Dying in Full Detail

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NOTES

Introduction

1 Bazin, “Death Every Afternoon.”
2 Rilke, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, 17. This passage came to my attention through Friedman, Fictional Death and the Modernist Enterprise, 57.
4 I will use the term “natural” death to refer to deaths we attribute to disease or age, but I make this choice between two terms that are both unsatisfying. Is there anything that feels either “natural” or “nonviolent,” for example, about a death in an intensive care unit that is accompanied by forceful chest compressions, jolts from defibrillators, and the frenzied atmosphere of a “code” (when a patient’s deterioration prompts CPR or intubation)?
5 Bazin, “Death Every Afternoon,” 30.
9 Dyer, White, 104.
11 Zelizer, About to Die, 43–48.
12 Qtd. in Zelizer, About to Die, 301.
13 Manovich, The Language of New Media, 300, 302 (emphasis in original).
14 For influential discussions of digital immateriality (not all of which frame the digital as simply immaterial), see Mitchell, The Reconfigured Eye; Rosen, “Old and New”; Hansen, “Between Body and Image”; Doane, “The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity”; Rodowick, The Virtual Life of Film.
15 Editing a digital documentary is, of course, a form of digital manipulation, but here I am referring to major changes to the mise-en-scène.
18 Halverson, Ruston, and Trethewey, “Mediated Martyrs of the Arab Spring.”


21 Kastenbaum, *On Our Way*, 44.

22 Lundgren and Houseman, “Banishing Death,” 226. Lundgren and Houseman clarify that while sanitary conditions in rural areas also welcomed disease, death rates outside the cities were significantly lower (225–26).

23 Lundgren and Houseman, “Banishing Death,” 227. A nineteenth-century young man’s diary entry about cholera expresses the terror these threats brought: “To see individuals well in the morning & buried before night, retiring apparently well & dead in the morning is something which is appalling to the boldest heart” (Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years*, 3). For more on death in the Civil War period, see chapter 1 and Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*.

24 Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*. Ariès claims that this model of death spread even to the frontier in the mid-nineteenth century, as letters from that period to loved ones back East indicate (449).


26 Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death*, 92.


29 Post, *Inquiries in Bioethics*, 83. To nuance this history, I will note that there are twentieth-century and twenty-first-century Americans for whom the sight of death remains common: medical professionals, care workers in nursing homes, police, and military personnel, for example. The sight of death is thus not hidden from everyone but rather has been increasingly restricted to professionals whose jobs necessitate significant exposure to death.


37 Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death*, 88–89.

38 Ruby, *Secure the Shadow*, 12.

39 For an analysis of how death functions in this important documentary (from a more theoretical than ethical perspective), see Jeong and Andrew, “Grizzly Ghost.”
The infamous film spawned several direct sequels and many derivatives in other multipart series such as *Facez of Death*, *Death Scenes*, *Traces of Death*, and *Banned from Television*.

This widespread eagerness survived the shocks of documentary death images from the 9/11 attacks and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that followed them, limited as the impact of the latter images may have been. Indeed, the public’s continuing drive to see recorded death became newly evident in the first decade of the twenty-first century with data on online image and video searches (e.g., Internet users trying to watch Nick Berg’s beheading video in May 2004 made it the most common search engine query in the week it was released) (Zelizer, *About to Die*, 286).


Ensuring that a rape survivor about to watch a film for class knows that it has a graphic rape scene is a widely palatable trigger warning example scenario. But the potential efficacy of such warnings, even in this seemingly clear-cut case, is not easy to predict. Survivors of traumatic events can have highly idiosyncratic triggers—like a sound or a color they associate with the event—rather than intuitive ones like seeing a rape scene in a film. Further, the benefit of a trigger warning may depend on how the warned individual reacts to it. Current psychological research on treating PTSD asserts that controlled exposure to the traumatic memory and its associations is more effective than avoidance. While a college classroom—however thoughtfully managed—is no substitute for a trained exposure therapist’s office, research suggests that we may be harming rather than helping our students if we encourage them to avoid assigned material on the basis of a trigger warning. The best use of such warnings, then, may be to prepare students who have lived through trauma to actually encounter potentially triggering material that is curated and taught with care, not to avoid it. *Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*, 8.

The most publicized instance of extreme trigger-warning culture on a college campus came from a quickly withdrawn document that administrators circulated to Oberlin College faculty advising them to “be aware of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, ableism, and other issues of privilege and oppression” in choosing what content to teach, to make that material optional where possible, and to favor alternatives. Jenny Jarvie, “Trigger Happy,” *New Republic*, March 3, 2014.

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Chapter 1. Capturing the “Moment”

1 The twentieth-century trends toward death from prolonged ailments continue in the twenty-first, where at least seven of the ten leading causes of death in the United States forecast a slow withering rather than a sudden end (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Deaths: Leading Causes for 2012,” 17, August 31, 2015, http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr64/nvsr64_10.pdf). These ten causes are based on the CDC’s 2012 study, the most recent year for which public data were available. The seven-out-of-ten figure also holds true within each racial category that CDC statistics include, though variance of a few percentage points exists between racial categories when measuring by total annual deaths rather than leading causes. Even the top cause, heart disease, does not always provide a sudden death from a heart attack. Heart failure often kills in a long process accompanied by painful swelling, difficulty ingesting food, and a sensation of drowning when the lungs begin to fill with fluid. Though the following additional statistics do not signify a period of “dying” in the sense of immanent terminality, the average American is debilitated for five (for males) or eight (for females) years before death (Hardwig, “Going to Meet Death,” 37).

