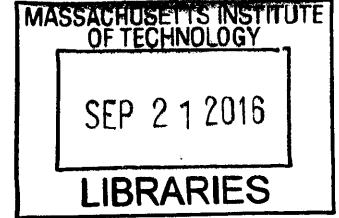


**Algorithmic Detectives Against Child Trafficking:
*Data, Entrapment, and the New Global Policing Network***

by

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B.A., Anthropology and Feminist Studies
Stanford University, 2009



ARCHIVES

Submitted to the Program in Science, Technology, and Society
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology and Society
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Mitali Thakor

Submitted to the Program in Science, Technology and Society at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on August 16, 2016 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology and Society

ABSTRACT

My dissertation explores how “anti-trafficking” has emerged as a global network of humanitarian professionals, law enforcement, and software companies collaborating to address the issue of child exploitation and trafficking online. I argue that the anti-trafficking network consolidates expertise through a shared moralizing politics of bureaucracy and carceral sensibility of securitization. This network mobilizes the issue of child protection to expand the reach of technologies of search and prediction, and to afford legitimation to a newly normalized level of digital surveillance.

My findings are based on three years of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with the United Nations and anti-trafficking organizations in Thailand, with a child protection NGO and police in the Netherlands, and with software companies and law enforcement in the United States. I use two case studies to support my argument that the child protection movement has motivated the expansion of digital policing and surveillance: 1) image detection software developed in collaboration between social media and software companies and international law enforcement organizations; and 2) the design and deployment of a 3D moving avatar of a photorealistic girl used in a child sex exploitation sting operation by an NGO working with an advertising firm.

I draw from queer feminist phenomenology to introduce ‘proximity’ as a governing concept for understanding expert sociality and digital surveillance. Child protection operates in a global affective economy of fear, in which the risk of violence is always anticipated and close. The new global policing network keeps exploitation proximate through the humanitarian ideology of emancipation that motivates child protection, and through publicity of technological campaigns, in order to produce public acquiescence to the spectacles of digital surveillance, shaming, and punishment.

Thesis Supervisor: Heather Paxson

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List of Abbreviations

- COMMIT** The Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking
- GMS** Greater Mekong Subregion
- ECPAT** End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes
- ILO** International Labour Organisation
- IOM** International Organization for Migration
- IOM-X** International Organization for Migration Campaign to Stop Exploitation
- MTV EXIT** MTV End Exploitation and Trafficking
- Palermo Protocol** Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (2000)
- RMO** Regional Management Office of UN-ACT (Bangkok, Thailand)
- RBM** Results-Based Management
- UN-ACT** United Nations Action for Cooperation Against Trafficking
- UN-CRC** United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (1990)
- UNESCAP** UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
- UNICEF** The United Nations Children's Fund
- UNDP** United Nations Development Programme
- UNIAP** United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking
- UNODC** United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
- TDH** Terre Des Hommes (The Hague, Netherlands)
- VGT** The Virtual Global Taskforce on Child Exploitation

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With love, Mitali.

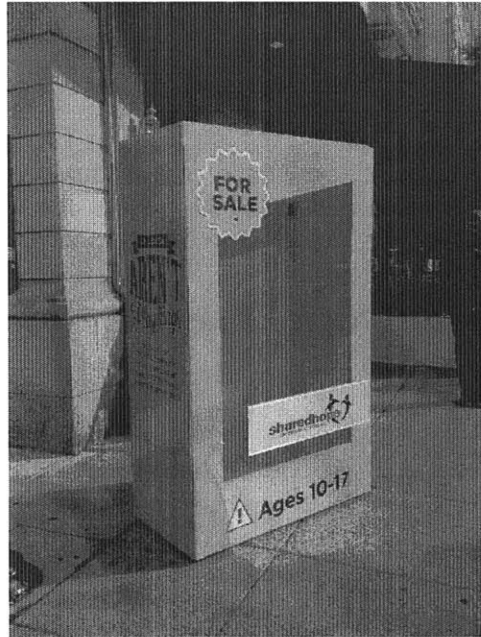
Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

A. Making Proximate: Docile Faces and Campaigns Against Child Exploitation

On a crisp November morning in 2013, commuters walking through McPherson Square in Washington, DC came face-to-face with an anti-exploitation campaign. The campaign took the form of a human-sized bubblegum pink box, plastered with a “For Sale” sign on the front over a glass window through which a person inside could be seen by others on the street. On the side of the box the organizers had printed, “Children Aren’t Playthings—Yet each year, 100,000 children in the US are sold as objects for the sexual entertainment of men.” Volunteers from Shared Hope International beckoned passersby to step inside a large pink exhibit and experience a moment as a “child sex slave.” This exhibit was one of several displays at a conference organized by Shared Hope International, an American non-governmental charity organization. The conference theme for 2013 focused on current issues related to sex trafficking of juveniles (domestic

minors) in the United States, including the role of technology in facilitating trafficking, as well as the public's role in gaining awareness and intervening into trafficking and exploitation.



Shared Hope International Doll Box, Washington, DC. November 2013.

In this dissertation I consider how anti-exploitation campaigns imagine and package the problem of the abuse of children. I examine how 'child protection' — from the signing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) to the ubiquity of Amber Alert signals on smartphones broadcasting the abduction of children — has emerged as a concerted, global effort conducted by activists, police, and computer scientists alike. Who is considered to be a child, and how are they to be protected? Who do these groups consider to be deserving of child protection—and who gets placed

outside the protective scope? To address these questions I focus on digital efforts at protection. Through my fieldwork I have come to learn that the ways in which digital space is imagined, with its many possibilities and perils, can tell us much about how various groups involved in child protection think about the *reach* and *possibility* of violence. Thus this project is about *proximity*: I explore how nearness and relationality are simulated to produce a global network of child protection specialists, activists doing anti-trafficking and anti-exploitation work, police investigators, data scientists, and social media content reviewers. Following Annelise Riles (2000), I call the constellation of these actors a “counter-network.” The anti-trafficking network is a “counter” to the trafficking it seeks to address: there is no issue of “trafficking” without the counter-network to name it and imbue it with meaning.

My dissertation investigates new algorithmic developments—image detection software and virtual sting operations—as part of a broader phenomenon of expanded digital surveillance that has become more clear by efforts to fight child pornography and trafficking. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2012 and 2015 through interviews and participant-observation with various groups in the “counter-network,” I argue that the movement for child protection has evolved to strengthen the reach of the carceral, policing and prosecuting, state. New digital experts entering into the counter-network (computer scientists, social media companies, digital forensics developers, and

graphic designers) have bolstered the child protection agenda traditionally held by law enforcement and anti-trafficking activists: namely, that protection is best achieved through punitive measures. These actors embed punitive logic into the investigative process through dual forms of apprehension: image detection software for identifying and locating abuse photos and videos online, and the actual arrests of abusers made possible through collaborations between law enforcement and software companies. I argue that a new policing network is being formed based on the incorporation of new digital investigation strategies to the existing anti-trafficking network. Digital investigation trainings and data sharing between police and technologists produce shared sensibilities of security and insecurity. Additionally, to make the Internet more 'secure,' one of these collaborations has resulted in an entrapment scheme to predict *future* abusers of children online, using a digital, artificial avatar of a child as a lure. Technologies of *detection* (image detection software) and *deception* (avatar-based entrapment) are, I argue, brought into being through the particular forms of sociality and proximity engendered through the network. The subject of my dissertation is thus as much about the collaboration and professional relationality that produce a shared regime of child protection based on securitization, as it is about the particulars of deploying these digital technologies. I conclude the dissertation to caution that digital protection predicated on the notion of proximity is inherently exclusionary—that which is not near must be kept at bay—and bent on shaming.

The analyses that follow in this dissertation are inspired by queer feminist phenomenology. I argue that the anti-trafficking policing network promotes protection of children, punishment of sex offenders, and the publicity of these efforts that permit a surreptitious and unprecedented level of digital surveillance. Protection, punishment, and publicity have looping effects (cf. Hacking 1983; 1991) in how ‘anti-trafficking’ has emerged as a networked labor form to address the ‘trafficking’ problem that it produces. My attention to child protection highlights how protectionism (cf. Musto 2010; 2016) informs anti-trafficking policy through rallying the network and the public around preservation of an imagined docile and innocent symbolic child figure (cf. Edelman 2004) that actually performs disciplining work through the mechanisms needed to ensure its preservation. By bringing child protection *close*, this network encourages computer scientists, humanitarian professionals, and the general public who view anti-trafficking publicity campaigns to support indiscriminate carceral punishment of sexual exploiters and offenders. Recent work in queer feminist social theory has considered how sex offenders have emerged as people who are “despised and disposable” (Horowitz 2015) or even othered “beyond the pale of humanness” (Borneman 2015). I draw from the works of Elizabeth Grosz (1994, 1995, 1999, 2010) and Sara Ahmed (2000, 2004, 2006, 2010, 2011), especially. I share their concerns regarding the importance of corporeality and bodily gestures—in all their sexual, gendered, raced differences—to understandings of the state and governance broadly, as I consider what

humanitarianism and policing, alike, mean as labor forms increasingly oriented *towards* punishment, surveillance, and shaming. In child protection research I consider how the body and the face are configured as data points for the algorithmic detection of child abuse. Here corporeality takes on salient hues in a digital space where bodies are imagined in order to be sought by law enforcement institutions. Ahmed has argued that “rather than othering being simply a form of negation, it can also be described as a form of extension. The body extends its reach by taking in *that which is not it...*” (2006:115, emphasis added). Those investigators who seek to locate and apprehend offenders must first become intimately knowledgeable about abuse—bring *close*, paradoxically—before enacting punishment and casting offenders out. Digital technologies, I will show, perform this act of extension—apprehending and making proximate violent others—by extending the corpus of policing power in order to seek certain bodies, and in doing so, do this work of othering. Image detection software does its work of sorting by locating and identifying violent scenes and offenders in order also to find missing children. Entrapment technologies aim to prevent these abusive scenes from ever happening. By identifying current and potential abuse, the teams of software designers and police—an aggregate group I identify as “algorithmic detectives”—must also become intimately knowledgeable about such violence, making it reachable, making the ‘distant’ come proximate. By “violent scenes” I mean both the recordings of child sexual assault made by perpetrators of such abuse into ‘child pornography,’ as well as the sorting of such

scenes into 'data' for technical detection, classification, and as evidence in legal prosecutions. To make these analyses, I find instructive the feminist scholarship on assessing how scenes of violence and subjection are metaphorically packaged for political purposes, especially the constitutive role (cf. Grosz 2003) of the depiction of harm to the feminized body in the establishment of politics. The moralizing politics that produce and maintain the anti-trafficking network depend upon the production and circulation of violent scenes: they maintain a "wounded attachment" (Brown 1995) to the "injured body" (Doezema 2001) of the prostitute and the sexually exploited child. In what follows in this Introduction, I lay the groundwork for an assessment of anti-trafficking professionals who consider themselves "abolitionists," in support of the feminist scholarship that has been critical of the way violence is represented and mobilized for political aim.

B. Trafficking and Anti-Trafficking

Reverend Dr. Brook Bello was the keynote speaker at the Shared Hope International conference held in November 2013 in Washington, D.C., the same conference at which the pink doll box was displayed. In Dr. Bello's speech, part historical lesson, part sermon, she told us her story of transition from self-identified victim of sex trafficking to becoming ordained and earning a doctoral degree in divinity studies. We stood in the

front row of a darkened auditorium, our eyes closed as hundreds of us clasped hands. On stage, Bello, a tall, stately woman, stood posed with hands raised, palms up. She was swathed in rust- and coffee-colored jersey fabrics and mala beads. She guided us in prayer:

“Right now, there is a trafficker somewhere. There is a victim somewhere, being taken this very moment. There is someone from another country that is being sold into domestic servitude. Or a young farm girl being raped. So I want you to repeat after me and say this, as we think of them:
This is not about me.
But it's about loving thy neighbor
as thyself.
If there is anything in me,
that needs help I will get it too.
Because of God
all things are possible.”

She spoke in rich tones, rising in volume to conclude, “They say modern-day slavery will never, ever end. But we know it will. Because we believe. Amen.” “AMEN,” the audience echoed, and applause and cheers lasted for well over a minute. The woman next to me squeezed my right hand. I glanced over and her face was flecked with tears. Behind and all around me I heard choked, relieved exhales, a swelling theater of energy feeling release. Onstage, Dr. Bello nodded at all of us.



Dr. Brook Bello, Sharing the Hope Conference, Washington, D.C.

Bello described growing up in California, and her abusive, volatile relationship with a man she later described as a pimp, who would force or cajole her into having sex with customers, keeping the money for himself. Describing her rescue, she quoted the Christian hymn, “Amazing Grace”: “Who could ever love a wretch like me?” Through the stories told in her speech, Bello explained that she came to identify what happened to her as sex trafficking. She clicked her PowerPoint to a slide of Harriet Tubman seated in a chair, with Tubman’s quote, “I freed a thousand slaves, and I could’a freed a thousand more, if they only knew they were slaves.” Bello, who is African-American, was framed by the enlarged portrait of Tubman magnified on the projector screen behind her—a deliberate juxtaposition Bello crafted to highlight her lineage with Tubman, both slaves-turned-liberators.

In Bello's story, a large part of her transition toward rescue and escape from a cycle of abuse and exploitation was her personal self-actualization as victim, as someone who needed help and escape. Bello's ecclesiastical journey echoed a theme of liberation pervasive throughout the conference, which was full of stories like hers narrated processually from victimhood and suffering to freedom and salvation. Salvation stories position freedom as the cathartic end to a linear journey of pain and struggle. Christian liberation theology, in particular, informs Bello's understanding of her personal story, as well as her understanding of Black chattel slavery and the work of 19th century abolitionists like Tubman: Once she identified herself as a victim, Bello could move forward to take steps to become a "modern-day abolitionist" herself, freeing others and spreading the gospel, as it were, to concerned civic activists much like us in the audience. The goal of abolitionism is individual emancipation, inspired by a notion of agency and self-possessed individualism that follows a lineage of Western Enlightenment liberation thinking foregrounding the freedom of the individual self (Charlesworth, Chinkin, and Wright 1995). This theological framing was one that I came to see and experience continually as I attended numerous such gatherings of anti-trafficking activists. At times the framing would be explicit, as with Bello, but often it was subtle, a referenced polarization between states of being free or unfree, being empowered or being exploited.

Activist groups and policymakers organizing against human trafficking rely upon diametric oppositions. Their work as abolitionists, rescuers, activists, or simply “anti-traffickers” hinges upon a shared understanding and consolidation of the concept of “trafficking” itself. The trafficking and exploitation of young people has received heightened global attention since the passage of the United Nations protocol on human trafficking in 2000. This protocol, officially titled the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish the Trafficking in Persons, set international standards criminalizing human trafficking for the purposes of labor or sexual exploitation (UN General Assembly 2000). Feminist scholarship has found the drafting process for the Protocol to be instructive of the language and ideology of current forms of anti-exploitation activism. As Jo Doezema (2005) has documented, the drafting brought together a peculiar constellation of religious advocates, anti-prostitution feminist activists, bureaucrats, and law enforcement. In the two decades since the passage of the Protocol, these actors continue to work in the field they dub “anti-trafficking”—simultaneously a social movement, a political moment, and a relatively lucrative career in the human rights field.

Drawing upon Riles’s (2008) concept of human rights activists forming “anti-networks,” I find that anti-trafficking activists are assembling themselves as a *counter-network*, responding to a common understanding of the problem of “human trafficking” as

knowledge professionals who share jargon, documents, and meeting sites. This counter-network constitutes techno-social solutions to what they conceive as an increasingly complex, digital, infrastructural problem of global human trafficking; the co-production of solution and problem is an issue I explore in this dissertation.

The counter-network was instrumental to passing a series of country-by-country legislation modeled on the U.N. Protocol. Such anti-trafficking legislation, including the U.S. William A. Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2001, followed the language of the U.N. Protocol in establishing criminal codes for trafficking as well as dedicating federal offices for trafficking research, reporting, and prosecution. (William Wilberforce was a prominent white Evangelical Christian abolitionist in Britain in the 19th century.) The US has since reauthorized and passed four newer versions of the TVPA, in 2003, 2005, 2008, and in 2013 as an addendum to the Violence Against Women Act. In *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, Doezema (2010) explains that the drafting and ratification process for current trafficking policies is inescapably rooted in the historical legacies of abolitionist organizing—in Britain and the U.S.—against Black chattel slavery and the lead-up to the U.S. Emancipation Act signed in 1862. But, Doezema explains, the language in current trafficking policies, especially around sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, is also informed by early 20th century American panics over “white slavery,” the unfounded and xenophobic fears of Eastern

European and Arab men kidnapping and sexually exploiting young white women which formed the basis for the Mann Act (1910). In a sense, then, the language of current trafficking policies merges a peculiar blend of both anti-racist and racist thinking.

The prospect of emancipation is central to anti-trafficking humanitarian work, feminist and queer activism, and social theory alike. Emancipation is a promise. Emancipation may be an end-point on a linear trajectory of good behavior—where what is "good" depends on whom you ask. The counter-network of professional humanitarians, bureaucrats, activists, and law enforcement working on anti-trafficking issues would not be possible without the orb of emancipation' as a logic to wrap around. Returning to the example of Dr. Bello speaking before the image of Harriet Tubman, the US-driven model of trafficking characterizes sexual exploitation as "slavery." Those who work against sexual exploitation are for this reason abolitionists, or emancipators. Emancipation is aesthetically potent. Anti-trafficking campaign posters make blatant use of images of freedom and slavery, from the discreet (a face in the dark shadows emerging into the light), the emphatic (the life-size doll box one can stand inside), to the grotesque (women figured as packaged chicken meat in plastic containers). The activist and academic Laura Agustín keeps an ongoing digital portfolio of images in the latter category, which commonly circulate online and in public media

campaigns. In her interpretation the cataloging of anti-trafficking propaganda posters serves to highlight how many abolitionist organizations tend to exploit heteropatriarchal media tropes of female objectification and infantilization in their purported effort to prevent these very dynamics in commercial sexual exploitation. Agustín's digital collection also highlights the similarities of images across time and geography, emphasizing the point she made in her book (2007), that the global effort against trafficking has manifested as a full "rescue industry."

Feminist scholars such as Gretchen Soderlund (2005), Elizabeth Bernstein (2007), and Jennifer Musto (2009) have also noted how anti-trafficking activism brings some "strange bedfellows" to the same table, from evangelical Christians to radical feminists. Most importantly, as Bernstein (2007) details, the seeming point for agreement among these disparate groups is a shared commitment to punishment for trafficking as a crime. It is telling, for example, that the UN protocol on trafficking, one that had been suggested and discussed for years in various UN agencies, was eventually pushed through by the agency handling transnational drugs and crime control. Bernstein argues that, in constructing legislation for the criminalization of trafficking, a Christian sense of penalty and retribution met a second-wave feminist aim to identify and prosecute perpetrators of the sexual violence and exploitation of women and girls. Bernstein names this shared ideology "carceral feminism"—a political ideology that

advocates for state- and law-enforcement based solutions for addressing crimes of interpersonal violence and exploitation. Carceral feminist solutions to sexual violence include lengthy mandatory minimum sentencing laws and state surveillance of convicted sex offenders. Critics of carceral feminism, especially radical feminist of color organizers in North America like the INCITE! Collective, have spoken out, vociferously and urgently, against policies such as the US Violence Against Women Act (1994; reauthorized 2013). These activists argue that police investigations of crimes of sexual violence and domestic violence driven by arrests and prosecution counts perilously replicate the racial bias in the legal system that has resulted in the disproportionate criminalization and incarceration of men of color. Bernstein's (2010) study of the motivations behind the 'new abolitionism.' Musto's forthcoming book on the carceral turn in exploitation investigations (2016), as well as my own research, with danah boyd, interviewing anti-trafficking social service providers (Thakor and boyd 2013), support these claims in specific regard to trafficking policies in the US. Digital techniques such as image detection software and avatars of children in virtual entrapment schemes form part of a new vanguard of surveillance aiming to locate current and potential child sex offenders and exploiters in the name of child protection.

At the same conference where Dr. Bello gave her keynote speech, various survivors of trafficking were called up on stage to tell their stories. One young African-American

woman named Tiffany described being abused and pimped by her boyfriend from ages 14 to 18 before being found by a local church anti-trafficking initiative. “It’s so hard when you don’t think anyone cares,” she explained, her voice breaking as she cried. When Tiffany said, “I’m a Christian now,” the audience applauded, and when she continued to explain that her ex-boyfriend “is in prison for the rest of his life; he got 82 years,” the room erupted into cheers and exclamations. The woman next to me shouted, “Yes!” with glee. The sense of triumph from the man’s incarceration was palpable throughout the room.

Bernstein (2010) argues further that the United States’ domestic commitment to “carceral paradigms of justice” has translated into similar policies abroad with U.S. state-based interventions into cases of trafficking elsewhere, through practices of what she calls “militarized humanitarianism”—e.g., the American financing of enforcement-heavy policing and raids of brothels, settlements, and urban spaces where cases of exploitation and trafficking have been purported. This point is perhaps best exemplified by the U.S. State Department’s Trafficking In Persons (TIP) Report, a country-by-country ranking system of the US’s assessment of governmental efforts to prevent and prosecute trafficking. Each country is assigned a “tier” ranking from 1 to 3 reflecting how well its anti-trafficking efforts have been implemented. The lower the ranking, the worse the U.S. assessment of that country’s anti-trafficking efforts, and the less

international aid it is likely to receive from the U.S. State Department. The assigning of tier rankings is not without controversy, as Pardis Mahdavi (2012) and others note, with western European countries such as France and the Netherlands typically ranked as Tier 1, and poorer countries such as Bangladesh and Myanmar typically ranked as Tier 3, alongside countries with which the US is at conflict, such as Iraq and North Korea. Mahdavi highlights the irony with which the US seems flippantly to assign values to countries while blatantly ignoring the prevalence of exploitation and trafficking of people within its own borders, especially in labor and agricultural industries. Additionally, and importantly, Mahdavi points out that many of the countries in the Tier 1 category have historically and often presently been involved in keeping lower-tier countries riddled with such forms of structural violence as war and resource extraction. One might interpret the tier rankings as yet another neocolonial ordering of the world, carving the world into “developed” and “developing” sectors through architectures of foreign aid dependency.

Other feminist scholars have similarly suggested that the 21st century US-based abolitionist movement has become a rationale for the neo-imperialist rescue of non-Western women, especially those identified as “prostitutes,” replicating a pattern of humanitarian intervention that has been oft-critiqued by postcolonial activists (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; Soderlund 2005; Desyllas 2007). Gayatri Spivak

famously termed this brand of western humanitarian activism “white men saving brown women from brown men” (1988:271).

The professionalization of anti-trafficking has led to an increased presence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in non-Western countries, focusing on saving young female victims of sex trafficking, perpetuating what many have described as a feminization of victimhood and a masculinization of rescue (Andrijasevic 2007; Soderlund 2005). Sex workers have accused anti-trafficking advocates of capitalizing on donations meant to combat the exploitation of children to instead (or also) target sex workers for moral reasons. The visibility afforded to sex trafficking—as opposed to issues of education, poverty, or environmental justice—has produced its own rescue industry (Agustín 2007) of professionalized humanitarians, journalists, bureaucrats, and corporate representatives seeking to stake their claim on anti-trafficking turf.

Drawing on fieldwork I conducted in Bangkok at the United Nations and two NGOs, I describe in Chapter III how the anti-trafficking “counter-network” functions and sustains itself through discursive and gestural practices between its workers. The people who forge relationships between and within these three agencies—the United Nations Action for Cooperation Against Trafficking in Persons (UN-ACT), End Child Prostitution And Trafficking (ECPAT), and MTV End Exploitation and Trafficking

(MTV-EXIT)—exemplify the sorts of highly educated and contract-laboring worker that I describe as humanitarian professionals. To reconcile their professional precarity these workers turn to particular forms of speech and gesture as moralizing practices that establish networked proximity to one another.

C. Vulnerable Images: Surveillance and the Anthropology of Data

In the past decade many social scientists have turned a critical eye towards data science and data collection techniques (cf. Andrejevic 2014; Boellstorff 2013; Boellstorff and Maurer 2015; Gitelman 2013; Kitchin and Lariault 2014). While state-sponsored data classification schemes, such as racial categorizations under the South African apartheid regime, had previously been examined for enacting disciplinary demarcations of racialized and sexualized otherness (cf. Bowker and Star 1999), in the post-Edward Snowden era of digital surveillance data collection software has come under new scrutiny for the subtler, more discreet ways in which it becomes manifest under corporate and non-governmental practices (Cheney-Lippold 2011; Lyon 2014; van Dijck 2014). Kelly Gates (2011) and Simone Browne (2015), especially, have raised significant critiques of the commercialization and ubiquity of facial recognition software and biometric data collection tools that push citizens to become consumers and develop

forms of 'critical biometric consciousness.'

"Big data" in the context of child protection efforts refers to several related databases: image repositories of missing children, repositories of reported and filed child abuse images and videos ('child pornography'), and databases of convicted sex offenders, producers, and downloaders of child abuse. These databases span multiple countries. By exploring the investigative process at law enforcement agencies and social media companies, I consider how child abuse image data is acquired and classified as a specific perceptual skill. I consider the ways in which such data can be of violent content, perilous content, and "vulnerable" to many types of authorities. Following a provocation articulated by danah boyd and Kate Crawford (2011), I treat such big data as interpretable in manifold ways by various political actors. That is, even an image of child abuse content can be treated as interpretable, as, for example, the recording of a crime scene, as an object of evidence accessible for a prosecution, or one step in a chain of clues to locate a potential offender or victim, depending on who is doing the perceptive and investigative work.

Mark Andrejevic and Kelly Gates argue that one of the most insidious changes to state policing structures is their attitude to data collection, a "collect-everything approach to monitoring and intelligence" (2014:185). They continue, the "advent of big data

surveillance augurs an era in which determinations of risk and suspicion result from complex data interactions that are both un-anticipatable and inexplicable. The database can generate patterns that have predictive power but not necessarily explanatory power” (Andrejevic and Gates 2014:186). Here they allude to the ways in which technoscientific experts can treat the technical organization of data as in itself some form of forecast. Data scientists and social scientists thus treat algorithmic learning with some reverence, an automated process to sift through packets of information and images, and somehow perform prophetic labor. In this dissertation, however, I approach the figure of the ‘algorithm’ as an opaque entity whose black-boxing sits at the nexus of political and technological ideologies that upholding digital solutions to child abuse problems. Both ‘algorithm’ and ‘child exploitation’ are black-boxed concepts that need to be unpacked: Tarleton Gillespie (2012) writes along these lines that “‘Algorithm’ may in fact serve as an abbreviation for the sociotechnical assemblage that includes algorithm, model, target goal, data, training data, application, hardware— and connect it all to a broader social endeavor,” while Jarrett Zigon (2015: 502) proposes that a “situation” is a “nontotalizable assemblage widely diffused across different global scales that allows us to conceptualize how persons and objects that are geographically, socioeconomically, and culturally distributed get caught up in shared conditions that significantly affect their possible ways of being-in-the-world.” The crafting of the ‘problem’ and of the ‘solution’ of child exploitation are each themselves

assemblages that are revelatory of how “digital ontology” is imagined (cf. Boellstorff 2016). Considerations of nearness, distance, risk, and anticipation of closeness are at the core of how digital proximity is conjured and designed. Underlaid beneath the networked infrastructure of the software is a network of people at every point (cf. Fischer 2013; Gillespie et al. 2014). In this dissertation I argue that anti-trafficking is taking a networked form, and that the network is expanded through the *labor* of new digital experts, the police investigators, computer scientists, and technology company representatives who program code, package software, and implement algorithmic tools in pursuing child exploitation cases. I explore the motivations, impulses, and skills that go into the creation of this kind of social-digital network—the *work* of making digital tools, as well as technological experts, against child exploitation and trafficking.

D. Layout of the Dissertation

A deliberate network has latticed across major global metropolises to address the issue of trafficking, which has evolved into a distinct professionalized category. A “networked ethnography” expands upon the rationale for multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork (Marcus and Fischer 1986). In **Chapter II, “Methods,”** I describe my field sites and methods of participant-observation and how I carried out fieldwork by ‘following the network.’ The professionals I observed to be forming a counter-network came

together at sites from Omaha to Bangkok to The Hague to Washington DC, reaching out to each other via Facebook posts, conferences, Twitter mentions, after-work drinks, and news media citations. I attended many of their professional meetings and observed these interactions by procuring positions as an intern at three key sites, an NGO in the Netherlands, an anti-trafficking project at the United Nations Southeast Asia secretariat in Thailand, and an NGO in Bangkok. I also describe my particular positionality and perspective in operating within this counter-network, having previously interned with a human trafficking project at Microsoft Research as well as the International Labour Organization.

In **Chapter III, "Counter-Network,"** I argue that professional anti-trafficking sociality is produced through its members' ideologies of human rights, ethics, and the role of humanitarian interventions. My conception of the counter-network draws on theories of networks from STS and social anthropology, particularly Annelise Riles' suggestion that modern bureaucratic institutions encourage a mimetic effect as they self-consciously arrange and display their own social networks, an effect that Riles calls "sociality seen twice" (2001). I draw on my ethnographic fieldwork with humanitarian workers affiliated with three different agencies in Bangkok—a UN organization and two NGOs. I argue that this network is shared, animated, and normalized through the moralizing practices of bureaucracy, exhibited through professional speech, political gossip, and

gestures of hierarchy. The moralizing practices and sociality of the anti-trafficking network are necessary for the expansion of anti-trafficking into a new *policing* network.

In **Chapter IV, “Detection,”** I introduce this policing network through my fieldwork and interviews with law enforcement at international child protection conferences and affiliated with Dutch and American investigative agencies. I describe how child pornography—the production, sale, and circulation of photos and videos of child sexual abuse—has been receiving renewed attention amidst heightened concerns over cybersecurity and the exchange of illicit content on social media websites. This chapter considers how different groups imagine risk, security, and the digital commons: Is cyber space lawless, sprawling, and deterritorialized? Or can companies and law enforcement enact jurisdictional control over various parts of the internet to be able to locate and control what sort of content (including child pornography) gets posted and made visible? This chapter discusses the reaches and limits of online content review, and queries who is it that actually performs the labor of content review. Through interviews and observations of content review teams at several social media companies, the Dutch National Police, a DC-based U.S. governmental organization, and digital forensic software developers, I describe how these groups are attempting to use image detection software to find child pornography photo and video content. Such image detection matches newly located pornographic images with existing national and

international databases of known illicit content, databases of missing children, and databases of known perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Databases and classification systems are increasingly becoming part of the infrastructure of everyday life (Bowker and Star 1999), and especially so in the aggregation and organization of data on child exploitation. Relevant electronic databases considered here include child abuse images (held by local, national, and international governments, the Virtual Global Taskforce, and several US-based social media and electronic media companies); sex offender registries; and databases of missing and formerly missing children. Algorithmic detectives pair technical expertise with collaborative perception or apprehension work, as well as a gut sensibility of intuition and suspicion in cases. To make this argument I contrast algorithmic detective work alongside “traditional” policing techniques such as investigative sleuthing and the craft of forensic sketches of suspects.

In **Chapter V, “Deception,”** I describe how one child protection organization decided to tackle another perceived ‘digital trafficking’ issue: the solicitation and sexual exploitation of children and teens on webcam chat rooms. This NGO, working out of Amsterdam with the support of an advertising agency and a graphic design company, produced a 3-D, moving, photorealistic avatar of a 10 year-old Filipina girl to pose online and entrap potential child solicitors. This avatar was animated in a six-month virtual entrapment scheme dubbed “Project Sweetie,” engaging people online to offer

sexual gestures in exchange for identifying information such as the solicitors' names, emails, and locations. One thousand names and identifying data were collected by the NGO and submitted to Europol and the Dutch Police under the charges of solicitation of minors online. In using a virtual decoy instead of a human decoy for the sting operation, the Project Sweetie team found an important legal loophole to conduct their work and make possible a form of extrajudicial 'policing.' Based on my participant observation as an intern at this NGO, as well as interviews with various members of the project, I argue that the issue of artificiality also has significant racial implications. The casting of a particularly raced and sexualized avatar—a female Filipina child—indicates, I argue, how the design of a 'desirable' object indicates the objects intended to be found. That is, how are entrapment schemes crafted, and for whom was Sweetie considered to be a lure? Who did the NGO intend to entrap? Using Anne McClintock's conceptualization of the colonial imaginary of Southeast Asia as a "porno-tropics" I suggest that the Dutch NGO's Sweetie design evokes a new sensibility of digital porno-tropics. As McClintock suggests, "uncertain" spaces become "libidinously eroticized," sites upon which both desires and fears can be projected; members of the counter-network do a similar projection with certain digital sites. I review existing debates on the practice of webcam-based sex work in Southeast Asia and its connection to child sex tourism between Europe and Southeast Asia, and how NGOs such as this one imagine children and offenders alike through their design work. Critically, the NGO described

their project as “pro-active policing,” and I contend that this phrasing signals an ongoing extension of policing power by informal groups and citizens, one that is made permissible through its use in the case of child protection. The protection of the child hinges upon defining its other, that which threatens childhood.

