic guidance of the tenements. If this image of her sexuality was subversive, its subversion must be managed by the discourse in which it was



FIGURE 2

Mountain Eagle, and his family of Iroquois Indians. The Jacob A. Riis Collection, #281 Museum of the City of New York

framed. Powerfully coded by her race, gender, and class, her negation or control becomes an enactment of bourgeois identity.⁵⁰

Once again, the discursive formations in which the *viewer* positions this image produces its meanings. The discourse of surveillance, in which this image became embedded, appropriates it as “objective” evidence of the degeneracy of the Other, in need of paternalistic control. What is clearly denied in this discourse is the way in which her Otherness is politically constructed; and an awareness of the material circumstances of her marginality is deflected. What is affirmed is the superiority of the observer (both Riis and his audiences) who carries, among other things, the presumed right to look.

In another instance Riis offers a peek into a “black-and-tan dive in ‘Africa.’”⁵¹ The history of popular images of black men needs little elaboration. What made this image so rhetorically powerful, however, was the appearance of a white woman with a black hand on her shoulder (see Figure 3). This image is accompanied in the text by a curious passage in which Riis claimed “the [color] line may not be wholly effaced while the name of the negro, alone among the



FIGURE 3

Black and Tan Dive on Broome Street, circa 1889 The Jacob A. Riis Collection, #163 Museum of the City of New York

world's races, is spelled with a small *n*."⁵² This characterization reduces African-Americans to the lowest of all humans, a characterization common to nineteenth-century anthropological and other scientific discourses, discourses that similarly demonized Hottentots as the lowest of all human "races."⁵³ Moreover, these discourses naturalized social inequalities between self and Other in the same terms as Riis uses here: "Natural selection will have more or less to do beyond a doubt in every age with dividing the races; only so, it may be, can they work out together their highest destiny."⁵⁴ By locating African-Americans at the bottom of the "race" hierarchy and attributing this position to "natural selection," Riis' text set a critical standard for race hierarchy and simultaneously erased its own politics. The audience is shown the "bottom" of the human condition as a product of primitive or degenerate nature. More importantly, the presence of a white woman made this image frightening for its viewers because it activated deeply-ingrained fears of miscegenation. She was thus positioned as the "weak link" between the races, and her looking down indicates both shame and the turn-of-the-century belief that mixing the "races" somehow "lowers" the quality of "mankind."⁵⁵

At another level, the image's ideological power came from its ability to activate cultural stereotypes of women as overly promiscuous and dangerous in any realm other than the domestic sphere. Possessed by virtue of the black hand on her shoulder, her position as an object of male sexual power is not open for question; her ability to be possessed is what makes her dangerous to the dominant culture. Her dirty face, raggy clothes and dishevelled hair mark her class affiliations with the black man as well: given the marginal status blacks have in contemporary culture, not to mention at the turn of the century, it was nearly impossible ever to escape poverty. In this image *How the Other Half Lives* brings together all of the fears of the dominant culture into the operations of surveillance; for the "bottom" of human existence, the completely Other, so to speak, fuses all categories of marginalization. To the degree that the poor white woman is brought into the possession of the obviously poor black man, this image argues that a flattening of distinctions of race, gender, and class is the worst of all possible conditions. She becomes the bearer of her race, and in doing so, becomes dangerous when anywhere but the privatized sphere of the "proper" home.

This point of convergence is pivotal to the ideological power of Riis' text. In its complex operations, the disciplinary gaze genders, racializes, and class(ifies) the Other at the moment of its performance; for race, gender, and class are socially constructed, not natural, categories politically deployed in the performative rituals of surveillance. The conceptual distance between the observer and the observed Other makes these operations possible because its attendant hierarchy confers on the observer the seemingly natural right to name, categorize, and ultimately control the Other. Differences of race, gender, and class are objectified in analogous ways, equally marginalized under the gaze. As depositories of Otherness, these categories perform identity in multiple layers of negation when brought together. Profoundly intertextual, the metonymy of Riis' text produced compelling images of Otherness through its complex affiliations with many interconnected hegemonic discourses. At the same time, it channeled these images into the production of bourgeois identity that functioned through the negation of all that was inscribed in the textually generated Other. By providing a *form* for middle-class anxieties, Riis' textualization of the "Other Half" *performed* his audiences' individual and cultural identity, an identity bound inextricably to the performance of the gaze.

