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Stephen Tatum, Nathaniel Lewis

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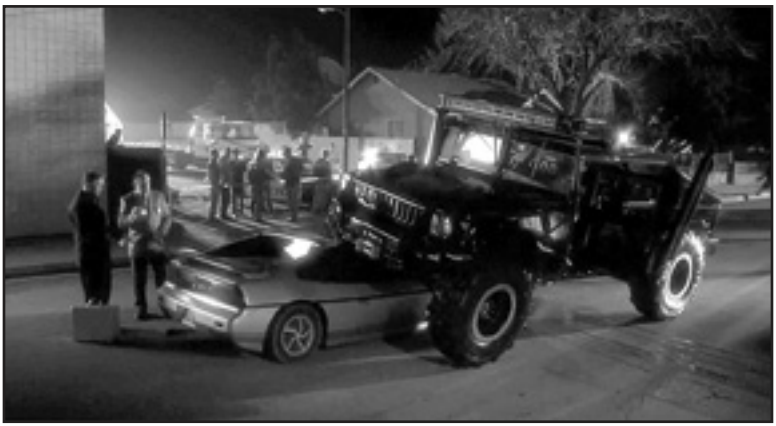
The "secret of Vegas" is that there are no secrets.

—Dave Hickey, *Air Guitar* (22)

1. Truckin'



By the time Gil Grissom arrived at the scene of the accident on the night of April 14, 2005, the police had already cordoned off the area and the injured man had been taken to the hospital. Grissom, Chief Crime Scene Investigator for the Las Vegas Police Department, looked over the accident: a new Hummer sat atop an old Pontiac Fiero, crushing the comparatively tiny car. Captain Jim Brass, the police detective in charge of the case, relayed to Grissom what was known: "The Hummer was going the wrong way on a one-way street—the guy in the Fiero, lucky to be alive—nobody saw the driver get out." The ensuing investigation soon determined that the injured man—a white male in his twenties—had bought a taco from a nearby roadside *taqueria* and then had driven away, traveling only a short distance up the one-way street before his Fiero was run over by the Hummer in a head-on collision.

Having witnessed the car accident in the opening moments of the episode titled "4×4," from the *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* television show's fifth season, viewers were aware of all these details before Brass or

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Grissom arrived on the scene. For in the first forty seconds of the episode, viewers see in quick succession: the young white man, the taco stand, and the Fiero; then the man in profile, driving and eating his taco; his face harshly illuminated by the accelerating Hummer's headlights, his body bracing for impact as he slams on the brakes; the flash of the Hummer's metal and the massive black tires shattering the Fiero's windshield; and finally, the victim's head snapping violently backward from the impact, his taco hitting the driver's window, producing a greasy smear of food on the glass, blurring but not concealing the victim's bloody face behind the steering wheel inside the Fiero. As a result, Grissom's belated, choreographed entrance onto the crime scene and hence into *this* particular *CSI* episode visually and spatially highlights that precise moment when the personification of rationality or order arrives to begin framing (as in containing, organizing, and explaining) the mayhem created by the accident. His body initially framed in the middle distance by police cars and uniformed cops, Grissom enters the scene by lifting up and then ducking under the cordon of yellow tape, striding toward the camera with his face modeling professional concern as well as curiosity. The horrific nature of the accident—intensified in the episode's opening seconds by accelerated editing cuts and by the grainy, high-contrast colors of a digital camera—is qualified by Grissom's first genuinely engaged comment to Brass, one uttered with surprise as well as a trace of amusement: "Is this a *Fiero*?" For his part, looking at the crushed car and implicitly acknowledging his own age, Brass responds drily to Grissom, "Yeah, the old Fiero. It kind of makes you nostalgic for a Members Only jacket."

Although it will have no official bearing on the resolution of the case, Grissom's expressed interest in the Fiero, a car last manufactured in 1988, importantly provides a larger context for this particular criminal case involving two different vehicles with two different drivers, one in the hospital and one on the run. On one level, Grissom ponders a literal or material juxtaposition and "interpenetration": Hummer on Fiero, present astride a relic of the past. As if enacting the nostalgia mode that theorist Fredric Jameson has characterized as a chief feature of an emergent postmodern aesthetic, the "4×4" episode seemingly allegorizes a violent collision between two recognizable machines originating from two distinct moments in US history. On another level, just as the SUV commodity representing our intensified consumer society's contemporary moment literally travels in the wrong direction down a one-way street, Grissom's and Brass's comments metaphorically trouble the idea of temporal duration and indeed of historical narrative as a relatively straightforward, linear movement that progresses solely in one temporal direction, from past to present.

The episode's opening accident disrupts a prior, preexisting narrative in progress (a young man stopping for a taco after work and then driving home), thus creating a narrative swerve that sets in motion and braids together a series of additional narratives: the arrival of medical assistance in the form of ambulances and paramedics; the setting up of the perimeter around the accident by uniformed police; detectives interviewing bystanders and planning their investigative moves before turning over the scene to the forensic team and medical examiner for the collection and later processing of evidence back at the lab. Moreover, though the Hummer's over-the-top demolition of the Fiero certainly produces a shock-and-awe effect, regular *CSI* viewers nevertheless have come to expect just this kind of introductory sequence of startling, hyperreal violence—one which serves to establish the typical *CSI* episode's primary investigative focus before the show's credit sequence visually layers the various names and titles over nighttime aerial shots of the Las Vegas Strip's fabled neon skyline while the "Who Are You" theme song by The Who occupies the soundtrack. Given the well-established television formula for police procedural dramas such as *CSI*—detection of the crime→procedural investigation that reconstructs the sequence of events leading from past violent act to present moment of discovery→solution of the crime and identification of the perp—one would reasonably expect this opening vehicular accident to stand as the major mystery to be solved in the hour-long format of the "4×4" episode. In terms of narrative expectations based on television genres, *CSI* viewers know that this car accident opening this particular episode is really, well, *no* accident at all.