2 Acknowledgments to Scott Combs, who uses Williams’s “Film Bodies” to discuss the temporality of staged death scenes in melodrama—a use that partly inspired my extended comparison between Williams’s modes and documentary death. See Combs, Deathwatch, 71–73.

3 Williams, “Film Bodies,” 713, 703.

4 Barbie Zelizer provides an alternative temporal framing to mine in About to Die, arguing for the primacy of the “about to die” moment caught on camera (one that occurs earlier than the “moment” of death I am discussing). For Zelizer, it is less the spectacle of death or the allure of its precisely timed capture that draws viewers in, but rather the way “about to die” images restore a subjunctive “as if” state where the ensuing death or destruction may still be avoided.


48 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 7.

49 See especially Barthes, Camera Lucida; Sontag, On Photography; Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others; Berger, About Looking; Renov, The Subject of Documentary (“Filling up the Hole in the Real”).


51 Sobchack, “Inscribing Ethical Space,” 252.

52 Sobchack, “Inscribing Ethical Space,” 255.

53 Although her assessment of documentary ethics prescribes close reading as a necessary tool, Sobchack herself does little of it in “Inscribing Ethical Space.” Her intentions seem to be broad and theoretical, and her ambitious coverage of an extensive topic in eighteen pages leaves little room for detailed analysis of actual footage. Additionally, far less of that footage would have been available and accessible to a scholar writing on this topic in 1984 (or even revising such a work in 2004) than to one writing on it today.
5 Williams, “Film Bodies,” 713.
6 Barthes, Camera Lucida, 92–95; Sontag, On Photography, 70; Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” 15.
7 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 24.
8 Sobchack, “Inscribing Ethical Space,” 237.
9 Barthes, Camera Lucida, 14; Batchen, Forget Me Not, 17.
10 Ariès, The Hour of Our Death, 415, 469, 442, 411.
11 Ruby, Secure the Shadow, 174.
12 Faust, This Republic of Suffering, 61, 70.
15 Qtd. in Mould, American Newsfilm, 220.
16 Nudelman, John Brown’s Body, 118–19; Bleiler, “Introduction.”
17 Nudelman, John Brown’s Body, 122; Schantz, Awaiting the Heavenly Country, 186.
18 Staging already had precedents in the short history of wartime corpse photography. In 1858, Felice Beato became the first person to photograph war corpses, after the siege of Lucknow in India. In doing so, he rearranged the bones of the slain for the camera and posed some local men behind them (Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 54).
19 Gardner, Gardner’s Photographic Sketchbook of the Civil War, plates 36–37; Nudelman, John Brown’s Body, 121. Significantly, the descriptions in Gardner’s book (self-published, on a small scale) may not have accompanied his pictures in other forms through which the public viewed such images: as cartes de visite and stereoviews, and in exhibitions at urban galleries such as Mathew Brady’s (Nudelman, John Brown’s Body, 105–6).
20 Gardner, Gardner’s Photographic Sketchbook of the Civil War, plate 37.
21 Faust, This Republic of Suffering, 10–11, 17.
22 Faust, This Republic of Suffering, 21.
23 Raiford, “The Consumption of Lynching Images,” 268. Victims of other races were also lynched, but most of those cases occurred in the frontier West, where the practice claimed to supply legitimate executions in the absence of a full judicial system. By contrast, lynchings of Blacks in the South often snatched victims from jails and purposefully denied them existing legal proceedings (Apel, Imagery of Lynching, 23).
25 Raiford, “The Consumption of Lynching Images,” 267. The photographs were sometimes appropriated to decry racism and its violence, but their original production and distribution were generally complicit in and supportive of that violence.
28 Raiford, “The Consumption of Lynching Images,” 270; Apel, Imagery of Lynching, 44.
29 Raiford, “The Consumption of Lynching Images,” 270. Photographs were not the only available souvenir of lynchings, but not everyone could obtain pieces of cloth,
hair, teeth, bone, or even flesh torn from the corpse (Litwack, “Hellhounds,” 9; Raiford, “The Consumption of Lynching Images,” 270).

30 Apel, Imagery of Lynching, 30.
31 Goldsby, A Spectacular Secret, 221.
33 Goldsby, A Spectacular Secret, 231–32. A photograph of Frank Embree (lynched on July 22, 1899, in Fayette, Missouri) standing handcuffed, naked, and visibly bleeding provides a revealing anomaly among these corpse images, underscoring Goldsby’s point about their usual obstacles to identification or sympathy (Without Sanctuary, plate 43). His seemingly defiant look directly at the camera forces the viewer to confront his humanity and disrupts the utter powerlessness that dominates lynching photos taken after the victim’s death.

35 Qtd. in Zelizer, Remembering to Forget, 89.
36 Qtd. in Abzug, Inside the Vicious Heart, 30.
37 Qtd. in Zelizer, Remembering to Forget, 86.
38 Abzug, Inside the Vicious Heart, 69–73, 82, 91, 129; Gladstone, “Separate Intentions.”
39 Roeder, The Censored War, 25. Yet there is also cause to be less suspicious of political motivations in this display of atrocities: the United States had reason to rebuild the German reputation, in the face of the developing Cold War (Roeder, The Censored War, 127).