CLASS VOYEURISM AND THE PERFORMANCE OF DESIRE

The conceptual distance necessary for the operation of surveillance inevitably produces a feeling of alienation and weightlessness in the observer, primarily because the fiction of a transcendent gaze is accomplished only by the rigorous denial of the body. With the body no longer serving as a referent for experience or as an anchor to the material world, life loses its center of gravity. One consequence is that gender, race, and class identity are unstable, constantly revised in the ongoing processes through which we continually engage texts. A second consequence is that texts become vitally important as anchors of experience and identity. Often acting as substitutes for physical experiences, texts are critical sites in modern culture where identity is performed. Finally, documen-

tary texts like *How the Other Half Lives* can provide a deferred sense of unity between body and seeing subject by allowing their audiences to look upon Other bodies. While the spectacle of the Other in *How the Other Half Lives* constructs the Other as an object of fear and contempt, it also produces the body of the Other as an object of desire. In this sense, Riis' text is a "keyhole vocabulary," a discourse of voyeurism.⁵⁶ Through this voyeurism Riis attempts to negotiate the complex interworkings of class boundaries and transgressions that animate cultural performances and social rituals.

In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue that the construction of social distinctions carries with it the desire to transgress them. Various social and textual practices implicitly sexualized the exotic Other, whose bodily images imbue surveillance with the pleasures of peeping through the keyhole.⁵⁷ Sexual relations between master and servant, for example, produce an illusory transgression of social and economic distinctions because the sexual act occurs between two bodies. However, this transgression is an illusion precisely because sexuality is infused with power relations; the sexual act still, perhaps even more profoundly, objectifies the subaltern.⁵⁸ In quite similar fashion, surveillance imbues the act of looking at Others with sexual power. Objectification is simultaneously a sexual and political act whereby the Other is rendered naked and vulnerable in the performance of the gaze. As passive objects offered up to the transcendent gaze, a gaze that invades the most private and vulnerable moments, Others are put on display and visually consumed.

John Berger explains that "to be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude. (The sight of it as an object stimulates the use of it as an object.) Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display."⁵⁹ A body does not have to be physically naked to be a nude, since, as Berger notes, "nudity is a form of dress."⁶⁰ Rather, the Other is sexualized as a nude by the way in which the viewer composes and consumes the image. For example, compare the young woman in Figure 2 with nudes of the nineteenth century or even images of women in present-day advertising. Her pose is very similar to the sexualized female in the iconography of the past two centuries. Her sexuality is put on display just as easily as her impoverished condition. But the discourse in which her image is embedded encodes her poverty as the result of her sexuality. Berger continues: "But it would seem that nakedness has a positive visual value in its own right: we want to *see* the other naked: the other delivers to us the sight of themselves and we seize upon it—sometimes quite regardless of whether it is for the first time or the hundredth."⁶¹ Surveillance, then, imagines Otherness in the nude, offering it up for political, social, and sexual consumption. In this way sexual pleasure is derived from the control of the Other's image, while, simultaneously, images of the body out of control become sites where the destabilizing tendencies of desire threaten social order. This tension, according to Stallybrass and White, animates the boundaries between self and Other.

Riis' documentary served similar ends; for bourgeois audiences sought to anchor their own sexuality in images of the Other, into whom the instabilities of sexual desire could be projected and managed. In fact, Riis' obsession with the

"Other Half" in the tenements could be explained as a metonymic projection of bourgeois anxiety/desire. Stallybrass and White explain that "whilst the 'low' of the bourgeois body becomes unmentionable, we hear an ever increasing garrulity about the *city's* 'low'—the slum, the rag-picker, the prostitute, the sewer—the 'dirt' which is 'down there.' In other words," they continue, "the axis of the body is transcoded through the axis of the city, and whilst the bodily low is 'forgotten,' the city's low becomes a site of obsessive preoccupation, a preoccupation which is itself intimately conceptualized in terms of discourses of the body."⁶² In the metonymy of Riis' images of the slums is a dialectics of bourgeois disgust and desire, where the erotics of forbidden zones and dangerous classes subtly permeates the rhetoric of disgust. Disgust is a way of channeling desire, just as the slum is a way of channeling anxiety about one's own body. Riis' text provides a plethora of examples of this activity, especially in his numerous pictures and descriptions of people caught in their sleep or in the act of bathing. The brutality of its representation is central to its appeal because the sense of "realism" it generated could maintain the objectifying distance necessary to channel desire into disgust. Ironically, the distancing of self and Other performed in the gaze produces both disgust and desire: each is an effect of alienating subjectivity from the body.

