

This chapter highlights the things that players bring to games in excess of the games themselves, and how play styles relate back to shared cultural fantasies. For example, a skilled player might “serve as their own secure base, tethered to their mastery of the game” rather than rely on any particular mechanic designed into the game (80).

The tether fantasy is closely related to the fantasy of accretion explored in chapter 4, the book’s final chapter, which addresses feelings of empowerment in video games where play consists of gathering abilities, items, and upgrades that gradually make the player character stronger and more capable in the game world. Goetz’s analysis refers to psychological research on variable reward structures, pointing back to the special power of video games to offer players fantasies and the opportunity to play them out again, and again, and again. Goetz sidesteps familiar Marxist critiques of games that feature accretion play, drawing attention to how the use of variable-ratio reinforcements (like slightly unpredictable leveling up in games) plays on human biology and psychology.

*The Counterfeit Coin* is ideal for scholars of film interested in learning more about video games and for video-game scholars interested in psychoanalysis and comparative media studies. It also intervenes into the ongoing debates within game studies about how games generate meaning, be that by virtue of mechanics, code and procedural elements, or narrative elements found in other media forms, like story and plot. Goetz’s approach takes a middle path: meaning in games happens in the relationship between “apparent” story—narrative as we might see in film or other nonludic media—and the game’s “underlying” fantasy structures, which drive player engagement and action at both an individual and cultural level.

My main critique of the book is that its thesis depends upon hegemonic cultural narratives (the existence of “boy culture,” for example) rather than focusing on the historical or contingent experiences of difference that are more often the focus of feminist science and technology studies and media studies (27). This critique is anticipated by the author in the introduction, where he notes the many complications and drawbacks that come with engaging Freudian psychoanalysis. The book makes a strong case for the utility of psychoanalysis as a framework for comparative media studies, but I found myself often on the outside looking in on these fantasies, both by virtue of the kinds of works chosen for analysis (predominantly mainstream, blockbuster movies and AAA titles, the latter term the gaming industry’s equivalent of the word *blockbuster*) and by virtue of the fantasies that Goetz describes. With these fantasies now described

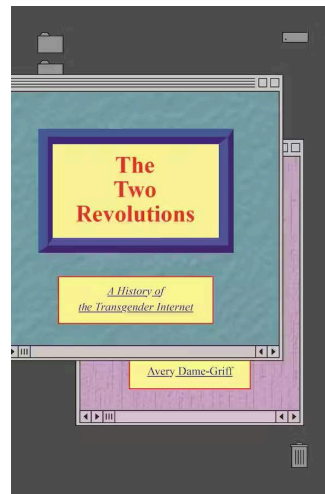
at length, there seems to be a generous opening for future scholarship that might more directly contest the violence implicit in many of these power fantasies.

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BOOK DATA Christopher Goetz, *The Counterfeit Coin: Videogames and Fantasies of Empowerment*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2023. \$150.00 cloth; \$37.95 paper; \$37.95 e-book. 216 pages.

## BASIL DABABNEH

### *The Two Revolutions: A History of the Transgender Internet*, by Avery Dame-Griff



As the Internet-connected computer grew in ubiquity across the United States throughout the 1980s and 1990s, neoliberal capitalism developed new ways of incorporating newly visible forms of difference into a profit-making apparatus, transforming identity into classifiable data. At the same time, the various and wide-reaching

representations of gender and sexuality made possible by digital-media technologies and distribution platforms also encouraged radically new forms of self-fashioning, online communication, and community building for marginalized users on the Internet. In *The Two Revolutions: A History of the Transgender Internet*, Avery Dame-Griff thoroughly explores this complex nexus of possibility and limitation across the history of the Internet and the history of the transgender user online, constructing a detailed media archeology at the overlooked intersections of these two contemporary histories.

Covering the period from the 1980s to the present, Dame-Griff’s book examines the influence of digital communication on the development of transgender identities and identifications. Dame-Griff’s rigorous archival research reconstructs the intricate digital networks that both displaced physical publications and periodicals and

asynchronously connected far-flung users who belonged to what was then recognized as the gender community—namely, the community of individuals invested in gender nonconformity. Demonstrating the central place of technology in trans social movements, Dame-Griff argues that digital communication among users in the gender community played a pivotal role in stabilizing the language used by members by the mid-1990s, effectively establishing *transgender* as an umbrella term for what was until then a less-defined community.