In the concluding section, **Chapter VI, “Proximity and Rights,”** I expand upon my introductory arguments on proximity and applying feminist phenomenology to STS research. The notion of digital proximity that I suggest is held by counter-network actors is crucial to their design of tools to locate existing abusers (and then to bring closer and apprehend) as well as to anticipate potential abusers who might put children at risk (to predict and make proximate). Digital proximity and the possibility of ‘proximate violence’—violence always near, always around the corner—is indicative of today’s digital risk society. A politics of digital possibility or optimism online is increasingly becoming twisted into a politic of digital protectionism—arming oneself with the tools to detect criminals and also deceive and entrap potential criminals, and allowing companies and law enforcement to do this for you. Protection of the child depends upon bringing closer and making proximate those who ought to be punished. The constitution of ‘protected’ and ‘punished’ categories is dialectic. This concluding chapter considers what happens after making proximate, after taking in. How do publics, digital or otherwise, deal with perpetrators of sexual violence to children? How

is an orientation away from violence also a turning towards punishment? How do certain marginalized communities resist and playfully distort and divert techniques of surveillance and databasing? I also consider the longer span of this project, beyond the example of child protection, and what happens as the same software, bureaucratic assemblages, and policing techniques become increasingly absorbed into counter-terrorism, migration and border control efforts.

As the examples and analyses of this dissertation aim to show, the counter-network of activist professionals and algorithmic detectives are oriented toward particular forms of sociability, globally, that depend upon shared notions of protection and punishment. The dialectic of protection and punishment makes possible a new form of digital surveillance, one that might even seem banal and playful, that actually thrives upon sensibilities of human sociality and affinity, a networked relationality that depends upon not only othering but shaming—making others visible to define oneself against. In this dissertation I make the claim that child protection software is predicated upon a desire to shame, and that shaming and outing are at the very core of new digital surveillance.

Chapter II

METHODS

A. Networked Ethnography

This project has unfolded over many years, from motor-taxi rides down clogged avenues in Bangkok through the cold, quiet corridors of Dutch government buildings. In this chapter I trace the origins of the project and how my research methods unfolded, in messy and latticed ways, across multiple offices, countries, and labor structures. I describe the project as an example of multi-sited, Global STS research, and my method as one of “networked” ethnography informed by digital anthropology. I use the concept of *proximity* to think through how my own theoretical and political orientations and bodily presentations have influenced the rhythms and results of this work.

I was 19 when I began deeply thinking about the linkages between technology, sexuality, labor, and bureaucratic power on a global scale. As a sophomore majoring in

anthropology and feminist studies, I made my first foray into fieldwork in the Gujarati cities where my mother grew up. I conducted interviews at the homes and offices of peer sexual health educators of the Gujarat State AIDS Control Society, nearly all of whom were themselves involved in some form of transactional sex in urban spaces. In my questions I was often clumsy, and fumbling, making all the snafus of a student trying hard to be a real ethnographer, unsure of how to frame my curious inquiries into sex practices, birth control methods, and femme aesthetics of sexual empowerment inflected with class, caste, and ethnicity. Very quickly I realized how much of their work—coordinating clients, meeting other peer educators, making arrangements with boyfriends and madams, hearing tips about police raids—was conducted over cell phone. This was in 2006, amid all the hoopla of the “global mobile revolution” in mobile-health and mobile-banking, and excitement over the possibility for text messages to convey cash, remittances, hospital information, and more. I became focused on the *gestural* practices of cell phone use—how women cradled their phones in carefully sewn, sequined pouches, and how they confidently wielded their phones on the street to effect authority in defiance of laws against solicitation. I was also working hard to appear a proficient ethnographer, and I learned from these women how to be cajoling and persistent, how to flirt and coax information from those so unaccustomed to giving it up. This enskillment is subtle, and it has taken me a decade to see how my body can curl comfortably onto the cushioned wooden swing of a pimp’s living room,

or sprawl slackly on the wooden benches of a *kroeg* pub in Rotterdam, or sit erect and responsive in a chilly, solemn governmental assembly in Bangkok or D.C.

The concept of “networked ethnography” alludes to the multi-sitedness of this project, each site representing a node in a larger network of anti-traffickers (which I describe as a “counter-network” in the next chapter). Child exploitation has become configured as a *global* “problem” by the experts whom I studied, and the corresponding “solutions” are similarly globally distributed. I make use of the multi-sited approach suggested by George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1986; see also Marcus 1995, 1998) to grasp how software implementation, policing, and activism are experienced globally. This approach accounts for the increasingly interconnected, networked ways in which labor and identity are practiced: “For ethnographers interested in contemporary local changes in culture and society, single-sited research can no longer be easily located in a world system perspective” (Marcus 1995:98). In addition, ethnographic work on digital space (e.g. Boellstorff 2008; Boyer 2013; Gershon 2010; Gray 2009; Helmreich 2000; Malaby 2009; Miller 2000) influences my use of ‘networked’ characterizations of the complex political and social relationships that flourish in, around, and through virtual worlds. The anthropology of virtual worlds (cf. Boellstorff 2012) takes digital objects as socially produced and mutable through use, and rejects a technologically deterministic view that the digital uni-directionally impacts the social (cf. Fischer 2003, 2013). For example,

Mary Gray (2009), in her ethnography of queer youth organizing in the rural US, develops the concept of “boundary publics” to describe networked activism and community-building that makes use of, but is not entirely contingent upon, digital infrastructures. My choice to study personnel with specialized expertise, rather than child victims, draws from anthropology of science and technology—the methodology of “studying up” (Nader 1972) to explore scientific labs as cultural spaces and scientists as having their own rituals, “natives,” and cultural identities (cf. Gusterson 1996; Helmreich 2009; Ho 2009; Martin 2007; Paxson 2012; Petryna 2002; Thompson 2005; Traweek 1992). ‘Studying up’ and feminist inquiry share a concern for understanding the mechanisms that shore up and legitimate relations of power, from academic institutions and government bureaucracies to technological and regulatory spaces. The move to describe and critique cultures of experts challenges ethnographies of ‘the subaltern’ by acknowledging “the impossibility of innocent ‘identity’ politics and epistemologies” (Haraway 1991:192) and how expertise and expert cultures shape relations of gender, sexuality, race, class, and power. My own identity politics are also far from innocent or objective—my ability to conduct research on the anti-trafficking network depends upon my own role *within* the network, to gain access to the institutions and people studied in this dissertation. My critical perspective on expertise is necessarily colored by my own positionality, perhaps even complicity, as at times adopting the habitus of one who also works to keep this network intact. I offer this

reflexivity in all its problematic weight, and acknowledge that my analysis of the interviews and fieldwork moments shared here shifts between critique and ambivalence, a tension that nods to the complexity and heaviness of taking the global policing of child exploitation as an object of anthropological study.

B. Interview Data and Methods

The essential content of this dissertation project is based on fieldwork conducted from 2012-2015 in the United States, the Netherlands, and Thailand, and supported by doctoral dissertation research funding from the National Science Foundation, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation for Research in Gender Studies, and a Hugh Hampton Young Fellowship from MIT. I conducted participant-observation under the auspices of three unpaid internships: nearly two months at Terre Des Hommes, an NGO in The Hague, Netherlands (discussed in Chapter V); six months at UN-ACT, an inter-agency project program based in the UNDP in Bangkok, Thailand (discussed in Chapter III); and three months at ECPAT, an NGO also based in Bangkok (referenced in Chapter III and the Conclusion but not extensively discussed in this dissertation). Participant-observation at these fixed field sites allowed me to experience the thrum and pace of life as an activist, a bureaucrat, and a humanitarian professional. In each of these sites I offered my resources in manuscript editing, producing blog posts, and writing white

papers on relevant topics to reciprocate for my presence in the office. In addition to these core field sites, I had repeated meetings and spent time at the following locations: Facebook's offices in Washington, DC and Menlo Park, California; the headquarters of the Dutch National Police in Zoustermeer, Netherlands; the office of the Dutch Special Rapporteur to the UN on Trafficking, in The Hague; and the ILO and UNODC, also housed in the same building complex as UN-ACT in Bangkok, Thailand. I also conducted interviews by phone and Skype with computer scientists and marketing directors at six digital forensics companies in the US and two in the Netherlands, as well as in-person interviews with digital forensics vendors at police training and child protection conferences. These conferences—in Omaha, NE, Washington, DC, and Dallas, TX—also served as important sites for hearing formal presentations, participating in information conversations, and observing knowledge transfer among various actors involved in the anti-trafficking counter-network. At each of these sites, I interviewed technology specialists, activists, and law enforcement personnel working on special investigations, image detection software and data collection to address the online sexual exploitation of children. The total data aggregated from this fieldwork includes 41 semi-structured interviews (of 34 unique persons), audio recorded when permitted, as well as numerous conference and workshop presentations, also audio recorded when permitted.

Some of this research was planned in advance, although various contingencies altered the timeline and direction of where I physically situated myself. Most notably, the Thai military coup, which reached its zenith in May and June 2014, coincided with my initial plans for moving to Bangkok to begin the internship at UN-ACT. The UN complex and many governmental agencies were effectively shut down during this period. By the time I arrived in Bangkok in July, business seemed to have returned to normal, and my UN-ACT colleagues joked about the few weeks during which they saved commute time by Skyping and emailing each other. (For many upper-class Thais and expats, the initial impacts of the coup and protests were felt only mildly, from a privileged distance I explore in Chapter III).

Much of the fieldwork and interviews evolved through the snowball sampling typical of ethnographic and social science research. I also had to recalibrate my expectations of access, as it quickly became evident that much of the software in which I was interested was proprietary, many of my interlocutors were involved with criminal investigations that were ongoing and thus confidential, and institutional knowledge was handled with multiple layers of secrecy. Jarrett Zigon makes the case for “assemblic ethnography” in his study of ‘situations’ in the ongoing global drug war, an example of “widely diffused assembled phenomena”: “As method, assemblic ethnography chases and traces a situation through its continual process of assembling across different global scales and

its temporally differential localization in diverse places. Just as one never knows if, when, and where they will get caught up in a situation, so too the anthropologist doing assemblic ethnography can never know beforehand where the research will lead and when it will do so" (2015:515).

In my initial research funding proposal, I had planned a three-month internship with the Victim Identification Lab at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), headquartered in Alexandria, VA. I had gone through several rounds of meetings, both in-person and via phone, to confirm expectations for this period of fieldwork, which would have been from January to March 2014. But in late December, between Christmas and New Year's, I received a short, formulaic email telling me that the Victim Identification Lab had elected to discontinue the internship program for the indefinite future. I tried, somewhat futilely, to understand why, but eventually assumed my presence might have been more problematic than useful for the organization dealing with sensitive, confidential material. Thus the data which I do present on NCMEC—which is significant, as it is the *only* clearinghouse for digital child exploitation located by electronic service providers in the US—is based on interviews and meetings with NCMEC staff and representatives at several conferences, as well as two in-person sets of meetings at the headquarters office. My fieldwork was a continual process of following up with contacts, presenting my research questions in multiple

forms to different members of the same team, and waiting for approval in hierarchical chains of command, a point especially true regarding law enforcement, but often equally the case with many companies and bureaucratic organizations.

My analysis also draws from my ongoing collection of visual, text, digital, and multimedia materials produced by organizations and companies to promote their projects. Steady document analysis reveals the pulse and larger arc of anti-trafficking over the past half decade, how issues or problems are conveyed, how violence is represented, which metaphors become reproduced and recycled, and how various actors—victims, survivors, heroes, rescuers, offenders, criminals—are presented by various agencies. Image production and the framing of “visual ops” (photographs tailor-made for any media opportunities) are integral to the marketing of digital forensics and anti-trafficking campaigns alike. A succession of images flows through my mind—the face of the avatar ‘Sweetie’ looking directly at the audience in a Youtube video; the designer of PhotoDNA posed insouciantly on a motorcycle, grinning for the camera; the Special Programs manager at Terre Des Hommes framed by campaign posters around his desk, ready for the next press interview; the UN and Southeast Asian governmental representatives of the COMMIT Process standing decorously together for their bimonthly photograph in a Bangkok hotel. All faces looking, bodies posing, eyes expectant—ready for their viewer moment.

I also draw extensively on prior research experiences, namely my internship in 2008 with the International Labour Organization (Bangkok, at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) and a research assistantship from 2011-2012 with Microsoft Research (the Social Media Collective in Cambridge, MA). I would be remiss if I did not offer transparency on how deeply those experiences made the present fieldwork possible. Having personal contacts at major bureaucracies and corporations, as well as the branding of my academic affiliations from MIT and Stanford, has opened many doors. Thus my use of the word “networked” also indicates my own positionality and privileged access, cultivated over time, in specific sites where the network operates.

This is the sort of ethnography that winds its way through corridors and meeting rooms, as I orient myself through different ways of being and practicing expert work. To have a body that is competent and “fluent” at maintaining composure and skilled in the delicate choreographers of “professionalism” is also to acknowledge the manners and forms of privilege. Anthropologists are always in some sense both “off stage and on display” (Shryock 2004), and my performances of proficiency or belonging were important skills in certain spaces. Multi-sited fieldwork across varied bureaucratic, professional, corporate, and technological sites requires one to “flow” easily between settings, from The Hague to Dallas to Menlo Park to Bangkok, for

example. Multi-sited, networked ethnography adds “layers to the complex sediments of cultural habitus” effected through “anthropological vagrancy,” as Herzfeld (2009:143) writes, not entirely tongue-in-cheek. And I was good at it: whether from years of dance choreography training, childhood drama classes, an elite college experience, or the mimicry of proficiency many of us children of immigrants subconsciously enact. I took belonging-ness as a test, in each site, expressed through my physical stance and clothing, my visibility or silence, with subtle androgynous office-wear in techie spaces, or flirtatious femme adornments in bar and club space.

A significant challenge in interviewing people in expert positions is coaxing them to “get off stage” (Herzfeld 2009:143) and talk in a way that moves them outside their canned speeches and rehearsed sound-bites. Sometimes this was as simple as offering an informal interview setting such as a bar or hotel lounge. But often, time and space were limited, and I felt I had to be quick and pushy in ways that afterward made me feel like a reporter chasing salacious gossip. But following Herzfeld I take seriously “the ‘mereness’ of gossip, gesture, casual encounters, and ordinary things in ordinary places” (2009: 132), by attempting to have expert informants “get off the stage and whisper all those intimate and slightly disreputable bits of gossip that make good, juicy ethnographic data” (Herzfeld 2009:143). “It is less the mastery of an official language and customs that serves the able anthropologist in seeking cultural knowledge or even

aspiring to serve the goals of the population being studied,” he writes; “it is, rather, the ability to demonstrate *obliquely*—through gesture, subtle dialect usage, and quite simply knowing when to shut up—that marks the capable and canny anthropologist and replays that Geertzian wink with something equally resistant to any kind of reductive analysis” (Herzfeld 2009:146-147). Nevertheless, in some spaces, police conferences especially, I felt that my very presence was offensive to the ‘real’ experts around me. It was a deep feeling of my complete un-belonging: my gender, my race, my naiveté, my lack of professional badges of any sort. I would sit very still and silent listening passively to presentations, careful to not make any quick movements, until I realized that this very stiffness was making me hypervisible when a law enforcement officer, a woman, shot me a mildly derisive glance that I could only interpret as saying something like, ‘hey, loosen up, weirdo.’ Sometimes my discomfort was ratcheted to the level of paranoia. I visited the UK Child Exploitation and Online Protection center on a short trip from the Netherlands. I agreed to meet a police liaison, Jenny, on a Friday for an “after work glass of wine.” She suggested a bar on London’s South Bank, at the Royal Festival Hall just across from The Eye. In our email exchanges coordinating the meeting, I sent her a headshot of myself so we could recognize each other in what I expected would be a crowded bar. Her reply:

Classification:OFFICIAL

Ha! I’m a detective....I’ve already looked one up :)

Welcome to London.

All of her emails began with the classification liner, as did most law enforcement officers' correspondence, but her remark that she is a "detective," while true, asserted a power dynamic of her professional access while I had little information on her. At this stage in my fieldwork I was becoming increasingly apprehensive that police investigators might take issue with my work. My apprehensions were and perhaps still are unfounded, as any mildly skilled investigator would be able to locate anything they needed to know about my research via simple online searches. I use this example, though, to convey how much my anxieties and sense of visibility did and may continue to filter how I approach interviews and the documented material.

Nonetheless, the most I can hope to do is convey the narratives I heard, however partial. These are layered stories, and I am grateful for the privilege of spending time with many unique, charismatic, expertly situated people who were so gracious with their time and shared their stories. The scenes I present in this dissertation simply attempt to make legible how these people themselves have made sense of a particular, networked world.

C. Notes on Pseudonyms and Terminology

Interviews were audio-recorded when permitted by an interlocutor, as described in my approved interview protocol. All keynote and general presentations given at conferences were audio-recorded, while police training sessions at such conferences were only recorded with permission. Some names are anonymized, but the majority are *not*, by request of the interlocutors themselves. This has proved to be challenging when I attempt to describe an organization or an encounter where the group leader takes no issue with being identified, and is usually easily known and identifiable, while others in the room may not be as comfortable. This is not an unfamiliar challenge for STS research, when using interviews and excerpts by persons who are used to being quoted and in the public eye. Thus I do not anonymize organization leaders, keynote speakers, and chief law enforcement investigators who each might be the unique person in their role; but I do use pseudonyms for all of their team members. This is not a perfect system and I understand that those familiar with these spaces may still be possible to identify persons.

Social science research on sex trafficking contains a multitude of terms to reference the various legal categories, individual identities, collective experiences, and labors that fall on the spectrum between coerced exploitation and voluntary sex work. While my

project focuses on the networked movement for ‘child protection,’ it would be impossible to discuss this issue without reference to the discordant terms for trafficking and sex work. This debate over terminology is described with further nuance in Chapter III, “Counter-Network.” Throughout the text I will use “sex work,” “transactional sex,” “trading sex,” and their derivatives, interchangeably. The choices for using ‘child,’ ‘youth,’ or ‘young person’ is similarly complex. Directly following a primary interview dialogue or a quote, I default to using the terms used by that informant. For instance, staff at Terre Des Hommes uniformly refer to persons ages 12 to 18 as “children” (in Dutch and English), while staff at UN-ACT and ECPAT alternated between children, youth, teenagers, and young adults. These phrasings include: transactional sex, people in the sex trades, youth in the sex trade, trading sex, survival sex, webcam sex, digitally-mediated sex transactions, and the sexual economy. It is my conscious choice to use these phrasings instead of the word ‘prostitution’ or ‘sex slavery’—terms that one may find quite frequently used by child rights organizations and anti-trafficking policy influencers. The labels ‘prostitution’ and ‘slavery’ have been criticized by far too many feminist activists—primarily radical, young people of color involved in the sex trades themselves—for the ways in which they ascribe a static ‘victim’ identity to people who may not identify so. In my terminology choices I aim to respectfully follow the guidelines for research on sex work suggested by The Red Umbrella Project to mitigate issues with researchers taking advantage of sex worker

communities (2011), *Streetwise and Safe* (Dank et al. 2015), and the activist scholars Laura Agustín (2007; personal conversation) and emi koyama (2012; personal conversation). This project is dedicated to young people involved in the global sexual economy for all the myriad ways they choose to define and own what they do.

Chapter III

COUNTER-NETWORK

Anti-Trafficking Professionals and Moralizing Practices

A. Becoming a Network

1. Confluence Points

The United Nations building complex, UNESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific), is situated centrally in old Bangkok, close to the Chao Praya River. UNESCAP is on Rajdamnoern Nok, a multiple-lane thoroughfare studded by major Thai governmental ministry buildings, notably the Royal Thai Military immediately to the left of the UN complex. Rajdamnoern Nok is framed by the King Rama V Monument to the north and the Democracy Monument to the south. The street is expansive and lined with pleasingly manicured gardens on each end. UNESCAP itself is hardly an eyesore, with the jade green roof of its assembly hall fanning elegantly

into a curve both imposing and inviting. The building complex also includes the secretariat offices for the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Office on Migration (IOM).



View from UNDP of the UN Conference Center at UNESCAP at Rajdamnoern Nok, Bangkok

Depending which of its many employees you ask, UNESCAP's location is either peacefully removed or maddeningly inconvenient. The complex is a short taxi ride from many of the neighborhoods around the central business district and Skytrain or metro stations, but the roads are congested and at rush hour taxis in that direction might be limited. During the military coup of 2014, UNESCAP often effectively shut down as employees were discouraged from being on the road or entering the area, given its prime position near the military and ministries. Many people commuted from Skytrain

stops using moto-taxis, perching on the back of a motorcycle with a driver designated by his neon colored vest. The moto-taxis could wend through traffic far more effectively than taxis, though without the luxury of air conditioning and with the added sooty and windswept glow of high-speed transit.

I usually took moto-taxis as I, like so many other commuters, was perpetually running late in Bangkok traffic. But the times I rode regular taxis were opportunities to ask others on the street at the Ratchathewi station if they were going to the UN and wanted to share a ride fare. This involved a lot of sly and awkward scoping out of people who were non-Thai, wearing casual office wear, and perhaps (most easily) their UN identification badge or lanyard. To intuitively “know” that people around me might be waiting to hail a cab, and might be employed at the UN complex, took some degree of perceptive skill. The act of seeing and being seen—an awareness of one’s conspicuousness and presentation—highlights the para-ethnographic elements of life as an expat and international employee at this particular site.

The UN system as it stands today is the culmination of a liberal vision spun throughout the 20th century. It is the confluence of universalist politics in governance, a teleological model of development and human progress, and the subscription to an individualist model of personhood and rights-based freedom and equality. The UN system is future

oriented, in that its conventions take the form of promises. Meetings and summits on key issues such as the Millennium Development Goals exemplify UN ideology, articulating end-points for these goals determined through consensus. Often these goals are deemed unfulfilled, and their timelines will be extended (as happened with the Millennium Development Goals). But the impression of the UN's heft and influence remains: its purported ability to pressure states on human rights issues, to support the implementation of poverty alleviation schemes, and to uphold the benefits of pluralist and democratic societies. A future-oriented institution perpetuates the notion of a world characterized by loss or lack, by that which is missing and remains to be fulfilled. When one, especially a left-leaning academic such as myself, writes about "the UN" as a totality as I have just done, critical scrutiny comes easily. But the institution is held together by many small parts: the individuals whose efforts comprise the UN system, even though they are not always formally employed (a precarity I will explore in this section). The United Nations building is the physically situated epicenter of a vast assemblage of people and organizations that make up the "counter-network."

In this chapter I argue that "trafficking" is produced as a 'problem' through the configuration of NGOs and institutions that form the anti-trafficking counter-network. The production of trafficking and its networked solution, anti-trafficking, involves a particular kind of humanitarian professional labor. Despite the precarity of uncertain

project contracts in humanitarian professional work, the people who do this labor perform and rely on the cultivation of moralizing practices and professional intimacy to remain relevant within the network and keep the objective of 'anti-trafficking' close. By intimacy I mean the cultivation of techniques of proximity, through speech and gesture, by which professionals who work on anti-trafficking *as a practice* maintain the sociality that keeps the network alive despite bureaucratic failures to fulfill "anti-trafficking" *as an end goal*.

Through the everyday speech, gestures, and networking practices of trainings and meetings of the people in this network, anti-trafficking has become a hyper-issue. Trafficking is today a problem with no immediate solution and an indefinite sense of time allotted to its discussion by certain key actors in the network. While it seemingly lingers outside of time, trafficking also accrues tremendous visibility, and increasing numbers of bureaucrats, politicians, business people, travelers, and many laypersons have come into contact with the term and produce text and policy on it. But like other such large global problem terms (e.g. climate change, poverty, and terrorism) most people do not possess a definitive concept of it, but only engage with it in the abstract. Without the organizational apparatus abstracting and translating the "problem" there is no problem. I am concerned here not with the 'phenomenon' of trafficking itself, but in the *naming* of it as a particular kind of phenomenon. I do not intend here to discount the

thousands of people who have been and currently are caught up and victimized within trafficking networks, labor exploitation, and forced migrations—my argument here concerns the discursive production of trafficking *by* and *for* the “expert” persons who legislate and dictate on the issue without direct contact to the issue itself. It accumulates discursive value as it becomes exchanged between expert persons and agencies, and it often becomes physically “sited” when various agencies (especially in the UN system) compete for funding and name recognition on the anti-trafficking issue.

In what follows, I first present an overview of the UN system with a focus on its central role in dictating the anti-trafficking network's expansion. Using examples from interviews and fieldwork conducted with people working at UN agencies, MTV-EXIT, and ECPAT, I will then elaborate on some of the particular moments of conflict and gatherings that institutionalized anti-trafficking within Bangkok and other key cities.

In the second section of this chapter I will argue that for anti-trafficking experts, trafficking as a concept is both intimate and strange. Actors in the anti-trafficking network thus bring the issue into proximity by establishing strong professional relationships with one another. By characterizing networking as the production of intimacy I depart from the simplistic view that large bureaucracies foster a sense of alienation in their professionalized workers (cf. Gerth and Mills 1946; Miller 1967;

Weber 1917). Through fieldwork encounters in various counter-network sites in Bangkok I show that workplace affect, speech, and gestures—that is, the “mereness” (Herzfeld 2009) of everyday behaviors and dispositions—have a crucial impact on how the counter-network assembles and sustains itself. Riles (2001), in her analysis of the Fijian Women's Network at the UN Conference on Women in the 1990s, suggests that when the very purpose of this “network” is to perpetuate itself, the effect is one of “sociality seen twice,” an “inherent recursivity” (172). Perhaps to some of my interlocutors in Bangkok these stories of “in-between” life outside the UN or other agencies may come across as trivial—but it is in these moments that expertise is enacted. How one signals a particular familiarity or orientation towards the issue, establishing both proximity and distance, is a key component of maintaining the counter-network itself.

2. Networks in STS and Anthropology

My use of the concept of the “network” draws upon a rich body of literature from science and technology studies (STS) and social anthropology. I find the form of the network to be a useful metaphor to describe how organizations and institutions assemble in latticed and interwoven ways in this particular political and social moment of globalized mobility and labor. The networked form encapsulates particularly well the

dispersed nodes of international organizations such as the United Nations and Interpol, their existence predicated on notions of universalized conventions using valued and strategically placed sites for implementation and conduct. I focus here on the traditions of network studies within social anthropology, STS, and symbolic interactionism as they pertain to understanding bureaucratic political networks, while acknowledging that the analytic form of the network has also been studied in social network analysis and digital studies.

Social anthropologists, long concerned with matters of 'form' in kinship and other relations, have also explored networks beyond their physical structure to interrogate their metaphorical power and representative resonance. Characterizing social relations as networks allowed many anthropologists to address the flexible complexities of social positions and classes. Studies of gift exchange since Mauss (1954) have informed anthropologists' observations of social stratification, class, gender, and political reciprocity (cf. Appadurai 1986; Strathern 1988, 1986[2004], 1992). In Chapter IV, I describe how "hash sociality," a particular form of networked, reciprocal relationship between police investigators and social media companies who share digital hash codes of child abuse images, involves various modalities of gift exchange. With the rapid growth of the production and use of new technologies—especially biomedical technologies, assisted reproductive technologies, and digital information and

communication technologies (ICTs)—anthropologists turned their attention to the ways in which these new objects influenced the character of kinship relationships (cf. Martin 2001, Paxson 2004, Thompson 2005) and the flows of information (Hannerz 1992; Castells 2000). The anthropological study of ICTs, especially, has been instructive of how technological communication and exchanges reconfigure forms of human sociality.

“Assemblage” (cf. Ong and Collier 2005) has emerged as a related concept to networks to describe socio-material or socio-technical configurations of scientific and bureaucratic institutions, experts, and laypersons who coalesce to render an ‘issue’ or ‘situation’ (Zigon 2015) legible and potent. Ethnographic studies of assemblage attempt to describe complex political formations and subjectivities victimized by, benefiting from, regulating, or simply existing within the ‘globalization’ discourse of corporations and nation-states (Briggs 2004; Choy 2005; Escobar 2001; Puar 2012; Puar and Rai 2002; Tsing 2005). Assemblic ethnographies take into account how people engage with the networked movements of capital and state power both through articulations of resistance and through the exercise of agency by the self-conscious organization into networks of their own.

Meanwhile, STS scholars have conceptualized “networks” as forms of social organization, political amalgamation, and as systems of exchange. Actor-Network

Theory (ANT) explicitly encourages us to think about networks as configurations of human and nonhuman actors (cf. Callon 1986; Latour 1987, 2005; Law 1986, 1988, 2004). In *Science in Action*, Latour (1987) makes a case for an ethnographic understanding of ANT, particularly in considering the material world (cf. Knorr-Cetina 1981) that scientists interact with as they do their work, as well as the “non-scientists” who make scientific labwork possible (e.g. department chairs, funders, administrative assistants, not to mention those who construct laboratories and do facilities maintenance). In their article on “institutional ecology,” Star and Griesemer (1989) bring symbolic interactionism to bear on questions of STS and the history of scientific knowledge production. They take the case example of the creation of the Berkeley Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, a project needing the inclusion and participation of very different actors. The nascent field of zoology, Star and Griesemer argue, illuminated issues of expertise and authority between biologists, fur trappers, taxidermists, and local bureaucratic officials, not to mention the wealthy donors funding the museum. In their ecological approach they map out the various actors and then consider how knowledge of zoology functioned as a sort of “boundary object,” immutably mobile as it became characterized and negotiated by different actors while retaining its epistemological shape (e.g. the fur trappers claimed they “knew” animal zoology just as biologists trained in universities made the same knowledge claims). My discussion of the mobilization of ‘child trafficking’ as an *issue* considers how this boundary object is taken

up by various actors in the network. Star and Griesemer's form of interactionism has been taken up by many STS scholars, especially those concerned with feminist questions of inclusion and exclusion, notably Adele Clarke (1992) in her analysis of the institutionalized marginalization of contraceptive technologies and reproductive technologies important to women, or Joan Fujimura's study (1992) of the definition, biomedicalization, and funding of the object known as "cancer." Interactionism encourages us to assess the knowledge claims and agency of all of the actors implicated in this ecology. Interactionism also encourages the analyst to identify the localized and intimate moments in which objects of knowledge (such as "work") are confronted and met with "friction" (cf. Tsing 2005)—and to understand what these abrasive contact moments reveal about the particular constitutions of expertise and authority in this instance.

Feminist scholars have amended and expanded upon ANT, a critique most salient in Karen Barad's work (1999, 2000, 2007). Barad argues that ANT's material-semiotics reflects a masculinist, Europeanist fixation with the symbolic, a move that privileges the representational over the everyday (cf. Bordo 1986, Martin 1985). This argument echoes the work of earlier feminist scholars like Collier and Yanagisako (1989) who had critiqued practice theory for its elision of the everyday realities of 'practice' as combined with strategically-masked, masculinist forms of representation. Practice theory also

tended to assume a sort of complacency in the analysis of people's behavior (e.g. 'this is just how they are'). Barad's more recent work on feminist new materialism offers a useful contribution to studies of networks, through an attention to performativity (cf. Butler 1993), or what she calls 'agential realism' (2003; 2007). Barad urges network studies to explore the "*intra-action*" of human and nonhuman actors, as opposed to *inter-action*; the deep implications of analyzing already networked, mutable, and constantly-negotiated relationships among actors. Charis Thompson, similarly, has described the discursive, political, and emotional coordinations between agencies and people involved with technologies as "*ontological choreography*" (2005), an analytic that highlights how multiple registers of social and political definitions must deftly operate and coordinate at the same time for technologies to 'work' as a concept and practice. In Chapter IV I draw on these feminist STS critiques in my characterization of perceptual enskillment between algorithmic and human viewers.

Taking into consideration this lineage of scholarship on the figure of the network, I draw on the arguments of Annelise Riles in the representational work that a network does both within and without its structure. Riles's interlocutors, Fijian NGO experts, self-consciously develop their organization as a network as they navigate the vagaries of daily networking practice; thus the political aura, or "the effectiveness of the Network is generated by the Network's self-description" (2001:172). To offer a point of

consideration from the history of technology: Otis (2001) considers how knowledge production is always mediated by metaphor: those within networks, and those who study them, are increasingly inseparable and indistinguishable. “What is new about networking?” Otis asks. The self-consciousness of the network metaphor, as an organizational form and a professional practice, highlights how members of the network may themselves articulate para-ethnographic sensibilities. Marilyn Strathern suggests that people are always already aware of their socially networked relations—a process she calls “recombinant culturology, the endless recombining of elements in cultural commentary” (1996: 522). The representational form of the network conveys the tight dynamics of affinity between the nodal points in anti-trafficking work. How does one stay *relevant* as node in such a network? How does one identify as a humanitarian professional? To imagine a constellation of institutions and people in a network is to define the boundaries of that network; that is, those within and without. Interiority and exteriority are always mutable, however. Knox et al. explain that “the inside of the network (the social relationships of which it is composed) is at the same time the outside (the representation or visualization)” (2006: 133). With regard to people’s relationships to such boundaries, Marilyn Strathern (1988) has considered the role of interiority and exteriority in senses of the self and personhood with regards to the social. As I will demonstrate below, “outward” gestures and speech by anti-trafficking professionals—at the office, at meetings, and at after-work gatherings—are

performative, but also *necessary* moralizing practices to maintain one's status and sense of belonging in the network.