The performance of the gaze is eroticized further in its rigid enforcement of the boundaries between private and public activities and spaces. Like race, gender, and class categories, the public-private dichotomy so prevalent in nineteenth- and twentieth-century discourse is a construction that serves particular political interests. In the previous section I suggested that much of Riis' rhetoric serves to naturalize woman's "place" as in the home, by implication producing an idealized public sphere in which male interests are universalized as "the public interest." This subjection of women and other marginalized groups is critically dependent upon the enforcement of rigid boundaries between public and private spaces. Privatized, women remain objects of discourse, rarely able to speak: we talk *about* the private; the private does not speak.⁶³ The gaze thus complicates the boundaries between the public and private spheres—making the private publicly visible to a "public" abstracted and interiorized in the private interests/anxieties/desires of the transcendental subject. The erasure of the private from many forms of discourse makes it a source of mystery, access to which is an exclusive privilege. In its treatment of the tenements as a hidden mystery to be explored by the camera, *How the Other Half Lives* is a thoroughly voyeuristic text. So much of it is devoted to the penetration of the most intimate moments of human existence. As Riis readily admits, many of his photos were taken by breaking into tenements after midnight in order to "catch" people in their beds.

A particularly stunning example of Riis' prying into the private activities of his subjects can be seen in his photo of newsboys washing up for dinner (see Figure 4). Here Riis' camera invades one of the most "private" moments in American bourgeois culture, bathing. Prominently displayed in the center of this shot is a faceless half-dressed boy removing his shirt, an image which exposes the body to audiences who, ironically, increasingly covered up their own bodies. This invasion constitutes a momentary transgression of public-private boundaries yet