40 Zelizer, Remembering to Forget, 39, 31, 33, 90.
41 During that time, there was a marked increase in belief, but both polls revealed that U.S. citizens still vastly underestimated the scale of the killings (Abzug, Inside the Vicious Heart, 10, 139).
42 Zelizer, Remembering to Forget, 118, 199–200, 174.
44 Sontag, On Photography, 20. She would later express second thoughts about images’ anesthetizing effect in Regarding the Pain of Others (105).
45 Mulvey, Death 24x a Second, 15, 12.
47 Banner, The Death Penalty, 154–56. A fascination with seeing the executions that had been shuttered from the public eye and the camera’s lens registers sensational publicity around the electrocution in 1928 of Ruth Snyder, convicted of murdering her husband. As Zelizer details, the New York Daily News in multiple issues published a hidden-camera photo of Snyder blindfolded and strapped to the chair. The paper’s varying captions and headlines for the same photo—including “DEAD!” and “RUTH SNYDER’S DEATH PICTURED!”—shift its alleged temporality from the “moment” of death to postdeath, as the blurry and innocuous image itself cannot reveal that information (Zelizer, About to Die, 34–36).
49 Further titles demonstrating the popularity of execution spectacles in this era include Shooting the Captured Insurgents (1898, William Heise); Beheading the Chinese Prisoner (1900, Siegmund Lubin); Execution of Czolgosz with Panorama of Auburn
State Prison (1901, Edwin S. Porter/Edison); The Terrible Turkish Executioner (1903, Georges Méliès); Execution of a Spy (1902, Mutoscope/Biograph); Electrocuting an Elephant (1903, Edison); and Reading the Death Sentence (1905, Mutoscope/Biograph) (Doane, The Emergence of Cinematic Time, 145; Combs, Deathwatch, 27–64).

Banner, The Death Penalty, 172–73.

Combs, Deathwatch, 43. Deviations from instantaneous death appear in the two electrocution films I will discuss later, but they were also reported in actual electrocutions, such as New York’s first—of William Kemmler in 1890. Kemmler’s body seemed to still after what should have been the fatal jolt, but then he began to moan and move shortly afterward, to the horror of onlookers (Combs, Deathwatch, 23–24).

Doane, The Emergence of Cinematic Time, 160.

Accounts of Czolgosz’s actual execution also note that multiple jolts of electric current were administered to ensure death (Johns, The Man Who Shot McKinley, 248).

Combs, Deathwatch, 33.

Doane, The Emergence of Cinematic Time, 145; Goldsby, A Spectacular Secret, 225.

Indeed actual animal deaths, such as Topsy’s, have been filmed and displayed in both documentary and fiction films far more frequently than actual human deaths—perhaps serving as a substitute spectacle. Sobchack reports that noticing this ethical discrepancy, while watching a rabbit killed on-screen in The Rules of the Game (1939, Jean Renoir), prompted her initial interest in writing about documentary death (245). We can watch actual animal deaths in films as geographically, temporally, and topically varied as The Lion Hunt (1907, Viggo Larsen, Denmark); Blood of the Beasts (1949, Georges Franju, France); Pink Flamingos (1972, John Waters, USA); Cannibal Holocaust (1980, Ruggero Deodato, Italy); and The Cove (2009, Louie Psihoyos), to name a few. Regulations now constrain U.S. filmmakers from staging animal deaths for their movies, but these do not affect unstaged documentary footage.

Combs, “Final Touches,” 40.

Doane, The Emergence of Cinematic Time, 160.


Whissel, Picturing American Modernity, 14, 90–91.

Whissel, Picturing American Modernity, 82, 96.

See the paintings Death of Col. Edward D. Baker (1861, Currier and Ives); Fighting at Virginia (1862, Currier and Ives); Battle of Spottsylvania [sic] (1887, Thure de Thulstrup); and Battle of Shiloh (1888, Thure de Thulstrup).


Fielding, The American Newsreel, 67–69; Bottomore, “The Biograph in Battle,” 32. Most famously, the British propaganda film Battle of the Somme (1916) staged an apparent on-camera death as a soldier charges “over the top” of a trench and crumples...
right back down. And in the United States, the American Life Photo Film Company had been staging “German atrocities” to film in New Jersey since 1914 (Kaes, _Shell Shock Cinema_, 29–31).

65 Fielding, _The American Newsreel_, 68.
66 Kershaw, _Blood and Champagne_, 39–42.
67 Sontag, _Regarding the Pain of Others_, 55.
68 Brothers, _War and Photography_, 183.
69 Zelizer, _Covering the Body_, 18.
70 For an excellent analysis of the Zapruder film as evidence—drawing viewers in not just with the sight of death but with the tantalizing promise that documentary footage could solve this nationally shattering crime—see Bruzzi, “The Event: Archive and Imagination.” Additional films shot on the other side of the road by Orville Nix and Mary Muchmore also offer evidence in this debate but have only distant, obscured views of Kennedy’s death itself. The Zapruder film transfer I am working from is _Image of an Assassination: A New Look at the Zapruder Film_ (1963; Oak Forest, IL: MPI Teleproductions, 1999), DVD.

71 Zapruder had to visit seven different offices and plants to get the film developed and copied—a delay during which no one even knew how much of the killing he had recorded. It took days to get (necessarily degraded) copies to all the investigators, who had to round up projectors that could slow down or freeze the film without damaging it (Wrone, _The Zapruder Film_, 19–31). Though the superpowers of digital video are often exaggerated, it remains true that such evidence today can be seen, copied, and transmitted almost instantly with little degradation.

72 Zapruder sold the film and its copyright for $150,000 plus 50 percent of future sales. Time Inc. returned its ownership in 1975 to the Zapruder family, who sold it to the U.S. government in 1999 for $16 million (Wrone, _The Zapruder Film_, 272–73).