3. Translation and Bureaucratic Time

In this section I describe three organizations involved in the anti-trafficking network of Bangkok. Each of these organizations has undergone a significant moment of translation, from one iteration of a project to another, all during the period in which this fieldwork was conducted. UN Action for Cooperation against Trafficking (UN-ACT) is the revamped version of the UN Interagency Project on Trafficking (UNIAP); the Sexual Exploitation of Children Online (SECO) Program is a new division of End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT), which changed its name from End Child Prostitution in Trafficking; and IOM-X is the new iteration of the MTV End Exploitation and Trafficking (EXIT) project, now housed under and funded by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). These acronyms are deliberately similar from one iteration to the next. I use the word translation to describe the process because the juncture from one iteration to the next is quite subtle, and deliberately smoothed over by the actors involved. The translations between these organizational entities are financial and programmatic—and indicative of a sense of “bureaucratic time.” Bureaucratic time is simultaneously urgent and

atemporal: bureaucratic practices are marked by the flurry and fixation on completing trainings, funding applications, donor reports, and press releases. But by taking the long view of translation between organizations, we also see an ironic prolonging of progress by institutions whose stated aim is development and modernization. Organizations in the anti-trafficking network are driven by a conviction to appear in constant *motion*, to provide an impression of teleological headway (cf. Brown 2001; Latour 1993), while its actors do everything possible to maintain the network as is, against the otherwise precarious nature and job insecurity of their profession. Workers in the anti-trafficking network reconcile the ambivalence or even impotence of their institutions by cultivating their own narratives and moralizing practices for establishing relevance and producing intimacy to each other and the network itself.

a. UNIAP to UN-ACT: Bureaucratic Stasis and Postponed Rewards

The first regional meeting of the UN Action for Cooperation against Trafficking (UN-ACT) Project was held in late July 2014 at The Landmark Hotel in downtown Bangkok, within easy access of the Skytrain and a major highway. Some attendees chuckled upon entering the hotel, where the revolving doors were staffed by two young white Australians, a man and woman in their early 20s who spoke limited Thai but clear English, a practice increasingly common at major hotels in the city catering to

international clientele. The rest of the hotel was manned by English-speaking Thai staff, and the conference center where the meeting was held featured an espresso bar at the center where attendees congregated during and between sessions. This bimonthly regional meeting, like several others I attended, exemplifies the coordinated networking space for establishing relationships between the UN and relevant anti-trafficking NGOs.

The UN-ACT regional meeting brought together representatives from the six governments of the COMMIT process taskforce. COMMIT, or the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking, was conceived in 2004 under a multilateral Memorandum of Understanding against trafficking between governments in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam). The MOU commits these governments to develop responses to human trafficking meeting the standards set by the UN Palermo Protocol, and to work in partnership with relevant non-governmental organizations in their respective countries. The implementation of COMMIT's agreement falls under the responsibility of the RMO in Bangkok as its secretariat. At the conception of COMMIT, the secretariat office was the UN Interagency Project on Trafficking (UNIAP),¹ housed within the UN

¹ From the former website of the now-defunct UNIAP: "UNIAP serves as Secretariat to the COMMIT Process, and as such is mandated to provide technical, financial, monitoring, reporting, and logistical support to activities under COMMIT. Based on its existing work and mandate as an inter-agency coordinating body, UNIAP is able to draw on its extensive network of partners throughout the region to provide technical and financial assistance to all aspects of the COMMIT Process, and also works with partners to ensure that programs and activities are aligned with government priorities in the COMMIT

Development Programme (UNDP). The UNIAP project, which ran from 2001-2013, was converted into UN-ACT following a series of tensions between UNIAP and UNDP staff persons. The mismanagement of projects under UNIAP was often alluded to by the staff who had remained from the previous iteration, but never in specific detail. UNIAP still held quite a deal of name recognition in the networked cosmos of Bangkok, and the continued success of UN-ACT hinged upon presenting a strong legacy from UNIAP while simultaneously appearing as a fresh new start with an externally-hired director and new country donors (UNIAP had primarily been supported by the US government while UN-ACT sought donors from Scandinavian countries).

When I arrived in late June 2014, the UN-ACT Project had been running for just over one month, with only a handful of staff members from the previous iteration of the project, know as UNIAP. Anita, a Swedish woman in her late 40s, had replaced an American man as the head of the UN-ACT/UNIAP project. Several staff persons, including Peter, continued on at UN-ACT after having worked for UNIAP; others, such as Maximilian, had previously worked with other UN agencies. Anita inherited the

SPAs and National Plans of Action. The inter-agency collaboration fostered around the first COMMIT SPA (2005-2007) has continued through the SPA II (2008-2010) and into the SPA III (2011-2013), with implementing agencies contributing their unique technical expertise to helping the governments advance along the measurable targets and progress indicators built into COMMIT's monitoring and evaluation framework. UNIAP project offices based in each of the six countries coordinate with government and UN agencies and NGOs on a day-to-day basis to ensure that the governments have the technical, administrative and financial support necessary to progress on all aspects of COMMIT SPA implementation." <http://www.no-trafficking.org/commit.html>

RMO, a quadrant of the 11th floor in the main building of the UNESCAP complex. This floor and another housed various projects of the UNDP. Each floor was divided into an east and west wing partitioned by glass ID-access doors, with a small lounge and restroom area at the center. Our quadrant consisted of several cubicles, with my desk closest to the glass door. During my second week in Bangkok, Anita suggested the whole team go out for dinner and drinks to welcome several new hires also arriving in that period—Naak, a young Thai woman who was a Thailand country office project manager, Melissa, a young Canadian woman who had begun a six-month UNESCAP internship as part of her Master’s program, and Jay, a young Thai man who had just joined as Anita’s secretarial assistant. We sat at a long table outdoors at a restaurant specializing in northern Thai dishes. The entire RMO team was present, as well as most of the Thai country office: the RMO head secretary, Pom, as well as other RMO staff—Peter, Maximilian, a consultant named Naren, an intern, Michael—and the director of the Thai country office, Mi. Jay and Peter ordered a round of “frozen” iced beers, tall frosty mugs of Singha that kept flowing throughout the night.

I sat next to Anita and learned more about her arrival to Bangkok. As project manager of UN-ACT she felt a strong sense of responsibility for this current iteration’s success as an anti-trafficking project with definitive goals (something UNIAP had been criticized for by top UNDP managers). Anita had a controlling supervisor’s exasperated

impatience mixed with the desire to be gregarious and well-liked, a reflection of her past work as project officer for several fieldwork positions at UNHCHR and UNICEF. When I asked her how she was settling in to Bangkok, she let out a dramatic sigh and told me about waiting for her “African furniture” to arrive. In the late 1990s she had lived in Rwanda, working as a project officer with legal expertise for UNHCHR on the trials after the genocide. “Until we were kicked out,” she added. Since that experience she had struggled with finding something similarly “immediately rewarding.” In Bangkok she felt her work had turned into quite the opposite of the Rwanda experience, full of tension, dealing with the country offices of COMMIT, and people in positions of seniority at UNDP and in some of the country governments who felt “entitled” to order the UN project around. “But our secretariat holds the funds,” she added. Anita missed having free time at work, and felt obligated to be present at meeting after meeting as the senior officer on the project. The affective charge of anti-trafficking had pulled her to consider applying for the UN-ACT position in the first place, but it had proved to be primarily desk-work. The tension Anita felt between this bureaucratic job and her desire to be politically relevant and to feel a moral obligation to her work was a feeling I commonly witnessed among managers of her status in the UN system.

b. ECPAT's SECO Programme: Bearing Witness and Reconfiguring Child Rights

Before the passage of the UN Palermo Protocol on global human trafficking, issues related to sexual exploitation, especially of children, were covered by smaller organizations promoting child rights. 'Child rights,' indeed was a confluence point for networked activism in the two decades prior to 'trafficking' (and anti-trafficking) becoming named.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN-CRC) was ratified in 1990. As of 2016, 196 countries are party to the UN-CRC, including every member of the UN except for the United States. The UN-CRC sets international standards regarding child welfare and protection, and importantly defines a child as "under 18 years of age." Countries that have not become signatories typically refrain on the grounds of clauses prohibiting child labor, the death penalty for children, and lifelong imprisonment of children (the United States has not signed due to opposing prohibition of the latter two points). In 2000, the UN General Assembly voted to approve two "Optional Protocols" to the UN-CRC, the Optional Protocol for the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (forbidding and preventing child soldiering), and the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography. (The Optional Protocols were ratified in 2002, and the US is a signatory on these.)

ECPAT (End Child Prostitution in Tourism) was founded in the first three years of the 1990s as a group of humanitarian professionals seeking to link the UN-CRC to Asian tourism issues. In their view, travel by Europeans and Americans to Southeast Asian countries for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation of children was an as-yet undefined and unaddressed issue, a symptom of the perilous side of globalization and mobility. ECPAT was conceived as a “network of civil society organizations” with a secretariat based in Bangkok. These organizations would work together to put pressure on the travel sector—hotels, airlines, and others in the hospitality industry—to raise awareness of sex tourism and exploitation occurring on their premises. By the late 1990s, the writing of the UN Protocol on Human Trafficking was gaining increased traction in Bangkok, and ECPAT aimed to have a larger seat at the table and expanded their mission and changed their name. Today, ECPAT’s name stands for “End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and Trafficking.” ECPAT’s mission is to end the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) through research and advocacy on four forms of CSEC: child abuse materials (“child pornography”), the exploitation of children in prostitution, the trafficking of children for sexual purposes, and the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism.

The new International Executive Director of ECPAT, Dorothy Rozga, was invited to attend the first of UN-ACT’s regional meetings held at the Landmark Hotel in Bangkok.

During a coffee break she and I chatted briefly about my research focus, and she suggested I spend some time learning about ECPAT's new project, the Sexual Exploitation of Children Online (SECO) Programme.² The SECO Programme had just been launched in early 2014 with a French woman, Marie-Laure Lemineur, at the helm. Lemineur, a lawyer by training, led the program at the ECPAT Secretariat in Bangkok along with two legal officers and some of the interns who regularly rotated through the office.

The Bangkok office of ECPAT sits in a leafy inlet close to the Ratchathewi Skytrain station. ECPAT shares the compound with a Christian school, and teenagers play basketball on the court at the center of the main quad. The quad is usually quiet outside school recess hours, except for the humming of beetles and birds, and the traffic in the distance. The ECPAT offices are on two floors of a modest building in the complex. The first floor is primarily a library and meeting space, with some offices. The second floor contains the majority of program officer desk space. These offices are quite small and there were often papers stacked on various mismatched tables. Desks for program officers and interns are scattered through the central hallway in half-cubicles, and project director offices line the glass walls. A person entering from the second floor staircase can be seen by most others seated at their desks.

In one of my early meetings with Lemineur, a couple of other senior staff members intended to join our discussion but kept popping in and out of the room for other meetings and phone calls. "Sorry, we're just *so* busy lately," one of them offered as a laughing apology. The feeling of frenzied activity filled the ECPAT office every few days, the printer humming and comments yelled across desks; these hyper periods were followed by ritual silence as staff returned to their diligent, quiet research at their own desks.

Stephen Hopgood (2006) describes in his ethnography of Amnesty International's secretariat in London how the organization is founded on the principle of watching or "bearing witness" to human rights abuses. Hopgood argues that this ethos is rooted in Christian theology and in that particular context, a legacy of British moral and religious reform. Amnesty's roots are humble, a small network of volunteers in the 1960s writing letters and testimonies on behalf of prisoners of conscience. But with new leadership in the late 20th century, Amnesty expanded into an international juggernaut competing for funding and credibility with other large-scale non-governmental human rights monitors like the Human Rights Watch and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Amnesty's secretariat office accrued more full-time research staff who began to have to negotiate salaries, benefits, and career sustainability. The moral obligation to serve humanity and bear witness to injustices remains within the organization but its

employees, as Hopgood describes, struggle to reconcile this ethos with a 21st century professionalism and productivity-driven work culture.

I observed a similar tension rippling through ECPAT in Bangkok. ECPAT's core mission is research-driven advocacy, and many of its senior staff are lawyers skilled in writing legal briefs and policy proposal papers. On arrival at ECPAT I was steered in the direction of Anjan Bose, a longtime senior staff member, to conduct my first interview. Bose, a gentle-spoken Indian man in his 50s, was a former ICT officer for ECPAT and had been transitioned into a researcher role to author ECPAT reports as an expert on "International Child Online Protection." Bose had co-authored several reports on child sexual exploitation and protection with John of MTV-EXIT mentioned above, who had previously been a research associate at ECPAT, circulating through the network. These research reports are the bread and butter of ECPAT. Prior to Lemineur's hiring, Bose was the organization's foremost "expert," in Lemineur's words, on technology issues regarding child exploitation. Bose is well-versed in many of the issues covered in this dissertation, including digital image forensics to detect child pornography online, and the "Project Sweetie" webcam sex tourism sting operation. But he refrains from overt politicized commentary regarding prevention of child exploitation issues, suggesting that "more research" and "day to day training" on children's uses of the internet would be necessary for long-term change. "We have to be

reactive at some stage," he offered passionately, but quickly conceded that ECPAT sat in the middle of disagreements about sexuality and sexual rights policies by national governments and corporations with morality clauses: "I feel sometimes the balance is lost when you have one extremist group." Bose and other senior researchers at the organization felt research-based advocacy ('bearing witness') was where they were best called to serve; and yet they continued to churn out one report after another every few months, often on repetitive themes.

The SECO Programme's launch expanded the NGO's original strand of research on child abuse 'materials' to include digital technologies and global child exploitation. The SECO program is an attempt at object translation--to facilitate the expansion from child rights to trafficking as an object of concern. The most obvious indication of this translation is in the name change from "End Child Prostitution in Tourism" to "End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and Trafficking" by the time their first "World Congress" on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children was held in 2001. I observed a similar translational maneuvering at Terre Des Hommes, a Netherlands-based international NGO discussed in greater detail in Chapter V. Terre Des Hommes added a new slogan--"Stopt Kinderbuiting" ("Stop Child Exploitation")--to reflect the organization's restructuring and new focus on exploitation and trafficking.

Lemineur, a charismatic and cheerful woman in her 40s, with a short brown bob haircut and wide-rimmed black frame glasses, also works on legal research briefs but primarily delivers presentations and lectures at major international conferences on online sexual exploitation and trafficking of children. Newly hired and new to ECPAT, she spoke with conviction and often voiced stern opinions on the “conservative agenda” faultily promoted by many governments refusing to acknowledge youth sexuality in their engagement with child protection issues. “Self-produced pornography and selfies are a real issue,” she said. And adding to clarify, with a smile, “Not an issue like a *problem*, but something that needs to be *understood*.” On the other side of the issue, she attended meetings with law enforcement where the issue of online trafficking was often hyper-inflated, and trainings fixated on complex software solutions for what she conceded were often low-tech issues, especially in the Southeast Asian region. “I mean, there are actually exploiters who are using these high tech technologies. There might be even just be a few of them, we don’t know,” she said. “But law enforcement should be focusing— Their job is to be scared and to identify threats. Of course our job is to make them *see* that. ...Maybe they are over-reacting and maybe it’s not that bad, but still they have to be ready to deal with problems.” Lemineur’s classification of her organization’s “job” is an assertion of moral responsibility, and a sentiment she echoed frequently. Her statements and public presentations frame ECPAT in a highly active role in “making them see” —an activity that stands in contrast to their passive day-to-day work.

c. MTV-EXIT to IOM-X: Staying Relevant in the Grant Economy

The RMO meeting was followed by a cocktail hour at a bar near the hotel. Clutching a 20-oz glass of Heineken (mimicking Maximilian who had just ordered one), I had inserted myself into a small grouping of four people, Naren and Maximilian from the UN-ACT office, and Tina and John from MTV's EXIT project. Earlier in the day, Anita had led a workshop exercise asking participants, working in groups, to come up with different strategies for raising awareness of a particular element of COMMIT's long-term goals. Tina and John had presented their group's three-party strategy, complete with cartoonish illustrations and large, bold handwritten font. Another participant commended them on their drawing abilities: Tina offered a small curtsy, and then, as an audible aside, "Too bad I won't be using those skills anymore." I did not understand her remark at the time, but was reminded of it at the bar later.

The MTV EXIT (End Exploitation and Trafficking) campaign was a multimedia initiative produced by the MTV EXIT Foundation, a registered British charity, to "raise awareness and increase prevention of human trafficking and modern slavery." The main elements of MTV EXIT's campaign included: 1) "On air," the production and broadcast of both dedicated and peripheral campaign exposure; 2) "On the Ground," awareness-raising events including large-scale concerts, youth sessions, roadshow

events and community screenings; and 3) "Online," production and maintenance of a multi-language, youth-oriented awareness and prevention website. In 2007, MTV EXIT expanded across MTV's channels in Asia and the Pacific in partnership with USAID, AusAID, Walk Free, and ASEAN. The campaign features similar elements to the European initiative. MTV EXIT in Asia and the Pacific focused on three major forms of trafficking in Asia and the Pacific: sex trafficking and forced prostitution, labor trafficking, and forced domestic servitude. Also, due to the complexities of trafficking and the differences found geographically, the campaign was split into two regions: Asia-Pacific and South Asia.

At the bar, Maximilian looked pointedly at Tina, smirked, and asked, "So what is going on with EXIT, eh?" Tina and John exchanged glances and then offered cryptically, "MTV is pulling out." This sort of "information withholding" (cf. Besnier 2009) works with one party offering partially occluded information that begs the interlocutor to request further detail. In response to Maximilian's and Naren's prodding for clarification, Tina and John explained that although the MTV EXIT project, which had been running high-profile, splashy campaigns and concerts out of Bangkok since 2005, would be coming to a close, they were themselves unsure whether the project would disappear completely or might merge into an existing program at another agency. This, in fact, is what happened, roughly five months later; Tina joined the International

Organization of Migration to form IOM-X in early 2015. IOM-X's mission is to develop "an innovative campaign to encourage safe migration and public action to stop human trafficking and exploitation. The campaign leverages the power and popularity of media and technology to inspire young people and their communities to act against human trafficking, which is the buying and selling of people for the purpose of exploitation." This new mission is nearly identical to the original MTV-EXIT objective.

UN-ACT and IOM-X are examples of a particular kind of "translation" at work in the anti-trafficking counter-network. The translation is temporal, financial, political, and discursive. Key actors in this network, e.g. Peter or Tina, keep themselves politically relevant to the issue by finessing the transfiguration of one organization into a nearly identical one. Their intimate knowledge of institutional history and networking skills foster their lasting presence in the network against the otherwise precarious length of project contracts. Moreover, this succession is emblematic of the sensibility of bureaucratic time which so many projects experience at institutions like the UN. The objective of such translation is to prolong that brand of anti-trafficking work—"brand" being an especially apt descriptor for MTV's sensationalized, concert- and film-based campaigns against trafficking—and the pools of funding that make it possible. Erica James (2012) characterizes such bureaucratic practices as functioning within a "grant economy" and the production of a sense of scarcity for humanitarian projects: "These

economies of scarcity lie between the practices of direct and reciprocal exchange within gift economies and the indirect transfer of currencies for manufactured objects in commodity economies. Like gift and commodity economies, grant economies are based on and generate particular cultures” (61). David Forsythe (2005), in his study of the International Committee of the Red Cross, has made similar observations. Under the confines of its strongest donor countries, the ICRC organization often maintains an apolitical neutrality, or “creative pragmatism” against “politicized humanitarianism.” This double-bind between funding cycles and efficacy has produced a bureaucratic ethos of inactivity and non-intervention. In specific reference to the ICRC’s passivity toward the US’s prisoner rights violations during the War on Terror, the ICRC’s “cautious approach might be interpreted as displaying more concern for an image of perfect neutrality than stopping abuse of prisoners in short order” (Forsythe 2005: 139).

As described in the Introduction, visual campaigns and interactive exhibits like the pink Barbie doll box at the Shared Hope Conference constantly press upon the public the crisis-level *urgency* of trafficking, and especially of children who are being exploited—yet the highest-level bureaucratic programs intended to deal with trafficking actually prolong to interminable lengths. The grant economy breeds cultures of competition ensconced within the cultural milieu of not only a country, I argue, but also a peculiar institution like the United Nations which sits at the confluence of cultures. (And, to be clear, I specifically mean the headquarters site of UNESCAP, not the individual country

offices.) Rather than overtly fostering malevolent gossip (cf. James 2010b, 2012) and accusations of corruption or maneuvering of resources, the site of the United Nations, and the anti-trafficking network in Bangkok in general, functions through the affectation of more subtle, often “polite,” middle-class professionalism exemplified through moralizing practices.

B. Humanitarian Labor in the Network

1. Humanitarian Professionals

a. Moralism in Humanitarian Institutions

The smooth vocals of Artiwara “Toon” Konglamai, a lean and tattooed man with a long ponytail, streamed through the speakers at a concert in Udon Thani, a Thai province just south of Vientiane, Laos. Toon is the lead singer for Bodyslam, a group that has hit the perfect combination of rock and pop music appealing to a generation of young Thais living in urban areas with middle-class parents. The concert was sponsored by MTV-EXIT, and Bodyslam headlined the event to raise awareness to trafficking and exploitation in the Southeast Asia region, and the attendees were primarily high school and college students from the area. The confluence of Bodyslam’s pop-punk rock aesthetic and appeal to free spiritedness, along with the humanitarian focus of the

concert sponsor, lent a particular air of excitement and transcendence to the space. MTV-EXIT thrived on its mass pop appeal and young, savvy brand to host a series of concerts every year since its founding, throughout major cities around the globe. At many of these concerts the young, vivacious MTV-EXIT staff of various ethnicities and nationalities give short speeches, rallying the crowd of young people around envisioning a future without trafficking and a future of liberation from sexual and labor exploitation (not for them, but for other young people *like* them). These events have the blissful, heady aura of youth rebellion safely ensconced in the respectable frame of good liberal activism.

The desire to be free from subordination permeates all strands of feminism (radical, socialist, liberal, psychoanalytic), Saba Mahmood argues; “Feminism...offers both a *diagnosis* of women’s status across cultures and a *prescription* for changing the situation of women who are understood to be marginalized, subordinated, or oppressed” (Mahmood 2005:10). Feminism remains both an analytic and a political prescription girded by a teleology of freedom or liberation, a problematic core interrogated by feminist anthropologists studying liberal ideologies in *practice* (cf. Brown 2001; Butler 1999; Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991; Rosaldo 1980; Strathern 1988). In *States of Injury* (1995) Wendy Brown writes, “Feminist charges against the masculinism of bourgeois freedom include its premise of a starkly autonomous subject, its abstract and alienated

application, and its atomistic social ontology” (20). As discussed in my Introduction, the predominant anti-trafficking rhetoric found in state policies and UN convention draws heavily from British and American abolitionism and liberal feminist ideology, both of which seek emancipation or freedom—collective and individual—as their ultimate goal. Organizations in the anti-trafficking network function through the *continued reproduction and preservation* of this ideological undercurrent of freedom and liberation. It is the everyday practices and subjectivities of anti-trafficking professionals, i.e. the people in the organizations, who make this reproduction possible through their identification as moral workers—moral professionals—working toward a larger aim despite the tedious and seemingly aimless routines of bureaucratic organizations.

The everyday speech and gestures of anti-trafficking professionals can be interpreted as moralizing practices within a bureaucratic labor economy. This interpretation of moralism draws from Brown’s distinction of morality versus a *politics* of moralism; the former often articulated as a religious code or doctrine of conduct, while the latter is a political agenda of aspirational moral achievement—*aspirational* being the operative word, as moralism is ultimately about a perpetually future-oriented model of progress.

Brown distinguishes between a “galvanizing moral vision” and the “reproachful moralizing sensibility” that characterizes the basis for political institutions informed by

20th century liberalism (2001:22). Such political institutions include the UN Development Programme and International Organization for Migration, within which UN-ACT and IOM-X are situated, respectively, as well as large non-governmental organizations such as ECPAT and Terre Des Hommes (discussed in detail in Chapter V). Moralizing political claims maintain an attachment—a “wounded” one—to “Truth” (absolute originalism) and to injured identity (collective and individual identity as victim and survivor) (cf. Brown 1993, 1995). But they also demonstrate what Brown later called a “crisis in political teleology” (2001:22), the realization especially at the start of the 21st century of the failure, or at best, *impotence*, of massive-scale development schemes as humanitarian endeavors. The loan conditionality of structural adjustment policies promoted by the World Bank under the euphemism of “good governance” is a striking example of moralizing practice at the bureaucratic level (cf. Anders 2008). Major international institutions like the World Bank and United Nations acquire governing power through their increasing intermingling with humanitarian organizations through what Bornstein and Sharma (2016) call a shared “technomoral” politics. Technomoral politics describes the mix of law and policy with sentiment: pronouncements of good work and moral obligation to defend rights that enable coercive political and infrastructural maneuvering. Technomoral politics “refers to how various social actors translate moral projects into technical, implementable terms as laws or policies, as well as justify technocratic acts—such as development and legislation regarding

administrative reform—as moral imperatives.” To reconcile the impotence of humanitarian development bureaucracies, leaders at these institutions have often turned toward an aspirational politics of “hope” and “dreaming” of the resolution of political crises without approaching that goal with any certainty (cf. Miyazaki 2006). Amidst temporal instability, individual workers turn to the cultivation of personal values to establish “rules to govern...future actions” (Miyazaki 2006:155) and to show they are doing “good work” (cf. Fisher 1997). Workers in the anti-trafficking network articulate their negotiation of precarity, and their personal longevity in the network, through moralizing practices such as storytelling, professionally animated speeches, and through technologies of proximity such as documents and contract identification cards.

Social theorists have long attempted to reconcile the roots for “morals” and “ethics” within and against cultural practices. Aristotelian ethics are a higher external idea and a set of regulatory norms; the “morally responsible” citizen voluntarily uses deliberation and reason to determine proper, responsible conduct (Meyer 2011[1993]). For Enlightenment-era, masculinist, western theorists morality is a rational decision made by individuals. Kant (1785) argues that morality is an external phenomenon, outside of the context in which an act unfolds, a “categorical imperative” that appeals to a higher faculty of reason. An individual acts morally *despite* their inclinations, habits, and

dispositions (cf. Mahmood 2005:25 for further discussion and critique of Kantian ethics). Later feminist theorists challenged this conception of ethics by arguing that ethics exist beyond “notions of norms, justification, legitimation, and meaning to include the consideration of the *practices*, selves, bodies, and desires that determine (and are codetermined by) ethics” (Colebrook 1998:50). For Foucault, “ethics” refers to the practices, techniques, and discourses through which a “subject” transforms oneself to achieve a particular state of being or truth (1990; 1997). Foucauldian ethics are a set of practical activities that are germane to a certain way of life: ethics is embedded in a set of specific practices. Ethics is localized and particular, ascribed to a specific set of procedures and discourses through which ethical-moral subjects come to be formed (Foucault 1990). “Morals,” however, are for Foucault codes of conduct, norms, scripts, and injunctions (Foucault 1990:30; cf. Mahmood 2005:28). In Erica James’s ethnographic analyses (2010a; 2010b; 2012) of humanitarian aid organizations and development assistance to victims of human rights abuses, the expert demeanor of bureaucrats takes on heightened salience against a climate of recovery from extreme political unrest and poverty in Haiti. Expertise becomes enacted as what James calls “bureaucraft”—“a technical practice employed by bureaucratic and therapeutic experts in their quest to assist clients of the aid apparatus and, indirectly, themselves” (2012:52). Bureaucraft is a “diagnostic” process, the attempts by actors in aid apparatuses to make sense of and exert agency within perceived “insecurity,” structural inequity and injustice. To Brown

political moralism marks deliberate aimlessness, “a misrecognition of the political logics now organizing the world, a concomitant failure to discern any direction for action, and the loss of a clear object of political desire” (2001:29). The global problem of ‘trafficking’ lends political responsibility to anti-trafficking. The nuances of bureaucratic conventions and project contracts, however, that produce cyclical bureaucratic time, are at odds with the purported urgency of ‘solving’ trafficking.

b. Workplace Affect and the Moral Professional

There is a disjuncture between the high stakes of the subject of the work and the everyday routines and gestures that constitute it. How do humanitarian professionals in anti-trafficking organizations reconcile such bureaucratic tedium with a moral impulse to do good work? Workers in the anti-trafficking counter-network negotiate or justify their professional precarity by cultivating a sense of moral obligation to their work. The cultivation of a professional humanitarian subjectivity occurs through moralizing practices—speech, gestures, gatherings—that produce meaningful interactions bringing workers closer together and thus maintaining the network. Professionals in the counter-network are “moral entrepreneurs” (Andreas and Nadelmann 2006) who *productively pass time* by producing intimacy through particular forms of workplace sociality, networking events, and after-work drinks. This form of ‘time-pass’ stands in contrast to the precarity of lower-class workers (cf. Endo 2014; Jeffrey 2010) who struggle with

extreme poverty and lack of employment amidst economic stagnation and recession. The workers I am describing are well-traveled, highly skilled and educated, and possess multiple work options that allow many of them the option to 'wait' out periods of *underemployment* (not unemployment) between short-term contracts. To productively bridge the time between assignments these workers thrive on a form of social-moral capital (cf. Bourdieu 1977) and acquire moral value even as they wait for their next contract to materialize.

My interlocutors at the UN and ECPAT were ambitious, classically educated at elite North American, Australian, and European institutions, and reasonably versed in social theory. Our bar conversations often gravitated towards debating rather abstract quandaries concerning individual choice, political rationalism, and the politics of collective good. These debates are performative speech acts through which social proximity and distance—one's place in the network—are established. For example, one night in mid-September after a UN-ACT team dinner at a Mexican restaurant to celebrate Michael's internship coming to a close, several of us decided to continue on to a bar at the intersection of our neighborhoods. Skytrain Jazz Bar is named quite literally for its placement at Skytrain-level overlooking the Victory Monument in central Bangkok. We sat on the casual open-air rooftop, just four of us, Naak, Michael, and Maximilian. We were each on our fourth or fifth beer of the night, and Maximilian,

naturally gregarious, was peppering us with cheeky questions about our upbringing, schooling, and travels. He and Naak had a playful, friendly rapport bolstered by her cursory German language skills and their mutual ability to speak some Dutch (Naak, Thai-born, had done her masters in Leiden; Maximilian was German but had studied throughout Europe and also been living in Southeast Asia for some time). Naak and I are nearly the same age and Maximilian often treated me similarly. Asking questions about my research he wondered aloud how we felt about the role of sex workers' rights organizations in anti-trafficking policy. This soon expanded into a larger discussion of the legality of sex work, and moral justifications for the regulation of sexual labor. Maximilian felt that in a Western European context such a debate was more possible, but that in the Southeast Asian setting he found the debate untenable, arguing, "I mean, there's just rampant inequality and poverty. I mean I would *like* to say that women can do whatever they want to do, but it's just not possible here." He shared examples from his previous fieldwork experiences in various parts of the region. Forgetting any supposed ethnographic impartiality or cool, and certainly aided by my fifth Singha, I bristled at Maximilian's attitude and tone that any such division could be made across cultural lines on a question of labor rights and bodily autonomy. I told him I took issue that he, a researcher and 'expert' on trafficking, should reserve what I called at that time a neo-imperialist and presumptuous attitude to determine people's fair work in the sexual economy. We argued heatedly for over a half hour, Naak and Michael silent and

listening, cautiously. Eventually I excused myself to the bathroom where I rapidly typed some notes about the conversation on my phone. When I returned to the table, the atmosphere had lightened, and Maximilian offered me a huge grin and a beer, calling a “truce.” I laughed and accepted. He appreciated my challenging him, and from that point forward we maintained a much more genuine and friendly dynamic. Sharing this story much later to other friends in Bangkok, they noted that perhaps we both began to respect one another more at this point.

Storytelling, as linguistic anthropologists have noted (Bruner 2003; Goodwin 1984; Ochs 2006), is a powerful narrative ritual that can function as an assertion of subjectivity and self-fashioning. Ochs (2006) writes, “Personal narrative becomes a way to reflect back on experience and give it autobiographical shape. Narrating personal experience allows us to reconcile how we (and others) behaved in the past and how we project ourselves (and others) in an as-yet-unrealized future with current self-understandings. That is, narrating experiences is a way of fashioning a sense of continuity of self” (285). “I would *like* to say,” Maximilian said—a future-referent statement embedded in his personal field experience. Maximilian’s arguments and stories help him position himself within the mess and precarity of the UN bureaucratic system. Storytelling can be interpreted as an interaction ritual in the absence of work that is inherently meaningful. Storytelling can also be anticipatory—a moralizing practice reconfiguring

one's personal experience of an institutional narrative from *aimlessness* to *progress*.

2. Documents, Gestures, and Professional Precarity

The anthropology of bureaucracy has focused on documents as artifacts of knowledge production, as symbols of cultural values, and the reflection of practices of skilled exercises of authority. Since Max Weber's descriptions of bureaucracies as rational-legal structures, documents have figured centrally in the enforcement of the rules and hierarchies that establish professional spaces (1922 [1968]). As the sociologist George Ritzer argues, professionalization and bureaucracy were interlinked for Weber, especially in his lectures on the development of vocations (cf. Weber 1917 [2004], 1919 [2004]): "bureaucratization and professionalization were complementary processes involved in the rationalization of the Occident" (Witzer 1975: 632). A class of workers comes to constitute a 'profession' through the cultivation of certain skills and dispositions and the reproduction of certain routines. In this section I describe professionalization at the UN through document training and identification badges—two technologies of bureaucracy that establish points of proximity between workers. Here my rubric of proximity introduces a new way of conceptualizing labor "precarity" for the increasingly provisional nature of professional contracts within humanitarian bureaucracies. Such precarity establishes the configuration and the importance of the anti-trafficking network.

Ethnographies of document production, from Riles's (2002) work on the UN Millennium Development Goals to Sally Engle Merry's (2006) on the passage of the US Violence Against Women Act to Michael Goldman's (2005) on the inner culture of World Bank policies on environmental development, have focused on how the circulation of documents is central to building a professional class upholding institutional culture. Weber argued that, "bureaucratic administration means fundamentally domination through knowledge" (1978[1922]:225), to which Matthew Hull (cf. 2008, 2012) counters that documents are not simply instruments of bureaucratic organization but rather are *constitutive* of bureaucratic rules, ideologies, knowledge, practices, subjectivities, and even the organizations themselves. One effect of this "counter-network" is to perpetuate the network itself. This perpetuity is accomplished through the cycle of documents—funding reports, project briefs, blog entries—which must be written, read, edited, circulated, and revised at the rhythm of a slow and constant hum. In his ethnography of the International Monetary Fund, Richard Harper (1998) argues that the processes of document production—the software, IT systems, and trained personnel—produce the culture of the bureaucracy entirely. Indeed, the very categorization of various texts and media into the fetishized category 'documents' demonstrates a tactic of power and authority (Hull 2012: 253). I argue that documents not only perpetuate and give substance to the organization; they are also technologies of proximity, bringing appropriate colleagues closer while establishing hierarchical

distance with others less credentialed.