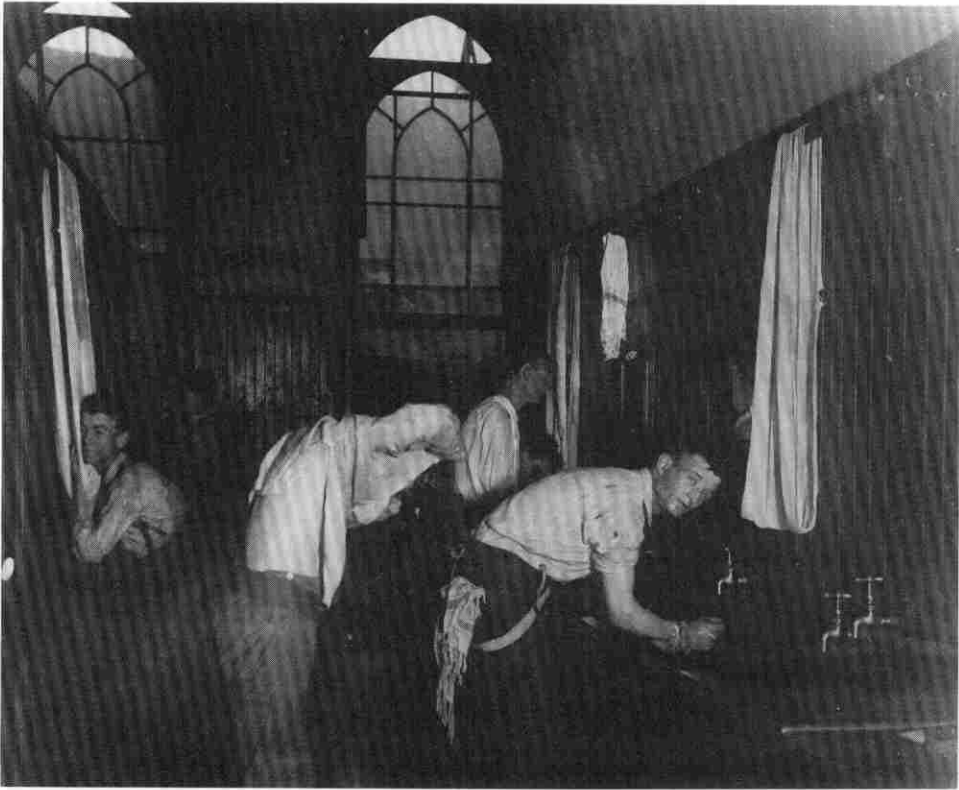


FIGURE 4

"Washing Up" in the Newsboys' Lodging House The Jacob A. Riis Collection, #164 Museum of the City of New York

contains this transgression within a moralized rhetoric suggesting that the activities in lodging-houses, like the one pictured here, help these young people "to grow up self-supporting men and women safe from the temptations and the vice of the city."⁶⁴ In the interplay of these two messages the stern and repressive morality of Victorian audiences could be validated and "safely" transgressed through a gaze that is both controlling and voyeuristic.

This voyeurism serves two distinct but interrelated purposes. First, the viewer's penetration into the bathroom was justified by the disciplinary motives driving Riis' rhetoric. Having access to the most private moments of people's lives is one of the most effective disciplinary practices precisely because it opens *every* human action up for surveillance. Thus, as Riis points out, "it is the settled belief of the men who conduct [newsboy lodging houses] that soap and water are as powerful moral agents in their particular field as preaching, and they have experience to back them."⁶⁵ Soap and water, from this perspective, is the disciplinary agent of the middle class, one that disciplines through denial and repression: the clean body is less "visible" than the dirty one because it does not activate the senses. Cleaning disciplines the body by hiding it, denying its

presence. "The police and soap," write Stallybrass and White, "were the antithesis of the crime and disease which supposedly lurked in the slums, prowling out at night to the suburbs; they were the agents of discipline, surveillance, purity."⁶⁶

Second, soap and water are combined with the gaze because we are looking across class boundaries: in this discourse it is the poor who are watched. At this moment, the objects of our gaze become eroticized. Because these boys are of the "underclass," their image is made available to the viewers. Bathing transgresses class boundaries temporarily in that it is a "universally" desirable ritual for the bourgeoisie. A positive image to its middle-class viewers, this photo collapses class boundaries temporarily with the effect of providing bourgeois audiences a chance to watch themselves in this most private moment. With soap and water washing away the "disgusting" barrier of dirt, we are left with an image of clean, hence "desirable," bodies. Interestingly, the auspices of the disciplinary gaze do not control this desire completely. The moment of transgression is subversive. Foucault makes the point clear: "But sexuality, through thus becoming an object of analysis and concern, surveillance and control, engenders at the same time an intensification of each individual's desire for, in and over his body."⁶⁷ Hence, while this image performs the disciplinary function of making the poor visible, the activity and space presented are destabilizing because they make the audience's own private activities erotically available to them. Needless to say, the "desirability" of what is presented here has multiple, interconnected meanings, not the least of which is the production of a desirable body.

The value of Riis' documentary realism for bourgeois audiences was tied to its ability to provide the illusion of an intense experience without any of its attendant risks. While erotic desires could be raised by these images, more often than not these desires were contained by the distancing gaze and "disgust." While activating such desires, the "balcony" rhetoric of *How the Other Half Lives* produced a strategy to deflect desire into the visual pleasure of the text. In his autobiography Riis identifies his textual "excursionism" as decidedly advantageous over direct experience: "The beauty of looking into these places without actually being present there is that the excursionist is spared the vulgar sounds and odious scents and repulsive exhibitions attendant upon such a personal examination."⁶⁸ Stallybrass and White point out that "the tram, the railway station, the ice rink, above all the streets themselves, were shockingly promiscuous. And the fear of that promiscuity was encoded above all in terms of the fear of being touched." Consequently, "contagion and 'contamination' become the tropes through which city life was apprehended."⁶⁹ Since bodily contact was seen as contaminating, the significance of visual experience was intensified, serving simultaneously as a means of control and as a substitute for direct experience. "From the balcony, one could gaze, but not be touched."⁷⁰ Riis made experiences of Otherness safe by enforcing the distance between his viewers and his subjects, allowing viewers to penetrate the darkest spaces of the tenements without leaving their viewing contexts. His audiences were thus transformed into tourists who followed the map he, as the guide, laid out for them; and as such, they could only be observers whose subjects were visually and ideologically packaged for them. Consequently, the sensational vulgarity of Riis' account served to provide only vicarious, hence contained, pleasures for a class

whose bodily experiences of reality were becoming increasingly regulated and displaced.