73 Wrone, _The Zapruder Film_, 35.
75 Warren Commission, Report of the President’s Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy, 108. For more on the film’s underground circulation, see Wrone, _The Zapruder Film_, 59–61.

76 A bootleg copy, enhanced by Richard Groden, aired on the March 6, 1975, episode, with an audibly shocked reaction to the headshot from the studio audience. The segment appears on the _Image of an Assassination_ DVD.
78 Instant replay was thus used to replay death actuality footage before it was used for its intended purpose of sports coverage—debuting weeks later in the 1963 Army-Navy football game (Jay, _More Than Just a Game_, 103).
79 Barnouw, _Tube of Plenty_, 334.
80 Kerekes and Slater, _Killing for Culture_, 204. Pennsylvania politician Budd Dwyer is sometimes erroneously included among famous live television deaths; his suicide during a 1987 press conference was recorded but did not air live.
81 Qtd. in Braestrup, _Big Story_, 35.
Pach, “And That’s the Way It Was,” 92. The levels of trust placed in the young medium of television were demonstrated by a series of surveys from the Roper Organization. After several years of war coverage in 1972, for example, respondents reported television as their main source of news and said they would trust television accounts over newspaper accounts in a case of conflicting information by a margin of 48 percent to 21 percent (Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 106).

Implementing official censorship in a never-declared war may have been illegal, would have connoted deception and secrecy at a time when too much was already in the air, and would have taken tremendous additional spending and organization. Plus, the United States could hardly censor foreign reporters who had flocked to the action. Whether due to an ethical investment in the free press or a fear of media outcry, the United States avoided the South Vietnamese participation that would have been essential for effective censorship, assuming it would be excessive (Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam*, 18, 43, 41).


85 Pach, “And That’s the Way It Was,” 95.

86 Rust, “‘Passionate Detachment,’” 48.

87 Pach, “And That’s the Way It Was,” 95.


90 Interview with Adams in *An Unlikely Weapon: The Eddie Adams Story* (2009), directed by Susan Morgan Cooper.


Indeed, more 1960s viewers likely saw the widely reprinted photo than Suu’s footage, which aired only a few times in the years after its debut on *The Huntley-Brinkley Report*: on *The Frank McGee Report* in March 1968 and in NBC’s *From Here to the ’70s* special in 1969 (Bailey and Lichty, “Rough Justice on a Saigon Street,” 227). The distinction is less sharp now, when we can possess copies of the footage (on a number of DVDs featuring it or as a video file downloaded from the Internet).

92 Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 90. Many letters from shocked or outraged readers that newspapers received upon printing Adams’s photo demonstrate that as a still, too, this sight could be “extremely difficult to watch” (Zelizer, *About to Die*, 227–28).


94 Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 19.

95 Pach, “And That’s the Way It Was,” 108.


98 “Death Jump,” for example, from a canister of unused 1912 footage, appears to show the fatal descent of inventor Franz Reichelt from the Eiffel Tower as he tested a new parachute design; the clip has been viewed about 3 million times through the archive’s YouTube channel as of July 2016 (YouTube video, 1:36, posted by...


100 Zelizer, About to Die, 286, 290.

101 I am referencing Supreme Court justice William Brennan’s well-known definition of obscenity: that which is “utterly without redeeming social importance” (United States v. Roth, 354 U.S. 476 [1957], 484).


Chapter 2. The Art of Dying, on Video

1 Freud, “Timely Reflections on War and Death,” 185.

2 See the introduction for further discussion on the history of attitudes toward death in Western culture, and especially Ariès, Western Attitudes toward Death; Ariès, The Hour of Our Death; and Lundgren and Houseman, “Banishing Death.”


4 See chapter 1, note 1.

5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Deaths, Percent of Total Deaths . . . by Race and Sex, United States, 2009,” 2012, http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/LCWK10_2010.pdf, 1–3. I calculated the 7 percent figure from this data set by adding together the percentages of deaths from all violent or possibly violent causes that were included: accident, suicide, assault, “events of undetermined intent,” and “operations of war and their sequelae.”

6 Kastenbaum, On Our Way, 121. Fiction films of the post–classical Hollywood era have made some progress in rectifying these misrepresentations, but many beloved deathbed scenes still contain them. Love Story (1970, Arthur Hiller), for example, presents an emotional deathbed scene between young lovers in which the dying cancer patient, Jennifer, appears beautiful, healthy, and strong on the last day of her life. Amos Vogel writes that Love Story exemplifies “the insufferable sentimentality and the manageable, antiseptic way in which people die in commercial films” (“The Ultimate Secret,” 263).


8 Combs, Deathwatch, 179–214.

9 Some cameras can penetrate the body and show us its inner workings, but (as the next section will illuminate) death as it is currently understood cannot be localized to one visible internal event—like the heart ceasing to beat.