Each morning at the RMO began with a flurry of activity to establish the schedule of meetings and plan for written work for the day, followed by five to six hours of mostly silent cubicle work, each person working on crafting their own section of a particular document. Each day of document production featured this same choreography. In the summer of 2014, the RMO devoted two weeks to training staff on using a Results Based Management (RBM) model for the UN-ACT work plan. The RBM model is intended for organizations to structure their agendas in such a way that tasks are directly actionable and assessment measures more facile. As I sat in on the training the RBM struck me as not unlike the assessment tools and metrics that many of my American teacher friends were instructed to use when designing their yearly lessons in public schools.

Melissa and Naak were trained in RBM through their respective masters programs, and Anita had experiential knowledge of the process through her previous employment as a project manager with UNICEF. The Results Based Management training was Anita's idea. An Australian international policy professor led a two-day training session via Skype. All country project teams were expected to sit in on the training so that they could draft RBM plans for their national efforts, while the RMO staff was also required by Anita to design an RBM draft for the regional management plan. During the course

of my fieldwork, UN-ACT spent close to one month on RBM training and the drafting, revision, and finalizing a management plan. Nearly every day Anita, Peter, and occasionally Maximilian would sit at the small circular table in Anita's office to Skype with a country team and review their RBM draft. Often I would hear exasperated sighs from Anita as she would scold a country project officer for not properly categorizing a task as an aim or as a tangible output.

The writing and circulation of RBM documents might exemplify classic bureaucratic document production, but as Melissa explained to me one day during the training period, the RBM model was a relatively recent introduction at international governing agencies, intended to encourage an easily measurable level of transparency so that project tasks would not languish endlessly. The hype and attention afforded to the RBM tool amidst concerns over transparency and competency highlights what many anthropologists have noted as a peculiar hypocrisy in politicized transparency, the production of "audit societies" (Power 1999) or "audit cultures" (Strathern 2000) that replicate technologies of power and hierarchy in their purported attempt to clarify. The production of bureaucratic documents, many social scientists have demonstrated (cf. Eisenlohr 2011; Hull 2003, 2008, 2012) is itself a process of layered textual mediation that renders the reading of the documents more opaque. The documents themselves "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are

supposed to carry” (Latour 2005:39). Alan Irwin similarly reflects on the increasing unease among STS scholars about institutional transparency, that “we should be cautious in the face of institutional claims to have embraced a new social contract of dialogue, transparency and consultation,” (2006: 302). The institutionalization of transparency and audit signals, he suggests, a technique of deliberate bureaucratic obfuscation, and STS should thus further explore the more fundamental cultural and epistemological assumptions that make transparency regimes increasingly popular.

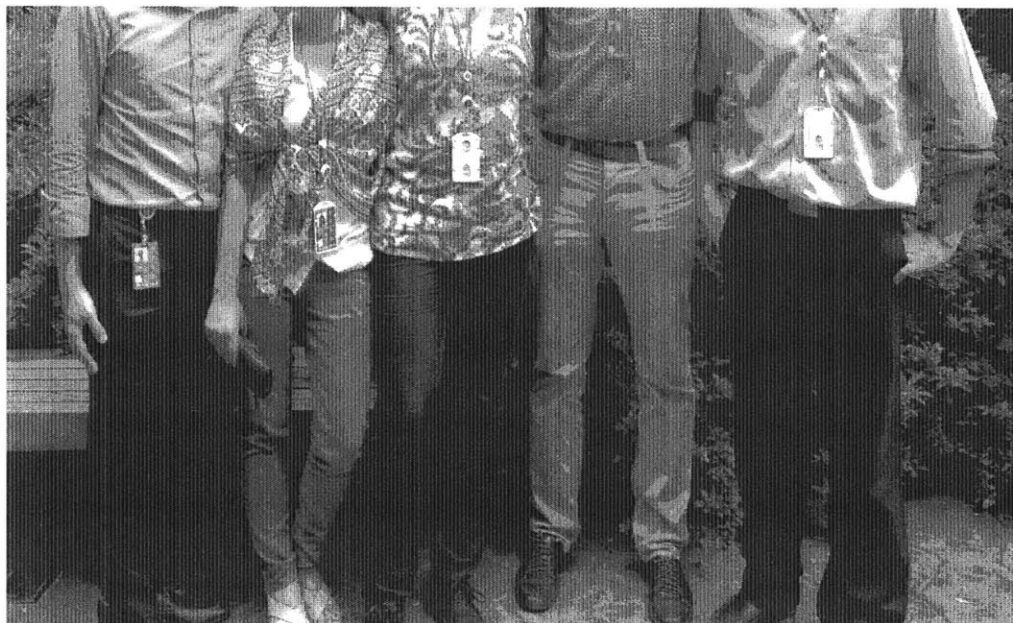
I sat in on the UN-ACT Skype training and obtained a copy of an RBM training portfolio, yet grew increasingly frustrated as I followed along with the examples of task categorization. The training included mini-quizzes on whether a given phrase should be filed under an objective, aim, implementation, output, or other category on the RBM table. I frequently answered incorrectly and struggled to make sense of the "correct" table designation, as Melissa or Naak would try to explain it to me, making all the more clear my lack of fluency in not only bureaucratic speech but also the mechanisms of its appropriate documentation.

The RBM texts are doubly mediated, in the complexity of their production and in the expertise required to be able to read and process them. Riles (2000) describes similarly how the women of PAWORNET used documents as gatekeeping artifacts, often

claiming that someone with “technical expertise” would need to be brought in to be able to read them. The RBM ‘document’ at UN-ACT existed as both an imagined cipher and a material practice of obfuscation in the name of enhanced clarity. Mazarella (2006) and Strathern (2000a, 2000b) take up similar concerns in the assessment of so-called institutional (governmental and academic) “transparency programs” which smuggle in new forms of internal managerial surveillance in the name of transparency and accountability. The tension surrounding RMO members’ struggles to get the document forms ‘right’ is indicative of their location within the bureaucratic hierarchy, their understanding of the importance of “observing the correct bureaucratic rule” (Sharma and Gupta 2006:12). As Harper (1998) writes of document production at the International Monetary Fund, documents are important “tools in the construction of fixed and shared meaning” (43), establishing a shared repertoire of codes and language between parties.

As an example of such a set of codes and cues, I turn to a simple technology of proximity: the large plastic ID badges worn by each person who works at the UN complex. The magnetized badge allows for access to the building complex, the cafeteria and conference center, the library, and coded entry to certain offices on each floor. As in many office buildings with moderate security and ID card access points, the badge must be prominently displayed; most people chose to wear it on a blue lanyard around their

neck, or clipped to a blazer lapel or pants belt loop. Names would be presented in large font on the badges, making certain interactions easier for me when I first began the internship and was attempting to memorize many new names.



ID Badges on UN-ACT staff, Bangkok, Thailand. Photo by author.

What intrigued me most about the badges, however, was the conspicuous listing of the end date of one's access to the building. My six-month internship finished in December, for instance, so my badge listed "December 20, 2014" as my final date of work. It was hard not to view this as an expiration date, especially as the majority of employees at the complex were not interns but contract workers, with contracts ranging anywhere from several months to five years. Once, Maximilian and I were in the elevator heading

down to the cafeteria when an acquaintance of his entered the compartment. After introducing the two of us, with a short upward nod Maximilian signaled the “November 14, 2014” date on her badge (the day’s date was November 5). “Any news on your contract?” The woman simply shrugged and gave a half-smile, indicating perhaps more than ambivalence an unwillingness to have a prolonged conversation about it within the social space of the elevator. There was no further talk as we left the elevator and said goodbye to the woman. Pointing and nodding at the badge is a situated interactive activity (Goodwin 2003). These gestures, points and nods, are spatially deictic activities, dependent on situational context and gestural competency, as Maximilian’s friend demonstrated by halting the conversation within the elevator confine. The badges are semaphoric, distinguishing objects, signs of belonging and time within the complex. As one person gestures and hails another’s badge with the steadily approaching ‘expiration’ date, they also signal the ephemerality of contract time within the UN. Maximilian’s gesture and accompanying question come from a friendly curiosity but also have a distancing effect, establishing a sort of hierarchy through time. His own badge listed a contract expiration date that was not soon approaching, and therefore was not subjected to comment within a limited interaction. A worker’s end date is no secret, being so prominently visible, and yet encapsulated within that sign is all of the tentativeness and precarity of a UN contract.

In the humanitarian professional cosmos of Bangkok, people signal their competency and belonging through more than just their mastery over document production or overt professional designation. The times between workplace hours offered valuable insight into understanding how this international counter-network maintains itself. A complex and playful ecology of people and places existed outside of the routinization of the UN bureaucratic office space. In her discussion of workplace affects, Melissa Gregg parses through literature on neoliberal office culture, contract work, and precarity to argue how professional “cool” (Liu 2004) has taken precedence over earlier, more quantifiable workplace assets. One’s value to an organization increasingly hinges more upon “the more valuable traits of ‘flexibility’ and ‘dealing with change’” (Gregg 2010:251; cf. Gregg 2011) than length of service or pleasant demeanor in predominantly heterosexual masculine workplaces. Gregg’s analysis of workplace affect fits a lineage of scholarship on social capital, class, and everyday practice brought forward by Bourdieu (1977) in his discussion of “practical mnemonics,” the practices of dress, physical bearing, and styles of comportment that signal one’s ease in a social grouping. Bourdieu considers the practices of a social group in how they embody and symbolize the *doxa* and ethos of the group. The ideologies that the members inhabit come into confluence as their social or class *habitus* (1977, 1990).

The flexible ability to adapt one’s dispositions and bodily movements to different professional scenarios is a skill necessary to navigate global diplomatic spaces such as I

encountered in Bangkok. Haritaworn's work (2012) on cosmopolitan affect, sexuality, and race is useful for its expansion of "metronormativity" to a Southeast Asian urban setting. The term "metronormativity," as originally used by Halberstam (2005), refers to the disposition or habits of an urban, cosmopolitan, middle-class modernism that is in itself quite 'queer.' (One critique of metronormativity, especially from American scholars of queer ruralism, is that such a move, rather than indicating a radical potentiality, in fact replicates normalizing effects in its espousal of capitalist and gentrifying behaviors and aesthetics.) As Haritaworn uses the concept, metronormativity places Lauren Berlant's multiple arguments on the "political and affective economies of normativity" (2006: 278; cf. 2004, 2007, 2011) within a global, cosmopolitan context. Metronormativity encompasses the subtle behaviors, gestures, and habits that make one 'competent' and 'successful' in particularly racialized and sexualized urban situations, such as office spaces, work-related happy hours, and networking events.

Many people at the UN, ECPAT, and related organizations had short and precarious office contracts. This state of professional suspension has produced what Neilson and Rossiter (2005) call a global class of the "precariat" (cf. Ross 2010), or in its upper-class iterations, the 'cognitariat' (Berardi 2004) or the 'cybertariat' (Huws 2003). These classes of anti-trafficking humanitarian workers are marked by the instability of their work that

must be constantly re-established through networking and staying within the network.

Feminist research on the political economy of care provides an antecedent to nuanced discussions of labor precarity. Feminized skills of emotional aptitude and caregiving are often underpaid or unpaid within global circuits of exchange (cf. Hochschild 1979 [2012]; Parreñas 2001; Razavi 2007; Yeates 2004). The devaluation of femme labor is rooted in gendered structures of moral obligation within the family and community. Central to these analyses is the problem of agency within labor: “The tension between moral frameworks that stress dependency and those that underscore autonomy underlies contemporary practices of making a living” (Narotzky and Besnier 2014: 57). A moral economy framework inquires into the distribution of affective labor being provided and received across a constellation of agencies and institutions, and urges that emotional and care work is integral to social-economic reproduction. Affective labor is increasingly branded as a “soft skill” in articles and lessons on corporate leadership trainings—the often-unquantifiable practices of being flexible to change, good-natured, and present at office gatherings such as after-work drinks.

I want to be clear that the “precarity” of humanitarian professionals in Bangkok is significantly different from the lower-class precarity of the urban poor in Southeast Asia. Bangkok, as recent anthropologists of Thailand have noted, can be seen as a

“capital city of the privileged” (Endo 2014) with a powerful elite class not present in other parts of this country or other countries in the Mekong Region. The rule of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006) and the puppet government of his sister, Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra (2011-2014) has cast a shadow on economic and political stability in the city and the region, reflected in increasing unemployment and restructuring of the “informal” labor sector into formal, taxable jobs—a policy that resulted in mass migration into Bangkok and further entrenching the class schisms in urban areas. The past decade has also been dotted by various political demonstrations, a military coup in 2006, a judicial coup in 2008, a state of emergency in 2010 amidst clashes between the democratic government and “Red Shirt” populist protesters, backed by Thaksin Shinawatra, and in 2014, right before this fieldwork, a military coup. The facts and details of these political progressions are contested, and other recent ethnographies, especially those by Claudio Sopranzetti (2012; 2014) and Tamaki Endo (2014¹), can capture the nuances better than meets the scope of this dissertation. I bring up these political developments only to emphasize how much the UN and NGO network sits above and removed from this fracas. As described in the introduction to this chapter, the division is also quite physical, the UNESCAP building complex situated in the old part of the city, near many governmental buildings but away from the commercial centers and neighborhoods where the majority of Bangkok’s population lives. Many of the employees at UN and international NGOs are privileged expatriates

with visas and global mobility, if not consistent sources of income. “Professional precarity” for the anti-trafficking network in Bangkok looks quite different than for the Southeast Asian precariat. Professional precarity comes not without anxiety, but this anxiety can also be productive, and indicative of new subjectivities or socialities (Gill and Pratt 2008). Those who—despite being *underemployed*—practiced a constantly attuned, playful, and alert disposition at the UN, MTV, or ECPAT (e.g. Peter at UN-ACT) were more successfully able to maneuver through the network and maintain a sense of professional stability.

3. Professional Proximities

Project officers and bureaucrats at the UN produce their professional work through particular speech frames and interactions within a global, multi-media ecology. Within speech interactions at the office, participants glided between multiple roles evocative of their institutional standing and knowledge. In a professional environment of bureaucratic magnitude that is simultaneously cubicled into intimate spaces, speech acts such as gossip, humor, and small talk play crucially in the maintenance of everyday bureaucratic life.

As Project Coordinator of UN-ACT, Anita's daily and weekly work life involved numerous meetings within the UN complex, off-site at government and NGO offices in Bangkok, on Skype, and on the phone; additionally she often gave short presentations at conferences, workshops, and ceremonies. For someone who often gives public speeches and then retreats to cubicle office settings, it might seem easy to rely on the performance trope to characterize the "front-stage" and "back-stage" positions required for bureaucratic gestures and speech. In a multimedia ecology of multiple media ideologies, the trope of performance, with an actor honing a "front-stage" and "back-stage" self, may fall short. Terri Silvio (2011) argues that "animation" might serve as a more potent metaphor than "performance" for characterizing the mediated self in late modern capitalistic society. Animation underscores how every interaction involves not just the animator and the actor (the 'thing' being animated) but also an animation 'team' of sorts, as well as an audience. Extending Silvio's argument, Manning and Gershon (2013) suggest that Goffman's own understanding of performance, from which performance theory has been applied to mediated contexts, shifted towards a notion of performance that considered animation. Manning and Gershon draw on Goffman's work on frame analysis in linguistic interactions (1974) to consider how he characterized animation and the animated in ways that might be productive for understanding digital media interactions.

One morning in the summer, Anita came into the office looking tired, her blonde hair frazzled, but with an open, impish smile on her face. As she strode into the shared cubicle “hallway” she seemed eager to talk. She was tired from having stayed up late the previous night working after most of her day was spent at a “Human Trafficking Day” event set up by Thai governmental agencies. As she stood in the hallway in clear view of all of our open cubicles, she put a hand on one hip and, rolling her head back in an affected diva flip, “I can’t believe what they had me do yesterday!” Peter, ever measured, smiled and asked how the event had gone. Anita dropped her pose and described having to walk onto a stage where confetti was dropped around her and Thai government officials before they each made a statement about anti-trafficking efforts in the country and in the Mekong Region. “There was so much glitter. I’m glad I put on some lipstick!” Anita joked. Pom smiled and raised her eyebrows quickly - a gesture serving the same function as an excited nod - and interjected, “Khun Anita, did you know there is a video?” Anita replied: “No! Really?! Let’s see!” Pom said she would need to look it up and she would email it to us. Within moments people began giggling. In the video clip Pom sent, a reporter had come up to a seated Anita for a sound bite after her stage time. In this example, Anita is literally a talking head, an animated machine delivering the statements of a larger institution. But with a pleasing nonchalance she speaks with a lopsided grin, a visual gesture producing intimate space with the reporter, mediated by the camera, within a wider, impersonal public space.

This flow between utterance and gesture is not disjunctural at all, but rather signals Anita's expertise in dynamically switching the frames of her authority. In sound bites and speeches, she establishes at once that she is a talking figure representative of the larger UN system, with set language and phrasing memorized straight from official reports, and also in the same utterance a woman with a genuine and passionate desire to assert her individuated understanding of the issue. The instance of Anita at Human Trafficking Day also allows us to see how bureaucratic speech production extends beyond the main "event." The moment of Anita's 'official' speech is grounded by its attendant moments—the interview with the reporter, her announced arrival at the office the next morning, and the circulation of Pom's email about the recorded interview and the event itself. The fluid shifts between technologically mediated frames (the microphoned speech onstage with confetti, the videotaped interview, and the office email) extend the event beyond its initial occurrence and stretch the temporality—and relevance—of Anita's speech acts.

An assessment of animation roles offers a more nuanced glimpse into how bureaucratic authority and structure get enacted and uttered on the everyday, banal level. A given speech interaction consists of key roles that may fluidly transition between participants: animator, author, and principal (cf. Goffman 1981; 1974) a fourth role, the figure, or character, animated by the animator. Critically, the animation analytic, as Manning and

Gershon are extending it, need not engage only human participants, with its characterization of roles like the “animator” being ascribed to a telephone, a chat box, or a Skype window (that thing which produces the sounds constituting an utterance); or the “principal,” which might be a social category or institution responsible for the utterance. The principal role is useful for considering how “UN speak,” or bureaucratic talk, infiltrates and flows within conversational interactions. If we take authorship quite literally, this can mean the circulation of bureaucratic documents mentioned earlier, which offer recycled language and statistics obfuscating the originator, or which might not even have a byline. In the context of a monologue such as Anita’s, speech animation theory helps us understand how an eschewal of authorship comes in the form of parroting of certain set UN language.

In assessing UN speech interactions, “one of the crucial elements of participant frameworks is how the participants themselves understand all the different ways that one can adopt certain participatory roles, leave them, invite others to take on certain roles, or prevent them from doing so over the course of a speech event” (Manning and Gershon 2013:114). Niko Besnier (2009) describes the elements that make gossip possible and important in his ethnography of the structure and function of gossip in a Melanesian community. In the anti-trafficking scene of UN officials and NGO workers who gathered together regularly in various spaces of Bangkok, gossip discourse plays a

key role in producing professional intimacy and in establishing authority and boundaries of expertise. My understanding of “professional intimacy” draws from Michael Herzfeld’s (1997) notion of cultural intimacy—the “self-stereotypes that insiders express at their own collective expense” (3). Workers in the anti-trafficking network who have seen iterations and translations of the same projects—from UNIAP to UN-ACT, from MTX-EXIT to IOM-X, and so on—may “ruefully” lament the impotence of their work, or the petty dramas and project mismanagement that facilitated those translations in the first place. But they maintain a tight understanding that these problems and impotencies remain *within* the network.

Professional intimacy can be fostered through the playful, pleasurable exchanges of gossip and rumor. Like a game of Chinese whisper, Ahmed (2010) writes, there is a “pleasurable perversity of transmission” (174). Gossip rests on more than a promise of happiness: to deliver and receive a rumor is a gift exchange of somewhat perilous gratification, with an immediate pleasurable feeling followed by the unknown of the rumor’s ultimate destination.

Gossip conversation, of course, requires both the deliverer and the recipient to acknowledge the information conveyed as sequestered from common knowledge and to follow the unspoken rules of reciprocation. This interlocutor collusion, or

participation in a gossip exchange, might fail when one actor either misinterprets the information or assumes a moralistic attitude to it. Peter at the UN-ACT office was a nearly impossible source of any sort of gossip, for example. His role as the sole member of the former UNIAP team made him a valuable source of institutional memory as the project transitioned, but he was forthcoming only to the point of professional acceptability, offering nothing more or less. His was a stable presence in the office, keeping rigid hours and maintaining the phatic expressions necessary for normal workplace sociality. Peter's unwillingness to collude in gossip interactions belied more than a professional work ethic. In after-work bar settings, Maximilian and Naren would often try to goad Peter into dropping some tidbit of opinion or information on a particularly annoying or frustrating UN or Thai governmental official. Besnier writes, "There are several ways of encouraging one's audience to agree to switch from small talk to gossip. One is to simply flout social mores and initiate gossip... Through the urgency that their voice, tempo, and intonation convey, they attempt to get their interlocutor to respond with the same. This strategy is not the subtlest, in that it presupposes more interlocutor collusion than may be forthcoming, and it is potentially dangerous for those who are concerned about their public reputation" (2009:104). Peter, however, would not respond as the others wished, but might instead offer a half-smile and take a sip of his beer. Through such a gesture, Peter's dissemblance enacts a gatekeeping of his (more senior, more experienced) knowledge. Gossip is about

information withholding and access, as well as morally assessing the behaviors of others.

Participants in such an interaction may withhold contextual information for dramatic effect or an assertion of hierarchy, but sometimes because they do not themselves entirely make sense of the larger situation (cf. Ochs 2004). Perhaps Peter's near-constant impenetrable countenance, with the polite smile and reserved mien, was a carefully inculcated Thai sensibility to deflect tension and potential conflict (Herzfeld 2009:141), meeting the standards of bureaucratic professionalism. Peter's expertise in this particular gestural economy may very well help to explain his longevity within the organization. He not only belonged within the UN complex, he was particularly adept at establishing distance as needed when interactions veered too close to intimacy.

After another RMO meeting, several months later in October, we again congregated at bar near the hotel for drinks. After the first hour most people had dispersed, leaving just Anita, Naren, and myself. Anita suggested we pull up stools to the bar to finish our steins of Heineken. We sat huddled close together, me in the middle with my shoulders nearly touching each of them. Anita was in a jubilant mood and she shared with us her feeling that the RMO meeting had gone exceptionally well, and that she had been satisfied with participant input. Naren nodded his agreement, remarking "I was really

impressed with how you got them together. AAPTIP and UNICEF never participated before.” AAPTIP, the Australia Asia Program to Combat Trafficking in Persons, had apparently chosen not to attend UNIAP meetings previously because of “personal conflicts.” UNICEF’s issues were more structural, where the organization generally took the stance that its official mandate enabled them to work on issues of child trafficking and exploitation without necessarily consulting other agencies. It was a confusing and isolating stance that had not been received favorably by UNDP and UNODC, who felt UNICEF was being territorial. Now, however, a new project manager had sent a researcher to observe the RMO meeting, an older British man who worked on issues of corporate social responsibility. As they explained this to me, Naren rolled his eyes and commented that “the previous person [project manager] was a total [expletive].” Anita said she and that woman had worked together at UNICEF and always had a tense relationship. “She was snooty because I had a legal background and she was a social worker,” Anita scoffed. “Once, she asked me if I had a background in child rights. I was about to say yes, but then I realized it was all bullshit so I said, ‘I have a background in *human* rights.’” Naren laughed heartily. The UNICEF project manager’s disciplinary boundary assertion was trivial to Anita, who enjoyed a secure position in her current contract as well as the time she had put in herself at UNICEF earlier in her career. Naren, by contrast, was younger (a few years older than me) and relatively new to the UN system. Here I recall Gregg’s remarks on workplace affect and

the use of affective labor, which is “meaningful and productive activity that do not result in a direct financial profit or exchange value, but rather produces a sense of community, esteem, and/or belonging for those who share a common interest” (Gregg 2009:209²). Naren’s willingness to stay at the bar, be an attentive listener, joke, laugh, and physically sidle up to his supervisor are unquantifiable acts with no immediate financial value. But these practices also demonstrate Naren’s metronormative proficiency and awareness of his professional precarity. Acts of professional intimacy help maintain one’s presence in the anti-trafficking network. Naren could ‘afford’ to be out socializing in terms of free time in his schedule, and it also served him well to be constantly networking, playing, and maintaining social visibility owing to his series of short-term contractual work at the UN. Networking is a form of labor integral to maintaining professional presence; “the practice [of networking] is itself the job; the only thing assumed is that any hallmarks of security will remain elusive” (Gregg 2011:13).

In this chapter I have argued that “anti-trafficking” has emerged as a networked labor form to mirror the issue of trafficking that it produces. Workers in the anti-trafficking network negotiate their labor in bureaucratic and atemporal organizations through everyday moralizing practices of storytelling and charismatic speech. They also navigate the professional precarity of office-based humanitarian work through

techniques of proximity and intimacy. By configuring the anti-trafficking network as taking shape through practice, I foreground the sociality and affect of its people in maintaining the network and keeping trafficking relevant as a political issue. In the next chapter, I now turn to a similar network—of policing liaisons and technical experts—who render *online* child exploitation and trafficking as a problem through their own practices of sociality and approaches toward shared sensibilities of digital risk, security, and labor.

Chapter IV

DETECTION

Apprehension, Security, and Digital Forensics Work

A. Apprehending Exploiters

Stephen Keating was captured in his Georgia home in 2012. The 53 year-old man was arrested on child sexual exploitation charges by federal law enforcement on November 15, 2012. U.S. Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) collaborated to make the arrest by identifying Keating's name and fingerprints in a still photo from a video of him sexually assaulting two young girls. The original video had been seized from a suspect in Denmark; Danish Police reported the file to Interpol, who delivered it to HSI and ICE after discovering American English cues in the video. The investigation team used forensic image detection software to zoom on the background of the photo, a bathroom with several prescription pill bottles,

and sharpen the text on one of the bottles to detect the letters “Stephen Ke” and the name of a pharmacy. Additionally, the team produced a fingerprint by focusing on one of Keating’s visible fingers—a new level of image recognition that had never before been processed. Within 24 hours of identifying Keating from this image, law enforcement had located and arrested him at his home in Georgia between Savannah and Jacksonville, FL. Keating’s capture was part of HSI’s “Operation Predator” and ICE’s nationwide “Operation Sunflower,” which resulted in the arrests of 245 people and the finding of 44 children and 24 adults who were being or had been exploited as children. A Jacksonville news outlet cited this report¹ from Brock D. Nicholson, special agent at HSI Atlanta: “The hideous abuse Stephen Keating inflicted on more than a dozen children can never be erased, but hopefully his victims can find some comfort in the fact that he will never again be a free man...This investigation is a perfect example of the revolution in international law enforcement cooperation in cases involving child exploitation and victim identification. After Danish police first discovered the photos, and less than 24 hours after we identified Keating as the perpetrator, HSI and a host of federal, state and local law enforcement agencies were searching his residence, putting him in handcuffs and rescuing his victims” (News4Jax 2013).

In this chapter I delve deeper into “the revolution in international law enforcement cooperation” that Agent Nicholson describes. What is the revolution, exactly, in terms

of law enforcement policies and practices? First I provide an overview of significant shifts to structures for “global policing” that have particular import for cybersecurity and child exploitation and trafficking issues. I focus specifically on two national agencies (the US and the Netherlands) and their relationship to international cooperation agencies (the Virtual Global Taskforce on Child Exploitation, the European Cybercrime Center, and the Interpol Global Complex for Innovation) as examples of nodes in an emergent policing network. My analysis of the “global policing network” follows my discussion of the anti-trafficking “counter-network” discussed in the previous chapter. Not only do I find these to be parallel assemblages, I draw similar conclusions as to how this policing network sustains itself through similar practices of bureaucracy, sociality, and collaboration. Trainings and police gatherings for international law enforcement liaisons serve as formal and informal spaces that reinforce shared ideologies of securitization, investigative research, data acquisition by the state, and police conduct on child exploitation issues in general.

Additionally, the new global policing network is unique for its expansion to include non-law enforcement specialists, primarily computer scientists and content reviewers at social media companies. The software used to make Keating’s arrest, for example, was designed through collaborations between several technology companies and government research labs. I describe how social media companies and digital forensics

startups are designing machine-learning algorithms that filter image content and produce identifying information, as in the Keating case. Facial recognition software, for example, may be run perpetually on a social media site (such as Facebook) to match faces in photo albums against police databases of arrest records and national databases of missing children. “Content reviewers” at these companies have in recent years developed teams, offices, and offshore sites for workers to flag pornographic or violent content that may be posted to their servers. I consider what automated algorithmic labor might mean as it increasingly augments the human-performed digital labor of content review. Drawing on my fieldwork and interviews with law enforcement officers, forensic specialists, and designers, project managers, and marketers at software and social media companies, I provide an overview of the software and processes used for arrests of suspected producers and downloaders of child abuse images. Image detection forensic software is a technology of apprehension, a category of search tool with the express purpose of expediting arrests with incriminating data. The digital search for Keating resulted in literal capture, an arrest and prosecution that generated a 110-year prison sentence. But capture is also the process of making apparent, the procurement of identifying data to build a corpus of evidence.

Based on my fieldwork of attending, observing, and conducting interviews at conferences where law enforcement gain training on new forensic techniques, I find that

'apprehension' is a collaborative effort, distributed across multiple forms of expertise, from technical skill to intuitive feelings, that produces a new category of persons I call "algorithmic detectives." The team of digital detectives working on Keating's case worked to produce a rendition of his face, his fingerprints, his name. The procedure of arrest makes legible how this capture involved a form of photographic recognition and image simulation, a capturing of likeness. To know *what* to detect one must become knowledgeable about the object (data, person) *sought*. Indeed, the etymology of 'capture' is instructive—the Latin *capere*, to take or seize, from the medieval Latin *sacire* or 'ad proprium sacire,' to 'claim as one's own.' To capture is to claim a sought object as one's own, to bring close and into proximity. Keating was made legible and known before he was found and arrested; and this arrest was only made possible due to the prior arrest of another sex offender in Denmark.

My arguments in this chapter draw on my fieldwork at international police trainings and child protection conferences in Washington, D.C., Dallas, TX and Omaha, NE; with international police liaisons and investigators affiliated with the Dutch National Police, the UK Child Exploitation and Online Protection Center, the Royal Thai Police, the Australian National Police; with the child exploitation review teams at Facebook and Microsoft and with various digital forensic companies; as well as in the U.S., with the FBI, the Department of Justice, U.S. Homeland Security, and the National and

International Centers for Missing and Exploited Children.

1. Making Insecurity, Making Uneasy

At a police training I attended in Dallas, two law enforcement investigators delivered the presentation, “Catch Him With His Encryption Down.” One of the men presenting was an investigator for the US Federal Bureau of Investigations, and the other from the Department of Justice’s Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS). Their training session was designed to educate investigators on the strategies for encryption used by distributors of child sexual abuse content. Their presentation began with photos of Julius Caesar and Leonardo da Vinci, with the suggestion that “encryption has been used throughout history” (Caesar used various ciphers for military messages; da Vinci wrote notes upside-down and backwards to prevent unwanted eyes from reading his ideas). The presenters continued that today, defendants in child pornography cases were increasingly using free-of-charge basic digital encryption programs, such as TrueCrypt or PGP (“Pretty Good Privacy”). By encrypting illicit material the defendants hoped to evade prosecutors gathering evidence. The presenters’ rebuttal suggestion: “The best way to handle an offender’s use of encryption is to address it early on.” Based on casework from the Southern California Regional Sexual Assault Felony Enforcement (SAFE) Team working with the DOJ’s CEOS and High Technology Investigative Unit,

the presenters described how investigators could obtain the child pornography “collection” of defendants before encryption could be activated. The presenters argued that investigators could literally “bust down the door” while the “guy’s encryption is down.” Clearly alluding to the act of finding this man with his metaphorical “pants down,” in a vulnerable moment, the presenters detailed that investigators could perform this act of exposure by entering a suspect’s residence while he is actively using his computer and has encryption disabled. To do so, the presenter from DOJ suggested, “Executing search warrants at 6:30 a.m. or a similar hour works well for some offenders.” He added that the prosecutor might consider strategic deceit to cause the offender to leave his house quickly, before he had any chance of re-encrypting, offering the “ruse” of having a tow truck parked outside and pretending to tow the person’s car.

I share this presentation as an example of how trainings produce shared understandings of insecurity and securitization. “Securitization” refers to the institutions, people, and ideologies that produce a regime of ‘security culture’ or security-based thinking (cf. Cavelty and Kristensen 2008; Goldstein 2007, 2010; Gusterson and Besteman 2009). A security regime produces an affective economy of fear (Masco 2014) through images of crisis and techniques of risk awareness (Collier and Lakoff 2008) to create a state of constant preparedness for threat (Lakoff 2007). Police investigators working on child exploitation cases spend a lot of time thinking

about security—and how to break it down. Global police trainings, through the sharing of case studies, reaffirm shared notions of security and insecurity. For child exploitation investigators, the security of an operation and the security of a jurisdiction is based on a politics of exposure. The revelation of incriminatory data (such as Keating’s name or personal files of child abuse media) is an exposing practice embedded into trainings as technical knowledge.