*The Two Revolutions* offers new insights into the Internet's nascent development and its impact on transgender discourses and politics, beginning with early debates around terms and definitions, visibility and opacity, respectability and perversity, and other topics. Drawing on the details of online interactions, Dame-Griff explores how transgender individuals not only used but also creatively misused the new possibilities afforded by digital platforms through practices of “obfuscation and elision,” which allowed them to build a sense of identity and safe belonging in a shared virtual community (4).

Dame-Griff opens the book by claiming outright that “the Internet was inescapably shaped by the presence of trans users,” who both visibly and invisibly made space for themselves in online spaces not granted to or designed specifically for them (4). In chapter 1, Dame-Griff elaborates this argument, providing an overview of the transgender community's steady shift away from analog publications and toward an engagement with the first digital platform: the bulletin-board system, or BBS. Beginning with GenderNet, the first BBS created specifically for the gender community, Dame-Griff argues that the affordances of such early digital platforms significantly transformed the trans community, allowing individuals to self-express freely without the risk of exposure, instead connecting, messaging, and relaying vital information in a safe and anonymous environment. The BBS was a site not just of social encounter but also of political activism. Despite fears that the Internet would draw users away from in-person organizing, BBS users, who represented a relatively small racially and economically privileged portion of the wider gender community, often envisioned the world-making power of digital communications in utopian terms, where transgender users' asynchrony and anonymity could foster widespread political organizing within the community.

The next two chapters continue Dame-Griff's focus on specific digital platforms, turning to America Online (AOL) and Usenet respectively, and often working through user negotiations around language. In chapter 2,

Dame-Griff explores how the gender community argued for their existence in digital spaces like AOL. Dame-Griff insightfully suggests that, to work around claims of the vulgarity and obscenity of the gender community's presence on what were marketed as family-friendly spaces, these users strategically, and problematically, deployed the logic of capitalism to justify their presence online as “a viable consumer demographic, not a problem to be removed” (57). While chapter 2 focuses on terms like *transsexual* and *transvestite*—which were outright banned by AOL—chapter 3 considers how online communication from members of the gender community also generated new terms and language to use online. Here, Dame-Griff turns to Usenet, a noncommercial platform where the term *cisgender* first gained prominence in the mid-2000s. The frequently confrontational uses of the term by early Usenet posters, as Dame-Griff argues, helped to construct an us/them dynamic to emphasize community members' shared belonging by way of a shared oppression.

In the following two chapters, Dame-Griff turns away from specific digital platforms to discuss trans users on the World Wide Web. In chapter 4, Dame-Griff considers how the Web radically transformed the circulation of trans information, especially in the way the Web allowed for low-risk gendered self-representation practices through the personalized home page (a predecessor to the social-media profile). Such increased visibility, variety, and reach of gender self-representations online, however, continued to fuel already existing fears about minors' access to what was considered by many as indecent material. Again, Dame-Griff explores how trans users were made to frame their legitimacy as good digital citizens who readily acceded to corporate expectations. In chapter 5, Dame-Griff takes up the Internet's larger role in transgender life and organizing throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, reexploring the digital's impact on analog communication. Here, Dame-Griff considers how trans youth with access to the Internet were increasingly finding and creating spaces outside of local organizations and existing in-person community infrastructure established by prior generations, effectively threatening older analog forms of communication and community organizing with obsolescence.

In the book's final chapter, Dame-Griff shifts to the contemporary Internet landscape in order to highlight the central place of Google's search algorithm and Tumblr's social tagging in the history of trans information seeking and self-fashioning online. Dame-Griff contends that these two ubiquitous digital systems systematically transformed how language and identity were created, used, and

disseminated in the community. In these negotiations, the term *transgender* itself became “enmeshed in and defined by the very infrastructure through which trans users learn about themselves, severely limiting users’ agency to shape definitions or terminology” (28). Not only transforming young trans users’ everyday experience of the Internet, the datafication of language within the community fundamentally shaped what it meant to be trans.