12 Manovich, The Language of New Media, 41–42.
13 Ariès, The Hour of Our Death, 614.
14 It may seem that Imitation’s anachronistic deathbed scene stems from the film’s source material, Fannie Hurst’s popular 1933 novel, published at a time when this kind of dying was a less-distant memory. The death scene in the novel, however, is not framed as strongly as a good death and differs significantly from the film’s (Hurst, Imitation of Life, 265–67).
15 Ariès, The Hour of Our Death, 560.
16 Filene, In the Arms of Others, 63.
17 Anonymous, “Ars bene moriendi.”
18 Kübler-Ross, On Death and Dying, 41–42. Kübler-Ross is herself the subject of a deathbed documentary, though one that is more interested in rehearsing her biography than in chronicking her dying process: Facing Death: Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (2003, Stefan Haupt).
19 Lock, Twice Dead, 7, 59–64, 1, 78.
20 “What and When Is Death?”, 220. The question of defining this “moment” was resurfacing after its seeming resolution at the turn of the century by doctors eager to put resurgent fears of premature burial to rest. These fears had intensified with the introduction of artificial resuscitation—a procedure that cast doubt on the permanence of “death” as it was then determined. Safeguards against death’s vague temporality became popular: waiting periods before burial, bell and flag alert systems to be used by those waking up in buried coffins, and even corpse mutilation (by request) to guarantee death. Consumers considering a coffin bell purchase must have been relieved when doctors in the late nineteenth century agreed that death could be declared confidently when heartbeat and respiration ceased. Alas, within decades the artificial ventilator, “brain-dead” patients, and organ transplant procedures shattered this certainty (Lock, Twice Dead, 66–71).
22 Lock, Twice Dead, 89, 79, 73–74. Lock compares the United States and Japan to demonstrate that well-educated citizens in other medically-advanced countries are less willing to accept medical assurance that “brain dead” donors are truly dead.
23 Lock, Twice Dead, 11. David Magnus, director of the Stanford Center for Biomedical Ethics, shares Lock’s perspective, conceding in a discussion on organ donation that “there is no bright line” between a living person and a dead body, “but we need that distinction for policy reasons” (Sanford, When Are You Dead?).
24 So much was written that the author of a 1979 bibliography on the subject quipped, “Death is a very badly kept secret; such an unmentionable topic that there are over 650 books now in print asserting that we are ignoring the subject” (qtd. in Walter, The Revival of Death, 1). The late twentieth century’s “badly kept secret,” death, had supplanted the nineteenth century’s sex as a taboo—not just simply, but in a rich, Foucauldian sense.
25 Churchill, “The Human Experience of Dying,” 33. Other contributing factors in the early stages of this “revival of death” include consumer advocacy groups (which empowered patients to demand more from medical providers), popular exposés.
on the funeral industry (e.g., Jessica Mitford’s *The American Way of Death* and Ruth Harmer’s *The High Cost of Dying*), and a widespread waning of trust in authority figures (like doctors) (Kastenbaum, *On Our Way*, 113–15).


28 Filene, *In the Arms of Others*, 158.


31 Rose, “Biological Citizens.”

32 Walter, *The Revival of Death*, 2; Leget, “Retrieving the Ars Moriendi Tradition,” 314; Becker, *The Denial of Death*.


34 In addition to Churchill, others calling for “stories over stages” include: Gavin, *Cuttin’ the Body Loose*, 194; Webb, *The Good Death*, xviii; and Byock, *Dying Well*, 36.

35 Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 52. Giddens describes the turn toward self-identity as part of “late modernity,” the same period that others characterized through neoliberal ideology.

36 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Deaths, Percent of Total Deaths,” 4–9. Approximately 11.6 percent of annual African American male deaths are violent, compared to 7.2 percent of all annual U.S. deaths. I calculated these figure from the CDC data set by adding together the percentages of deaths from all violent or possibly violent causes that were included: accident, suicide, assault, “events of undetermined intent,” and “operations of war and their sequelae.”

37 Actually, Sally’s was not the first segment in the original cut that aired on PBS (it was preceded by two interviews), but the only version of *Dying* in distribution during my research—a DVD from Filmakers Library [sic]—begins with Sally.

38 Michael Roemer screened and discussed *Dying* in a documentary course taught by George C. Stoney that I took at New York University in the spring of 2003 (providing my first exposure to the film and my initial interest in documentary representations of death). In his remarks, he claimed that Harriet was well aware that she would likely be perceived as “a bitch,” in her words, and encouraged him to use the footage anyway. After *Dying* aired, she spent time doing invited talks on bereavement and anger.

39 See Nichols, “The Voice of Documentary.” This trend is wonderfully illustrated by Albert and David Maysles’s *Grey Gardens* (1975) in the year before *Dying*, in which the old “fly on the wall” pros allow eccentric subjects to bring them into arguments and to perform overtly for the camera rather than keeping up the charade of its invisibility. More radically still, others were exposing the pretensions and deceptions of the direct cinema style through parody and imitation in powerful faux docu-
mentaries such as David Holzman’s Diary (1967, Jim McBride) and No Lies (1973, Mitchell Block).


43 Kübler-Ross, On Death and Dying, 8.

44 Wood, Expressive Death, qtd. in Walter, The Revival of Death, 32.


46 Kastenbaum recognizes that sometimes in this culture “the good death is the one that achieves” (On Our Way, 123).


48 Michael Roemer (question and answer session, New York University, New York, NY, Spring 2003).


53 This section title references Laura Mulvey’s book Death 24x a Second. “30x a second” reflects the change in frame rates between film and video, though these are not uniform across all types of video production.


55 Kearl, Endings, 387.

56 Fleischer, “Dying to Be on Television,” 30, 32.

57 Near Death, in typical Wiseman fashion, is actually about the intensive care unit as an institution more than it is about people dying. As one of the most generously funded documentarians, Wiseman—despite his notorious shooting ratios—was able to keep working on celluloid into the twenty-first century before making the switch.


59 Kerekes and Slater, Killing for Culture, 261.

60 “Show Business: Death Watch.”