Additionally, investigators practice techniques of exposing through a honing of intuition and “gut” feelings. To introduce the concept of detective intuition I share this example from another policing conference. On a cold, blustery day in Omaha, with hail pellets coming down outside, Officer Ally Jacobs took to the stage to deliver the keynote at a child protection conference that I attended. The title of Officer Jacobs’ talk was “Intuition Unleashed.” She was, in her own words, “just a Berkeley street cop” who had an uneasy feeling in her “gut” when a man named Philip Garrido walked into the precinct in the summer of 2009. Garrido was rambling, erratic, and citing messages from God as his reason for coming to the station. He had two young girls with him, describing them as his daughters. This encounter launched Officer Jacobs’ investigation into Garrido, through which she eventually would become the officer to find Jaycee Duggard, a young woman who had been kidnapped by Garrido 18 years earlier, and held in his home, tortured and raped, along with two daughters she bore.

Officer Jacobs strode across the stage in front of several hundred police officers and child abuse caseworkers, and argued that with new technologies, some of the “gut intuition” and sixth sense of being a detective was being lost. Throughout the room people nodded their heads knowingly. Officer Jacobs urged caseworkers on child exploitation cases, especially, to rely on their intuition to speed up the arrest and prosecution of offenders like Garrido. “When you see something, say something; don’t be afraid to take risks. We, law enforcement, are sometimes afraid to act because of liability or cynicism or some other excuse; but why would we ignore our instincts? Be thorough, do your job.” Jacobs cited Gavin de Becker’s *The Gift of Fear*, a set of essays on human perceptions of danger and risk, and how socially conditioned ‘objective’ judgmental capacities interfere with an innate sensibility of approaching violence: “We, in contrast to every creature in nature, choose not to explore—and even to ignore—survival signals” (1997). Officer Jacobs described her apprehensions and alarm when Garrido entered her office and began rambling about visions and messages from God, accompanied by two stoic young girls. Jacobs shared that it was the girls’ deadpan silence, not the rambling man (not an uncommon sight in Berkeley), which first put an apprehensive feeling in the pit of her stomach. She followed a hunch and ended up trailing Garrido’s car out of the station and all the way to his home in Antioch, California—against supervisor orders. Based on what she found at the house, Officer

Jacobs soon had Garrido arrested in what would become a nationally high-profile case.

In her talk at the Omaha police training she encouraged police officers to ‘go back to their gut’ and not rely so heavily on the high-tech software offered to their precincts. Garrido already had two prior sex offense convictions; in a 1976 court-ordered psychiatric evaluation, Garrido was diagnosed as a “sexual deviant and chronic drug abuser.” He served over 10 years in prison from 1977-1988. Upon release he was put on parole, which in the state of California meant he was monitored with a GPS-enabled ankle bracelet and frequent home visits by parole officers, local sheriff's deputies and federal agents. One of those parole visits was filmed. On that day in Omaha, Officer Jacobs told us she had procured that video, and she led us through an exercise viewing the footage of the parole visit. She played the short clip, less than ten minutes long, and at the end she paused and asked officers in the room if they had noticed anything strange. Several officers ventured guesses until Jacobs revealed subtle cues—including children’s crayon drawings and young women’s clothing strewn about the house, as well as a covered tarp shanty in the backyard—that Jaycee Duggard had already been kidnapped and held in captivity by Philip Garrido for 10 years at the point of that parole visit. The parole officer in the video had noticed nothing strange, and despite all of the efforts at monitoring and surveillance of a prior convicted offender, that officer left the premises and Jaycee remained in captivity for eight more years.

Officer Jacobs used that video footage to illustrate the point that gut feelings ought to be harnessed and finely attuned in cases like these—that intuition could not only be unleashed but in fact trained. Perhaps it may seem at odds to juxtapose the “intuition” of so-called traditional cops with the programming expertise of high-tech interventions into child exploitation. But I argue that non-police—from computer scientists to social media companies to activists to advertising execs—are increasingly looping back to evoke intuition in their own work. I argue that detective intuition is becoming a distributed form of cognition (cf. Hutchins 1995). What is unique about the new policing network against child abuse is the participation by actors beyond law enforcement—namely, computer scientists, corporate representatives, and content reviewers at these companies—who together develop a shared sensibility of detection work. My analysis of this new network takes into account its daily practices of gut feelings and corporeal enskillment, heeding Elizabeth Wilson’s (1998) call for feminist scholarship that foregrounds gut, corporeality, and connectionism in cognition processes.

2. Assembling a Global Policing Network

Today many law enforcement, NGOs, activists, and the general public take for granted that criminal investigations across national boundaries will be dealt with by an

international policing force. But the production of a globalized policing entity to handle criminal investigations has only become naturalized and routinized within the past century. The possibility for global anti-crime cooperation raised the issue of what exactly the “global” is, and how international policing might function alongside other modern bureaucratic institutions for cooperation and engagement like the United Nations or the International Criminal Court.

The promotion of Raymond Kendall to Secretary-General of Interpol in 1985 marked a shift in the organization: Kendall was the first non-French director, a Scotland Yard officer and former Interpol Assistant Director of Drugs, who spearheaded Interpol’s expansion into global counter-terrorism during his tenure until 2001. Until Kendall’s appointment, Interpol had somewhat more passively assisted European governments in fugitive investigations, drug trafficking, and issues of counterfeit money and goods. When the Interpol headquarters in St. Cloud, a Paris suburb, was bombed in 1986, the organization rapidly expanded its anti-terrorism project and shifted to a new site in Lyon, France, a building complex that many refer to as a “fortress.” By the start of the 21st century, Interpol had aggressively increased the scope of its cybersecurity initiatives and developed a shareable interactive database of global crime records and biometric data. Contrary to common belief, Interpol does not technically have any “officers”—its staff are all researchers and liaisons, and cannot technically conduct

investigations or make arrests themselves, but rather assist member countries in doing so. As Meg Stalcup writes in her history of Interpol, the organization was never intended to function as a global-scale policing body, but rather its aim is “to produce a shared policing ethos through meetings, conferences, and train-the-trainer initiatives” (2013: 232). Each Interpol member country has its own National Central Bureau to serve as the contact point for the Interpol General Secretariat, and its fundamental concern is with information flow.

Dan, an investigator for the Dutch National Police, explained, “The internet is beyond borders. Automatically you have to work with a lot of other law enforcement, and non-governmental organizations as well, and other agencies. So that's where I come in.” I met Dan at the International Crimes Against Children Conference held in Dallas in August 2014. We sat down on cushioned chairs in a corner of the massive exhibition hall and hotel for the conference. He and a colleague were attending to learn and give a training presentation on international cooperation in using digital search tools in child exploitation cases. Dan has a background in organizational studies and had worked on criminal investigations with the Dutch police until the creation of their child exploitation team. In 2013, the Dutch Police were nationalized to unite 25 regional police forces and generate national investigative teams, including the child exploitation

unit.² Itching¹ for international work assignments, Dan applied for a job as coordinator of international affairs with a speciality on child exploitation issues. As he explained it, the role of ‘coordinator’ involved managing a globally networked team of investigators and legal attaches in multiple countries:

So we have the regional unit: in a case where a guy [investigator] from this region [the Netherlands] is traveling to Philippines, how does that work, what do they need to do. I make sure to form the right nexus abroad. So if they have to go there to do interviews or whatever I make sure that is all taken care of. Not everything, but I advise them, and I have my network with all the legats [legal attaches] or liaisons with our law enforcement who are in the Netherlands but also my own liaisons who are widely placed in these places, the police liaisons who are, for instance in Bangkok.

“Legats” and liaisons are not new roles for the organization of international criminal investigation. But in the context of child protection cases much of this work is still being newly defined. Liaisons take on issues as varied as disputes between local laws of age of sexual consent, cultural norms about transactional sex, classifications of digital exploitation in countries with limited cybercrime legislation, obtaining and transferring evidence data between national governments, and coordinating the authorization of raids of suspected locations where abuse may be occurring. In practice, coordinators

² On Jan. 1, 2013, the Government of the Netherlands combined 25 regional police forces and its Dutch Police Services Agency into a single Dutch National Police (DNP) force. In 2010, the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice called for the restructuring and improvement of the government’s approach to tackling child pornography within its police forces and Public Prosecution Office. The underlying objectives of the approach were: to intensify the fight against Dutch child abusers and the producers and commercial distributors of child pornography; to identify and rescue more victims; and to contribute to international efforts to combat child pornography and child sex tourism. The National Program Against Child Abuse Images and Child Sex Tourism has become the driving force behind the implementation of this intensified approach within the DNP.

like Dan have a perfunctory knowledge of current global child exploitation issues, but an exhaustive understanding of policing organizational structure, hierarchies of communication, and the cultural nuances of daily investigative work in multiple regions. In this way they occupy compelling para-anthropological positions as arbiters of legal discrepancies amidst nuanced cultural milieux.

They also must be able to network, to perform an easy sociability across cultural spaces. Throughout our conversation Dan would crack jokes about different cities he had visited for his liaising work, including Baltimore and Bangkok, and particular foods or phrases idiomatic of those areas. At one point our interview was interrupted by a phone call, where he chatted and made plans to meet with some of his American counterparts after that day's conference sessions, for Tex-Mex and drinks, and to "be each other's wing-mans" out on the town that night. Dan had the same affable sociality as Jenny, the UK CEOP liaison I met for a cocktail near the London Eye. She spoke equally knowledgeably on issues of live-stream abuse in Thailand and the best places she had scouted out for scuba trips in the region, smoothly transitioning between topics. Liaisons are notably similar to many of the humanitarian "professionals" I described in Chapter III, forming yet more nodes in the anti-trafficking counter-network.

Dan spoke to the importance of having international liaisons who network and build

relationships at trainings and conferences.

There are a lot of challenges with other law enforcement agencies. Different legal systems, cultural backgrounds, those are most important. Most important. I think working together, having a legal system that can be challenging. So for instance one thing can be punishable in one country but not in another country. Or they can ask me to do something that, for instance another law enforcement in another country can ask me to do something for them. But I have my rules and regulations. If they don't know my rules and regulations, and the basis on which they can actually ask me this. And I say, no, I can't. There's gonna be, lost in translation, a lot of rules and regulation when it comes to international cooperation. So in theory it's all easy and in practice it can be hard. Combined with the cultural thing. We are very direct in the Netherlands—we say yes or no, that's it. Whereas in other countries more formal. So there can be some, if you don't know that about each other—it can raise conflicts as well.

Investigations of cyber-crime are increasingly dominating the focus of Interpol and its member agencies. Interpol has its own secure communications network; from the Interpol website:³

If you've ever watched a movie where the good guys "run fingerprints against all known databases" the chances are they are doing it via I-24/7. I-24/7 is INTERPOL's super secure network that links the member countries to each other and lets them search INTERPOL's international criminal databases. It's a bit like a private Internet just for police. Police use a portal known as I-link to access I-24/7. Using I-link, they can view INTERPOL's international criminal information and can share alerts with other member countries.

Specifically on child exploitation and protection issues, this "private Internet just for police" contains an online collaborative portal and database, run by the Experts Group on Crimes Against Children. A sub-group, the Interpol Experts Group for Victim Identification, consists of 42 member countries—although when I interviewed United States Special Agent Jim Cole, he clarified that only 15-20 of these countries were highly active.

Agent Cole is Section Chief for the Victim Identification program at the Department of Homeland Security. “When members of the [Interpol Experts] group who are proactively looking for new material come across material, they can run it in a couple systems just to make sure it’s new. But then they can put it up in that collaborative portal, and then we can have a running dialogue about that series of material,” he explained. The ‘material’ Cole refers to is child abuse images and videos, either part of ongoing investigations or completely ‘new,’ meaning none of the national teams have come across that particular content or child. Agent Cole’s Victim ID program staff can “run image, video, and audio analytics, enhancements, clarifications of child abuse imagery and video, with a purpose of identifying and rescuing the depicted child victims, identifying and apprehending the depicted offenders, and identifying and locating the crime scene where it occurred.” I will return to the specific analytics and software in the next section, but here I focus on his program’s liaising role.

Cole manages Project VIC (Victim Identification Collaboration), a joint partnership between NGOs and industry (digital media and technology companies) to assist law enforcement agencies with processing child abuse content, “these massive amounts of data we’ve been receiving.” Before Project VIC was created under Homeland Security, law enforcement across the country would receive “huge amounts of data” through international investigations, or seize digital media files from suspects, and be forced to

process hours of video footage. Law enforcement were “going back to their forensics lab, they’re imaging it, and then they’re using more traditional computer forensics tools to go through it which were very inefficient. To watch a video in those tools is really *painful*, painfully slow process.” Note that Cole refers not to the emotional toll of viewing potential pornographic footage as “painful,” but instead to the lengthy undertaking of processing material. Project VIC, like the Interpol Experts Group on Crimes Against Children, and another body called the Virtual Global Taskforce on Child Exploitation (VGT), are all aimed at improving speed and *efficiency* through new software collaborations as well as increased flows of communication between governmental and non-governmental groups. The VGT,³ created in 2003, is unique for its explicit partnership with non-state agencies on issues of virtual child exploitation issues, distinguishing it from the Interpol Experts Group. At the time of this writing the VGT is comprised of 14 law enforcement organizations, of which 11 are member countries, as well as 18 “private sector partners” from electronic media companies to NGOs⁴. Dan from the Dutch National Police noted that initially, “we were not accustomed to working with NGOs, because NGOs are not enforcement,” but agencies like the VGT have streamlined the sharing of new software and image processing

³ As listed on the VGT website, “To become a private sector partner of the VGT, organisations must follow five principles: 1) have a proven track record of cooperation with, and a public commitment to, law enforcement; 2) have a pro-active commitment to combating child abuse online and making the internet safer by design; 3) actively support law enforcement on crime prevention and reduction strategies, including those developed by the VGT; 4) show commitment to the development of effective educational programs that promote safety on the internet; and 5) actively support and promote the work of the VGT.

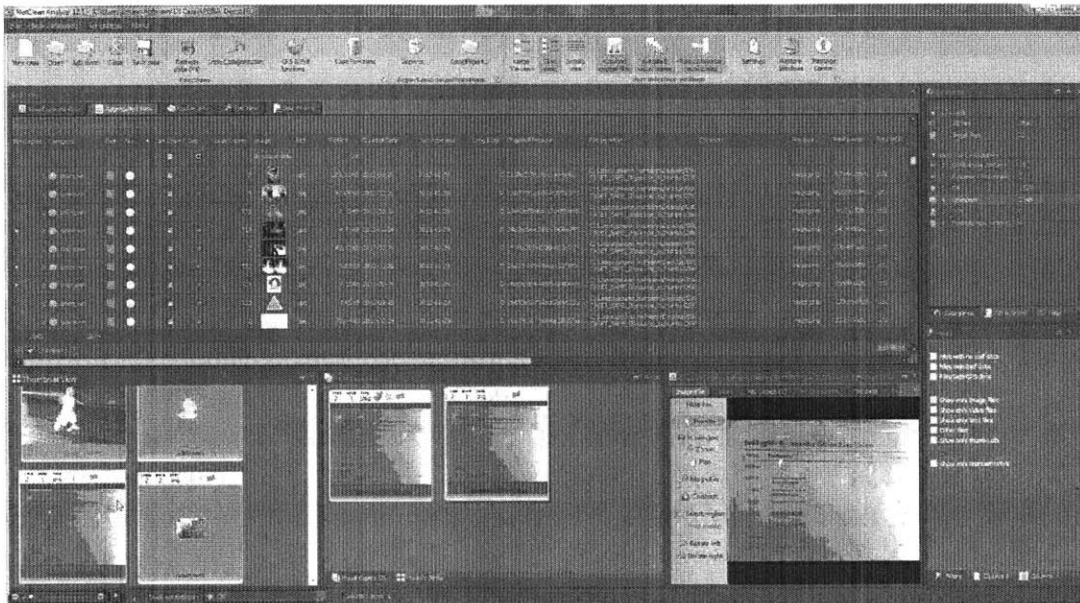
techniques between countries. Agent Cole continued, “And so, the first thing we try to do beyond, is it [the image] already identified, is what country did it originate from? And so the way it works now, if anything is in the United States then it comes to our lab. But we still help out on the global scale, ‘cause there may be—y’know—each of the kind of 20 active folks have different skill-sets. So, we’re well know for our abilities to do like enhancements and clarifications on stuff, and so usually when that type of work is required, they’ll ask for our assistance.” With their location under Homeland Security, Cole’s program coordinates between various levels of law enforcement affiliated with Interpol—such as Dan’s division with the Dutch National Police—and within the US—the FBI, Postal Inspection Service, and 61 internet crimes against children task forces throughout the country. Cole also manages a full-time liaison staff person at the US’s National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), near Washington D.C.

B. Apprehending Images: Digital Image Forensics

1. Image Source Detection and Hash Sociality

I visited the NCMEC headquarters multiple times in 2013 and 2014. The office is a stately brick building in downtown Alexandria, Virginia, approximately ten miles south

of D.C. Linda, an analyst with the Child Victim Identification Program at NCMEC, sat at her desk within a long room of cubicles and walked me through a demo using scrubbed images (where any identifying markers on faces and bodies would be blocked).



Demo module for NetClean Analyze image classification software; courtesy of NetClean Analyze

Linda described to me the reporting process for technology companies who might come across child pornography and other abusive content on their platforms. The US SAFE Act of 2007 (H.R. 3791) set reporting requirements for companies falling under the rubric of “electronic communication service providers and remote computing service providers.” Facebook, Google, YouTube, Microsoft, Instagram, Twitter, and many other major social media and software companies fall under this category. If one of these providers comes across an image depicting child abuse, or that seems threatening or

suspicious, they file a case report to submit to NCMEC. The way in which a provider “comes across” such images varies greatly across companies, and the process of reporting also differs. When NCMEC receives such images through their reporting system, they are sent to Linda and her team in the Child Victim Identification Program.

On her computer that day, she pulled open a file folder containing what she explained as, “a dossier of reported CEI [child exploitation images]” from Facebook, with the faces and bodies scrubbed. She then opened a software program called “PhotoDNA” and uploaded one of the photos from the dossier into the program. A small loading timer popped up, and as it marked one minute, Linda looked up at me and smiled in anticipation. When the program finished loading, a set of several hundred photos was displayed, with the original photo isolated on the left side of the screen. I could see at a glance that the newly displayed photos were all quite similar, showing a young white child, most likely a boy; in some of them he was wearing a blue baseball hat and blue-and-white outfit. The results page contained images with similar hash values to the original photo, Linda explained. “So it seems like our photo in question here might be part of a ‘series,’” Linda explained to me during her demo at NCMEC. A ‘series’ of child abuse images refers to a set of photos of either the same child in various different scenarios, poses, or clothes or even at different ages, or a set of photos of different children in similar scenarios, poses, or clothing. If this were an ongoing case rather than

a demo, Linda would run searches on the remaining photos in the dossier to see if any contained what she suspected was the same child, and next contact both Facebook's child exploitation team as well as the FBI's Violent Crimes Against Children Program to begin to file a case report and aggregate all known data about this photo series, gathering as much additional information as possible on the time and location that the photos were taken.

The database against which Linda was matching the reported photo was NCMEC's National Child Victim Identification System, which was established in 2002 along with the Child Victim Identification Program and contains images contributed by local, state, federal, and international law enforcement. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) also runs a database that contains filed images of child abuse. As of 2012, analysts had reviewed more than 77 million images and videos (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children 2014). This number has increased to more than 100 million in the past two years (Johnson 2014). NCMEC reports that approximately 5,400 children have been identified through the database review and matching process from 2002-2014. The PhotoDNA software was searching through NCMEC's own database of known images of child pornography to see if the "new" image might be similar to, or even identical to, an image that had already gone through that system. If two images were exactly identical, they would have the same hash value.

Agent Cole from Homeland Security explained their use of hash sets this way: “every [image] file that's on a computer, seen by a computer, is made up of 1s and 0s. You can run an algorithm over those files and there are numerous hashing algorithms so. The most common in law enforcement is Message Digest 5 [MD5] or Secure Hash Algorithm 1 [SHA1]. When you run the algorithm against an image file it basically just cares about the 1s and 0s that make up that file, and so it can produce the, what comes out on the other side is a unique identifier, or what we like to kind of refer to as a 'digital signature' for that file because it's unique to that file. So if I have two of the exact same file, or if I make a direct copy of a file, digitally, and I don't change anything, then those two binaries values, signatures, will be identical, they'll be the same. And so when we're processing suspects' machines, and we have a set of the hashes that we're interested in mining, we can run those up against and find the digital duplicates in an automated way.”

While this may seem intuitively simple, Cole clarified to me that law enforcement was relying too much on binary (duplicate) hash sets. “Law enforcement in general is very offender-focused, it's, y'know, 'put the bad guy in jail,’” he explained, and a forensics team would “run a hash set, get several thousand hits [on the offender], which would be more than enough to prosecute an individual...and then they'd call it good.” To him and other managing liaison officers, this quick-match technique focused on the

perpetrators of abuse, missed the larger picture of new child abuse image production: “If there are *newly* produced images of a *victim* in that volume [in a series], you're not gonna find them. Because you're relying on a hash set and just by the very nature of being in a hash set it's already been seen before, and designated as something we're looking for. So we were literally—law enforcement *across the globe*, it wasn't just a US problem, this is a global issue—was for all intents and purposes shoving victims in the evidence room never to be found.”

Thus, Project VIC and, internationally, the VGT, aim to remedy the offender-focused image detection process by encouraging more focus on child victims, and using newer software better able to detect new child abuse images without relying exclusively on past known-hash image sets. “Look, we'll use the hash sets to get work load reduction so that you're not having to manually review all these files like you did in the past—but we want you to do is instead of focusing on the hits, we want you to focus on the stuff ya didn't hit,” Agent Cole explained, “because that's where new victims will be.” Project VIC actively solicits and tests new software packages from multiple companies and countries to provide free to local law enforcement agencies. As part of the reporting process with electronic service providers, NCMEC is also authorized to send “elements related to any image reported to its CyberTipline” back to the service provider if it will help them stop “further transmission” of similar photos. ‘Elements,’ as the law

stipulates, can include “unique identifiers” associated with an image, any known website locations of the image, and “other technological elements” that can be used to identify further images of that nature. The elements for each case are, as one might guess, quite discretionary, and necessitate frequent communication and close ties between the Child Victim Identification Program at NCMEC and its complementary units at electronic service providers.

In practice this works out as an extremely close relationship between NCMEC and some software companies that have a dedicated task force or unit for the investigation of child exploitation. Facebook, for example, has several units that might potentially deal with child abuse content, including a Child Exploitation Team and a Trust and Safety division. Other companies, such as Tagged (until recently) had no single person or unit dedicated to assessing and reporting child abuse content. Despite a legal obligation to report CEI content, the reach of the federal law is limited in the extent to which companies must establish standardized internal procedures or personnel to content review. The cyclical process of reporting to NCMEC, and NCMEC reporting back in case there is need of further review, thus plays out very differently in each case with each company.

Facebook’s director of Trust and Safety, Emily Vacher, discussing PhotoDNA with me,

exclaimed that “We love it [PhotoDNA],” but “we want to be able to do more, to be more proactive and find child pornography without the images having already been known about.” She expressed a desire to work on “hash sharing” with other technology companies, but that the current search processes varied greatly between companies. Her colleague, Michael, a manager in Facebook’s eCrime division, separately made nearly the same remark to me: “We’re pushing for hash sharing between tech companies. The hashes are a good signal as well.” He added that PhotoDNA software, a sort of emblematic software that set the baseline for child exploitation detection but not used as much anymore, is also symbolic of collaboration: “It’s [PhotoDNA’s] biggest piece of value is as a signal.”

The comments by Vacher and her colleague on hash sharing indicate a particular form of sociality that characterizes this extension of the policing investigation network. The exchange of image data and hash sets between agencies and companies produces a new form of gift economy. I call the discourse and practices at data sharing among these actors “hash sociality.” Law enforcement investigators and social media companies dissolve mistrust and establish the basis for investigative cooperation through reciprocal exchanges of data. Federal law enforcement from the US often made remarks about trust, making casual distinctions between social media companies as “good partners” or “bad partners.” A lesser-known social media company, Tagged.com, was

often brought up as a past example of a company not always cooperative with law enforcement. Today Facebook's division dealing with child protection issues is literally called *Trust and Safety*. The networking meetings and trainings at which cooperation is discussed—not always amicably—provide space for the negotiation of trading illicit data as well as proprietary investigative software. Hash sociality, the exchanges of data brought forth by legal necessity, also establishes a shared ethos for digital investigations and forensic work.

2. Making Algorithmic Detectives

The process of image matching described above with Linda from NCMEC falls under the umbrella term of 'source identification' in digital forensics software: the comparison of one new digital image with a set of known images in a database. This might mean comparison between a newly flagged potential image of child pornography being matched with a law enforcement database of known, reported child pornography images. Other methods digital forensic investigators might use to detect child abuse images include tampering detection and hidden messages recovery. Tampering detection is straightforward and an increasingly common exercise; examining pixels, for example, to detect any evidence of cloning, healing, blurring, retouching, or splicing images. In the case of child abuse images, this might mean detecting the placement of the image of a child's head upon an adult body. Hidden messages recovery involves the

detection of camouflaging information within an image, such as the concealment of an illegal image embedded within or underneath a more innocuous one. Forensic analysts would also need to attempt to recover the hidden, original image. Newer digital forensic software designed for the purpose of use in child exploitation cases increasingly attempts to algorithmically automate these forms of image detection. These software packages use machine learning to train the algorithm to continuously improve the accuracy of its search results.

I characterize the computer scientists and content reviewers at social media companies as “algorithmic detectives” who use technical expertise, collaborative play, and a sense of tacit or gut knowledge gleaned from traditional policing, to design and perform these algorithmic searches. The viewing and classification of photos relies on the dual efforts of (non-human) machine learning algorithms and (human) skilled viewers. Software coders and content viewers share practices of using standardized rules and categories to classify image content, including by skin color, sex, and age discrimination. This indexical work also hinges upon drawing from a memory cache of previously viewed and filed images. I suggest we may view the work of digital image forensics in child exploitation cases as a heteromated (Ekbria and Nardi 2014) practice of distributed cognition (cf. Hutchins 1995; 2006) using the multiple skills of computational and human vision efforts. Image detection work in general, let alone for child protection

cases, is difficult to entirely automate; heteromation acknowledges the necessity of human mediation in a technical process. In the sections that follow I will describe how “human labor, skill, and affect are brought to bear” (Ekbia and Nardi 2014) to make image detection work. Additionally, “distribution of cognitive labor is always mediated by human interaction” and the cognitive labor of sorting through image files relies on particular forms of sociality (Hutchins 2006:377) practiced at police trainings, child protection conferences, and meetings between law enforcement and their child protection counterparts at major technology companies.

My understanding of ‘algorithmic detectives’ draws from other anthropological interpretations of algorithmic culture, which describes and often challenges the supposed dichotomy of expertise between software and its designers, and the ‘non-technical,’ earlier specialists whose work might be replaced by the technology. Gillespie, for example, writes, “A market prediction that is ‘algorithmic’ is different from a prediction that comes from an expert broker highly respected for their expertise and acumen; a claim about an emergent social norm in a community generated by an algorithm is different from one generated ethnographically. Each makes its own play for legitimacy, and implied its own framework for what legitimacy is (quantification or interpretation, mechanical distance or human closeness). But in the context of nearly a century of celebration of the statistical production of knowledge and longstanding trust

in automated calculation over human judgment, the algorithmic does enjoy a particular cultural authority” (2014). In the case of image content review work, designers of algorithms explicitly understand the ways in which content reviewers will use and train the software based on their preexisting expertise, and the content reviewers (or their managers, rather), understand the ownership they have over decisions to escalate an investigation.

Forensic investigations have become increasingly specialized to fall under the domain of specific investigative personnel. Ericson and Shearing (1986) describe this process of professionalization as a “scientification” of the police, with the division of policing into public safety and criminal investigations. While “street cops” devoted to public safety patrol routine areas and only occasionally have breakthrough “hunches” like Officer Jacobs in the Jaycee Duggard case, investigative police are trained to work more steadily case by case, to use increasingly sophisticated forensic technologies, from fingerprinting to DNA testing, to obtain evidence and bolster claims in criminal legal proceedings, as the conversations between Linda at NCMEC and Agent Cole show. Several STS scholars have documented the historical and cultural contexts of increased reliance on technological methods in forensic investigation, especially the rising symbolic value afforded to technological evidence, and those who can wield it, in a society that increasingly upholds the power of scientific truth and production (e.g.

Huey 2010; Cole 2001; Cole and Dioso-Villa 2007; Kruse 2010). Here I am drawing from the literature on how representational “devices”—technologies, practices, objects—are made central to the structuring of scientific practice (cf. Coopmans et al. 2014; Latour 1986; Lynch and Woolgar 1990; Suchman 1990; Suchman and Trigg 1993). By studying how digital image forensics tools are designed and used to make child exploitation cases, I describe how the people who design and use these tools form a particular community of practice. I draw from Charles Goodwin’s analysis of “the public organization of visual practice within the work-life of a profession” (2000:164) to argue that ‘viewing’ becomes a skillful practice through trainings that establish shared ways of ‘seeing’ child exploitation images. As Goodwin explains, “crucial work in many different occupations takes the form of classifying and constructing visual phenomena in ways that help shape the objects of knowledge that are the focus of the work of a profession” (167). Different actors—be they law enforcement investigators, digital forensic startups, social media company reviewer teams, or the outsourced content review workers who are contracted by larger corporations to make the first reviews of potentially abusive images—learn to adapt shared ways of seeing images. Shared ways of seeing are produced through training certain “techniques of the body” (cf. Mauss 1935 [1973]). Cristina Grasseni emphasizes that “one never simply looks. One learns *how* to look” (2012:47, emphasis added). Grasseni continues, “A way of seeing acquired in this way is not simply a semiotic code. It is a perceptive hue...it becomes permanent

sediment, an embodied way of accessing the world and of managing it—in other words, an identity” (Grasseni 2012: 45). Seeing is also tiered, or classed, in how certain perceptions are afforded higher authority. Goodwin’s striking analysis of perceptive regimes in the Rodney King trial demonstrates that certain viewers, such as policemen, can make more authoritative interpretations of visual data, however controversial, within the space of a court of law (cf. Goodwin 1994, 2000). In the case of content viewers of child abuse images, these actors’ perceptions of their own *labor* differs significantly. I argue that a tiered and classed system of content review has emerged that produces different viewing practices as well as subjectivities and precarities, a point I will discuss under considerations of affective work in the digital viewing economy.

a. Perceptive Skills

Software designers, law enforcement, and the publicizers of these increasingly popular software packages imbue the algorithms with biological, or perhaps “natural,” qualities. In numerous interviews and press materials, the designer of PhotoDNA is often quoted saying some variation of, “Like human beings, every photo is a bit different.” The name of such software—PhotoDNA—is evocative of the notion that images have a natural quality, an originary or authentic source point. The discourse around digital image

forensics mirrors that of DNA forensics, with a “belief in science and technology as a way to attain the truth and effectiveness in criminal investigation” (Miranda 2015). Forensic technologies have an “aura of infallibility” (Byrne and Marx 2011). The marketing of PhotoDNA often touts its high accuracy and low rate of false positive results; that it will attain a speed and accuracy not possibly by human eye alone. Many researchers working on image detection algorithms emphasize the possibility of a future where humans do not at *all* have to see child abuse images for content review, that it might be entirely mechanized.

To explain this point further I return to the PhotoDNA demonstration Linda walked me through at NCMEC. In her demo, the search query resulted in other photos of the child at potentially different ages. As she led me through the demo, she would gesture and make aside comments on what the program was doing. Linda scrolled down the results display and paused to point out a couple photos. “See, the child looks a little older here, or at least larger. So this is a problem.” A problem, in the sense that if the child seems to have aged during the course of the reporting, and various photos at different ages are on file, it is more likely that the child is still being abused and coerced into posing for such photos. Despite the automated matches, she still continued to pause and point out her own data points in the images. Her remark that “this is a problem” indicated a gut feeling—her tacit knowledge—that some images represented possible other ages and

the need for further investigation. Image content review is interpretive work, and such work is also trainable. Once Linda's search query resulted in several hundred photos, she searches through the results to disqualify any images that are very obviously—to her eye—not a match or should not belong in the set. Images in these cases are classified according to various larger categories: human and non-human objects (to ignore any objects or pet animals in the image in an initial search query), the environment (indoors versus outdoors, certain rooms, etc.), percentage of skin showing (corresponding to nudity), approximate age of the human depicted (at the simplest level, child versus adult), and skin tone and color (corresponding to lighting exposure but also to race and ethnicity). In doing this disqualification, she helps train the software to produce more accurate results in its next search query based on the classification elements of the qualifying and disqualifying images. Such work entails skilled vision, "a capacity to look in a certain way as a result of training" (Grasseni 2004:41; cf. Grasseni 2012). This trained viewing operates within a larger culture of human quantification and classification that has been explored extensively by scholars in STS and anthropology of science (Lampland and Star 2012). An important point raised by such research is the production of the supposedly "standard human" (cf. Epstein 2008; Timmermans and Epstein 2010)—a baseline identity of certain gender, race, and size that informs classification practices. Digital forensics designers and users use a training set to improve their algorithm's ability to detect faces, genders, and races; the problem of bias

in the selection of the data set and what new “hits” it is tested against continues to be a vexing issue for algorithmic detectives attempting to locate more faces across a greater global diversity.