This textualization of experience takes the control of meaning out of the hands of those colonized by the text. Instead, meaning is largely controlled by the expert whose own discourse morally and politically, as well as physically, separates his audience from the tenements. Here, then, is where textual experiences become most insidious. As texts like *How the Other Half Lives* drive the production of a specific body of knowledge about Others, the meanings they naturalize make it possible for "experts" to continue producing statements about "ghettos" and other marginal spaces and people without ever having to enter them. The "Other Half" is a textual construction whose images have rather direct political consequences, namely their literal ghettoization in the discursive practice of surveillance.

Riis' semiotic of the body, then, operated textually as an object of desire and knowledge to be managed and contained through the disciplinary gaze. Though the working class body was inscribed with the status of inferiority (Riis' accounts of disease, stench, fatigue, and above all sobriety draw attention to this), it can also be seen as a site of resistance. John Fiske writes, "the struggle for control over the meanings and pleasures (and therefore the behaviors) of the body is crucial because the body is where the social is most convincingly represented as the individual and where politics can best disguise itself as human nature."⁷¹ The bourgeoisie sought to repress the working class body because it could resist the dominant order, but in the end the bourgeoisie needed the body as the textual link to authenticate its own sense of identity. Thus, disgust not only can produce class identity by what it excludes, but the body out of control can also deeply threaten the ontological foundations of distinctions. Fiske explains that "cleanliness is order—social, semiotic, and moral (it is, after all, next to godliness)—so dirt is disorder, is threatening and undisciplined. The body is inherently 'dirty': all its orifices produce dirt—that is, matter that transgresses its categorical boundary, that contaminates the separateness of the body, and therefore its purity as a category."⁷² In its textual operations, the body is transformed into a containable abstraction. While the body may be a vital site from which to oppose a particular social order, the modern techniques of surveillance can discipline and punish it without the direct use of force. And yet while the gaze offers the body of the Other up visually as something to be controlled, subversive moments appear, thus producing the text as a site of struggle. This struggle suggests that domination, like resistance, is enacted in the moment of performance—never given, never stable, never final.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

How the Other Half Lives, in its complex discursive operations, was a late nineteenth-century strategy for managing cultural diversity. Through the controlling gaze of the camera and documentary description, the bourgeoisie sought to contain and transform these differences into usable units of production and consumption. Whether this strategy was successful is a matter for speculation. Though bourgeois political power was increasingly solidified by the turn of the century, it was often exercised through the direct use of force. Violence against organized labor continued and even intensified after the turn

of the century, often pitting government troops against strikers. The racist sentiments of the time shortly thereafter developed into the nationwide revival of the Ku Klux Klan, which widened its attack to include nearly every point of difference from ethnicity to religion to social class.⁷³ Viewed in this context, Riis' documentary realism can be seen as part of a larger struggle to transform nationalist anxiety into a manageable system of signification, thereby maintaining the unstable hegemony of the ruling classes. Riis' realism, read in its intertextual relations with other realist texts, as well as the economic, legal, scientific, and anthropological discourses of its time, was a critical site in which Otherness could be both textualized and performatively engaged. *How the Other Half Lives* performed a semiotics of race, gender, and class identity that ultimately naturalized these differences as a "real" hierarchy, producing and justifying hostility against cultural differences. This ideology of difference is only just now being seriously challenged by multiculturalist academicians and activists who have done much to raise critical awareness of the politics of seemingly "objective" information-gathering practices.