61 Gavin, Cuttin’ the Body Loose, 142.

62 Part of the aesthetic contrast between Dying and The End results from production logistics rather than types of equipment. Dying selected and filmed patients who were still mobile and well enough to spend time outdoors. The End found its subjects through a hospice organization, and therefore began documenting their deaths later in the process, when most were already significantly debilitated and unable to leave home.

64 Roemer, “Filmmaker’s Report on ’Death and Dying’ Film,” 123.
67 Zelizer, About to Die, 157.
68 Walter, The Revival of Death, 22.
69 For comprehensive overviews of autobiographical documentary’s formation and influences, see Renov, The Subject of Documentary, 171–81; and Lane, “The Convergence of Autobiography and Documentary,” 11–32.
70 Sobchack writes about the dying person in these rare scenarios (she mentions only Dying and Silverlake Life) as reviving a style of death ritual described by Ariès in which the dying is the organizer and the guardian of that ritual’s protocols (“Inscribing Ethical Space,” 253).
71 Efforts to hold onto the perishable bodies of the dead were sometimes extreme: one elaborate plan arose to vitrify the deceased’s skeleton, producing a glass-like substance from which to make medallions or a portrait to commemorate that individual (Ariès, The Hour of Our Death, 513–16).
72 Batchen, Forget Me Not, 78.
73 Batchen, Forget Me Not, 87.
74 Renov, The Subject of Documentary, 186.
75 Sobchack, “Inscribing Ethical Space,” 243.
76 Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” 15.
77 This quotation comes from one of the oldest photography advertising slogans: “Secure the Shadow, Ere the Substance Fade, / Let Nature Imitate what Nature Made” (Ruby, Secure the Shadow, 1).
78 I am working from the samples included in Hallas, Reframing Bodies, 131–32.
79 Kastenbaum and Normand, “Deathbed Scenes as Imagined by the Young and Experienced by the Old,” 201; Evans, Walters, and Hatch-Woodruff, “Deathbed Scene Narratives”; Tomer, “Death-Related Attitudes,” 88; Bassett, McCann, and Cate, “Personification of Personal and Typical Death as Related to Death Attitudes,” 163–72.
80 Sobchack, “Inscribing Ethical Space,” 253.
81 Agamben, Homo Sacer. While I believe a loose comparison is apt, I acknowledge that the “actively dying” person does not align perfectly with Agamben’s “homo sacer” (especially in that the dying party still has notable legal rights, as the cases of “brain dead” patients like Terri Schiavo demonstrate).

Chapter 3. “A Negative Pleasure”

1 A suicide into water from a bridge was also staged for the screen during this period by Vsevolod Pudovkin in the fiction film Deserter (1933), complete with languorous slow motion.


Matier and Ross, “Film Captures Suicides on Golden Gate Bridge.”


Sobchack, “Inscribing Ethical Space,” 249.

For more on dead time, see Doane, “Dead Time, or the Concept of the Event,” in The Emergence of Cinematic Time, 140–71. YouTube’s maximum video length is currently about twelve hours, so my assertion is that long documentary videos full of “dead time” would not succeed in YouTube’s “attention economy,” not that the site is technologically incapable of hosting them.

Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays, 4.

Plato, The Dialogues of Plato, 2:265–66; Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, 390. For a visual interpretation of Socrates’s crowded bedside as he drank the hemlock, see Jacques-Louis David’s painting The Death of Socrates (1787).

Friedman, Fictional Death and the Modernist Enterprise, 52. The fourth-century scholar Libanius records Athenian law on suicide as follows: “If your existence is hateful to you, die; if you are overwhelmed by fate, drink the hemlock. If you are bowed with grief, abandon life. Let the unhappy man recount his misfortune, let the magistrate supply him with the remedy, and his wretchedness will come to an end” (qtd. in Durkheim, Suicide, 330).

Durkheim, Suicide, 327–28.


Brown, The Art of Suicide, 73–74. These seem inspired by George Cruikshank’s engraving The Drunkard’s Children (1848), plate VIII.

At least one of these suicides is verifiable through more reputable sources: the Sydney Mail of December 14, 1872, confirms that Alice Blanche Oswald did indeed jump to her death from London’s Waterloo Bridge.

Kushner, Self-Destruction in the Promised Land, 30–37; Brown, The Art of Suicide, 109; Minois, History of Suicide, 191, 281, 297.

Maris, Berman, and Silverman, Comprehensive Textbook of Suicidology, 269; Kushner, Self-Destruction in the Promised Land, 81, 62. Modern suicidology research was sparked by Edwin Schneidman’s chance discovery of a large file of suicide notes in
the L.A. County Coroner’s Office in 1949, which Schneidman reflected on decades later in the most bizarre, and bizarrely earnest, quotation I have read about the study of suicide: “The golden road to the kingdom of understanding suicide was paved with suicide notes” (Maris, Berman, and Silverman, Comprehensive Textbook of Suicidology, 269).

22 Minois, History of Suicide, 321.

23 Qtd. in Kushner, Self-Destruction in the Promised Land, 44–45.

24 Meerloo, Suicide and Mass Suicide, 136. Meerloo’s comment that “the suicidal tendency is infectious. It arouses the suppressed self-destructive inclinations in everybody” reveals the Freudian underpinnings of suicide contagion theory, which posit publicity on individual suicides as feeding latent impulses toward self-destruction (8). Freud’s Beyond the Pleasure Principle controversially argued in 1920 that the life-preserving sexual instincts were in constant tension with destructive “death instincts” that could account for behaviors like suicide among individuals incapable of repressing or sublimating them effectively.

