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Source: *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* / *Cahiers canadiens de sociologie*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Spring, 2005), pp. 189-214

Published by: [Canadian Journal of Sociology](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4146130>

Accessed: 02/12/2013 12:42

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# How Closed-Circuit Television Surveillance Organizes the Social: An Institutional Ethnography<sup>1</sup>

*Kevin Walby*

**Abstract:** Institutional ethnography is a sociological method of inquiry which problematizes social relations at the local site of lived experience, while examining how series of texts coordinate actions, consciousness, and forms of organization in extra-local settings. This paper will demonstrate that institutional ethnography is a critically innovative way to study the socio-technical dynamics of camera surveillance. Closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance video should be conceptualized as a text which is active and activated, coordinating lived realities and facilitating organization at the institutional level within a specific ruling framework. Research was conducted with camera operators in a Suburban Mall CCTV control room located in Victoria, BC. The talk of CCTV operators in their work setting demonstrates how video is used to coordinate lived realities and facilitate extra-local organization. The findings of this study suggest the gravity of racialized profiling in everyday surveillance and complicate Foucault's Panopticon metaphor.

**Résumé:** L'ethnographie institutionnel est une méthode d'enquête sociologique qui questionne des relations sociales à l'emplacement local d'une expérience vécue, tout en examinant comment les séries de textes coordonnent des actions, la conscience, et des formes d'organisation dans les arrangements supplémentaires-locaux. Cet article démontre que l'ethnographie institutionnel est une manière innovatrice et critique d'étudier la dynamique socio-technique de la surveillance de camera. La vidéo de surveillance de la télévision à circuit fermé (CCTV) devrait être conceptualisée en tant qu'un texte qui est en activité et activé, qui coordonnent les expériences vécues et qui organise au niveau institutionnel dans un cadre régnant particulier. La recherche a été conduite avec des opérateurs de camera dans une salle de commande d'une CCTV suburbaine mail située à Victoria,

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1. I would like to thank Dr. Dorothy E. Smith for her input into this paper, and also for her tireless efforts as a groundbreaking and personable scholar. I would also like to thank Dr. Sean P. Hier and Dr. M.E. Leighton for their suggestions and support, as well as the knowledgeable and articulate academics who reviewed this paper at the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* for their important comments/critiques.

B.C. L'entretien des opérateurs de CCTV dans leur arrangement de travail on démontré comment la vidéo est utilisée pour coordonner des réalités vécues et pour faciliter l'organisation supplémentaire-locale. Les résultats de cette étude opposent la théorie de Foucault au sujet du Panopticon. D'ailleurs, on explique l'importance de la catégorie de "race" quant à la surveillance.

## Introduction

Social interaction is increasingly mediated textually, by paper, electronic, and televisual media. Series of texts, inscribed in words and images, are used to coordinate the activities of people in everyday life. Institutional ethnography problematizes social relations at the local site of lived experience, while examining how series of texts contribute to the coordination of actions, consciousness, and forms of social organization in extra-local settings (Smith, 1987; 1999). Once texts are seen as fundamentally *active* constituents of sociality and work processes, read and *activated* by social actors, the method alters the ontology of established sociology so as to uncover how daily activities arrange and assemble ruling practices. As both a form and critique of sociology, institutional ethnography aims to explicate ruling practices as they are worked by actual people via textually-mediated coordination to organize our lives.

In most western nation-states during the last decade, there has been a rapid diffusion of closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance into open-streets, apartment complexes, and places of consumption. Within the new paradigm of neo-liberal governance, CCTV has been implemented to "reaestheticise" particular geospatial locations throughout the city and to promote consumer friendliness (Fyfe and Bannister, 1996; Coleman and Sim, 2000; 1998). Inside the quasi-public space of the shopping mall, the body language of citizens is relentlessly scrutinized from a distance by CCTV operators, though a high number of people remain unaware of the cameras (Honest and Charman, 1992:6). Ethnographic research has been conducted in CCTV control rooms,<sup>2</sup> but, to the knowledge of this author, no study of CCTV monitoring has been conducted from the perspective of institutional ethnography. What differentiates institutional ethnography from other forms of ethnography is its focus on texts as coordinating social organization both in local and across extra-local settings.<sup>3</sup> This study falls roughly into the category of ethnographic "workplace studies" which are concerned with the practical details of organizational activity and the use of technology (Heath, Luff, & Svensson, 2002; Heath, Hindmarsh & Luff, 1999).

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2. See McCahill (2002), Heath, Luff, & Svensson (2002), and Norris and Armstrong (1999b) for the most in-depth studies. These works will figure prominently throughout this paper.
  3. Institutional ethnography's advantage over other forms of ethnography is that it explicates both ethnosocial *and* structural features of social organization.

In order to examine CCTV from the perspective of institutional ethnography, it is key to conceptualize CCTV video images as a form of text<sup>4</sup> which is central to the coordination of peoples' activities. This coordination can occur in two ways, both of which depend on an interpretive activation of the text by a CCTV operator: (1) understood as a "rolling text," CCTV video can result in the real time concerting of a sequence of events;<sup>5</sup> (2) understood as an "initiating text," CCTV video is rewritten and reinterpreted as a series of texts which can coordinate social activity between different complexes of social organization. By means of video as a "rolling text," the shopper-turned-risk is caught in the act of shoplifting by the CCTV operator. Through the video as an "initiating text," the act of the offender is written up and distributed to various institutions in a process involving televisual mall surveillance, risk detection and risk communication.

This paper will show how CCTV video, conceptualized as a televisual text or a primary source in a series of televisual and non-televisual texts, coordinates actions/events and subsequently plays a role in reproducing social relations. Institutional ethnography offers a novel methodological approach to analyzing camera surveillance. Research for this paper was conducted with camera operators in a Suburban Mall's CCTV control room located in Victoria, BC. The data are a combination of unstructured interviews and observations that occurred in the CCTV control rooms while the CCTV operators worked. It must be stressed, however, that the data presented here are part of an ongoing project and therefore limited.