At a deeper level, however, *How the Other Half Lives*, like any other text, contained numerous points of instability; for the wealthy needed the vulgarity of the working class body in order to authenticate its, albeit vicarious, own experience. Here the body became a site of resistance precisely because the bourgeois desire for intense experiences made its regulation a shaky practice. Ironically, the very instrument of power for the bourgeoisie—the controlling gaze—could itself provide only voyeuristic experiences of the body. To gaze on the vulgar body and to transform it into a text is only to experience it visually. Consequently, the visual experience of such hegemonic texts functions to channel desires in ways that contain them as a threat to the social order, hence reproducing in the bourgeoisie the alienation their performance of identity sought to escape or transcend.

ENDNOTES

¹Howells, William Dean, "Criticism and Fiction," *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. George J. Becker (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1963) 145.

²John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation* (Amherst: The U of Massachusetts P, 1988) 66.

³Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." First published in 1936, this essay appears in a collection of his essays entitled *Illuminations*, ed. and trans., Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 219.

⁴For examples of this trend, see Carol Squires, ed. *The Critical Image* (Seattle: Bay P, 1990). See also Richard Bolton, ed. *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1989).

⁵Specifically, close examination of the root words of "photograph," "photo" and "graph," reveals that photography itself is a discourse, literally. Jacques Derrida points out, the graphic is "read, or it is written" (3) in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1972). To the degree that photography is a writing of images, it is a mode of communication not substantively distinct from other communicative forms. The difference is one of function. That is, photography appropriates a discursive space distinct yet necessarily interactive with other modes of discourse. The importance of visual texts for performance studies is discussed by Sonja K. Foss in "Review Essay: Visual Imagery as Communication," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 12 (1992): 85–90.

⁶Beverly Whitaker Long and Mary Susan Strine, "Reading Intertextually: Multiple Mediations and Critical Practice," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75 (1989): 474.

⁷For relevant discussions of these issues, see Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978). See also, Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. R. D. Laing (New York: Vintage Books, 1970). Jean Beaudrillard goes further in flattening the distinction between text and performer by suggesting that human bodies and subjectivities are textual performances: "With the television image—the television being the ultimate and perfect object for this new era—our own body and the whole surrounding universe becomes a control screen." See "The Ecstasy of

Communication" (trans. John Johnston) in ed. Hal Foster, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle: Bay P, 1983) 127.

⁸Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1977) 10. Another comprehensive treatment of the relations between looking and voyeurism can be found in Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990), Chs.1,2.

⁹Maren Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America 1890–1950* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1989) 2.

¹⁰Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991) 175.

¹¹Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 193.

¹²Foucault 170–194. In the interests of clarity, the present study uses the term "discipline," as Foucault does, to signify a number of overlapping phenomena. Academic disciplines as fields of study constitute one such usage of the term. However, this usage is inseparable from the activity of discipline and punishment; for all of these activities seek to normalize or standardize behavior, whether in the rubric of producing research or maintaining social order. Disciplines, in short, produce both knowledge and order.

¹³Foucault 219.

¹⁴Gilles DeLeuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987) 109.

¹⁵Foucault 200.

¹⁶Sander Gilman explicates the appalling results of textualizing the body of the Other in "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," "Race," *Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985) 223–261. Similarly, Dwight Conquergood explores the role of ethnography in constructing and resisting the "Other" as an object of knowledge in "Poetics, Play, Process, and Power: The Performative Turn in Anthropology," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 1 (1989): 82–88. See also his "Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Poetics," *Communication Monographs* 58 (1991) 179–194.

¹⁷Foucault 221.

¹⁸Benjamin 226.

¹⁹See Tagg 144–148.

²⁰Tagg 99.

²¹Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988) 20.

²²Stange 1.

²³Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*. (1890; New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1971) 1.

²⁴Stange 4.

²⁵Anita Levy, *Other Women: The Writing of Class, Race, and Gender, 1832–1898* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991) 27. Though Levy's study focuses on English sociological discourse of the mid-nineteenth century, this passage appropriately describes Riis' strategic deployment of middle-class values.

²⁶Riis 226 (emphasis added).

²⁷Riis 1.

²⁸Riis 229.

²⁹Tagg 11.

³⁰John Berger makes this point deftly in *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting System Books, 1977) 47: "One might simplify this by saying: *men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight." For an elaboration of the panoptic operations of gender, see Sandra Lee Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 63–82.