Age estimation continues to be a challenge for digital forensics research, especially in searching for children at different ages. Currently, in many investigative units a forensic artist will help with searches by making age progression sketches to estimate the aged faces of missing children. The artists use a combination of known photos of the child, photos of any older family members, especially siblings, and knowledge about how faces age (for example, most people’s faces and noses elongate as they grow older). The designers of age progression algorithms aim to mimic forensic sketches using similar criteria. A researcher who is part of a computer science team at the University of Washington explained during a conference presentation that figuring out how a person might have aged is, “part art, part science, and a little intuition.” This provocative statement indicates to me how much of the technical design is also a form of craft.

The craft and skill of drawing a facial composite from witness testimony is often held up as the antecedent to facial recognition and reconstruction software. When I was first given a tour of NCMEC’s headquarters, my hosts showed me around the forensics floor. In this wing of the office, forensic artists and facial identification specialists

worked on federal-level investigations of missing and murdered children's cases. The office cubicles contained wide sketching desks and graphic designer stations, neat setups of files and posters as well as the odd skull. The NCMEC staff person showing me around chuckled and said he loved letting visitors get a peek at the various plastic replicas of infant, toddler, and child skulls. On the day I visited only one of the four full-time forensics staff was present, a young man who had recently completed a masters degree in criminal justice. The staff members here worked on various aspects of forensic art, including producing composite imagery of faces, child age progressions, and postmortem facial reconstructions and approximations from skeletal remains. Composite imagery production is quite well known in police work: the composite sketch of a suspect or victim's face based on the descriptions of a witness or witnesses. Increasingly, a substantial amount of composite imagery drawings are done using design software such as Adobe Photoshop.

b. Collaborative Play as Enskillment

At the Crimes Against Children Conference I attended in Dallas, Texas in August 2014, the conference organizers coordinated the first annual "Digital Crime Scene Challenge" workshop. The workshop was reserved for law enforcement only; although I was unable to attend the actual event or learn about the specific content, it was described as "a new interactive workshop" set up as a "competition between three-person teams."

The Atlanta-based software firm Silent Shield sponsored the setup and prizes for the competition, advertising that participants:

... will execute a search warrant on a mock crime scene of a suspected offender's residence. The suspect has been accused of child sexual abuse. The goal of the competition is to retrieve as much evidence as possible from the scene and the suspect in the time permitted and to formulate an investigative plan in response to the allegation. Points will be awarded for various pieces of evidence identified and recovered with the winning team receiving the most points. The winning team members will each receive a Nexus tablet. ("Silent Shield" 2014)

Homeland Security's Special Agent Matthew Dunn arranged the fact setup and scoring of the challenge. Participation in the competition cost \$25 per person, compensated by local law enforcement teams. On the first day of the conference at various cocktail mixer events, officers gleefully chattered about the competition, remarking that it was based on a few recent actual criminal investigations. For participating investigators, success in the game relied upon a specific visual acuity, recall memory of past cases, and efficient collaboration with their teammates (case-worker colleagues from their own local investigative unit). By working on the same mock case, the competitors were afforded the opportunity to discuss with their teams and others various elements of their own decision-making and investigations. The participation in like activities and the shared materials "...mediate and propagate the training of the eye, constituting a common idiom, a shared ecology of professional practice" (Grasseni 2004: 44). A group of three investigators from Oklahoma won the crime scene challenge, interviewing a person role-playing as a suspect, issuing a search warrant, cataloging evidence in the room, and coordinating next steps for the investigation.

Grasseni writes, “By skilled vision I mean the way our looking can be trained to detect certain specific features in objects that are commonly available to generalized perception” (2004: 49). Of course, the “objects” I am referring to here are anything but commonplace—they are extra-ordinary, the alleged illegal recordings of crime and thus highly safeguarded data. The possibility for a child exploitation image to be a source of condemning evidence in a criminal trial enhances its value and makes the act of its viewing, and the physical locations in which it is viewed, all the more acutely charged. Intuition, in the way that I am using it here, entails a “common sensing” of information acquired and shared by a particular community of practice.

The accumulation of and sifting through such images—photos and videos of child abuse, and abusers—is explained by social media companies and law enforcement as “a necessary evil” to get at the truth. Social media companies hire their own content review teams both on-site and offshore to review “borderline” cases they may want to “escalate” (send to NCMEC and law enforcement) by engaging in individual and group decisions on the content of specific photos. Employees from Facebook’s ‘Operations Team’—from the Trust and Safety, eCrime, and the User Operations divisions—meet weekly to review what one employee, Tim, called “edge cases.” Edge cases include issues of mistaken age or misclassified “lascivious exhibition” (e.g. an artistic

photograph or partial nudity at the beach or a music festival). The team may meet urgently or more often if an image or video is suspected to pose “imminent harm” to the person depicted. The people who sit at a table and review these cases are generally young, a few years out of college, with humanities or social sciences backgrounds. I met one of these groups, three women in their 20s and 30s, on a visit to the Menlo Park office. The conference rooms in which they meet are ordinary, with a large table and screen set up for Skype to easily include their senior staff as needed, who are often traveling or based elsewhere. They go through a short, two to three month on-boarding process at the company, as all employees would, but the bulk of their training comes from actual practice through group viewing work.

Much as Officer Jacobs did in the case of Philip Garrido, these viewers rely on a combination of their tacit knowledge and accumulated expertise as they sift through child abuse image content. By collaborative play I refer to the group-work dimensions of content review work, which is far from solitary as well as the gameified ways in which reviewers are trained to hone their feelings of suspicion and intuition that something is ‘off’ with a particular visual image. Returning to Officer Jacobs’ keynote speech on intuition in investigation—I suggest officers’ “gut feelings” are not being ‘lost’ (as she argues) with the deployment of new technologies. Rather, officers and other viewers are further training their perceptive skills in a way that intuition is

“distributed” (Hutchins). Indeed, my treatment of “algorithmic detectives” refers to the expansiveness of this category of persons—it is no longer simply law enforcement who view and sort child abuse images, but many other counterparts at NGOs and technology companies as well. Algorithmic detectives include software designers, machine learning computer scientists, and human content reviewers like Linda at NCMEC or the team at Facebook, and possess a multitude of skills among them. The design of digital forensic software is only made valuable in its usability, which hinges upon “craft” practices of skilled vision and collaborative play for enskillment.

3. Digital Laborers and the Tiered Viewing Economy

How does a company like Facebook “come across” child abuse images in the first place, in order to launch the investigative process described in the above sections? A vast, globally distributed infrastructure of ‘content review’ sits beneath the end result of an image being investigated by the FBI, the Dutch Police, or another national law enforcement agency. Users on a social media site can flag or report images, text, and videos with questionably violent or hateful content. These flagged images are given a first pass by content moderators at firms outsourced by major corporations. The majority of content moderation firms used by social media companies are based in the US or Southeast Asia, especially the Philippines. This first pass of content review work

is performed outside the elite spaces of technology companies and local law enforcement; it is outsourced and made routinized. Flagged images needing further scrutiny or screening are then sent back to US domestic offices where a next level of viewers can classify the files or submit them for further discussion and investigation.

Adrian Chen's (2014) detailed investigative journalism piece on content review work describes the daily practices of laborers in the Philippines who review the massive amounts of 'illicit content'—child abuse, graphic violence, murder, racist diatribes, and more—posted on social media websites. He opens his story by bifurcating the physical settings of the social media company economy: "The campuses of the tech industry are famous for their lavish cafeterias, cushy shuttles, and on-site laundry services. But on a muggy February afternoon, some of these companies' most important work is being done 7,000 miles away, on the second floor of a former elementary school at the end of a row of auto mechanics' stalls in Bacoor, a gritty Filipino town 13 miles southwest of Manila." Chen's division highlights how commercial content moderation is stratified across nationality and class. But in addition, this aspect of content moderation introduces a new affective economy of viewing. The lowest class of content reviewers is skilled at high-speed viewing, doing classification work of violent materials to meet their daily quotas before clocking out. They are "data janitors," cultural workers who are absolutely necessary yet increasingly invisible and underpaid in the content

moderation economy (Irani 2015). What is the emotional cost of such work? Unlike the reviewers at NCMEC, who are mandated to visit an on-site psychiatrist every week to debrief and process their work, the laborers at outsourced centers have no such emotional labor. As Chen argues in his article, burnout is quite rapid and severe from the task of viewing such materials every day.

At the same time, the precarity of such work is not without its benefits. Digital labor at American outsourcing firms offers promise, the prospect of lucrative work within a larger global system, and employment at outsourcing firms can be seen as a sort of immaterial “hope” labor (cf. Bulut 2015; Kuehn and Corrigan 2013). As Emmanuel David (2015) has recently written, outsourced call center work offers additional liberatory potential for queer and trans workers in the Philippines to work, often safely and anonymously, within an otherwise queerphobic labor environment.

C. Corporate Craft: Marketing Forensics Technologies

1. Child Protection as Corporate Responsibility

The software Linda was using at NCMEC, PhotoDNA, was developed in 2011 by a computer science professor at Dartmouth and donated to Microsoft for its own in-house content review process. Microsoft has shared the software with various companies and

organizations, including Facebook and NCMEC. Microsoft and Facebook have continued to do their own research on designing other systems for image detection and recognition. Both companies have launched prominent advertisement campaigns on their anti-cybercrime centers, and PhotoDNA has enjoyed years of publicity and public awareness promotions since its launching in 2012. Recalling the discussion in the previous chapter on “moralizing practices” by bureaucratic humanitarian institutions, I see a similar comparison to the “responsibility” efforts promoted by many major social media and technology corporations. Many companies—Microsoft and Facebook quite prominently—have taken on ‘child exploitation and trafficking’ as prominent headline issues for their companies to become involved in. As the previous section explained, companies based in the United States have a legal obligation to report child abuse materials. But their own corporate responsibility promotions also sell child protection as a *moral obligation*. Anthropologists and sociologists of corporate management practices have suggested that the increasing use of the phrase “corporate citizenship” signals a neoliberal ethos where private companies are part of and *expected* to participate in the political process as “good citizens” and neighbors.

Anthropologists and economic historians have long explored the role of large, multinational corporations in influencing and interconnecting with state power and citizen subjectivity, from the perspective of political economy (Cefkin 2010; Chandler

and Mazlish 2009; Litvin 2003; Nash 1979), the development of spiritual and religious economies (Moreton 2009; Ong 1988), in producing class stratification, unemployment, and blurring of formal and informal labor sectors (Jeffrey 2010; Nace 2005; Walley 2013), and in inculcating ethical and hardworking professionalism (Kondo 1990; Schwartzman 1981, 1989). Corporate social responsibility has been often discussed, for example, in recent ethnographies of environmental conflict in attempts to assuage relationships between environmentally destructive corporations and activist communities (cf. Fortun 2001), especially on issues of mining and oil and gas extraction (cf. Coumans 2011; Ferguson 2005; Rogers 2012; Sawyer 2004; Welker 2009). By treating the corporation as a modern “social form” (Welker et al. 2011) these studies aim to show how non-governmental actors are powerfully involved in the reshaping of political and cultural orders. Anthropologists of biotechnology have described how new research is promoted by corporate ‘hype’ machinery in ways that intimately link biology, capital, social reproduction, and the envisioning of state futures (cf. Fischer 2005; Hayden 2003; Sunder Rajan 2006). The notion of corporate personhood and rights continues to re-emerge in political discourse, both *for* corporate rights, as in the US Supreme Court case *Citizens United v. Election Commission* (2010), and in ways that challenge corporate personhood, as in the December 2015 European Union Privacy Law, which tightened regulations on corporate access to consumer information.

Ronen Shamir (2005) argues that the branding of corporate social responsibility has actually seen “social responsibility...transformed into a managerial tool” for executives to maintain employee satisfaction and pride in the company (cf. Nyqvist 2015). Workplace intimacy is enhanced by the feeling of moralizing practices, of the company ‘doing good work.’ This process is cyclical between companies, NGOs, and law enforcement organizations. ECPAT, for example, was founded on the principle of exerting pressure on the travel and tourism industry to aid with exploitation prevention efforts. In 2012, ECPAT developed an offshoot organization called “The Code” to specifically handle advocacy on corporate conduct. The Code—short for The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism—is according to their mission, “an industry-driven responsible tourism initiative with a mission to provide awareness, tools and support to the tourism industry in order to prevent the sexual exploitation of children.”

ECPAT and other NGOs, including MTV-EXIT and Terre Des Hommes, have also turned their attention to *consumer* citizenship through raising awareness to supply chain issues. In 2012 I attended the Harvard Business School’s annual Social Entrepreneurship Conference, at which a panel on “Supply Chains and Human Trafficking” was heavily attended with participants flowing out into the hallway. This panel has been held at the conference every year since. The critiques of “supply chain capitalism”—“commodity

chains based on subcontracting, outsourcing, and allied arrangements in which the autonomy of component enterprises is legally established even as the enterprises are disciplined within the chain as a whole” (Tsing 2009: 148)—are not without merit, especially in how they implicate and render nonwestern and femme labor even more precarious and vulnerable to multiple forms of exploitation. But the increased presence of these issues at social entrepreneurship and business development meeting spaces begs the question of the “solutions” being posed by upper-class workers with an investment in being hired by these massive corporations themselves. Such efforts and conferences cement a sort of “supply-chain citizenship” (Partridge 2011) predicated upon articulating moral responsibility and ethical business agendas without any substantial changes to labor rights and employment practices. Since 2009 ECPAT has partnered with the British cosmetics and beauty company The Body Shop on various anti-trafficking campaigns. The Body Shop plasters bright pink and orange text—“Stop Sex Trafficking” in its stores and on its products—and a portion of profits from those items are sent back to ECPAT and other NGO partners. The Body Shop campaign is an example of what Elizabeth Bernstein (2010) has criticized as an easy, opaque attempt at a market-based “humanitarian” solution that obfuscates how the larger issue of exploitation is far more complex and systematically implicated within the same market economy. Discourse and propaganda on corporate social responsibility serves as yet another example of moralizing practices in the anti-trafficking network.

2. Forensic Innovations: Programmers, Vendors, and the Art of Hype

Today each of the larger social media companies has a "child safety" division; if not an entire division devoted to child protection then at least a team within a cybercrime division. I had the opportunity to visit Facebook's child safety offices in Menlo Park and Washington DC multiple times, as well as attend some of their trainings at child protection conferences. The team is headed on a global scale by Emily Vacher, the Trust and Safety Manager described earlier discussing "hash sharing" in investigations. Vacher manages a team that includes content reviewers as well as computer scientists.

One of these computer scientists, a man named Tim, is a lead programmer based in Menlo Park but who travels frequently (we met in Washington, D.C.). When we met he was wearing black jeans and a black shirt, an outfit he joked was his programmer uniform. Tim's role within Trust and Safety is to develop and oversee the classification and analysis of reported child abuse images. His colleague, Paul, joined one of our meetings; Paul is a project manager in Trust and Safety and works on broader internal product reviews and child safety issues. At one point Paul slightly jolted and said, "Oh that reminds me, I have a USB with some hashes for you, Tim." He dug into his pocket and pulled out a USB drive to hand to Tim. Tim smiled and remarked, "Oh, uh, you could have just emailed it? I have the encrypted email you know." Paul shook his head

and explained he needed to do this one by USB, indicating that the images on file might be an open (ongoing) and sensitive case. I asked Tim to lead me through his research process—the current strengths of his team, and the programming challenges they were hoping to address. “The vast advantages that Facebook has,” Tim began, included their team being able to work backwards, to provide a full narrative to an exploitation story from grooming process to act of violence. However, he was currently fixated on the problematic of age detection. “There is so much that skirts the border,” he explained, exasperatedly. Age becomes increasingly difficult to detect and sort with “age-intersecting details like race, cultural signifiers of age, and makeup.” He and his team conduct research on better sorting age algorithmically in order to reduce the bloat of files submitted from Facebook to NCMEC; when his team cannot determine if a person depicted is underage, they send the entire set of files to NCMEC. “We are already overwhelming law enforcement.” Tim’s impulse to conduct research is not only to improve machine learning and digital problem-solving, but also to provide a more efficient service to law enforcement. These dual impulses interestingly mirror what Chris Kelty (2005) has characterized as a component of geek culture, how programmers imagine their social roles through both technical practices (hacking, networking, code writing) as well as discursive arguments of rights and their social relations (185). Tim imagines himself as part of a larger ecosystem of programmers doing “good work,” echoing the corporate responsibility ethos on an individual level. “These images are

toxic,” he said with conviction, but added that “Our User Ops is getting pretty good at weeding stuff out.” The metaphor of gardening is striking, the cleaning and cultivation of an exploitation-free platform that he can directly tend to.

Tim’s counterparts at smaller companies express similar values. Digital forensics startups develop image detection software for the explicit purpose of having their software purchased or acquired by law enforcement and social media companies for child exploitation, missing persons, and counter-terrorism efforts. In the past decade many scientists in computer vision have begun devoting their research projects beyond facial recognition, to full body and scene analysis. Published papers almost always describe the promise of such research for detecting crime scenes and pornographic images. These scenes can be sorted through for skin color detection and nudity (the percentage of skin color pigments visible within a proportion of an image). A group of Brazilian computer scientists has creatively called their program “NuDetective” (nude detective), branding the software as a child exploitation forensic tool. Computer scientists are also working on developing better searches for emotion (more common and complex in affective computing and artificial intelligence research, in our case here this might mean facial recognition of smiles versus other emotions) and kinship (matching missing children with photos of known biological relatives).



Vendor hall at Crimes Against Children Conference, Dallas, TX. August 2014.

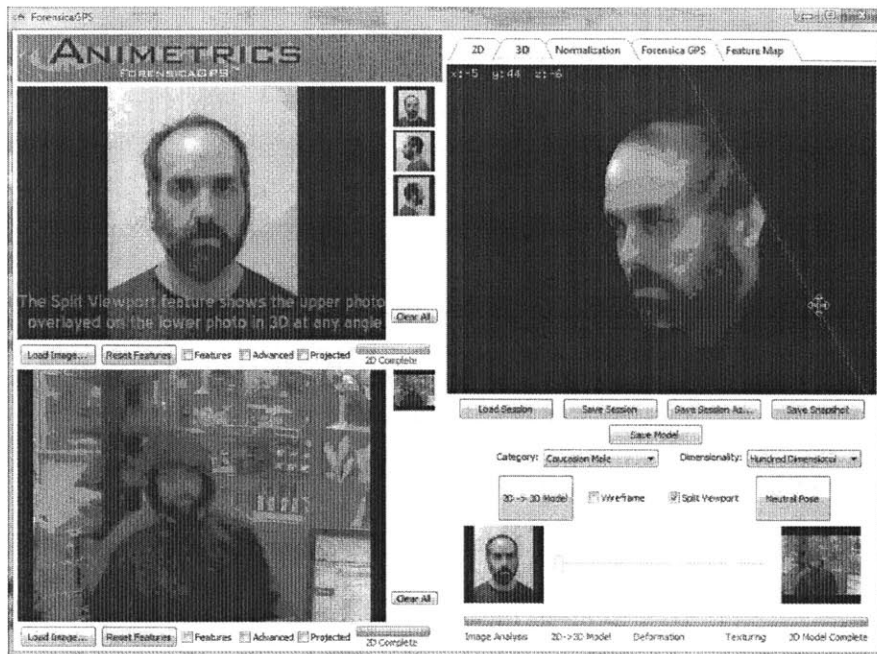
The Dallas conference, as well as the one in Omaha where Officer Ally Jacobs spoke, featured large vendor halls. Here, software developers of new forensic technologies had set up small booths with tables and pamphlets of their products. Products on offer ranged from text analysis and search tools, to voice recorders, to 3-D printing to simulate physical injury, to pose-correction software of video surveillance footage images. Some vendors were familiar names—The Mayo Clinic, Airbnb.com—but most were small to mid-size software ventures out of California and New England. These smaller booths enticed passersby with demo stations where investigators could try out new tools for searching through text and images. Some of these demo stations would be concealed behind a small curtain where an officer could show their badge before entering. Like some sort of consumer electronics tradeshow, the floor buzzed with

conversations and people trickling in from nearby coffee tables, internet cafe stations, or the bar adjoining the conference hall. When workshop sessions would re-start, the vendor hall quickly emptied out except for a few people, and staff at the demo booths were often eager to chat during this lull. I interviewed reps from five small software companies during these moments throughout the conference, often during times when I, and they, were not permitted to enter a law enforcement-only session.

Greg, a young man with a small five-person startup based in Las Vegas, described some of the projects his company had been working on. He was currently working on a program to automatically match user images on dating websites with the public online sex offender registries. This project was largely theoretical, as they were facing hurdles with privacy and proprietary data from the dating website end, but he was interested in imagining its potential for user “empowerment” and to take advantage of the location-based features of both databases. In a later interview over Skype, Greg was also excited to share with me a stunt the company had recently done, to show that Google Glass could be tinkered to do automated facial recognition. “So, it’s against the user agreement for Google Glass to do facial recognition,” he conceded. But “it was kind of speculation for us... like being the tech rebels ‘cause it was against the user agreement,” he chuckled. He continued, more seriously, that facial recognition was a ripe field of study for curious programmers like himself. “The face is a unique identifier at a

distance,” Greg explained, “So unlike, like a thumbprint scan or an ID card where you need to be there physically in person.” In terms of police investigations he suggested that “there’s a lot of grey area with the Fourth Amendment in terms of search and seizure. Like the example I like to give is, if a police was gonna search your car, you’d have to give them permission. But if they could just take a picture and show that you were there, that’s kind of the grey area in the law.” Greg’s articulations of his research underscore the toggle between scientific curiosity—developing an algorithm because they *could*, and to be “rebels”—and a specific understanding of *insecurity*, in thinking about criminal investigations and assisting law enforcement.

Image recognition of humans works best with a full-frontal face view, where vector points on the face have known ratios and symmetry. But in many of the actual photos used in cases, especially still-shots of video footage, a full-frontal face view might be difficult to come by, and thus computer scientists are also working on “pose-correction.” Kate, a marketing manager I spoke with at a facial recognition software company based in New Hampshire, offered a simple explanation of pose correction software: “if a face in a photo is not looking straight on to the camera we can load that image into our system and it will detect the face in the photo, then create a 3D avatar-like model and rotate the face to be a full frontal straight-on pose. This image can then be saved and run through FR [facial recognition] systems to get better results.”



Demo of pose-correction software, ForensicaGPS, from Animetrics, Inc. (2013)

The company that developed this pose-correction software is a small venture, a startup cobbled together by former academic researchers. They have since both donated and sold the software to several local law enforcement agencies. Their pose-correction software can be used to identify children whose faces might otherwise be obscured in a pornographic/abusive video—but also, as the sample image above shows, be used to identify partially-hidden faces on surveillance cameras. The settings for such detection could easily include convenience stores, street-sides, public transportation areas, airports, and more.

The scope of digital forensics software development fits within the ecosystem of the larger, broader-sweeping corporate responsibility initiatives described above, as well as a larger policing network. Coding is a kind of craft-work (cf. Ensmenger 2003, 2010). As Mateas and Montfort (2005) suggest, “Good code does double-duty. It must be interpretable by humans (the original programmer or someone adding to or maintaining the code) as well as by the computational device.” The craft of code harnesses dual interpretation, by programmers and computers alike, but also in programmers’ articulations of their moral responsibility. Facial recognition and digital forensics software translates easily when rooted in ethical imperatives to *intervene* and make criminal investigations more efficient. Digital forensics designers become algorithmic detectives as they too cultivate their own moralizing practices and shared sensibilities of security and rendering “insecure.” They also subscribe to a politics of hope (cf. Miyazaki 2006) and hype (cf. Sunder Rajan 2006). Their software has promissory value as a tool for a particular kind of security-oriented view of safety, and the designers increasingly subscribe to a politics of insecurity despite endorsements for privacy protections (privacy for some, not all).

The social study of algorithms has focused on the “politics” of algorithms, the sociotechnical environment within which algorithms are operating. Much of this research draws from STS arguments that classification and standardization practices are

not apolitical or value-neutral: “each category valorizes some point of view and silences another” (Bowker and Star 1999). Jenna Burrell’s (2016) article on code audits argues that the audit process reveals the lack of neutrality or objectivity in algorithm development. Algorithms are “opaque” in the sense that “rarely does one have any concrete sense of how or why a particular classification has been arrived at from inputs” (Burrell 2016:1). She suggests that “Finding ways to reveal something of the internal logic of an algorithm can address concerns about lack of ‘fairness’ and discriminatory effects, sometimes with reassuring evidence of the algorithm’s objectivity” (9). Code auditors can ensure classifications are non-discriminatory and also open up room for human interpretation of machine thinking, in contrast to what Domingo (2012) has suggested, that human “intuition” fails at high levels of technical complexity. Of course, some machine learning processes are proprietary and intentionally opaque, as with many of the software packages actually used law enforcement. Agent Cole of the DHS, and Dan from the Dutch Police, both would only allude to the software employed by their teams as “similar to PhotoDNA,” a common referent, but clarify that they had moved on to more sophisticated and multi-pronged software that could do further detection and classification work.

In April 2015, Interpol officially opened the Interpol Global Complex for Innovation (IGCI) in Singapore. The organization, housed in a former police headquarters, includes

110 officers from over 50 countries, and will eventually employ 350 staff. IGCI was explicitly developed as a research and development (R&D) facility on digital tools against cybercrime. The center explicitly institutionalizes the *global* nature of relationship-building between law enforcement and software design. According to statements released by Mireille Ballestrazzi, President of Interpol, and Jürgen Stock, Secretary General of Interpol, at the launch of the complex, the IGCI will “will strengthen INTERPOL's global presence,” “enable INTERPOL to develop and use advanced tools and training techniques to build capacity in member countries to tackle emerging criminal threats,” and “use Singapore's location in the heart of Asia to reach out to the rest of the region and beyond.”⁴ The physical situatedness of this “complex” in Singapore is an overt maneuver by corporate interests seeking to capitalize upon a country whose government actively funds “innovation” and startup industries in academic and private sectors. Ironically this same country espouses what many view as draconianly repressive policies against online expression and a law enforcement model predicated upon surveillance. While IGCI’s opening falls outside the timeline scope of this dissertation, in future iterations of this project I aim to further explore the policies and daily practices that foster a certain kind of networked sociality increasingly blurring law enforcement and digital research capacities.

⁴ Transcripts of speeches on April 23, 2015, published by Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs: [https://www.mha.gov.sg/Newsroom/speeches/Pages/-The-Interpol-Global-Complex-for-Innovation-\(IGCI\)-Inauguration-Ceremony-.aspx](https://www.mha.gov.sg/Newsroom/speeches/Pages/-The-Interpol-Global-Complex-for-Innovation-(IGCI)-Inauguration-Ceremony-.aspx)

In this section I have argued that the global policing network addressing child exploitation is expanding to include new actors, from social media company employees to content reviewers to computer programmers. I call the people in this network algorithmic detectives, who cultivate collaborative feelings of gut intuition and perceptive skills of viewing in their apprehensions of images of victims and criminals alike. Through data sharing, trainings, and meetings, these actors develop shared understandings of security and investigations. In the next chapter I will further explore what the expansion of this investigative and detective sensibility to new actors might mean for the pursuit of *future* criminals who threaten child protection online.

Chapter V

DECEPTION

The Allure of Artifice: Deploying a Filipina Avatar in the Digital Porno-Tropics

A. Project Sweetie

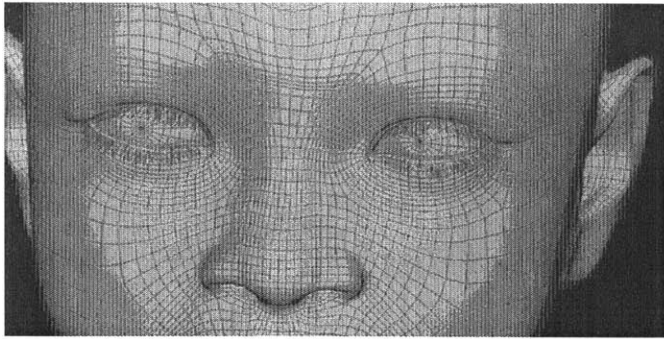
The lights switch on and a child speaks, her face looking directly into the camera. “My name is Sweetie. I’m 10 years old. I live in the Philippines,” the face on the screen begins in a soft voice.



“Every day I have to sit in front of the webcam and talk to men. Just like tens of thousands of other kids.” The video shows a cascade of collaged photos of children, their heads cropped out of the images, as well as photos of adult men holding up panties and other articles of clothing. “The men ask me to take off my clothes. They play with themselves. They want me [to] play with myself. As soon as I go online, they come to me. Ten, hundred, every hour. So many. But what they don’t know?”



The camera fades to show neon grid architecture beneath the child’s face. “I’m not real. I’m a computer model, built piece by piece.” She continues, shaking her head, “To track down these men who do this.”



The video continues with a different voice, male and adult, describing how “Webcam Sex Tourism” is a dangerous new form of exploitation, “spreading like an epidemic,” as children in places like the Philippines are paid to undress on live-streamed video in chat room websites. The narrator continues that while tens of thousands of children were forced to perform “for men from rich countries,” only six people had ever been “charged.” The narrator explains that his team decided to take matters into their own hands—patrolling the websites where illicit chats with “predators” occur, and posing as a 10 year-old designed to “look and act like a real girl.” On the chats, ‘Sweetie’ would try to convince people to share their email addresses, names, and identifying information in order for her to share nude photos and videos of herself. Over the course of 10 weeks, the Sweetie team had collected a list of 1,000 names and other identifying data of people from 71 countries, including the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and India. In November 2013, they submitted the list to the Europol office in The Hague and to the Dutch Police in South Holland. The narrator of the video concludes by saying

that Project Sweetie was an example of the power of technology to draw attention to the webcam sex tourism issue, through which “predators are being stopped, and children are being saved.” The team that produced Project Sweetie is named at the end of the video as Terre Des Hommes, a Netherlands-based children’s charity and non-governmental organization (NGO). The NGO regards their work as “pro-active policing”—with the caveat that no law enforcement officials were involved with the campaign in any capacity.

As I have described in the previous two chapters, the anti-trafficking counter-network conjures techno-social solutions to what they conceive as an increasingly complex, digital, infrastructural problem of global human trafficking; the co-production of solution and problem is an issue I explore further in this chapter. I argue that Sweetie, in particular, exemplifies the racial exoticization and artifice used, perhaps paradoxically, in anti-trafficking campaigns that increasingly blur with formal policing schemes to perform spectacles of rescue.

I focus on Project Sweetie for its unprecedented use of a particularly racialized and sexualized artificial character—the product of unique collaboration—designed to be a “lure” and entrap potential predators. Based on ethnographic fieldwork with the NGO and creative team behind Project Sweetie, as well as officers from the Dutch National

Police, I describe how perceptions of digital risk and racial desire critically underpin the production of child protection campaigns. I conducted my fieldwork by procuring an internship at Terre Des Hommes at the denouement of Project Sweetie, as the organization was grappling with newfound international publicity for the campaign.

In this chapter, I argue that the particular ways in which Sweetie is animated—technologically and socially, through its affective resonance as a publicity campaign—are revelatory of a new development in policing, deception by design. By animating a racialized child avatar as a body that performs on webcam chat rooms and attempts to learn information about the older men that solicit the ‘child,’ the design team generates a peculiar type of proximity. The Project Sweetie campaign, both the operation and the publicity thereafter, is illustrative of how “lures” are designed and can operate, and I argue that the design of desirable technology is intimately linked to the design of punishable objects or persons. The team needed to become intimately knowledgeable about the type of potential ‘offenders’ they wished to entrap in what they called a sting operation—who might be intrigued by Sweetie, and who might be likely to divulge personal information in exchange for what they believe to be future sexual promise. Once these names had been acquired and delivered to various law enforcement agencies, the team set up the next stage of the campaign, a curated publicity video, research document, and web presence. This second step, the publicity campaign itself

advertising after the entrapment scheme, reinforces and produces 'Project Sweetie' in totality. This chapter will discuss both components, the publicity scheme through which I initially learned about Project Sweetie, and then back-tracking through the design process of the team of people and organizations that imagined and crafted the avatar.

B. Terre Des Hommes: Stop Child Exploitation

The Netherlands-based Terre Des Hommes entered the anti-trafficking scene in 2010, following a significant internal restructuring that shifted the organization's focus almost entirely toward addressing the sexual exploitation of children. Their new slogan, "*Stopt Kinderbuiting*," which accompanies all promotional materials, translates literally to "Stop Child Exploitation." The managerial and organizational changes within Terre Des Hommes are representative of a global change to many children-focused organizations in the period following the passage of the Palermo Protocol on Human Trafficking, as described in Chapter III ("Counter-Network"). I present my interviews with and observations of staff at Terre Des Hommes as a microcosmic glimpse into how new political language, ideological platforms, and international donor pressure play out on an everyday scale in a small office. In addition, in Terre Des Hommes' case, these shifting dynamics provided the ideal destabilizing moment to make a daring campaign like Project Sweetie possible.

Founded in 1960 in Lausanne, Switzerland by Edmund Kaiser, and named after the book by Antoine de Saint-Exupery, Terre Des Hommes (“Land of the People”) initially described itself as a children’s charity broadly addressing childhood nutrition, poverty alleviation, disaster relief, and education promotion. The Terre Des Hommes headquarters building is in The Hague, steps away from picturesque cobblestone streets and a tram stop, and a short bicycle ride from the Scheveningen seafront. The office overlooks a small circular park where vendors set up weekly stalls to sell fresh smoked herring and other treats. A desk worker admits guests through a secured front door of the office. There is a lounge on the first floor, off of the main lobby, with a sleek espresso bar, couches, and bookshelves of organizational pamphlets and copies of Saint-Exupery’s *Terre Des Hommes* children’s book; visitors and guests to the building would often be seated here upon entry. The office is bold and whimsical, with a colorful life-sized cow statue welcoming one into the lobby. Heike, a project coordinator in the Special Programs division, even cited the eccentric cow statue and the lively, colorful office environment as motivations for her accepting the job offer at the organization over seven years before. Most of the walls of the three-story building are painted tomato red, dotted with framed photographs and campaign posters, mostly of non-white children. Forty people work at the Terre Des Hommes headquarters building in The Hague, doing marketing, fundraising, research, and special campaign projects.