### **Reading Video through the Lens of Institutional Ethnography: Texts as "Active" and "Activated"**

#### *Institutional Ethnography*

Institutional ethnography sees texts as active in shaping and reproducing social relations.<sup>6</sup> For Dorothy E. Smith, participants in social relations are not necessarily known to one another, but are connected through texts and the

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4. For an introductory discussion of conceptualizing video as text, see Scholes (1991).

5. The "rolling text" is just as easily conceptualized as a "real time" text. What differentiates the "rolling" or "real time" text from the "initiating text" are the temporal and spatial locations of subsequent actions taken by CCTV operators, authorities, extra-local organizations, etc.

6. This is not to reduce institutions to texts, but rather to show that texts are the foundational media in co-ordinating people's work activities in institutional complexes (Smith, 2001:175). *Social relations* refer to "concerted sequences or courses of social action implicating more than one individual whose participants are not necessarily known to one another" (Smith, 1987:155). See Curtis (2002) for a discussion of the varying constructions of "the social" in modernity.

organizational features which envelope work processes. *Institutions* identify a “complex of relations forming part of the ruling apparatus, organized around a distinctive function,” and *ethnography* commits us to an exploration of “the persons whose everyday world of working is organized thereby” (Smith, 1987:160). Institutional ethnography draws on Marx and his conception of political economy and class structure arising from the activities of people (Smith, 1990:94), but also on ethnomethodology, in which the institutional ethnographer finds significant the common-sense knowledges of people and how they think, intend, and feel in the local settings of their work (Smith, 1999:75).

Institutional ethnography goes further to focus on texts as they structure our thinking, intending, and feeling, and seizes critical advantage of texts as they are accessible for research. As a method of inquiry, institutional ethnography exposes both our own engagement with textually-mediated interaction and the ruling practices which texts organize. The text must be seen as active; there is always something in the text which, existing *in potentia*, enters into the organization of what is to come (Smith, 2001:174). For this to happen, the text must be activated by a reader. Activation involves a reading of the text, and each reader brings with her/him a set of informal rules about how to approach the text. These rules are manifestations of the institutional ruling practices in which the reader is embedded.

For the institutional ethnographer, texts are conceptualized as data, but not in the same sense as data are construed in established sociology. Most methods of traditional sociology reduce social relations to an immutable portion of a totality, thereby contributing to objectified knowledges. Established sociology has “found ways of appropriating others” voices for “its own uses without being accountable to them” (Smith, 1999:155). Institutional ethnography instead discovers the workings of everyday/everynight lived reality, thereby preserving people’s presence as subjects (Smith, 1987:151). Texts are not inert, but through activation have the capability to do untold work upon bodies, consciousness, and social organization.

### *Video Surveillance in Modernity*

Video is the central artifact in the shift from logocentrism to imagocentrism, from faith in the word to faith in the image. We live in a surveillance society (Lyon, 2002; 2001), which doubles as a televisual culture. Visualization is essential to knowledge reproduction and therefore bound up in the exercising of social power (Jenks, 1995; Jay, 1995; Macphee, 2002). Video has challenged the written word for top status as the characteristic textual medium. Anthony Giddens asserts “the development of writing greatly extends the scope of distanciated interaction in space as well as in time” (1979:204). To

conceptualize video as a text, we must see video, aided by the technologies of satellite and fiber optics, as extending the scope of distanciated interaction beyond the spatial potential of written texts. The possibilities of new visual technologies like CCTV are implicated in a complex new arrangement of social relations, transforming what it means to be visible, who can be visible and when (Cragg, 1996:2103). Images increasingly influence political decisions. CCTV is a distanciated form of governance,<sup>7</sup> which dismantles long established time-space boundaries and therefore alters the mode of interaction between authorities and citizens.<sup>8</sup>

One of the most distinguishing features of modernity is the power of the visual, evidenced in Foucault's discussion of the Panopticon and panopticism (1979). The Panopticon is the predominant, if not over-indulged in, metaphor used to describe modern surveillance practices. Foucault sees the Panopticon as a technique used to administer or discipline large numbers of people within a particular institution (Poster, 1984:101). The Panopticon forces people into enclosed spaces where they can be watched so as to normalize their behaviour along institutional contours (Bauman, 1998:52). Despite contentions to the contrary (Deleuze, 1990; Lianos, 2003), and serious problems with the Panopticon metaphor,<sup>9</sup> it is important not to jettison Foucault's concept of panopticism because it insistently reminds us of the presumptuous ambition of both state and non-state organizations to *see* and to *know* everything, and of the ways in which data collection and knowledge are intertwined (Webster, 1995; Boyne, 2000). CCTV cameras involve a relationship of power between the watcher and the watched, signifying the continued resonance of panopticism in the 21st century (Norris and Armstrong, 1999a:5).

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7. Following James Tully (2001:51), I conceptualize governing as any co-ordinated form of human interaction, for interaction "involves reciprocal, multiple, and overlapping relations of power and authority in which the actions of some agents guide the actions of others." Also see Rose (2000b:142) for a similar description.
  8. It is now common for banks and other commercial entities to outsource their video monitoring to settings situated thousands of kilometers away. The cameras remain local, but "the watchers" are now extra-local. As a Canadian example, banks in downtown Victoria and Vancouver transmit the live images caught on their CCTV to Toronto via fiber optic connections. The CCTV operators in Toronto then alert authorities in the given city if need be, thereby orchestrating subsequent social events.
  9. The prevalence of discreet and mundane surveillance practices does not create the automatic functioning of power that Foucault had envisioned. For instance, CCTV cameras are sometimes not noticed by the people who fall under the optical gaze. The presence of cameras does not directly alter people's behaviour. Citizens regularly commit litigious acts, despite knowing they are likely to be caught. While we have not seen the closure of agency implied in Foucault's disciplinary society, the desire to know, watch, classify, and exclude — panopticism — remains central to CCTV surveillance.