³¹Jane Miller, in her insightful discussion of the convergences of race, class, and gender, explains the connection between the colonizing gaze and "feminization" thus: "To undermine the economy, the sovereignty and the culture of another people is, above all, to undermine the identity and integrity of its male citizens. That has often involved the theft of their women, as part of a process which is to be thought of as infantilization or, ultimately, as feminization. The question remains: why does such an analysis not entail a concern for women's loss of political and economic status, in itself?" *Seductions: Studies in Reading and Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991) 118. Miller answers this question by pointing out that colonization is fused with the imagery of sexual penetration: "A prevailing imagery of penetration, of stamina and of the eventual discovery of the strange and the hidden merge the colonizing adventure definitively with the sexual adventure" (117). In a nutshell, the penetration of Other spaces is both rape and colonization. For another discussion of how gender is a discursive production, rather than a natural quality, see Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter (New York: St. Martin's P, 1989) 1090–1118. For a discussion of the ways in which colonialism and patriarchy converge, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," in Gates 262–280.

³²Riis 19.

³³Riis 19.

³⁴Riis 80.

³⁵For relevant examples of these discourses, see John Fiske's *The Discovery of America Vols. 1 & 2*, (Boston: 1895). See also W.A. Croffut, *The Vanderbilts and the Story of Their Fortune* (New York: 1886). A particularly informative example is Andrew Carnegie's "The Gospel of Wealth," *Words that Made American History Since the Civil War*, 3rd ed. Vol. 2, ed. Richard N. Current et al. (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1962) 123–133. For an elaboration of the pervasive operations of this discourse, see Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981) Ch. 1.

³⁶Riis 124–126.

³⁷Riis 124 (emphasis added).

³⁸Riis 124.

³⁹Riis 109.

⁴⁰Levy 33.

⁴¹Riis 83.

⁴²Levy 34.

⁴³Riis 183.

⁴⁴Riis 183.

⁴⁵Riis 124.

⁴⁶Gilman 256.

⁴⁷Riis 22.

⁴⁸John Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1990) 94.

⁴⁹Riis 22.

⁵⁰On the multivalent effects of her triple stigma, Sander Gilman elaborates: "The 'white man's burden' thus becomes his sexuality and its control, and it is this which is transferred into the need to control the sexuality of the Other, the Other as sexualized female. The colonial mentality which sees 'natives' as needing control is easily transferred to 'woman'—but woman as exemplified by the caste of the prostitute. This need for control was a projection of inner fears; thus, its articulation in visual images was in terms which described the polar opposite of the European male." (256)

⁵¹Riis 115.

⁵²Riis 115.

⁵³For a thorough discussion, see Gilman.

⁵⁴Riis 115.

⁵⁵The fear of miscegenation is very clearly performed in D.W. Griffith's 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* where the Ku Klux Klan's violent enforcement of racial segregation is seen as the critical moment in which "America" as a nation is unified against the "common" enemy of "the black man" and thus "born." The assumption that racial differences are natural is considerably complicated in Charles W. Chesnut's 1901 novel, *The Marrow of Tradition* (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1969), in which realist and naturalist techniques are invoked to show that the social distinctions between races are arbitrarily derived. Both narratives suggest to a large degree that the "nation" is defined by rigid, often violent, enforcement of race, gender, and class exclusions. While Griffith's film celebrates this conception of "America," Chesnut sees racism as the morally debilitating "marrow" of "American" tradition.

⁵⁶Torgovnick 4.

⁵⁷Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986) Ch. 4.

⁵⁸Stallybrass and White 149–150. A similar discussion of the issue appears in Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1969) 168–169.

⁵⁹Berger 54.

⁶⁰Berger 54.

⁶¹Berger 58.

⁶²Stallybrass and White 145.

⁶³For elaborations of this argument see Susan Willis, *A Primer for Daily Life* (New York: Routledge, 1991) Ch. 5. See also Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1990).

⁶⁴Riis 160.

⁶⁵Riis 156.

⁶⁶Stallybrass and White 134.

⁶⁷Michel Foucault, "Body/Power," *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980) 56–57.

⁶⁸Stange 16.

⁶⁹Stallybrass and White 135.

⁷⁰Stallybrass and White 136.

⁷¹John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989) 70.

⁷²Fiske, *Understanding* 99.

⁷³For a relevant discussion see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860–1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1970) 264–330.