While Dame-Griff insists that the development and dispersal of new technologies do not always carry with them the promise of linear progress for marginalized groups, the author expresses their hope, in the book’s conclusion, that the future can hold radically imaginative possibilities for something other than trans exclusion or exploitative inclusion in a corporate-owned Internet. Dame-Griff speculates about other futures for a trans Internet, including empowering trans individuals to “own the goddamned servers,” thereby placing the community at the center of both hosting and platform governance in a push toward “safe spaces we own” (209). Dame-Griff ends with this utopian provocation: that new technologies ought to be designed by and for trans people, wholly outside of existing capitalist frameworks. Pegged to the future, the book’s final argument is also a gesture of return to the early promise of analog publications that were fully owned and run by gender-community members.

While its conclusion leaves a lot to the imagination, perhaps too much, Dame-Griff’s book is overall a very welcome and necessary addition to the growing field of transgender studies as well as an important intervention into the archival history of the Internet for new media studies and the digital humanities more broadly. *The Two Revolutions* is ultimately a reminder that the development of the Internet is itself a pivotal part of recent transgender history.

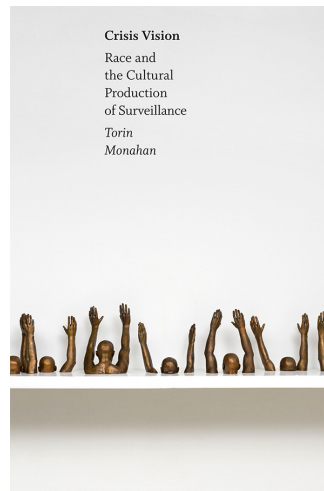
BASIL DABABNEH is a PhD candidate in cinema and media studies at the University of Chicago. His work explores queer and trans aesthetics of silliness in popular media.

BOOK DATA Avery Dame-Griff, *The Two Revolutions: A History of the Transgender Internet*. New York: New York University Press. 2023. \$30.00 paper. 265 pages.

## HENRY NEIM OSMAN

### ***Crisis Vision: Race and the Cultural Production of Surveillance*, by Torin Monahan**

Mass surveillance takes place in streets and stores, on public transportation, in schools, and through doorbells and cell phones—to name a few common locations. The very ubiquity of both state and corporate surveillance would



seem to imply that it is a universal threat to which everyone is equally exposed, given that there are over a billion surveillance cameras deployed today. In *Crisis Vision: Race and the Cultural Production of Surveillance*, Torin Monahan asserts that artistic interventions based on an imagined “universal threat or individual responsibility ...

create blind spots to social inequality, racialization, and violence” (4–5). Put differently, a theory of surveillance in which all subjects are equally exposed to the eye of the state obscures surveillance’s constituent violence.

Monahan’s *Crisis Vision* offers an incisive critique not only of surveillance but of surveillance studies’ own methodological reliance on visibility, evident in its calls to reveal nefarious technologies or uncover previously hidden systems. In turning away from these often-perfunctory gestures, Monahan argues that crisis vision, a “destructive way of seeing” and an “an entire field of operation where visual logics structure social and cultural life,” produces a continuum of racialized threat (12). “Crisis” here speaks to a rupturing of the normal, while “vision” is defined as the seemingly “neutral mechanism” that restores and returns to the norm (13). The focus of the book is not a technological study of the apparatuses that produce the visual field, but rather how the visible is constituted under racial capitalism. For Monahan, vision as a paradigm renders neutral the racialization at the heart of crisis vision’s hierarchies and continuums of threat. Moreover, art destabilizes and makes crisis vision visible, producing, following Monahan’s reading of Rancière, new (re)distributions of the sensible. What Monahan terms “critical surveillance art” constitutes a field of aesthetic activity with which “the grammar, the unspoken rules and logics, of structural and symbolic violence” can be grappled (90).

Each chapter is structured around a different strategy used by critical surveillance—“Avoidance,” “Transparency,” “Complicity,” “Violence,” and “Disruption”—and draws together a broad range of works from the United States, South Africa, Pakistan, and Denmark, among other countries. The work of Chinese critical surveillance artists, such as Xu Bing or Deng Yufeng, isn’t mentioned, but would offer a window into different permutations of crisis vision.