The postmodern mall is instrumentally designed to promote purchasing, and hyperreal fixtures mask its highly controlled nature (Gottidiener, 2003:132). Citizens shop in malls for the perceived advantages of heightened security and levels of safety which streetscape shopping spaces do not provide. The sense of safety in the quasi-public space<sup>10</sup> of the mall reflects the intensity of surveillance provided by private security personnel and CCTV (Fyfe and Banister, 1998:258). The perception of order, its “agreeable ambiance” (Lianos and Douglas, 2000:115), makes the mall a favorite place of the consumer for purchasing commodities and services. CCTV is the televisual means to govern visions of order and disorder in spaces of consumption. Business and moral entrepreneurs are in constant tension with visions of disorder, like fear of “crime” and homelessness, in their attempts to achieve social hygiene and consumer friendly spaces. Malls therefore follow strict norms of consumer citizenship, favouring the efficient user.

CCTV serves as an authoritative tool which aids in policing those persons unwilling or unable to subscribe to consumerist ideology out of the mall. CCTV control rooms operate as the “nerve centre” of shopping malls, where risk information is managed and communicated, and where decisions are made immediately (Helten and Fischer, 2003:21). Plugged into the information circuitry and organizational interests of the mall, the CCTV operators use the camera technology, as well as their practical knowledge and familiarity with the store (Heath, Luff, & Svensson, 2002:186), to collect and collate televisual data which they use to manage the flow of shoppers.

### *Video as Text: Active and Activated*

Video is the textual device of CCTV surveillance, and is *active* in that it is used to coordinate lived realities and facilitate organization at the institutional, extra-local level. In one sense, I conceptualize CCTV video as a “rolling text,” used to mediate sociality and work processes within the local setting directly in the moment. In a second sense, I conceptualize CCTV as an “initiating text,” akin to how a written text would be dealt with in institutional ethnography. The “initiating text” overlaps with a series of texts, facilitating extra-local

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10. Increasingly there is confusion over what constitutes public versus private space. For Slater, “the shopping mall indicates the most profound contemporary confusion of public and private: it is a private development which ‘simulates’ a public sphere which has all but disappeared from contemporary society” (1998:150). Implementation of CCTV constitutes the privatization of public spaces. For Christian Parenti (2003:110), public space is a resource, a democratic platform, and this holds true for the Greek polis through to the town square and the contemporary city streetscape. Parenti writes, “destroying or controlling these public spaces has always been a political tool by which rulers battle restive populations (ibid).

organization of the social and the production of information. A discussion of video as text is entirely consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of institutional ethnography.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the “rolling” and “initiating” texts are bound up in the two dialectically related characteristics of surveillance: the collation and storage of information concerning a subject population, and the direct supervision of that population’s conduct (Giddens, 1981:5, 1991:15; Dandeker 1990:37)

Beyond phenomenal analyses of content, texts help organize courses of concerted social action (Smith, 1990:121). Video is active in that it can serve as an “initiating text,” being rewritten and reinterpreted into a series of non-video texts which can coordinate social activity between different complexes of social organization. Like the field notes of a police officer or sociologist, the video data is rewritten within an institutional discourse which frames the text in light of a ruling practice. Wrenched out of social relations and transcribed into written text, the televisual data are a constituent in concerting future events, actions, and work. In the case of CCTV video, video’s function as an “initiating text” is evident in its transcription by a CCTV operator into other documents (e.g. incident reports, logbooks) which are then used to coordinate relations between authorities, social services, Courts, etc.

As a “rolling text,” CCTV video is active in the immediate sense, being a constant display of people and their behaviours. The CCTV operator reads the embodied ambiguities of shoppers/citizens as they move on and off the screen; this reading of the video frames the body language, dress, skin colour, age, etc., of the shoppers/citizens as normal or abnormal, suspicious or unsuspicious. The “rolling text” is active because it informs consciousness and social organization in real time, as the text unfolds itself to the CCTV operator. A particular reading of the text by the CCTV operator can lead to security work on the floor level. The experience of the shopper/citizen can be radically altered. What was before a leisurely period of shopping can become a threatening experience, inundated with authorities. A CCTV operator, informed by the video, may communicate to a floorwalker to track a shopper, issue a security alert, or contact police authorities. This conceptualization of video as text will crystallize when we engage with the interview data. Video is active just like the plethora of other texts which organize the social, and activation of both the “initiating text” and the “rolling text” hinges on an exegetic reading by a CCTV operator.

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11. Smith writes that textual-mediation co-ordinate work organization in two senses: “one the actual local setting in which it goes on and the other the hook-ups it creates with other setting and text-reader conversations of other people reading the same text” (2001:175).



In order to coordinate interaction, texts need to be read and *activated*. Activation of a text is bound up in the interpretative and subjective processes of human consciousness, reading, and action:

That it is activated by the reader means that the activity or operation of the text is dependent upon the reader's interpretative practices. These too are constituents of social relations rather than merely the idiosyncrasies of individuals. (Smith, 1990:121)

This interpretative aspect is an unfailing characteristic of televisual social monitoring: "[operators] rely on a set of normatively based, contextual rules to draw their attention to any behaviour that disrupts the 'normal'" (Norris, 2003:265). The reader both activates and responds to the text. Activation is therefore informed by a subjective reading which has in part been structured by institutional discourses and other informal socialization processes.

In conceptualizing "video as text," one must consider how video is interpreted by the camera operators, and how this interpretation is translated into an institutionally-fit language which then orchestrates action. Of particular concern are the body language or embodied ambiguities on the part of citizens which are classified and interpreted by camera operators as suspicious, the social activities that the operator's reading of the video text overlooks,<sup>12</sup> and the subjective processes of the operators which are written into the text during the work of reading, interpretation, transcription, and activation. Moreover, textually-mediated work occurs within specific organizational settings, and is couched in discursive and ruling practices.