25 Phillips, “The Influence of Suicide on Suggestion.”

26 Swales, Goethe, 58, 94, 99.

27 Duncan, Goethe’s Werther and the Critics, 1, 23. Most scholars treat the book’s alleged influence on suicide rates as unsubstantiated, though Minois lists a number of specific cases in which the corpses of suicides were found with copies of Sorrows (History of Suicide, 267). Fear, at least, of imitation was great enough to get the book banned in Leipzig, Copenhagen, and Italy (Phillips, “The Influence of Suggestion on Suicide,” 340). Leipzig even made wearing the popular “Werther costume” a fineable offense (Swales, Goethe, 97).

28 Wasserman and Wasserman, Oxford Textbook of Suicidology and Suicide Prevention, 520–21.


32 Aaron, “Cinema and Suicide,” 75. Literary representations of suicide have used similar techniques of omission to render the act romantic. Plato, for example, writes about Socrates’s death as gradual and peaceful. Bringing a medical eye to this account, Robert Kastenbaum wonders “where is the agonized gulping for air, the burning sensation in the mouth, the blue tinge of the skin, the tremors, the cramps, the convulsions? Hemlock is nasty stuff. It does not make for a tranquil deathbed scene. The dying person suffers, as would any compassionate witness” (Kastenbaum, On Our Way, 56).


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35 Qtd. in Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 76.


40 Qtd. in *The Falling Man* (2006, Henry Singer). This documentary, originally airing on Britain’s Channel 4, does not have Region 1 DVD distribution but can be streamed on Hulu: http://www.hulu.com/watch/400148.


42 Qtd. in *The Falling Man* (2006, Henry Singer).


45 Junod, “The Falling Man.”


49 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 78–94.


52 Durkheim, *Suicide*, 133, 141.

53 Aaron, “Cinema and Suicide,” 75.


63 The study cited is Seiden, “Where Are They Now?” Seiden tracked 515 individuals who were prevented from killing themselves at the Golden Gate Bridge between 1937 and 1971 and discovered that 90 percent were still alive or had died of natural causes at the time of his data collection.

64 J. Esther, “Suicide at Sundance,” *Curve* 15, no. 3 (May 2005), 67.

65 E-mail message to author, November 17, 2009.

66 In 2014, for example, the film’s official website was remodeled and a new “Suicide Barrier” page appeared, featuring a short, first-person essay from Steel reviewing the history of efforts to build a barrier. In it, he overtly and causally aligns productive steps toward erecting the barrier with significant junctures in *The Bridge’s* production and release. “Notes on the Suicide Barrier at the Golden Gate Bridge,” *The Bridge* official website, http://www.thebridge-themovie.com/suicide-barrier/.

67 My examination covered the 960 entries posted to the official site’s message board through April 5, 2014. Later that year, the message board feature and all its archives were removed in a site remodel.


69 These included the Tribeca Film Festival, the San Francisco International Film Festival, and the London Film Festival.


71 Message boards are at *The Bridge’s* official site and IMDb.com. For memorial sites, see http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=26753163 and http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=37568059894. In the time since I first drafted this chapter, the Facebook group has been made private to Gene’s friends and family.

72 Qtd. in Swales, *Goethe*, 97.


74 Carol Pogash, “Suicides Mounting, Golden Gate Looks to Add a Safety Net,” *New York Times*, March 26, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/27/us/suicides-mounting-golden-gate-looks-to-add-a-safety-net.html?assetType=nyt_now. Though I would not take them as proof of *The Bridge*’s imitative influence on suicide, jumper statistics at the Golden Gate do show a rise that correlates with the film’s circulation. Twenty-five individuals died in 2004, as did 23 in 2005, 34 in 2006 (when *The Bridge* hit theaters), and 35 in 2007 (when the film became available on TV and DVD). *The Bridge* is only one potential factor for the increase among many (including the U.S. economy), but it has been cited as a likely contributor by Bridge District officials and local suicide prevention advocates. Analyzing the

Chapter 4. Streaming Death

1 See chapter 1 for the full passage. Qtd. in Whissel, Picturing American Modernity, 63, 115.
2 Sobchack, “Inscribing Ethical Space,” 237.
3 Hallin, The Uncensored War, 110; Hoskins, Televising War, 13.
4 Torchin, Creating the Witness, 220.
6 Zelizer, Remembering to Forget, 212.
7 Dean, Blog Theory, 110, 125.
8 Torchin, Creating the Witness, 201.
10 The majority of these events’ recordings were made on mobile phones, but a few used stand-alone digital cameras.
12 Perhaps in light of the site’s heavy use during the Arab Spring and by Black Lives Matter activists, YouTube recently updated its guidelines to explicitly acknowledge the following: “Increasingly, YouTube is becoming an outlet for citizen journalists, documentarians and other users” whose videos may contain violent content. YouTube implores those users to contextualize such material “to help viewers understand what they are seeing” (“Community Guidelines: Violent or Graphic Content” (accessed September 29, 2015), http://www.youtube.com/yt/policyandsafety /communityguidelines.html).
Farhad Manjoo, “Virginia Shooting Gone Viral, in a Well-Planned Rollout on Social Media,” New York Times, August 26, 2015. Screenshots of these defunct account pages reveal that Flanagan’s tweet, “I filmed the shooting see Facebook,” was retweeted more than 400 times its first twenty minutes, and the actual video post on Facebook was shared internally on the site 161 times in its first thirteen minutes. Flanagan’s own recording of the murders was their second documentary record, as Flanagan made his assault while one victim was conducting an interview for live broadcast, which involuntarily aired the attack on CBS affiliate WDBJ.