1. Charismatic Leadership and a Strategic Shift

From 2010 to 2011, under consultation from an external firm, Terre Des Hommes management re-branded the organization from a broad children's charity to an NGO focusing almost solely on commercial child exploitation. Their new slogan, "*Stopt Kinderbuiting*," which accompanies all promotional materials, translates literally to "Stop Child Exploitation." The Special Programs division, on the third floor, has a splashy all-red wall stamped with the new slogan and the Terre Des Hommes logo. Child exploitation became the centrally branded issue for the organization, reflected in the slogan change as well as the types of special programs conducted, and the fieldwork partners chosen.

The six staff members on this floor deal with creative campaign projects not covered by other divisions of the organization, such as local exhibits and films, as well as Project Sweetie. In the sections that follow I will cite from interviews and conversations with five of them—the director, Hans, as well as Jeltje and Sara, who were also involved in Project Sweetie, and Heike and Anton, the latter with whom I also worked alongside in Bangkok. In addition, I include information gathered from interviews with two members of the management, as well as three members of the Marketing division, Sonja, Claudia, and Lena, who were all involved with elements of post-production advertising and fundraising plans around Project Sweetie.

The driving force and continued publicity for Project Sweetie is in no small part due to the charismatic Head of Special Projects at Terre Des Hommes, Hans Guyt. Hans is in his late 40s, a white Dutch man who splits his time living in Amsterdam and Dublin with his family. Prior to his fairly long career at Terre Des Hommes, Hans had been a somewhat controversial activist for Greenpeace's anti-whaling campaign—a fact notoriously known throughout the office. With his bounding presence and boisterous voice, it is not hard for me to picture a younger version of Hans on the deck of a boat like Greenpeace's *Rainbow Warrior*, with a jaunty multicolored knit cap on his head and a spirited gleam in his eye.

He has a restless energy, is almost always trailing a suitcase behind him as he enters or exits the office, and sometimes wears the same clothing several days in a row. Hans certainly cuts a different figure than the polished, suited new managing director of Terre Des Hommes, or the cosmopolitan, hipster Anton, an employee of the Special Projects division who primarily liaised with other organizations, including UN-ACT in Bangkok, and with whom I became friends. Hans is sarcastically funny, constantly firing off witty jabs that might easily rub colleagues the wrong way. When he was present in the office there was a wiry charge to the day in a way that made the projects area feel rushed and purposeful, like a magazine production room. During our interviews Hans frequently pounded on the table emphatically, in rhythmic tune with

his words. This was a man who was used to giving statements, to issuing declarative snippets for media interviews. Which he does, often—so frequently that his L-shaped desk was perpetually framed by two large standing canvas posters for Project Sweetie and Terres Des Hommes, to serve as backdrops for the numerous Skype video interviews Hans would give to news media outlets. The effect, for anyone peering into his office, was one of him being self-consciously constantly on display.

I sat at a low desk in an open-plan office floor with all of these staff, adjacent to the hallway leading to the kitchen and lounge where many of our interviews would be held. Hans, the program director, was the only one seated in a closed office with a door. The repercussions of the changed organizational structure are still felt every day by the staff—in our interviews many would casually reference “the shift,” a temporal marker. Hans had previously held the title of “Manager” of Special Programs, but after the shift, all manager roles were dissolved and Hans became “head of special projects.” Along with the shift, new titles, and some new hires, the older staff felt increasingly distanced from other programs at TDH. Early on during my fieldwork at the office, Hans joked with me that he looked forward to hearing what I might learn about other projects at the organization, that this might be my “secret mission.” Jeltje echoed this feeling by diplomatically portraying TDH as “growing,” not having quite reached the point of openness or transparency, as they were often unaware of what their colleagues were

working on: “people working on the same projects are not really communicating enough with each other. This floor doesn't exactly know what the floor beneath [the Marketing and Fundraising programs] is doing.” I had surmised that an anthropologist asking nosy questions about daily life at such an organization would be a nuisance, and I was surprised to be welcomed so warmly. TDH staffs were eager to discuss “organizational culture” with me, an eagerness I credit primarily to the shift that had just occurred. Heike explained that during the internal restructuring, a new director was hired as a CEO of Terre Des Hommes: “Everything changed very quickly. It seemed that the management had a very different vision for us.”¹ The year of the shift was marked by a series of internal interviews and surveys by the new management of the staff, particularly on the leadership style of their project managers, including Hans.

The shifts to organizational structure that I am describing (as described by my informants) are symbolic of broad shifts in many child rights orgs at this particular moment, in the first two decades of the 21st century. Many smaller organizations feel pressure from both international agencies and donors to refocus on “rights-based” activities with perceived direct action rather than passive ongoing work. At Terre Des Hommes I felt an undercurrent of restlessness by some of the staff to do something high-impact and visible, Project Sweetie being just one example of special interactive campaigns to engage the public. The rhetoric of high-impact visibility could have come

directly from a start-up company's blog. Hans characterized the new direction of TDH as one where the organization would be seen as "innovative, new, daring." He said this excitedly, repeatedly clicking his ballpoint pen while speaking to emphasize the points.

2. Mapping the Problem: WCST in Southeast Asia

Terre Des Hommes has long had an interest and stake in Southeast Asia. They maintain regional offices and partners in several major cities in the region, including Jakarta (in general, Dutch NGO presence in the former colony of Java and the Dutch Indies is quite common), Bangkok, and Manila. Under the new organizational shift, field projects that had been focused on child nutrition, education, and poverty were redirected to amplify cases of child labor and sexual exploitation. When I pushed them to explain how this had played out, staff who worked in Southeast Asia such as Jeltje and Anton explained that part of the justification for refocusing was that child sexual exploitation issues might be seen as a nexus or product of all of the overlapping structural issues of early childhood malnutrition, lack of education, and general regional poverty. In the Philippines, specifically, child sexual exploitation issues are "very unique" for a confluence of factors, according to Hans: the prevalence of English as a commonly spoken language, the average lower age of girls and women working in the sex trades, and a sense of familial obligation to earn a contributing income. Hans explained:

"There are cultural aspects in the Philippines that makes the Philippines more vulnerable to this.

Right, well first and foremost it's in the culture there is the language - English, that's the second language. That's an important factor. Second important factor is that child prostitution is not a new phenomenon in that culture. It's been around for decades. And that is partly - prostitution in general - partly linked to the U.S. presence since World War II. Military base. You lock up thousands of young men and of course there will be a demand for girls, women, prostitution... And the third factor is this: there are very strong family ties in the Philippines culture. And that's strong - and that's not exclusive for Philippines - but particularly strong and unusual it is common practice that an individual member of the family sacrifices himself or herself for the benefit of the family as a whole. And this is the extended family, this is not the family unit. Sacrifice is the norm. It's normal. That's why kids don't go to school, get a job instead. Add to the family income, contribute to the family income. But it goes beyond that - further than that. And therefore prostitution is like, ok, you do that for the benefit of the family. So you can pay for the medication of your auntie, for your granddad on the mother's side.

"...That's another cultural aspect that you meet in Philippines. All the time. This is almost like an obsession with girls and women for western men. It's not a universal truth. But the people we work with in the slums, they see that as a way out of their poverty trap. To befriend a westerner, a rich person, a sugar daddy. It's almost like an obsession. So yeah, they want to meet these men. Absolutely. They want to start a relationship. So that they have the benefits of a certain income. That's what they're looking for."

These factors cited by Hans are explored in detail in a 2012 film, *Lilet Never Happened*, produced by a Dutch filmmaker under consultation with Terre Des Hommes' Special Programs division. Jacco Groen directed this story of a 12 year-old girl working in a hostess bar in Manila, and the Dutch aid worker woman who attempts to rescue her, based on a real teenager who had come through one of Terre Des Hommes' partner programs in Cebu. The film attempts to complicate issues of age and agency, labor versus exploitation, and the politics of rescue. But it also reinforces an ideology of Western male desire and reactionary Asian sexual corruption that I explore later in this chapter using Anne McClintock's theoretical framing of "the porno-tropics." The film was positively reviewed and the lead actresses each received several independent awards for their roles. The director, Groen, stopped by the office to visit Hans twice

during my fieldwork period. The close relationship between the two men, as well as the positive feedback for the film project, seemed to have set the stage for Terre Des Hommes to become more comfortable with high publicity endeavors and collaborations with creative arts partners.

By 2011 and 2012, Hans and TDH's Manila office had begun to learn about specific neighborhood communities communally coercing youth to perform in front of webcams. At this point they and many other organizations, as well as the Philippines government, had recognized that certain urban areas had higher proportions of youth (girls and boys both) involved in digital, transactional sex work, especially in Internet cafes.

"...There were Internet cafes all over the place. Like 4 or 5 on one street. It was basically a hut with a slot machine - not a cafe, as we know them. The cottage industry was left alone for a long time. But that started off last year, earlier last year - the raids. With the arrival of the new mayor. And the dens have been the targets for years. Cybersex dens.

...They're basically like fake Internet companies mostly set up by westerners. Through middlemen - middle-women, mostly - Filipino women. They organize girls, to lure them in, promising them, y'know, jobs, administrative jobs, secretarial jobs. But they're mostly victims of trafficking. They get in to this space called the 'den' and they can't leave anymore. And they have to perform these kind of acts. They close the curtains at nighttime and they start working. And they call them 'cybersex dens.' And there have been quite a few raids."

But this 'cottage industry' as Hans called it, of multiple families working together to employ or coerce their children into working on chat sites, was a newer "phenomenon" to them.

"Cordova - outside Cebu, it's more rural area in nature. It's urban mixed with rural influences. It's an entire neighborhood slum slash neighborhood, where people started - families started - to

engage in that kind of child sex tourism by putting their own children in front of the web cam and establishing contact with westerners. At first the mother establishes contact - then she would get feedback like, 'Hey I love you very much, but what about your daughter?' ... It started off with adults establishing contact with western clients, and it moved on to them involving their children.

And *much* younger than the kids working from the internet cafes. These are as young as, say, the client wants them. And if they don't have an 8 year-old boy...they knock on the door of the neighbors' and say 'Can we borrow your son for 20min?' And they say, 'Ok, pay me 20 dollars for my son.' So it started off with individual adults, then the entire family became involved, then the entire neighborhood became involved. It became an INDUSTRY - people working from their homes, not from offices or dens or what-have-you. From their homes. A cottage industry."

Hans and TDH learned about this cottage industry around 2011 or 2012, he estimates:

"from stories in Cebu, from working with the communities, from working with people, from working with the kids. Because they know what's going on. Kids know. So they are a great source of information. So we tried to find some NGOs - but they didn't have any access to that neighborhood. Totally closed off. It was that bad in 2011, 2012. And then there was a new mayor appointed, and he was sick and tired of the whole thing. The local police were [had been] involved as well, they were paid off. And now it is recognized, also exposed - *arrests* have taken place. But it is still happening. And it's moved on to other areas, yeah? That's what you get. That's the waterbed phenomenon. [pounds on table] You put down one place and it pops up somewhere else! Not just in Cebu but in different areas of the Philippines. Angelos is one, Manila...

As long -- that's the reason why we made the strategic shift -- as long as there's this huge demand, there will be a supply. And even if the police cracks down on the Philippines, then it will pop up in Indonesia, or Laos, or Vietnam, or Cambodia. It will. If you [slowing down emphatically] don't address the demand side.

These people want *more*, they want more. I mean, the nature of child pornography... That is what is in demand. Not a picture of a 14 year-old girl taking off her clothes. They want **more**. They want rape, they want abuse, sex between kids and adults, bestiality - That's what they're looking for. That's what they pay for. That's the business. That's the business. And the producers know that.

And are they savvy? With the internet and all - not really. But what they're really clever with is - and that is also - the demand from the clients - is to hide the identity of the individuals involved. Also with regard to the financial transactions, how the money comes from A to B. In the beginning it was like - a couple of years ago - pretty straightforward, Western Union, etc. But then they leave a paper trail going back to the individual. But now they make it much more complicated. They're very savvy. It's like - prepaid credit cards - Paypal, but also like different bank accounts. Money goes from one account with one name to another account... Different layers. It's what they do now."

Terre Des Hommes launched a two-part intervention onto the “phenomenon,” for which they did not yet have a name: research on the psychological effects of digitally-mediated sex work on young people; and marketing, through a press trip for Dutch journalists to accompany Terre Des Hommes staff through neighborhoods around the cities of Cebu and Cordova in the Philippines. Hans sent the program’s newest hire, Jeltje, a psychologist, to Cebu to learn more about the emotional effects of digitally-mediated sex work on young people. From May to July 2013, Jeltje worked through TDH’s local partner organizations and translators to interview children and teenagers involved in various aspects of webcam and chat based transactional sex.

3. Animating the Solution: A Virtual Decoy

Sonja, head of Marketing at Terre Des Hommes, helped me understand how the organization went from this focus on research with and logistical support of field partner NGOs to the Sweetie campaign. We sat at the large white communal table in the TDH lunchroom to have some peppermint tea as Sonja relaxed during a break. She was seven months pregnant with her third child at that time; she had been working at Terre Des Hommes since 2006 but she joked that I could subtract a year from that time frame for her two previous parental leaves. Sonja handles all press inquiries and media releases for the NGO, and was involved in Project Sweetie from the outset: “Three years

ago, we had a small press trip to the Philippines about cybersex. Child cybersex, we called it. We didn't have a name for it - we just knew it existed, that there were children behind webcams performing sexual acts, and we thought this is an issue, this might be a future issue, and we wanted to draw attention to it. So we decided to invite some Dutch press to come to the Philippines. This is what we call a 'press trip.'"

The director of Lemz, a prominent Dutch advertising firm, viewed the subsequent press releases and an article about child sex tourism, and approached Terre Des Hommes to discuss the issue. This director, Mark Woerde, saw the potential for a high-profile publicity stunt that would capitalize upon the complex digital elements of the alluring problem of child sexual exploitation, and afford a new marketing opportunity for both the NGO and the ad firm alike.

Woerde and Guijt labeled the Philippine phenomenon "webcam child sex tourism" (WCST) to emphasize a particular linkage between Western digital 'tourism' and sexual exploitation in the Philippines. The two men assembled a team from the NGO and the ad firm to begin "field research" —without video—by pretending to be a young girl messaging people in chat rooms. They operated for three months out of a warehouse in the Netherlands, a location they still will not divulge. "We were extremely paranoid...we didn't know who would come after us once we started getting deep,"

Zayn explained,² articulating the team's apprehensions during the initial preparation for the operation. They feared high-level criminal syndicates would notice and retaliate to the operation. Jeltje, despite having done preliminary fieldwork for the sting operation, was not part of what she calls "the circle," and she was only informed of the campaign in October, one month before its launch: "I did not know anything about Sweetie. It was already in progress but they kept it quite small, the circle. Of course because they didn't want it to leak to the press or anything. So I didn't know anything about it. So that was for me, it was quite a shock when I came back and Hans - only after I finished a complete report...In October Hans told me about the Sweetie Project. So quite late."

Sonja had more to say regarding the organizational secrecy:

"And what was difficult was that, the project itself, there were just a few people working on it. I would be a little bit - I wouldn't say frustrated but irritated - if I knew that my colleague who I'm next to is working. If I would find out that my colleague is already working for almost a year on a project and she didn't tell me *anything* I would AT LEAST be surprised, totally surprised and also be a little like, 'Ok, why were you informed but not me?' That's something that I think we should have done differently. I would have informed at least people working on this office [motioning to Programs]. Properly in a meeting and tell them what is going on. Maybe not give them all the details but - yea. I would've done that."

Nonetheless once the Project was officially announced in November 2013, most members of Terre Des Hommes rallied together in support of the operation, and the attention it brought to their collective work. Sonja continued:

"For the most part I think it was good because we realized we are capable as a rather small organization to put a topic on the world agenda, at least the agenda of governments and the United Nations, etcetera. That's good. It felt like everybody was proud. Even if you hadn't worked on it, it's not important. I mean we all do different work... It felt like people were very proud. And also we have a stronger relation with the other TDH organizations, which is also important for us, because we can help each other."

This sense of pride and ownership trickled throughout. Telling me about the logistics of obtaining information from people on the chat forums, Jeltje switched between describing the investigative team as “we” and “them.” She had only been brought on toward the end of the operation, and was able to participate in one month of the chats. And while she had not been told of any of the design planning or initial stages of the project, I suspect Jeltje felt a larger stake in the overall project owing to her direct proximity to youth who had been the inspiration for the entire campaign.

“When I got involved in the project, Sweetie was already 'out of business' actually. All the chatting and all the predators were already identified. But I went there a couple of times just for me to get a little bit better feeling of the project and Sweetie and also what way the chat conversations went down. So I went there with Zayn, also other researchers, and they would show me how they would chat and how the guys would react. I was glad to see that as well. Because it was really the different side of the story from what I had been telling. So I'd been telling the story of the children and what their lives had been like, and now - of course I knew they were in contact with these guys but I didn't want to - I hadn't gone online before to check how it works. This was something I think was difficult to imagine for me. I didn't *want* to imagine exactly how this contact went. So it was good to know.

It's just really strange to know that at that moment there is an actual guy, actually looking for webcam sex with a child. Of course I *knew* that it was happening. But just to really see it happening before your eyes, it was different.”

The chatting team never initiated contact with another person, but always waited to be contacted. They were, however, deliberate about choosing a variety of chat room websites to wait on, from sites that explicitly advertised chats with Filipina women to generalize teenage web chat sites, and to encounter a variety of nationalities if possible.

Within a few days the investigative team realized that the chats with their avatar—

varyingly dubbed “Sweetie,” “Honey,” and “Baby” — could become quite explicit, with people asking for the chatter’s age, gender, sexual preferences, whether she would engage in a sexual conversation, and finally, whether she would turn her webcam on for a video show. Ferguson confessed he was “freaked out” by how quickly the solicitations came, especially when they posted younger ages for the avatar: “It was stupidly easy to get these guys to give us their email addresses or even names when we offered that Sweetie would do X or Y, or take off her clothes.”³ Jeltje added, “It was unbelievable...It would just be like *pop-pop-pop*, all the time people asking for chat conversations.” The team would pretend that the online connection was poor and offer to send photographs to the chatter’s email address. Sometimes the chatters would subsequently discontinue the conversation, but often they would obligingly offer their email addresses.

Sonja clarified to me that this “research,” the first part of the operation was actually their primary effort. For many of the chats, they “did not really *need* a character.” By this she meant that the iconic, memorably visible Sweetie face was *not* used in the majority of the chats. This fact is noted in the official Terre Des Hommes written report on Project Sweetie, but not featured in any campaign videos or press releases.

“Sweetie did not trace the 1,000 men. The face of Sweetie. We only used her a few times, at the end of the project. Because it was very hard to develop her. It’s a high-tech Hollywood technique. It took more and more time. This was also kind of frustrating because the research already

started, tracing the identities of the men performing webcam child sex tourism. And we also found out we did not need Sweetie at that time. Because we were just there in chat rooms. And men were all, they were—if you would just introduce yourself as a 10 year old from the Philippines then they already would start very explicit conversations. At that time you did not really *need* a character.”

C. Capture: Allure, Secrecy, and Trickery

The team decided to go a step further and assume a specific identity for their chat character. Lemz and Terre Des Hommes partnered with a graphic design firm specializing in visual effects and facial animation to develop a physical image of a girl for the avatar. Using facial motion capture and a live human actor, the team mapped 15 unique facial expressions and movements for the avatar.

One of the team members who was brought on towards the end of the operation described the types of “tricks” the team used to elicit information from the men with whom they chatted, without giving away ‘Sweetie’s true identity:

“Then the guy would reveal his intentions, and they would agree on a price or so. And then she would put on - or, *we* would put on her webcam. And they had all these tricks to, how to get more information from the guys. They would say, 'Oh the webcam on this messenger service doesn't work! Give me your—do you have a Yahoo address? Maybe we can try it at Yahoo?' And he would give his Yahoo address and they would have an extra address, or find out his name. So that way they only used the webcam for little bits. So they would never get to a point where she had to put out her clothes. They had all these type of tricks, how to keep the man waiting on the site.”

These voicing changes indicate the complexity of “animation” with multiple voices and

inputs involved (cf. Stacey and Suchman 2012). At times Jeltje is in the chair at the computer, at other times she is metaphorically leaning over someone's shoulder— primarily Zayn's, Hans's, or Sara's—letting them direct the course of conversation and pull “tricks” on men on the other end of the chat window. Joanna Bouldin writes, “Not only do animators draw upon multiple references for the creation of the animated body, but the body that we, as viewers, experience is also radically hybrid and multiple (particularly the commercially produced animated body)” (2004:10). As I described in Chapter III, the metaphor of animation also serves well for descriptions of bureaucratic speech, with multiply voiced stances melding into one professional speech act (cf. Silvio 2010).

Sweetie did not technically “speak” until the campaign video was released— during the sting operation itself, the activists would pretend that the audio connection was broken and conduct all communication by written type. The typing eliminated the problem of finding a live, realistic child's voice to use during the operation. However, the use of the distinctly Filipino-accented child's voice in the publicity campaign suggests another level of artifice in the campaign video's depiction of the sting operation. The campaign's advertisement video suggests perhaps a more ‘life-like’ simulation than was actually deployed.

If people chatting with Sweetie requested further movement or video, the team would again fake a poor connection and request an email address where they might send photos (an offer they would never follow through on). The team emphasized with me that the chats were *never* of a visually sexually explicit nature, despite what the promotional video would later imply. Jeltje said, “this was not child pornography. Just an image of a normal girl chatting with guys who revealed their interest in sexual show from Sweetie. But there was no child pornography or anything involved.”

“You just saw her face - y'know the face you see in the media. And she had several moves she could do, like this and type and look up and down. But fully dressed. She was just chatting with the guy. So then the guy would ask her if she would do this and that for so many dollars and that is when the investigators would try to find out the identity of the guy, so they would try to keep chatting with him as long as possible and get as much information from him as possible. Because he had already admitted that he wanted that and wanted to pay for it. But they would never make it one step further, because it would be illegal.”

“We recorded everything,” Sonja emphasized. Every video chat in which a man’s face became visible would be screen-captured and added to the file eventually delivered to law enforcement. The “captured” faces and names of the men were contrasted against publicly available Facebook or LinkedIn profiles. Sonja continued:

“I was just shocked about this whole new world, this sinister and dark world. It was strange. I have a total other look at Facebook or something like that. Because that's actually the place how we exposed the men. Through Facebook. That's how we—they for example would give their nickname, and some people they use nicknames and they're quite the same as their real names, we found out. Sometimes it was not hard at all to trace them. And we used for example Facebook to see if it's the same person. So if you have a snapshot of the face of the person, if you [sic] show himself on camera, because most of the time they would only show body-parts. Because they were somehow aware of being careful. But sometimes they would just make a mistake, or you're on the camera and you're busy with it, and they'd show their faces. And then you could compare it with their Facebook account and see if it's the same person.”

When I asked Jeltje if she was surprised that they would show their faces so willingly, she was quick to say no: “It really shows they feel they are invincible online. And nobody can catch them.”

“Because he would put on his webcam and they want to capture his face, of course, then they had his face. So yea there were a lot of webcam images of just, *ugh*, dirty, dirty, naked men...And then they would try to get him to put the webcam to his face, so they could capture an image of his face. They would just do it quickly – whoosh! – but they captured all the images so they could retrieve it.”

The correctly matched photographs were printed and posted onto a large bulletin board in the warehouse, and eventually printed into a large document packet submitted to the Dutch National Police and Europol. Sonja explained: “We made a wall of 500 of the 1,000 men Unrecognized but you could definitely see part of the body. We did that because we knew if there would be media attention they would want to film... You also want to visualize things and that picture wall was very impressive.” The physicality of the bulletin board and printed packet made the data capture material and tangible. It also highlights how the team anticipated the operation being visually depicted and publicized.

1. The Racial Erotics of Artifice

The virtual decoy of Sweetie was vital to both the legality of the “sting operation,” and the success of the subsequent publicity campaign. The practice of sting operations, or

entrapment schemes, is quite commonplace in the U.S.; however, in the Netherlands, and most of Europe, police are forbidden by law from conducting stings using human decoys (adults posing as children). Terre Des Hommes, as a civilian group, could not have legally conducted a sting using a human decoy.

Lemz produced the campaign video, editing footage of their investigators at computer screens and showing select portions of the motion capture process. In final campaign videos Sweetie was presented narrating the story I described at the introduction, looking directly at the camera and speaking in Filipino-accented English. There were three versions of this campaign video, with the male narrator's voice in American English, British English, and Dutch. Several slightly edited versions were released in February with updated clips of news media reports and follow-ups of arrests made.

The first launch, in November, announced only Terre Des Hommes as the creator and producer of the operation. The timing was strategic. Sonja noted that in some respect they were "ready" to make a press release as early as June 2013, but the investigative team and Lemz executives felt a more comprehensive public presentation was possible.

Sonja explained:

"And then I remember I actually said well if we want to do it in June, here in the Netherlands, the vacations start. And we don't have any minister in politics, they'd all be at the beach! So it didn't make any sense. I mean we'd still have media attention, but if you want to do something right you're not going to do it in June, July.... September we had our own report on Child Sex Tourism,

and we handed that over to the minister. So we wanted to wait - have a few weeks in between. And then but of course - the project started to grow and grow. We had Sweetie, we needed FAQs in different languages, the research report wasn't ready yet. One thing that was very important to all of us, especially Terre Des Hommes, was to be REALLY well prepared and to have everything. Every word in the research report, everywhere, had to be good, to be well thought about. Because that's actually—at that time we knew it would go very big, and be well known all over the world. We wanted to be prepared and have everything in place. And at the same time, when the press conference happened we didn't know it would have such a huge impact. Somehow it didn't click in my mind.”

One week after the November launch, the Philippines was struck by a massive earthquake and typhoon which claimed thousands of lives. “If we would have postponed it we might not have had any attention at all. Or criticism. It's weird how it works...They would've said 'Oh, it's very cheap for you as an organization to raise this as an issue right now’” Sonja explained. Coincidentally, Typhoon Haiyan primarily hit Cebu, the exact province TDH had focused on in its report. This disruption to the publicity for Project Sweetie was unfortunate, but also allowed for Lemz to work on an updated publicity video.

The original campaign video released in November, while in fact produced by Lemz, kept the advertising firm anonymous. Lemz, Ferguson explained, feared ridicule and backlash for such a different approach to the typical work they did and uncertain what might occur once the email addresses and names were submitted to the Dutch Police and Europol. As it turned out, however, by the new year (2014) the Sweetie campaign video was positively received by a number of NGOs throughout Europe.

Heartened by a U.N. statement praising Terre Des Hommes, Lemz released the edited second video in February 2014 and came forward as the producer of the campaign (Woerde 2015). “Once they realized it was a good thing, they [Lemz] weren’t scared anymore,” Hans chuckled. The advertising company has subsequently been lauded with numerous innovative advertising prizes for Project Sweetie, including 13 Cannes Lions awards, as well as the 2014 Dutch Design Award at Dutch Design Week in Eindhoven. At the time of this writing, Project Sweetie is still prominently promoted on the header of the Lemz website, with the tagline “Creativity Can Change the World.” The Dutch Design Award jury wrote about the campaign, “A design doesn't always have to be comfortable: 'Sweetie' proves this and in doing so exceeds the standard of design. This eyeopener gave the jury goose bumps” (“Face” 2014).

The issue raised by the Dutch Design Award jury, of “goosebumps” at the prospect of the horizons for design, has wide-reaching implications for the policing of child exploitation, and for policing more broadly. The boldness of the ‘pro-active policing’ element of the campaign strikes a much more memorable cord through the use of the Sweetie avatar. In the use of the avatar in both the sting operation itself, and the publicity campaign after, the charisma of digital mimesis meets racialized allure to render the overall project even more potent.

The stunning accomplishment of Project Sweetie as a publicity campaign is the design team's self-conscious, stylized acknowledgment of the avatar's artificiality. By conducting Project Sweetie in two parts, as the operation itself and then the subsequent publicity video of the operation, the campaign team is able to specifically frame various elements of Sweetie's artificiality and ethnicity. The Sweetie avatar's face is in fact modeled after actual young people who have come through Terre Des Hommes' local service partners in the Philippines. Sweetie is an amalgamation of real children's faces from the photograph database of FORGE. In viewing the Project Sweetie campaign video, the audience does a kind of double seeing: knowing that Sweetie turns out to be a digital model, even vocalizing itself as "not real"—and yet knowing that Sweetie's kind, other similar children, exist in the real world and potentially face actual online harassment and exploitation. In the words of a woman I interviewed at the Dutch National Rapporteur's office, "She [Sweetie] would appeal to perverted European sex tourists." This blunt comment was echoed numerous times throughout the course of my research, producing the sentiment that Sweetie was specifically designed as an object of racialized desire.

Artificiality that does not quite reach the point of "uncanny" produces affects of cuteness and affinity. The work of animation is a collaborative effort; it is also a playful effort. The process of motion capture is the same as that used by many film and video

game designers. Additionally, the secretive design process and the concealed “headquarters” warehouse add drama to the designers’ sense of their craft. The avatar is animated to perform childish innocence, and femininity, and simultaneously represents adult cunning and artifice. As I suggest, this is precisely the allure of artifice and artificiality. To put it another way, the Project Sweetie operation and campaign have mimetic effects: the viewers of, first, the operation, are lured in to the scheme (to collect their personal identifying data) in much the same way that ‘traditional’ sting operations work. The viewers of the second part of Project Sweetie, the campaign video, can enjoy all of the filmic, shaming qualities of the operation as a whole, and savor the acknowledged artificiality of the character. As ‘Sweetie’ narrates in the introduction of this essay, viewers of the campaign quite literally follow Sweetie talking and revealing herself—not sexually, but as an artificial creation. The revelation of artificiality—pulling back the curtain, so to speak—is a process with its own erotic charge. The campaign video forces the viewer to participate in the moment of revelation, a doubly voyeuristic act. The desire to uncover artificiality, measure the degree of realness also comes from the desire to intensify the gaze “to inspect realism,” an eroticizing gesture that, Reed and Phillips suggest, also heightens racialized otherness. Racial encoding in performance technologies is about producing aesthetically pleasing skin tones, face shapes, characters. By producing a specifically raced avatar, the Project Sweetie design team also erotically encodes and interpellates those who would find it attractive.

Science and technology studies informed by feminist and queer theory take stock of artificiality and reality by exploring where the supposed binary between the two becomes crafted and distorted. Feminist studies of computing, especially, illuminate how computer science theories of robotics and artificial intelligence hinge upon static and monolithic notions of that which is 'human.' Such notions come from specific positions of gender, race, and class privilege; yet often remain "mystified" and out-of-frame in the final production of the animated character. As Bouldin suggests, "Not only do animators draw upon multiple references for the creation of the animated body, but the body that we, as viewers, experience is also radically hybrid and multiple (particularly the commercially produced animated body)." Sweetie is the admixture of a white Dutch woman's gestures and expressions used for the purposes of motion capture, and Filipino children's actual faces from the photo repository of a Philippines-based NGO. The avatar enables the campaign viewer to conveniently forget the 'real' children being referenced and enter the filmic enchantment of the avatar video. The campaign video's moment of "pulling back the curtain" only further enhances the allure. The queer Black science fiction writer Samuel R. Delaney suggests that the practiced sci-fi reader is comfortable with half-truths and half-understandings: stories "should provide the little science-fictional frisson that is the pleasure of the plurality of the sci-fi vision."

2. Savior Voyeurism and Child Protection in the Digital Porno-Tropics

This particular “Project” is unique for its blending of social activism, policing intervention, publicity campaign, and digital cinematography. The campaign was the product of collaboration between an advertising agency, a graphic design company, and a children’s charity, all attempting to mimic and even subsume law enforcement operations.

Sweetie is also attractive in a different way, as symbolic of new labor value—“Let’s put Sweetie to work” as ‘herself’ an agent in the entrapment of potential sex offenders. A Manila newspaper article about the campaign used the title “Virtual Pinoy Catches 1000 Predators,” evoking not only the avatar’s ethnicity but also the sense of Filipino labor. In the context of the Philippines, which has the highest number of global migrant workers, the majority of whom are women, this headline combines a sense of nationhood with labor obligation and domestic responsibility. Human responses to digital objects are produced through repeated interactions and orientations toward affinity. Some humans are increasingly comfortable and accustomed to certain kinds of digital labor, rendering such labor invisible. Sweetie as a *product* is a fetish, both an alluring object and a labor commodity fetish.

Once the avatar is set in motion it performs digital labor—conversational and alluring, but not erotic or sexualized—over enough time that the team who animate it and ‘speak’ (in this case, type) for it can obtain identifying information or data about the avatar’s interlocutor. The animated speech is collectively performed by a group and follows a set trajectory with the intention to entrap. The avatar’s design, appearance and dialogue are *oriented* toward outing people. This understanding of racialized and eroticized (digital) labor on behalf of NGOs must also necessarily fall against the backdrop of the labor dynamics of sex work. Sweetie’s “work” is both similar and highly contrasted to the survival sex and transactional sex strategies used by the youth she represents. But Sweetie’s very purpose is to seek supposed deviants, to be alluring enough to ensnare.