### *Textually-Mediated Discourse and Ruling Relations*

Any co-ordinated form of human interaction that involves reciprocal, multiple, and overlapping relations, in which the actions of some social actors guide the actions of others, can be a ruling relation. Textually-based ruling relations structure consciousness via discursive processes in such a way that social relations are seen as disconnected. Smith writes,

The ruling relations "extract" the coordinative and concerting of people's everyday/everynight activities and subject them to technological and technical specialization, elaboration, differentiation, and objectification. They become independent of particular individuals ... Coordination and concerting are leached out of localized and particularized relations. ... (1999:77)

The use of texts in work processes has the effect of objectifying social relations, making them appear as mere moments as opposed to ongoing social

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12. In the collection of televisual information, the nuances of a citizen's daily life which constitute their presentation of self are overlooked under the CCTV operator's scrutiny, thereby reduced to basic behavioural components.

courses of action (Campbell and Manicom, 1995:7). This form of social consciousness is a property of organization, which is manifested in the creation of institution-linking texts or series of texts. Discourses<sup>13</sup> within ruling relations affect social actors in such a way that they conceptualize their own position within the field of relations as disconnected from the position of other social actors (Sharma, 2001:420), rendering the organizational features of a particular institution invisible and in need of problematization. Care should be taken, however, not to homogenize discourse across individual-social networks of communication, or conflate discourse *as* ideology, despite the fact that discursive processes are ideological in their effects (Purvis and Hunt, 1993). Particular to specific locales, discursive processes are continuously re-oriented by the CCTV operators. The status of discourse is as much an outcome of interactions between operators and video as it is an input which frames practices of camera surveillance.

The expansion of textually-mediated discourses of ruling has largely occurred over the past century, and this expansion has been enabled by the development of technologies that permit the rapid reproduction and circulation of texts in multiple sites (McCoy, 1995:184). I am arguing that video, and more specifically of CCTV video surveillance, should be conceptualized similarly, as a text which is active, activated, and contributing to the organization of sociality and work processes within an identifiable ruling framework.

Several discourses inform the “activation” of CCTV video. In commercial settings, a discourse of the flawed consumer and underclass informs the consciousness of CCTV operators. Flawed consumers are those citizens “who are unable to respond to the enticements of the consumer market because they lack the required resources” (McCahill, 2002:11), or those who respond through illicit activity (e.g. shoplifting); the underclass are those who constitute the growing army of unemployed and homeless increasingly seen not as a social group to be integrated, but as dangerous “anti-social” groups, as “risks to be policed” (ibid.:16; Goldberg, 1993:169; Rose, 2000a:195). Discourses converge across different sites and are prevalent in synoptic<sup>14</sup>

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13. Discourse is produced wherever work is regulated through series of texts. By means of the reading, writing, and viewing of books, magazines and videos we can locate the intersection between our everyday discursive activity and the hierarchal structures of business, state, authority, and capital.

14. The synoptic is reciprocal of, and dialectically related to, the panoptic. Thomas Mathiesen (1997) argues that we live in a synoptic/viewer society. Synoptic processes refer to situations where “a large number focuses on something in common which is condensed” (ibid.:219). Most often, the “large number” views decontextualized news iconography. In the synoptic news, material is hurled back into the open society as stereotypes and terrifying stories about individual cases.

media, but CCTV operators participate in and reproduce the discourses through their meticulous monitoring of citizens. CCTV facilitates the coordination of action and events in settings far removed from the local, coordinating social relations through the orchestration of events which safeguard capitalist accumulation. It is through discursive processes that common knowledge of this coordination is subverted.

## **An Institutional Ethnography of CCTV Surveillance**

### *Method of Inquiry*

Utilizing interviews in the work setting, interviews outside the work setting, and observation, the institutional ethnographer uncovers the organizational features of a given set of textually-mediated interactions. Embedded in informants' talk about their work is their tacit knowledge of how to concert their own pieces of the work with the work of others. Interviewing in institutional ethnography differs from other styles of interviewing, as the method attempts to locate the multiple points of textually-mediated coordination of action within/between organizations.<sup>15</sup> When interviews are used in this approach, "they are used not to reveal subjective states, but to locate and trace points of connection among individuals working in different parts of institutional complexes of activity" (Devault and McCoy, 2002:753). The interviewers' aim "is to elicit talk that will not only illuminate a particular circumstance but also point towards next steps in an ongoing, cumulative inquiry into translocal process" (ibid). Informants reveal certain characteristics of the textually-mediated discursive processes which inform their position in an organization.

Research for this paper was conducted with camera operators in a Suburban Mall's CCTV control room located in Victoria, BC. The control room was situated in a large department store, part of an even larger suburban shopping complex. The interviews went on for lengthy periods of time, and the transcribed versions of the interviews are not fully presented here. This study utilized open-ended interviewing and observation; freedom in research design is important because it allows the informants to tell the story of their work.<sup>16</sup> The primary structuring device of the interviews was to get the CCTV operators to describe their average shift while the researcher logged hours in the actual control room, and these data were supplemented by observations of the operators' work processes.

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15. The focus of the interviews was not the informant herself, but rather the institutional complex in which she worked.

16. See Smith (1987), pp 187-190 for an "in practice" methodological outline of institutional ethnography.

The aim of the interviews was three-fold: (1) to explicate the interpretive aspects of the CCTV operators' work, which indicates how they read and activate the "video as text," but also indicates the textually-mediated discursive processes which envelope their work process; (2) to listen for and ask about texts or series of texts which are the active constituents of work-related activity and sociality (Devault and McCoy, 2002:765); (3) to connect the active text(s) and its activation to an extra-local organizational complex. Police authorities and Courts are the principal extra-local organizational complexes, although the Suburban Mall is connected to many other extra-local organizations. The terms and forms of language derived from the interview are those of the informant, not the institutional ethnographer (Smith, 1987:189). To protect the anonymity of the informants and organizations, pseudonyms are substituted for their names.

## Research Findings and Analysis

### *Resource Protection Officers W & T at Suburban Mall*

Resource Protection Officers W & T are both white males in their late twenties. The retail outlet, situated in part of Suburban Mall, wholesales over \$50 million in merchandise a year. W & T are "resource protection officers," and are less concerned with filling arrest quotas than with preventing the loss of capital.<sup>17</sup> Officers W & T work as both the CCTV operators and the floor-walkers, communicating between the floor and the control room with mobile phones, plugged into the information network of the municipal police. Officers W & T work eight hour shifts, either between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. or 1 p.m. and 9 p.m. Several other CCTV operators are employed by the department store, but Officer W is the lead supervisor and therefore responsible for administrative duties. Incentives for pay raises are related to the annual amount of "resources protected," and the individual allocation of pay raises is supervised by Officer W.