Zelizer, About to Die, 286.


Indeed, some videos on death porn sites directly blend death and sex and advertise that combination, as in TheYNC’s “GORE: Dead and Mutilated Woman in Morgue (Her Tits Stay Unharmed).”


Bazin, “Death Every Afternoon,” 27–31. See the introduction for more on this essay.


28 Sobchack, “Inscribing Ethical Space,” 255. For a more detailed account of Sobchack’s gazes, see the introduction.

29 Quoted from a BBC interview in Now That We Have Tasted Hope (San Francisco: McSweeney’s / Byliner, 2012), Kindle edition.


31 Zelizer, About to Die, 266.


33 Statistics on criminal charges brought against officers demonstrate how unusual Mehserle’s case was. See Demian Bulwa, “Ex-BART Cop Accused of Murder in Rare Group,” San Francisco Chronicle, February 15, 2009, http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/02/15/MN2615QDo1.DTL.

34 Comment from Sepirothkai ("Iran, Tehran: Wounded Girl").


36 The 1968 coverage of Lém’s execution provides a notable predigital precursor. For more on Hollywood’s presentation of death from multiple angles, see Rust, “‘Passionate Detachment,’” 22–42.


39 Evelyn Azeeka Alsultany, contribution to the Roundtable “Keyword Searches: 9/11 Plus Ten” (presented at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association, Baltimore, MD, October 20–23, 2011). I am also grateful to Nazanin Shahrroeni for giving me similar insights in commenting on a draft of this work.

40 Afshar, “Are We Neda?,” 246; Naghibi, “Diasporic Disclosures,” 61, 66.

41 Sabet, “Graphic Content,” 123.

42 Sabet, “Graphic Content,” 123.
One example showing a male protester dying from a shot to the neck has only 844 views and six comments, as of October 2015 [“Protester Shot in Neck in Iran graphic material discretion is advised please do not remove,” YouTube video, 0:43, posted by CensorshipIsBad, June 17, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGsMfOo3q_8]; another of a slain male protester covered in blood has accumulated only 1,598 views and fourteen comments [“How Many More Should Die? Tehran Demonstration 20 June 2009 (+18),” YouTube video, 1:24, posted by penguinswillfly, June 21, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GH8ELmefOjk].


Jean Burgess and Joshua Green describe YouTube as a site that is “U.S.-dominated demographically to an extent; but . . . feels culturally U.S.-dominated out of all proportion” (YouTube, 82).


Butler, Precarious Life, 37.

Barthes, Camera Lucida, 111.

For examples, see comments from soulstealer1995, portisalpha, and dgfmoore on “Iran, Tehran: Wounded Girl.”


See chapter 2, note 36, for statistical details.

Photo count as of November 7, 2013; photos collected at http://nedaspeaks.org/gallery.

Dean, Blog Theory, 3.

The soldier writes: “i know i don’t represent much of the people i serve with, and that saddens me. it’s hard for me to relate to many of these people. but even in the military there are those of us that see what is happening in the world, and we are also appalled. i’m only one country away from iran, and there’s still so little i can do. for what it’s worth, i hope this helps, somehow.” (“I Am Neda”).


Cook, Martyrdom in Islam, 4, 154–55; Varzi, Warring Souls, 47.

Shirazi, “Death, the Great Equalizer,” 115.

Qtd. in “A Death in Tehran,” Frontline, directed by Brent E. Huffman and Katerina Monemvassitis, aired November 17, 2009.

Journalist Scott Peterson speculates, “Part of the strategy like that, certainly for the Islamic Republic, would be to just cast so much doubt, to really just cloud the issue so much, . . . [that] all of it would be meant to somehow undermine the power of the story of Neda’s death” (“Interview: Scott Peterson,” Frontline, September 9, 2009, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/deathin tehran/interviews/peterson.html).

These tropes are described by Cook, Martyrdom in Islam, 116–34.

Examples of Iranians reading Agha-Soltan’s death through the codes of Islamic martyrdom abound in HBO’s For Neda (2010, Anthony Thomas)—a documentary that scarcely mentions the word “martyr,” let alone explains its cultural context, but includes interviewees who weave together a forceful, subtextual martyrology more accessible to viewers steeped in Islamic culture.

Cook, Martyrdom in Islam, 4.


This article ran with a suggestive headline: Demian Bulwa, “Position of Mehserle’s Taser Holster May Be Key,” San Francisco Chronicle, February 14, 2010, http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/02/14/MN8D1B8R8U.DTL.


Alexander, “‘Can You Be BLACK and Look at This?’,” 84, 96.

Bulwa, “Mehserle Video: Clear as Mud.”
77 Williams, Playing the Race Card.
78 Although they occurred too late in this book’s production schedule for me to substantively analyze them here, the recorded deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile should be included in this, tragically, ever-expanding list.
80 To give just one example from statistics released by the U.S. government: “Young black men are killed by police in ‘justified shootings’ at a disproportionate rate, based on Department of Justice statistics. In 1998, there were 48 young black men killed in what were described as ‘justifiable homicides,’ of young white males nearly the same numbers—53. Yet, young black males made up only 1 percent of the total U.S. population and young white males made up 8 percent” (Fulbright, “Many See Race as Central to BART Killing”).
85 Cook, Martyrdom in Islam, 11.

Conclusion
1 Bazin, “Death Every Afternoon,” 30.
2 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 115.
4 Doane, “The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity,” 143.