Terre Des Hommes’ stated intention was not to elicit massive arrests or prosecutions, but simply to emphasize the limits of possibility for police action. In doing so, however, the organization further entrenches the normalization of policing and surveilling action by non-governmental entities. The men whose names Terre Des Hommes collected are allegedly committing an offense in their solicitation of the avatar. In turn, in the campaign video publicizing the sting operation, the viewing audience is also invited to participate in a moment of triumph of rooting out and punishing “predators.” This moment is captured in the campaign video by panning over a physical ‘wall of shame’

inside the warehouse.

Hans was quite critical of 'traditional' law enforcement operations to locate the producers and downloaders of child abuse content. Citing a recent international operation spearheaded by the UK police, Operation Endeavor, he scoffed, " It takes years. And they have to be lucky. And this particular case, Operation Endeavor, was *highly* publicized. And you can hear all about this - 'seventeen arrests in the UK.'" He thumped his chest. "Oh oh oh!"

"But they were SO lucky! They were lucky in the sense that they found - arrested a guy - in, was it Birmingham? - a convicted pedophile. And the neighbors were complaining about him. So the police sought a court order, went to his house, confiscated his computer, so and so and so, arrested him. And then as they were studying the computer they found this correspondence with this Filipino address, and correspondence with other pedophiles - because most of the time they are, y'know, in contact with each other - *recommending* that particular address in the Philippines. So the British Police then contacted the Filipino Police. They sent a team - a team! (laughing) And after about six or seven months they found the address. "

I was struck by the irony in Hans's assertion that Operation Endeavor simply earned the British police some media attention. The very nature of the operation—a six month undercover program followed by a string of arrests and a splashy publicity announcement—is precisely the model TDH aimed to imitate. But Hans emphasized that Project Sweetie would go further: ""This is something for the long term. We cannot just hit-and-run." At the time of this writing, Terre Des Hommes has announced plans for "Sweetie 2.0," which would be a full "software system" to address child sex abuse online ("Sweetie 2.0" 2015). In one of our interviews Hans was emphatic about these

phases of these project: “Phase 1 as we talked about was all about identification. Phase 2 is about warning, discouraging. And Phase 3 is about *open warfare*.”

Sonja said, “The press is always on the other side of the time frame. They always want to have news, impact, or story, far before you can deliver. It's definitely in the Netherlands less interesting now. They want to view results, and that's difficult. I mean we do have results for the Sweetie campaign, but it's growing, it's not there. When I asked her to clarify what she meant by “results,” Sonja explained “‘Results’ is actually just ‘arrests.’ Arrests being made of persons who were on the list. Or maybe were related to this issue.” Sonja’s comment helps make clear that Hans’s “open warfare” will morph anti-trafficking into a large-scale, inter-networked round of global arrests. Jeltje joked about the media reception: “This is really un-typical for TDH. I think it's the first time there has been such a big campaign and such media attention for TDH. And but the main difference is that TDH always focuses on the children. And in this case we have focused on the demand side—the predators, the perpetrators. And now all of a sudden we are ‘pedophile-hunters! We are called pedophile-hunters!’”

The triumph of saving ‘Sweetie’ is all the more poignant when undergirded by lasting tropes of the Philippines as a “porno-tropics,” a site of both European male sexual desire for young Filipina bodies and European desire for configuring the Philippines as

poor, dirty, deviant and in need of saving. The Philippines is situated by Terre Des Hommes as a space of racialized fantasy and sexual deviance, replicated in digital space on webcam chatrooms. Sonja said to me, “We thought for a long time about the name we would give this phenomenon. Webcam Child Sex Tourism. And if we would use a typical Dutch girl or boy, then it would not be about this WCST... But in this case it is definitely also about power, a relation between someone from a rich country is exploiting a child from a poor country.”

Sweetie’s face might also be considered symbolic as what Hortense Spillers has called “porno-troping” (1987 [2003]), the act of mediating the racialized human which has the effect of separating body into flesh for the pleasure of the viewing sovereign. Agamben (1998), similarly, has characterized this separation as the rift by which the *homo sacer* becomes ‘bare life’ in the eyes of the state (‘bare life’ is naked life, in some translations, a particularly apt comparison to the case here). In Project Sweetie, the racially charged character is made doubly potent through its splicing into child’s body and artificiality, its ‘barefaced two-facedness’ (Spillers 2003: 19). In Alexander Weheliye’s analysis of Spillers’ porno-troping as applied to the filmic representation of torture under slavery, the *narration* of violence done to the racialized body is the act of mediation that accomplishes the division between body and flesh, *homo sacer* and bare life. The narration of Sweetie’s humanity to artificiality—for the explicit purpose of doubly

pleasuring a potential offender *and* then the viewing public of the campaign—is what consummates the ‘pro-active policing’.

The hope of the Lemz and Terre Des Hommes producers is to spur viewers into caring about and acting against exploitation outside Europe, to develop an emotional investment in the issue, one that would ideally lead to financial investment through donations. Indeed, just one year prior to Project Sweetie, Terre Des Hommes had worked with a Dutch filmmaker Jacco Groen to produce “Lilet Never Happened” (Springfilm, 2012), a movie about a Dutch woman (played by Dutch actress Johanna ter Steeg) who attempts to rescue a teenage Filipina girl doing sex work in Manila. The film follows Lilet, a twelve year old girl (played by Filipina actress Sandy Talag), through various urban spaces of Manila, from her family home, to a youth shelter run by a Dutch charity, to a hostess club and bar where she intermittently lives and works.

Lilet’s older sister lives at the bar, having run away from home and a sexually abusive stepfather. Lilet, subject to the same everyday violence, soon follows suit, triggered to run one night when her mother attempts to sell her virginity to a prospective older male client at a restaurant. Lilet joins a street settlement with other runaway youth, a temporary reprieve before they are all rounded up, beaten, and arrested by local police. Lilet strikes one of the police officers in the eye, scarring his face. At the city jail, when a Dutch woman, Claire, arrives to bail out another youth, she meets Lilet and bails her out as well, bringing her to a local youth shelter. Lilet pretends to be orphaned to avoid being sent home.

Claire is depicted as internally struggling with wanting to save and help the smart-talking and wayward Lilet, who frequently disrupts classes and events at the shelter with curses and raunchy jokes. Lilet begins a flirtation with another tween at the shelter, Ninoy, much to the exasperation of Claire and her Filipino husband, who also works at the shelter. Eventually Lilet's mother finds her at the shelter and brings her back to the family house, upon which Lilet runs away once more, this time to the hostess bar and nightclub where her older sister works.

The sly and stony-hearted proprietress at the nightclub is the quintessential caricature of a brothel madam, and quickly puts Lilet to work waiting tables in the bar and flirting with the mostly foreign male patrons of the club. At the insistence of Lilet's sister, Lilet does not initially engage in any sex work, but sleeps and hangs out in the same room with a dozen women who entertain clients and trade sex in other areas of the bar. She becomes friends with Mercedes, an older sex worker with a daughter of Lilet's age. Mercedes tells Lilet stories as she smokes a crack pipe. The women are locked into the bar during the day, a time they usually spend sleeping or relaxing before resuming work in the evenings. Mercedes takes a protective attitude to Lilet, and secretly begins sewing a lacey white princess dress for her.

With customers at the bar, Lilet goes by the name "Snow White." Director Groen intersperses cityscapes with dreamscapes, scenes of Lilet in stressful moments cutting to Snow White gliding through the city in a crisp white princess gown and tiara. Snow White manifests immediately after Lilet experiences a particularly violent and abusive interaction. The effect is one of dissociation and escape, a lighter moment floating the viewer away from Lilet's gritty life. Snow White carries Lilet's latent purity and innocence.

One night, when an American bar patron sees Lilet he asks the madam for the price of taking her home. Lilet overhears the price being bargained over, and insists that the madam increase the price as she is a virgin. The madam agrees, and after some more haggling, Lilet gulps down a drink and heads home with the man. Several scenes later, some time has passed and Lilet has worked with multiple clients and begun drinking regularly. In one scene she is vomiting in the shower when the madam rushes in and slaps her for lying to a customer about her virginity. In front of the other women, Lilet drunkenly yells at the madam for stupidly refunding the customer, arguing she still had to do all the work. "He fucked me! He fucked me *hard!*" Lilet screams while her sister looks on, stricken. Lilet runs away again, and later in the film we see her and her sister walking through a park being interviewed by a Dutch documentary crew doing a special on prostitution in Manila. Lilet wants to be an actress, and hams it up in front of the camera, affecting sweet and vivacious energy, and inventing wild stories of her escapades with customers. At one point she gleefully pulls out a knife from her purse to show to the camera how she protects herself. This scene of documentary production underscores the layers of fabulation Lilet wraps herself in; that the viewers are never quite sure of her reality nor her sense of agency. Lilet is always on the hustle, and wary in every instance of being taken advantage of.

One night when Lilet and Ninoy are flirting at the shelter, Ninoy asks Lilet how much it would cost to sleep with her. He holds up a small handful of pesos and she scoffs that his amount would certainly not be enough. She compromises to offer him a kiss, and then suggests they go on a joy-ride in a taxi throughout the city. They stop for a drink at a roadside snack-house, where a group of boys pick

a fight with Ninoy. Claire and the shelter find out the next day when Ninoy needs to be taken to the hospital for a fractured arm.

Seething, Claire rants at Lilet and blames her for dragging Ninoy back into the street lifestyle. She pulls Lilet into her office and pulls out wads of cash from her desk, throwing the bills at Lilet. "How much?! How much?" Claire yells. "How much for you to take your clothes off?! What are you worth?" Lilet glares at Claire through the rant, finally yelling "Fuck you" and striding out. The scene is one of the film's most explosive, shifting and blurring roles between buyer and seller, adult and youth, customer and worker, rescuer and victim.

Claire's words seem to stick with Lilet, however, and the next night as she is back dancing at the bar, winding against the dance pole, she pauses and catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror. The dance-floor lights flicker over her face, and her expression is dazed and numbed. Her face staring into the mirror stares right at the viewer. It is as if in that moment she sees herself seeing us seeing her. The effect is shaming and disturbing.



Still Frame, Lilet Film (2012)

During some downtime, Mercedes pulls Lilet aside and presents her with the dress she has been sewing. She holds up a bottle of champagne and asks Lilet to help her read a letter her daughter has mailed her. They sneak upstairs to the bar attic. In that moment, police pound on the doors of the bar and raid the dance floor. They roughly throw out all of the clientele and arrest the hostesses and the madam. Mercedes and Lilet escape the arrest, and sneak out from a back exit of the bar. On their way out, Lilet spots Claire standing with the police outside and becomes furious. Claire is looking for Lilet, and appears to have ordered the police raid, as she keeps asking the police to continue searching inside for a young girl.

Mercedes and Lilet beginning wandering through Manila, uncertain what to do next. Along the way, they are approached by a man who seems to recognize

them from the hostess club. He solicits both of them, and Lilet convinces Mercedes to go into a hotel room with him. Afterward, Mercedes seems wracked with bitterness and guilt. She commits suicide the next day, jumping off a bridge while Lilet is out elsewhere. When Lilet finds a crowd of people gathered over Mercedes' dead body, she shoves her way through and begins screaming, "Wake up! Wake up!" She kisses Mercedes on the cheek, Snow White attempting to awaken another lifeless body. Distraught, Lilet seeks out Ninoy, and the two of them plan to break into the now-shuttered bar that night to retrieve Mercedes' letter from her daughter. Ninoy stands guard outside while Lilet breaks into the bar window. Inside, after she fetches the letter, she finds her completed Snow White dress and can't help but put it on. As she climbs back out the window, she notices a stillness outside and can't find Ninoy. Suddenly she is intercepted by a police officer, the very same policeman she struck in the face at the beginning of the film. As he violently grabs her Lilet notices Ninoy bound and trapped within the police car, struggling to get out. The police officer pins Lilet and begins to rape her until Lilet is able to reach the knife in her purse and stab him in the stomach.

This violent scene fades out to the conclusion of the film, a dreamy, sun-drenched sequence of Lilet with shorn hair in what appears to be the shelter. Ninoy calls to her from outside, and together they walk out of the shelter and out into Manila in the sunlight.

The specter and threat of violence to the child is countered by the promise of punishment to the perpetrator and sending the child goes home in the arms of rescuers. Project Sweetie successfully invokes the porno-tropic fantasy such that viewers automatically understand and take for granted its digital version of "webcam sex

tourism” and comfortably acquiesce to its argument for the policing and punishment of pre-crime. With Project Sweetie the potential for punishment was spectacular, a dazzling display of the power of digital surveillance: 1,000 people’s names were collected and handed off to the police. Since 2013, over 50 people in three countries have been arrested after being identified and located via the Sweetie campaign—including 46 in Australia alone. Most of these people had prior arrest records of possession of child abuse image content. Viewers of the campaign video can feel comforted in the notion that a social problem has been solved technologically, and that potential “predators” have been detained to await criminal prosecution.

That an NGO and advertising firm could conduct a decoy sting operation, and be showered with praise, signals an expansion in the willingness of law enforcement and the anti-exploitation network to increasingly blend together. The symbolic protection of children through public displays of punishment helps preserve a sense of stability for the anti-trafficking network in the face of increasingly inscrutable and encrypted Internet crimes. The Project Sweetie team strategy of “pro-active policing” extends the logic of sex offense punishment by actively encouraging non-police to engage in the search and identification of offenders. By framing digital violence against children as an issue with a technological, carceral solution, the Sweetie campaign encourages other groups to take on community surveillance roles in digital space, patrolling and

interpellating online users as criminals and fundamentally transforming the ways in which both 'activism' and 'policing' are practiced. The symbolic protection of children through public displays of punishment helps preserve a sense of stability for the anti-trafficking network in the face of increasingly inscrutable and encrypted Internet crimes.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

A. Vulnerable Images, Playful Biometrics, and Algorithmic Living

The image detection and recognition software discussed in Chapter IV are not isolated technologies; versions of such software are near ubiquitous. Image recognition—especially facial recognition—can, of course, be used for multiple applications. Facebook’s automated photo tagging, which uses facial recognition to suggest tags for an uploaded image, has been widely criticized and also ruled to violate European Union privacy law in 2013, owing to Facebook’s requirement that users opt *out* of its facial recognition database, rather than being able to opt *in*. The FBI, meanwhile, has expanded its “Next Gen” identification system to work towards a full citizen biometrics database for training facial recognition software, a development that has raised alarm from privacy rights groups such as from the Electronic Frontier Foundation on the FBI

Next-Gen Biometrics database (Lynch 2016), but otherwise has gained little traction.

As our everyday lives become saturated with the production and possession of digital images, we—and the companies who host these images on their platforms—swim in increasing amounts of data. Carolyn Kane describes this state of being as an “algorithmic lifeworld” (2014:214) in which daily existence is increasingly symbiotically fused with practices of data collection, coding, and visual imaging technologies. Kane’s phrasing echoes other work in the anthropology and social theory of algorithms. The public becomes increasingly comfortable with the omnipresence of digital data collection and classification in our everyday lives, especially when such techniques are softly delivered under the rubric of banality (e.g., why might one even bother resisting uploading a photo album online?) or even play. Ariane Ellerbrok argues that “play” is central to the mission creep of surveillance software from ‘hard’ biometrics to ‘soft.’ “Alternatively mobilized as marketing logic as well as a form of cultural practice, “play” has a fundamental role in the social life of technologies—even controversial or “serious” technologies” (2011: 529). Through applications like Facebook photo tagging, as well as games to produce one’s own personalized avatar, such as MyIdol, facial recognition has shifted from a controversial securitization technique, emerging from the Post-9/11 surge in racial policing strategizing, to a softer, benign platform for play. Ellerbrok writes, “Historically, the social role of biometric technology is clearly linked with the domination of marginalized groups, by allowing authorities to filter

individuals, thereby assigning them differential rights based on racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic categorizations” (532). Numerous STS scholars have described the role of biometric technologies, from fingerprinting in colonial India (cf. Cole 2001) to airport surveillance cameras (cf. Browne 2015; Gates 2011; Magnet 2011), in producing notions of racialized and sexualized criminalization and in the policing of deviance. As Ellerbrok argues, the seeping of biometrics into “playful” software helps produce momentary lapses or erasures of its insidious surveillance roots—in this way playful biometrics is a method of obfuscation. A feminist sociotechnical analysis of “play” stays attuned to the ways in which playfulness and playful activity have been generally feminized and their importance diminished, yet that play is fundamental to the construction of individual subjectivities. Soft biometrics perpetuates the normalization of surveillance of marginalized people in various spaces. Yet playful biometrics can also be productive and resistive: Small blips of resistance, such as messing with Facebook’s photo tagging algorithm, offer new forms of playing back against biometric technologies. Some users of the facial avatar application MyIdol, for example, have generated avatars of Vladimir Putin, perhaps in response to the recent banning of Putin memes within Russia. Queer studies scholar and performance artist Zach Blas has designed a “Facial Weaponization Suite” (Burks 2015) of dramatically lumpy silicon masks people can wear to ‘hide’ from surveillance cameras seeking to acquire facial data points. Blas was motivated in part by reading about a research study claiming to

be able to “see” a “gay face” in a crowd—chilling and terrifying if used in the wrong situation or the wrong country. Adam Harvey’s “How to Hide From Machines” similarly used simple open-source computer vision algorithms to design face props and wigs users can wear as ‘camouflage.’ Such forms of resistance are small arms against the function creep of facial recognition. As the anti-trafficking network of humanitarian professionals includes law enforcement, software companies, and computer scientists, other actors become increasingly excluded, including contracted digital laborers who do the first stage of image content moderation, as well as “radical” activists who do not take part in the moralizing politics of the network.

B. Radical Intimacies and Alternative Futures

Against the professionalized network of anti-trafficking and police officials, how do less formalized activists express a plea for recognition and rights? Marginalized people, from convicted sex offenders to undocumented queer migrants, reject the politics of shame imposed by global political regimes. Such actors play with and subvert digital surveillance in ways that produce new, perhaps more potent, forms of networked sociality. It is this latter category that I describe further here as an alternative to conceptualizations of an expert network, through their production of different forms of political intimacy. Radical political intimacies reconfigure sociality outside of the

network in ways that are informal, less than comfortable, and politically tentative. But transgressive research and playful resistance to biometrics offer two outlets to producing political futures outside of technocratic expertise. Efforts to address child exploitation not just *in the future*, but in the present, must heed the call of these resistant actors in order to more totally dismantle the systems and institutions that make exploitation a lived reality.

How do those outside the network—non-experts, one might say—and especially radical queer of color activists, make their own forms of political intimacies? While these groups have not been the focal point of this dissertation, they are worthy of future study as my research continues. Here I wish to offer some cursory thoughts on what it might mean to reconfigure the network to include other forms of sociality and intimacy. Radical organizing is precarious, as Wendy Brown reminds us, for it operates outside of the dominant, future-oriented moralizing politics of the expert state, by expressing its *rage with the present*:

“When genealogy replaces totalizing and dialectical history and contests for hegemony replace progressivist formulations of change, when the future thus becomes relatively continuous with the present, so that radical political discontent can no longer make a home in an analysis of a powerfully determining history and a transformed future, where does it then live? What form does this radical discontent take within the emotional substructure of political expressions and political formations? If, as Nietzsche recognized, impotent rage inevitably yields a moralizing (re)action, how might we succeed in rereading contemporary political life through this recognition? Might it help us understand, for example, the contemporary tendency to personify oppression in the figure of individuals and to reify it in particular acts and utterances, the tendency to render individuals and acts intensely culpable—indeed prosecutable—for history and for social relations? (Brown 2001:21)

Radical politics is often punished by dominant moralizing politics: "...moralism, considered as an effect or consequence of weakened life forces, strikes at what appears to subordinate or humiliate it (but which has actually produced it): expressions of life forces or power" (Brown 2001:23). Those activists who imagine *alternative futures* by disrupting the present "are seen as committing acts of senseless violence, *which stops any hearing of the ways in which revolution makes sense*" (Ahmed 2010: 170). The moralizing politics of the anti-trafficking police network aims to place culpability within *individuals*—sex offenders, lone men, queered, marginalized others—rather than within the larger context of systemic global inequities. Radical organizing in recent years has sought to expose and destabilize the *structural violence*—including bureaucratic policies—that make any form of human exploitation possible. This destabilizing is not comfortable, and, in many ways it is perceived as threatening to the dominant political order.

Two organizations based in the U.S. inspire my reflections on building radical political intimacy outside of the professional anti-trafficking network. Streetwise and Safe, based in New York City, and Black and Pink, based in Boston and with chapters across the country, both seek to challenge the ownership of 'child exploitation' by dominant humanitarian bureaucracies. In both cases this has manifested as a combination of qualitative research and political advocacy.

For example, in 2015 Streetwise and Safe published its own research report, through the Urban Institute, on youth involved in the informal urban economy in New York (Dank et al. 2015). The youth-led research team interviewed 283 youth in metropolitan New York, specifically focusing on people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning, young men who have sex with men (YMSM); and young women who have sex with women (YWSW) and who get involved in the commercial sex market in order to meet basic survival needs, such as food or shelter. This report offers a qualitative analysis of youth experiences to understand why youth engage in “survival sex,” and to describe how various support systems—foster care, policy custody, shelters—might fail to offer a sense of community and render these youth even more isolated (e.g. 58% of the youth respondents lacked access to stable housing). Youth engaged in transactional sex and survival sex face disproportionate harassment and arrests by law enforcement, rendering them doubly vulnerable. As Melissa Gira Grant notes, “Surveillance is a way of knowing sex workers that unites the opportunity for voyeurism with the monitoring and data collection performed by law enforcement, by social service providers, or by researchers” (2014: 60). In an interview, the lead youth researcher for Streetwise’s report, Mitchyll Mora, described their experience of interviewing youth:

Nearly every time I asked an interviewee this question, I would ask myself too. “Do I feel that trading sex defines me?” More often than not I’d answer, “Yeah, it does.” But this wasn’t true for 85% of the youth we interviewed. “No, it does not define me” was a common response, and while that might not feel true for me all the time, I do get it. Youth who are or have engaged in survival

sex live large lives, filled with all kinds of pain and joy and resilience. We can define ourselves. By having youth like me doing the interviews, we created an environment that allowed for nuance of the experiences being shared. They knew that I knew that engaging in survival sex wasn't the only thing that has ever happened in their lives. That it's complicated.

Streetwise and Safe's report presents to me a compelling counter-narrative to the stories of child exploitation described by Terre Des Hommes and U.S. abolitionists. As I have argued in this dissertation, humanitarian professionals in the network have their own political agendas at stake when they collect and mediate youth stories in a particular way. They have chosen to "animate" the narrative within the rubric of their own bureaucratic and moralizing ideology. Streetwise and Safe's strategy of representing complex personal stories through youth-led research bypasses the mediation by humanitarian experts.

The other organization I consider, Black and Pink, advocates for the rights of queer people held in prison through research and letter-writing solidarity with people inside the carceral system and those who have been released from it. Through a recently completed national survey of Black and Pink members (Lydon et al. 2015), the organization argues that gay men and trans women are incarcerated disproportionately under sex offense charges compared to the non-queer population in prison. These findings echo similar research inside and outside the United States by Emily Horowitz (2015), John Borneman (2015), Roger Lancaster (2011), Dean Spade (2011), and Sarah

Lamble (2009), who all suggest that sex offender charges participate in the systemic carceral punishment and surveillance of marginalized populations, often trans, queer and/or people of color, rather than in the incarceration of the silent majority of sex offenders, who are often family members known to victims. Discrepancies in prosecution and criminal charges play a large role in this glaring gap. Once part of the carceral system, especially in the U.S., but increasingly in the Netherlands and other parts of the European Union, those convicted of child sexual offenses are increasingly kept on a tight leash (cf. Lamble 2009), through surveillance and monitoring systems such as GPS-enabled tracking ankle bracelets and the publicly searchable sex offender registry online. Lancaster argues that by mobilizing the figure of the stranger sex predator, a supposedly uncontrollable and repeat-offending criminal, the carceral state is able to “arouse fear, rally citizens, and inspire legislation” bent on arresting and tracking male populations (Lancaster 2011: 78). Despite overwhelming statistical data across countries and states that stranger assault accounts for the *least* common form of child sexual abuse, and that recidivism rates for sex offenders are under 3% in most studies,⁵ the sex offender continues to be figured as a relentless criminal destined to repeat offend. A case like Jaycee Duggard’s abduction at the hands of Philip Garrido (described in Chapter IV) is an outlier, yet its affective pull is considerable as it

⁵ See, for example, this 2013 report by Human Rights Watch:
<https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/05/01/raised-registry/irreparable-harm-placing-children-sex-offender-registries-us>

combines the issues of stranger assault, the abduction of a young white girl, and a narrative of heroic police rescue of filmic proportions.

C. Making Proximate: Sex Offenders and Terrorists in the Future

The man who designed PhotoDNA will help the United States fight terrorism. So claim a series of headlines from May and June 2016 proclaiming that Hany Farid has adapted his child exploitation detection software for locating photographs and videos recording instances of violence and terrorist speech. Some of these news reports are breathlessly optimistic, some more bemused, such as “Suppressing Extremist Speech? There’s an Algorithm for That” (Groll 2016). As with PhotoDNA, this new software would require access to a database of violent content to train the hash function in better detecting images and videos flagged as “extremist.” Farid is partnering with the independent Counter Extremism Project to develop such a database. The Counter Extremism Project describes itself as a “not-for-profit, non-partisan, international policy organization formed to combat the growing threat from extremist ideology.”⁶ Its founders include Mark Wallace (CEO), former US Ambassador to the UN, and Frances Townsend (President), former chair of the Homeland Security Council under President George W. Bush. The Counter Extremism Project aims to position itself as a national clearinghouse

⁶ About the Counter Extremism Project: <http://www.counterextremism.com/about>

for partnering with social media and technology companies in efforts to detect and report extremist content online. It is no coincidence that the Counter Extremism Project sounds similar to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children—a national clearinghouse, neither explicitly federal or non-governmental, with direct access to private citizen data reported from social media companies.

The network to address child exploitation has arisen, as I have shown, through the moralizing politics of humanitarian bureaucracies and the shared sensibilities of security held by law enforcement investigators. Companies that do not initially comply with state demands to collaborate on data reporting and sharing are eventually brought into the fold through public shaming and legal coercion, their management appointing or hiring internal representatives like Emily Vacher to liaise with law enforcement. Twitter, for example, has recently been labeled a “cyber-sanctuary” for ISIS,⁷ on the grounds that the company does not proactively moderate violent content, or at least offers little transparency on its moderation process. This was previous the case regarding Twitter and child abuse images, but in 2013, conceding to pressure from other companies and from the US Department of Justice, Twitter eventually incorporated the use of PhotoDNA software into its moderation. We can expect a

⁷ Michael Smith, chief operating officer for Kronos Advisory, a digital security consulting firm, described his disappointment with Twitter as a sanctuary for terrorist organizations like Daesh/ISIS, in May 2016: <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Passcode/Passcode-Voices/2016/0527/Opinion-How-to-beat-ISIS-on-Twitter>

similar timeline by which companies come around to collaboration on eradicating other forms of violent content.

In this dissertation I have used my fieldwork in the US, Thailand, and the Netherlands to describe the network of humanitarian professionals, police investigators, and technology specialists who work on resolving child exploitation cases. My dissertation shows how the anti-trafficking movement has grown into a network of ubiquitous surveillance through the inclusion of unofficial police in formal policing operations to develop new digital publicity and punishment techniques. The global movement for child *protection* has worked in tandem with *publicity* campaigns and with the design of technologies of *punishment* to expand the policing network. These three arenas of activity—protection, publicity, punishment—make use of the socially symbolic child as a rallying cause for the expansion of intrusive online surveillance, with ramifications for punishment and surveillance by state power broadly.

I have argued for the concept of proximity to think about how networks are formed and maintained, how criminals are apprehended, how child risk is anticipated, and how offenders are kept at bay. From the life-sized pink doll box placed on a Washington DC street by Shared Hope International, to the face of “Sweetie” used in Terre Des Hommes’s publicity campaign, the public is invited to come close to child abuse in

order to bear witness and establish it as an issue. Such proximity to child exploitation also involves repulsion *away from* those who perpetrate abuse, a category of persons labeled sex offenders.

The moralizing politics of the anti-trafficking police network are future-oriented, in that they aim to *secure* a particular kind of future of child protection by punishing those who threaten it. As Lee Edelman argues, the symbolic Child is central to the “telos of the social order” in that it is *for the security of* this imagined innocent child that a certain social order is held intact (2004:11). In the name of securitization, the image of the child becomes coercive and disciplining. Drawing on Lacan, Edelman suggests that ‘the child’ acts as a signifier of a signified future (cf. Lacan 1956-57 [1994]). The child is a perpetual symbol, and a structuring object for a particular kind of vision of the future. This future fits neatly with the “structuring optimism” of moralizing politics in the anti-trafficking network (cf. Berlant 2011). Sweetie’s face can easily be put inside the pink doll box, as can any number of other imagined innocent faces.

Moreover, the child’s face is a happy object. Sara Ahmed argues that ‘happiness’—like Berlant’s ‘optimism’—is an orientation *towards* the objects we come into contact with: “Happiness can thus be described as *intentional* in the phenomenological sense (directed toward objects), as well as being *affective* (contact with objects)” (Ahmed 2004:32).

Happy objects are structuring forces in an affective economy: “This affective differentiation is the basis of an essentially moral economy in which moral distinctions of worth are also social distinctions of value” (Ahmed 2004:35; cf. Skeggs 2004). Happy objects accumulate affective *value* as we anticipate their proximity, and, I would add, their protection or their cherishing. The symbolic child performs cultural labor as an object to be cherished, *protected* and kept close.

To imagine child protection, the network must also envision punishment, keeping *out* those who threaten the structuring order which the child maintains. The social issue of ‘child protection’—and the network that organizes around it—mobilizes digital surveillance that intrudes into common spheres of everyday life, both online and off, in the name of security. Ensuring the security of some entails producing the *insecurity* of others. The populating of these respective categories—*some* who remain close, and *others* who must be kept far—is in fact the ultimate trick. The promotion of image detection software by law enforcement and software companies imagines saving white children from lone, perverted men sitting in basements in the West. The promotion of Project Sweetie imagines saving poor brown children from perverted tourists in Europe. The application of PhotoDNA for counter-terrorism imagines saving American citizens from perverted ISIS terrorists. Who is the next pervert, the next “bogeyman” (Ahmed 2004), the next monster (Puar and Rai 2002)? The reach of the carceral, punitive state is

seemingly limitless when objects of fear are constantly brought forth. In the same way that a happy object has positive affective charge, malevolent objects—the sex offender, the sex tourist, the terrorist—has a negative charge. It is “fearsome” (Ahmed 2004:33; cf. Ahmed 2003). In its fearsomeness this object must be kept at bay, *away from* happy objects—for it is *hateful* and “despised” (Borneman 2015). To maintain the negative charge of fearful objects, we must always, however anticipate their arrival, their proximity: “Some things more than others are encountered as ‘to be feared’ in the event of proximity, which is exactly how we can understand the anticipatory logic of the discourse of stranger danger” (Ahmed 2004: 40). These strange objects must be kept intimately familiar to be kept at bay.

My dissertation contributes to feminist studies of human rights, the anthropology of data and surveillance, and science and technology studies of expertise. I make a new contribution to these disciplines by arguing that a moralizing politics of *shaming* is central to the maintenance of an anti-trafficking policing network. The crisis problem of child trafficking produces a state of heightened insecurity, or a “state of exception” (cf. Agamben 2005), permitting increased digital surveillance. But, as Giorgio Agamben warns in his reflection on post-9/11 statecraft, the publicity of a crisis, or ‘state of exception,’ is deceptive. The production of a state of exception is central to modern democratic society, such that a state of exception is now *the norm* (Agamben 2005: 35; cf.

Goldstein 2007). That is, in the name of child protection, the network designs, deploys, and maintains ever-intrusive techniques for data detection and collection. The spectacle of shaming gives purpose to continued surveillance. Humanitarian professionals, law enforcement, and corporate representatives for software companies form a new global policing network to counter the issue of child protection. This network is produced and maintained through moralizing practices exercised through speech and gesture to establish a shared sense of securitization. I draw from examples of network sociality in Bangkok to show how moralizing practices of narrative speech, gossip, and gestures establish bureaucratic order and proximity amidst the contract time precarity of humanitarian professional work. I also describe how the investigative arm of the anti-trafficking network is expanding to include social media companies and software programmers designing image detection software for better apprehending images of child abuse online. These groups come together as networked experts through meetings, trainings, and the sharing of data, a collaborative process I describe as perceptual enskillment and hash sociality. The moralizing politics of the anti-trafficking policing network is future-oriented, in its objective of child protection and its members' shared prolonging of that goal in order to preserve the network. The entrapment scheme of Project Sweetie, a photorealistic motion capture based avatar of a Filipina child, audaciously demonstrates the culmination of anti-trafficking ideology, digital surveillance, and future-oriented moralizing politics by seeking and entrapping

potential—not actual—offenders of child abuse online. The Sweetie avatar’s artifice is twofold, as a lure for potential solicitors but also as an enticing object for the audience of the NGO publicity campaign. The network supports Project Sweetie, as evidenced by the copious funding and publicity Terre Des Hommes gained after the campaign, and the current production of “Sweetie 2.0.” Project Sweetie is the culmination of the ideologies described in this dissertation for its particular vision of a *future* where detection and shaming will permanently oust anyone with the *potential* to offend. “Pro-active policing,” if extended to include the digital counter-terrorism measures described at the outset of this conclusion, is a harbinger of a punishment-based moralizing politics that may, in the future, pervade all digital space.

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