The department store at Suburban Mall has a 27-camera monitoring system, one of the most sophisticated in Victoria, BC. Three multiplexers condense the 27 cameras into three, recordable screens. Cameras are used primarily to track and record the actions of those citizens deemed suspicious, but cameras are also used to monitor the work of employees and for internal audits.<sup>18</sup> The

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17. For a similar conclusion see Beck and Willis (1995).

18. For instance, officers W & T place tiny, nearly undetectable, cameras in discreet locales for monitoring internal theft. Workplace surveillance is an entirely different set of phenomena. Capitalist workplaces are primary sites of surveillance (Lyon, 2003:163). There is not space in this article to fully explicate the practices of work place surveillance as it pertains to my research at Suburban Mall. For more on this, see Zureik (2003).

CCTV control room is located near the back of the store, closest to the exit leading into Suburban Mall and furthest away from the exit leading onto a main street in the city. Before the implementation of the camera system, Suburban Mall lost nearly \$1 million to theft each year. This figure has been cut back by several hundred thousand in the five years since the camera system was implemented. Both Officer W and Officer T were present in the control room at the time of the interviews.

### *Officers W & T and the “rolling text” at Suburban Mall*

When CCTV video is conceptualized as a “rolling text,” of interest is how the text *immediately* transforms social relations at the local setting. Officers W & T read the actions of people on the screen. In interpreting the CCTV text, Officers W & T assume “everyone is a thief” (Officer W) “until proven innocent ... [laughs]” (Officer T). They read the video text from the interpretative-institutional frame which presumes each person who enters the store is a potential risk — a potential shoplifter.<sup>19</sup> As explicated later in the data, Officers W & T do not target suspicion equally towards all shoppers; rather, their informal watching rules direct intensified surveillance at racialized minorities, single mothers, persons receiving income assistance, and other socially constructed categories of citizens coded as “abnormal.” This influences W & T’s reading of the video text; the same segment of video might be read completely differently by a reader external to the organizational complex. Embodied ambiguities arise in the practice of Officers W & T watching and interpreting the intentions of people who participate in the everyday routine of shopping.

K: What do you look for in people’s actions?

OFFICER W: On a camera system, you are twelve feet up, so it is a different perspective than on the floor, you can see a lot more ...

OFFICER T: You can also get in a lot closer, you know, zoom in and see how old their shoes are ...

OFFICER W: What they are doing with their hands ...

OFFICER T: First thing you look for is if they are *sketchy*, if they are dirty and sketchy ... if they are scruffy ... either they are shopping or they are not shopping.

OFFICER W: Shopping behaviours, you know, you see someone walk in the store and they go straight for a high-end item. Most people they walk in, they browse, they ask for help, but if they go straight for the boom box ...

OFFICER T: If they are carrying bags, if they come in the store with a big GAP bag, you know, what are they doing with the bag? They probably came on the bus from a different mall ...

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19. Gary T. Marx (1988) argues that new surveillance technologies, like audio and visual monitoring, trigger a shift towards categorical suspicion.

Shopper behaviour seen as inherently abnormal by Officers W & T would not be self-evident to the lay viewer. Normative judgments about what constitutes a regular shopper are implicit in Officers W & T's reading of the text; these normative judgments are manifestations of the organizational features of the institution where they work. Given the volume of people potentially monitored at any given moment, "operators utilize their already existing understanding of who is most likely to commit crime or be troublesome to provide potential candidates for targeted surveillance" (Norris and Armstrong, 1999b:119). There are many embodied ambiguities that Officers W & T socially construct and scrutinize during their work of watching:

K: Do you have a list of things you look for ... things which would make you think someone was suspicious?

OFFICER T: You always look at their shoes. If they got dirty shoes ...

OFFICER W: 99% of the time a shoplifter will have bad shoes ...

OFFICER T: Except sometimes a shoplifter might have good shoes, 'cause they stole them ...

OFFICER W: Baggy coats, everyone has their own method. A big one is their hands, what are they holding, what are they carrying. If they aren't looking at the price tags, they are just grabbing stuff, you know, people don't shop like that ... we'll look for grab-n-runs, we'll look for people leaving their bikes right by the front door ...

OFFICER T: Sometimes someone will grab something, like a couple pairs of underwear, then they'll go and get a pair jeans and lay them over top, or they'll leave something in one part of the store and come back to it, so you wait for them to come back and then you nab them ...

OFFICER W: Or they'll bunch something up in their hands ...

OFFICER T: Or they will have been in the store a couple days before, they'll have a receipt for something, they'll grab the same item and walk up to counter and try to exchange it, they'll say they have a receipt for it and they'll try to return it.

OFFICER W: A lot of the time people will be touching their faces, they'll be very nervous, even the experienced ones. It is like poker — everyone has a tell!

Both Officers W & T received university educations in psychology. Officer W completed his M.A. in behaviourism. Clearly, the reading of people and their actions is a central part of the CCTV operator's job at Suburban Mall. They not only read the screen for criminal behaviour, but also for behaviour they treat as indicative of potential criminal behaviour (Norris and Armstrong, 1999b: 130; Graham 1998:490), like the parking of a bicycle near the front door or the wringing of hands. CCTV becomes activated when the officer's reading of the text influences his next action, orchestrating a sequence of social events.

OFFICER T: Sometimes you can zoom in, catch the number on a credit card, type it in on the computer, and it says the account holder is born in 1921, but the guy with the card is only a twenty-year old. It is reasonable to say that it is not his card ... sometimes you type it in and it is a stolen card, so you let them buy the stuff and then you get them outside and arrest them.

OFFICER W: Sometimes we don't even have to move. Like if we recognize a person who has come in, we can just page them, say "so and so please come to the Resource Protection office." So they'll know we're watching them, they'll get spooked, and they'll leave. Or we'll flash our radios. That is where the prevention side of it comes in. Or, if a person we recognize comes in, they steal, and they get off with some merchandise, we can just phone the cops and tell them and they can go to their house and arrest them.

In both these instances, the CCTV as "rolling text" is used to coordinate a sequence of events in real time. In the credit-card fraud scenario, the social event takes place in the local setting. In the case of the grab-n-run shoplifter who escapes the store, the event is coordinated via communication with police in the extra-local setting.<sup>20</sup> In the case of the known offender, the public address system allows the operator to make announcements directly to the offender, which also alerts other workers in the store. Suspicious activity is sometimes first identified by workers in other sections of the building (Heath, Luff, & Svensson, 2002:190). Mobile phones aid communication within the store, so that the operator on the floor can contact the operator in the CCTV control room and vice versa:

K: So one of you is in the control room and one of you is out on the floor, how do you communicate?

OFFICER T: We got walkie talkies and portable phones, so when three of us are in, maybe we'll have one in the control room, one on the floor and one at the exit. So Officer W will say "heh he is going out," and we'd make the arrest ...

When citizens are detected as shoplifters, they are placed under citizens' arrest by officers W & T. The experience of the shopper-turned-risk is immediately altered. The criminal code, a text in itself and part of a series of texts (which includes the video), directly informs their work:

K: So you call in the police?

OFFICER W: Yup, every time we make an arrest.

OFFICER T: Section 494 of the criminal code states that to arrest a person you have to report it to the police, if not you will be charged for acting as a cop when you are not a cop ...

K: So you're making citizens' arrests?

OFFICER W: Yup, we have the right to detain someone for shop theft.

### *Officers W & T and the "initiating text" at Suburban Mall*

The "initiating text" can be rewritten and reinterpreted into a series of texts which overlap and facilitate extra-local organization of the social. Writing

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20. For a discussion of police-community interaction and the enforcement of security from the perspective of the information age and risk society, see Ericson and Haggerty (1997).



practices are crucial to collecting and processing information and to classification; they also play a key role in constructing and objectifying consumers (Callon, 2002:199). At Suburban Mall, CCTV video is put into words, written into a logbook, rewritten into an incident report (sometimes referred to as an RCC by Officers W & T), which is subsequently sent to a host of interrelated organizational complexes. They are interrelated through administrative practices which are co-textually-mediated.

K: Do you write happenings down in a logbook?

OFFICER T: Yeah, we write it down in the logbook, and also we have reports ...

K: Incident reports?

OFFICER W: But today, a known shoplifter was in the store, she was looking around, and we recognized her. So we went down to talk to her, we spooked her, she left the mall, so I called mall security and said, "Hey, look, a known shoplifter just exited the store and went into the mall, she is probably looking for vacuum cleaners ..."

K: So this would get written in the incident report?

OFFICER W: This would get written in the logbook, what she was wearing, the time, what she was looking at ... If there is an arrest we'll start an RCC, we'll call the police and we'll start an official file ...

K: So the logbook is used to build an incident report, and the RCC is an official incident report?

OFFICER W: A lot of times it is ...

OFFICER T: We have our store incident report which gets emailed to Toronto ...

OFFICER W: And it gets catalogued nationally ...

OFFICER T: Then there is a report to Crown Counsel. That becomes a Crown document, on file, and the police handle that, it goes to the Courthouse, and it is used if we have to testify if they don't plead guilty.

K: So what will you write?

OFFICER T: We'll note down physical characteristics, they were looking around, here and there, they were paying more attention to their surroundings than normal shoppers do ...

OFFICER W: And then if you're off for a couple of days you come in and you always review the logbook, see what happened, find out who has been in ...

K: So the RCC it ...

OFFICER W: It is the same form that the police use ...

OFFICER T: It is the same program on the computer that the police have.

The video as text is interpreted as a "rolling text," and then transcribed, taking the form of an "initiating text." It initiates a series of texts which orchestrates a future sequence of social events. Officers W & T transcribe the CCTV image, which is reinterpreted and re-transcribed into the incident report, which



can be sent to a host of interrelated organizational complexes including the police, the Crown Counsel, the Courts, and the head office in Toronto via email. Moreover, the incident report exists at the outset as a computer file which is compatible with the method of police record-keeping. Further probing revealed the organizational depth to which the incident report coordinates action:

K: Who else receives the incident reports?

OFFICER T: John Howard society, through the Crown.

OFFICER W: Yeah, whoever needs to get a copy of it just talks to the Crown and can get one. Yeah, the John Howard society gets them, "cause they deal with a lot of offenders. They rehabilitate offenders. They get a copy of the incident report and make them realize what they did wrong and they have to write an apology to the store.

OFFICER T: Baby strollers are a hot thing too. Yeah, because they are new moms and they don't work, and they have their kid all day long, they need something to do and apparently they shoplift. A lot of them will go, fill up the bottom of the stroller ... sometimes Social Services gets involved, especially around the children ...

K: Do they get a copy of the incident report?

OFFICER W: Oh yeah.

OFFICER T: And if you're caught on tape, well, most people plead guilty. And if they don't, and we got them on tape, we just forward it to the defence attorney and they usually change their plea.

K: So how does the video get used by the Courts?

OFFICER W: If I actually had to testify it would be played by the Court as part of the testimony, and basically I'd be describing it as if I am the camera operator. I'd be explaining what I was doing, what he was doing, like, "here he is folding some clothes over some others," you know?

K: Where else does the incident report go?

OFFICER T: Every RCC we fill out, the video evidence is available upon request, so that's why we try to get everything on tape, 'cause if all you have is your logbook notes, the defence attorney will cross examine you and try to screw you up.

K: What about the tapes?

OFFICER W: It depends on the level of interest, like sometimes on a big case the video evidence can go to the regional manager in Vancouver, and it might make it up all the way to Toronto to the national manager.

OFFICER T: And we're not really allowed to give away the video footage, but if there is a known offender then we can make a photo from the video and forward it to other store locations.

An incident report for each offender, initiated by the video text, is forwarded to the Crown Counsel, the defence attorney, the Court, and in some cases to the John Howard Society and to Social Services. These are examples of how the video as text becomes a written text and then facilitates further work processes. The video as text itself is sent to the regional manager in Vancouver or the

national manager in Toronto, and can also be used as a standardizing piece of evidence within the Courtroom. Within the Court room, the tape is re-interpreted using the professional language and interpretative-institutional frame of the CCTV operator (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1999), who is located within a specific organizational framework within the shopping complex. "Professionals," like the CCTV operator, have the power to legitimately visualize and put into words the events which unfold on video.

*Officers W & T, Discourse, and Ruling Practices at Suburban Mall*

As people located within the framework of ruling, Officers W & T construct objectified versions of citizens using televisual and non-televisual texts. CCTV video, and the incident report, guide their work in a manner which has both immediate and extra-local effects on the people who are made objects of surveillance. Officers W & T's talk makes clear the particular discursive approach they partake in through CCTV monitoring, and indicates the organizational complex which frames their work:

OFFICER W: A lot of it is facial recognition, we have known offenders ...

OFFICER T: About fifty percent of them are repeat offenders ...

OFFICER W: They are probably IV drug users and this is their livelihood, to steal for a living ...

K: So you build a profile about known offenders?

OFFICER W: Well every month or two there are Resource Protection meetings, we talk and swap photos ...<sup>21</sup>

OFFICER T: But we don't get a lot of the worst of the worst up here, you know, drug addicts who are homeless, they don't come up from the downtown core ...

K: So do you make a lot of arrests?

OFFICER W: Not right now 'cause it is after "welfare Wednesday," so they have money, but once they run out of money things will pick up again.

Recall from an earlier section the discourses of the flawed consumer and underclass. The flawed consumer, a veritable member of the socially constructed underclass, is unable to respond to the enticements of the consumer market for lack of required resources. In the act of surveillance, the "shopper deemed suspicious" becomes a risk to be policed. From the perspective of the organizational complex, it is suspicion which is directed towards people who

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21. The text can also be broken down into pictorial representations which are shared between store locations. Photographs are records or texts which are viewed in socially organized ways within a particular discourse.

receive social assistance, not compassion or understanding. This discourse informs the work of Officers W & T, directing asymmetrical levels of organizational surveillance at those presupposed to not belong. Norris and Armstrong suggest that the area surveyed by the CCTV operator is an area of "normative ecology," and that people regarded as not belonging are treated as "other" and made objects of intensified surveillance (1999b:140). This presumptuous reading of the text by Officers W & T constructs future shoppers as suspicious *ipso facto*, as illegitimate, as depersonalized "things" to be watched. More importantly, and akin to the "colour-coded" profiling Norris and Armstrong discovered in their CCTV study (ibid.:124; see also Fiske, 1998a), camera monitoring at Suburban Mall constitutes a racialized exclusionary practice<sup>22</sup>:

OFFICER W: As for what we look for [pause] ... Natives. Hate to stereotype, but I know in Central Saanich they have houses on their reserves that are basically a shopping store of merchandise stolen from real stores ...

K: An urban reserve?

OFFICER W: Yeah, where the police can't go, without a warrant.

OFFICER T: I've been told that the Elders give the younger ones a list of what they actually want them to steal, and if they do get caught, the punishment is handed over to the band, so nothing gets done because the band does nothing.

K: They come in contact with the police?

OFFICER T: Yeah, you still get hauled down to the police station and it gets turned over to the band.

K: And the incident report?

OFFICER T: It goes to the band, but nothing happens, they aren't punished, so they come back. What else? Basically, if they look like a dirtbag, then they are. So you watch, and figure out ...

OFFICER W: Like a construction worker might come, and they are dirty, but we know the ones who aren't ...

Those "dirty ones" are not aesthetically dirty like the construction worker. Rather, Officers W & T *know* it is some innate quality of the young, Aboriginal shopper which necessitates intensified surveillance. In this instance, it is not embodied ambiguity but skin colour which acts as the "signifier of

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22. Robert Miles' technical term *racialized exclusionary practice* is appropriate for describing this situation. For Miles, "social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities" (1989:75). Exclusionary practices occur "where a specified group is shown to be in unequal receipt of resources and services, or to be unequally represented in the hierarchy of class relations" (ibid.:77)

suspicion.” CCTV operators engage in racialized profiling because they feel they are more likely to “protect resources” if particular categories of shoppers are monitored. Aboriginality is the indicator onto which the CCTV operator projects the shopper-as-risk discourse. The racialized profiling practice noted in this study indicates the prevalence of exclusionary, rather than inclusionary, forms of social control.<sup>23</sup> Racialized profiling through camera surveillance will become a serious social problem in Canadian society if policy initiatives are not enacted to regulate the rules of watching that CCTV operators use to classify, sort, and exclude citizens.

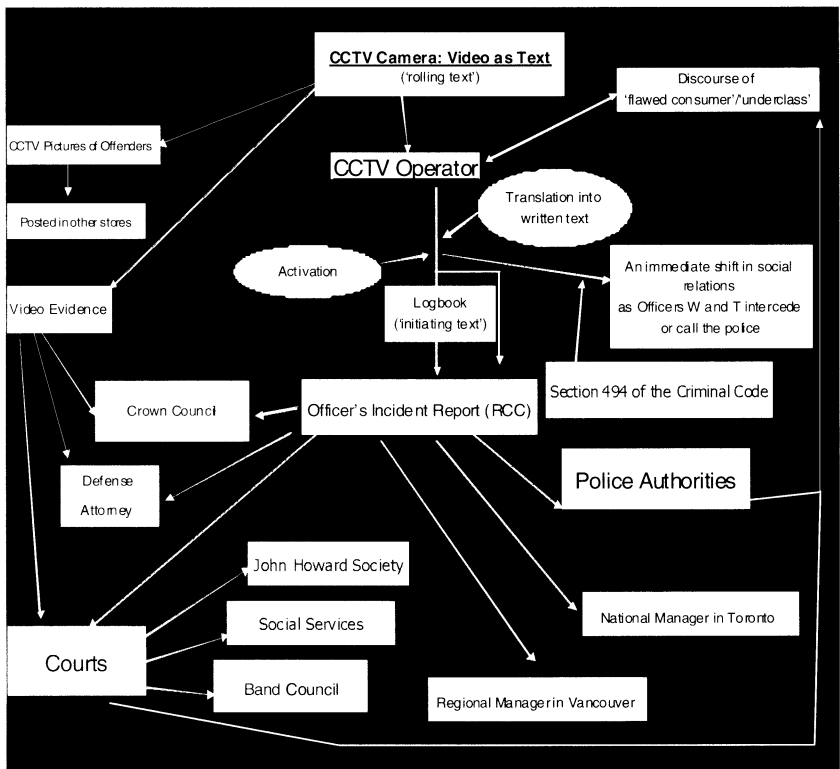
### Discussion and Conclusion

CCTV video is used to mediate activities within the work setting and facilitate organization at the institutional level. The institutional ethnographer is acutely interested in mapping out textually-mediated work processes. Table #1.1 explicates the coordinating role of televisual and non-televisual texts within Suburban Mall. The video as text instigates the process, acting as a “rolling text” of embodied persons which is read by the CCTV operator from an interpretative-institutional frame. The “rolling text” is interpreted in real time, and informs Officers W & T’s work of resource protection in Suburban Mall. The CCTV operators do the work of activating the video text, making citizens’ arrests, and translating the video into a written text. This written text, or “initiating text,” takes the form of the logbook, and, in cases where it is warranted, an incident report. However, video of offenders can be freeze-framed and distributed to other stores as a picture text, and the video itself can be sent to Crown Counsel, the defence attorney, and the Court. This underlines the *replicable* form of the video text as one linkage in the technique of inscription. The incident report also goes to Crown Counsel, the defence attorney, and the Court. The Court can then distribute the incident report to the John Howard Society, Social Services, or the Band Counsel, depending on the given situation. The same copy of the incident report can be sent to the Regional Manager in Vancouver, the National Manager in Toronto, and Police authorities.

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23. This statement must be qualified by acknowledging that computerization, digitization, and automation, particularly in forms of consumer dataveillance and database amalgamation, move the inclusion/exclusion dialectic towards inclusive forms of surveillance. The tension between inclusion/exclusion is a key dialectic informing surveillance studies. Linking facial and movement recognition software with CCTV monitoring systems has not yet become routine, so camera monitoring is still contingent on assessing multiple factors of human sociality, and therefore based on subjective decision-making processes pertaining to who should be barred entry from particular locales.

Table 1.1. Officers W and T at Suburban Mall



The CCTV video, in original or transcribed form, is active in coordinating sequences of sociality and work in each institution shown in Table 1.1. Through video as “rolling text,” the shopper-turned-risk is caught in the act of shoplifting by the CCTV operator. Via the video as an “initiating text,” the act of the offender is written up and distributed to various institutions in a process involving televisual mall surveillance, risk detection and risk communication. Contained within the text is a dialogue, a dialectic of reading and writing which reveals the organizational arrangement of an institution. Video is active when used as a constituent of social and work processes, despite indication that the participants in these interactions are not necessarily known to one another. Televisual texts, in both the “rolling” and “initiating” senses, contribute to the construction of an objectified reality, displacing the subject.

What we see in the Suburban Mall is not Foucault’s automatic functioning of power (1979:201), where the behaviour of shoppers is normalized by the perpetual gaze of the CCTV camera. Rather, the imperative of capital accu-

mulation induces a desire to exclude flawed consumers from territories of consumption (McCahill, 2002:196), leading to a form of CCTV-mediated “moral regulation” (ibid.:14). As Officer T explains, “Sometimes you’re all gung-ho because you really want to catch them, *it is like they are stealing from you.*” The evidence presented in this paper demonstrates how, through their own reading and rewriting of the video text, Officers W & T actively participate in the discourses which are fundamental to the relational aspects of the organizational complex where they work.

For Foucault, the “disciplinary individual” is always the inmate — the object of the guards’ scrutiny — never the observer in the central tower (Goodlad, 2003:543; Lyon 1991). As an interesting twist to the Panopticon metaphor, it is the CCTV operators’ watching behaviour which is normalized along institutional lines by being behind the camera at Suburban Mall, not the shoppers’ behaviour by being pored over by the all-seeing eye. Officers W & T occupy a position in the ruling structure, so they come to view the world in distinctive ways by virtue of their participation in the discourse that underpins their work processes; Officers W & T presuppose and internalize the propriety of the organizational complex in which they work.

Through the construction and use of classificatory rules for watching, the cognitive activity of the CCTV operator is trained, producing the objects of knowledge around which the institutional discourses of the profession are organized (Goodwin, 1994:628). CCTV operators employ ways of seeing and acting which are subjective as well as manifestations of the organizational interests of Suburban Mall. The textually-mediated experience of participating in discourse also displaces the officers’ own experiences of watching and reading the CCTV video. CCTV operators are best conceptualized as “control workers” (Rose, 2000a:199–200). It is their job to administer the marginal in the geospatial locale of the mall, to protect communities of consumption from those individuals socially constructed as inherently risky, and to identify, assess, and reduce or eliminate the possibility of profit loss. The targeted surveillance and exclusion of the Aboriginal shopper is bound up in the racialized subjectivities of the CCTV operator, but also the Suburban Mall’s prerogative of resource protection. CCTV operators use codes to classify and sort the shopper population. Activity by Aboriginal shoppers is automatically considered as suspicious, as “anti-social,” and threatening to the flow of capital.<sup>24</sup>

Utilizing institutional ethnography, the talk of CCTV operators in their work settings explicates how CCTV video, conceptualized as a text or as a primary source in a series of texts, is used to coordinate lived realities and

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24. See also Fiske (1998b) for a discussion of the asymmetrical levels of surveillance targeted at Black men in the U.S.A.

facilitate organization at the institutional, extra-local level. In their work processes, CCTV operators employ a diverse array of texts, including the logbook, the criminal code, the incident report, pictures, and the video itself. The video as text — in picture, written, and original form — is an active constituent of sociality. In Suburban Mall, and many other institutions, video contributes to both the immediate and extra-local coordination of work processes. The events which video as text are active in shaping take place within the discourses which permeate the organizational complex, discourses that the CCTV operators actively participate in. Institutional ethnography, as both a critique and form of sociology, should take seriously video as a text in order to supplement its growing reputation as a critical method of social inquiry.

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