For his part, Gil Grissom's first move is not to move at all, but rather to stand motionless in the street, imagining what must have happened with his mind's eye. So viewers see the episode's initial forty-second sequence repeated once again, but this time an opaque, ghostly Hummer speeds down the one-way street in the wrong direction and literally runs through the reflective Grissom before colliding with the Fiero. This stylized re-presentation of the inaugural accident serves to emphasize, by sheer force of repetition, the original accident. But it also importantly reproduces that accident as a *spectral* artifact—one seemingly "real" in and of itself and yet also re-created as a simulacrum. Rendered as an accident virtually present in mind and yet absent in reality, Grissom's speculative reconstruction of the accident testifies to the power of autonomous, discrete temporal segments or moments *and* to the reality of a fluid temporal continuum where the present interpenetrates the past and vice versa. On the one hand, Grissom's first investigative move clearly attends to the discrete moment of the Hummer/Fiero accident. But on the other hand,

its spectral play with temporality—reminiscent of such recent movies as *Memento* (2000)—also anticipates a series of further temporal and spatial collisions that will play out over the course of the entire "4×4" episode. For it turns out that this episode is not just about a massive SUV with four-wheel drive. As its title somewhat enigmatically suggests, "4×4" is about the forensic investigation of four different, yet entwined criminal cases, each accorded approximately a quarter-hour segment of the hour-long episode.

All this suggests, for starters, that the "4×4" Hummer/Fiero accident—*perhaps like all accidents*—simultaneously represents an unexpected rupture (of narrative, spatial, and temporal forms) and also an inevitable, fated development (for as soon as the car was invented, as Paul Virilio suggests, the car accident was invented simultaneously [10]). So then, to engage in our own staging of repetition and reproduction, with the example in mind of the car accident that opens this *CSI* episode, we might ask: is the shiny new Hummer's demolition of the faded grey Fiero entirely emblematic of a culture that privileges the next big thing over an obsolete (and perhaps somewhat embarrassing to the nation-state) industrial past? And is this next big thing—signified here as a machine combining military and consumer electronic high technology—inevitably destined to bury the past under its considerable weight? If so, then, is this accident also conceivably emblematic of the death of history or suppression of the past, allegorizing in material form the historical amnesia that, for some theorists of the postmodern, defines the spectacular time of the postmodern and, now, postindustrial experience? Put more broadly, what can we learn as we enter the second decade of our new millennium from the event of the "accident" in a *CSI* episode like this—and, more generally, from the spectacle of Las Vegas, which serves as a metonymy of the contemporary American West?

When they set out in 1968 to learn from Las Vegas in their Yale School of Architecture Studio, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown began with an apparently straightforward intention: "to question how we look at things" (3). At first, they used the Strip's commercial sprawl architecture and Las Vegas's overall spatial non-conformities—these spawned by the dominance of the automobile—to ponder the fact of historical change and transformation, or *development* in the US West. As they came to realize, Las Vegas epitomizes the "problem" with development because its built environment, sustained now by late capital's emergent globalizing mode of production, "is neither contained and enclosed like medieval space nor classically balanced and proportioned like Renaissance space nor swept up in a rhythmically ordered movement like Baroque space, nor does it flow like Modern space around freestanding urban space

makers" (75). Their response was to juxtapose the seemingly chaotic present of the Las Vegas commercial sprawl—its "impure architecture of the symbol"—with the past, exemplified by the example of the Roman piazza or by other "pleasure zone" architectural oases in the world's vast deserts. And they did so by learning to withhold judgment about either the past or the present, as well as about the virtues and vices of so-called high and low culture. So they wrote, "there is a perversity in the learning process: We look backward at history and tradition to go forward; we can also look downward to go upward. And withholding judgment may be used as a tool to make later judgment more sensitive. This is a way of learning from everything" (3). Even from Las Vegas. Better yet: especially from Las Vegas.

The "4×4" episode's structural architecture of the accident defines the evolution of vast space in the urban American West and provides an analogue for what Venturi et al. identify as Las Vegas's impure architecture of inclusion challenging the aesthetic script and cultural narrative of Modernist architecture. In this context in which "structure" or "the architecture of form" connotes the temporal and spatial logics inherent in the narrative *and* the built environment, let us consider a comment by Henri Lefebvre from his *The Production of Space*:

> No space ever vanishes utterly, leaving no trace. Even the sites of Troy, Susa or Leptis Magna still enshrine the superimposed spaces of the succession of cities that have occupied them. Were it otherwise, there would be no "interpenetration," whether of spaces, rhythms or polarities. It is also true that each new addition inherits and reorganizes what has gone before; each period or stratum carries its own preconditions beyond their limits. Is this a case of metaphorization? Yes, but it is one which includes a measure of metonymization in that the superimposed spaces do constitute an ensemble or whole. (164)

Following Lefebvre's lead, we might say that the history of an urban space like Las Vegas in the historical development of the US West is, metaphorically speaking, precisely that of a mystery story and that all those material "traces"—the bricks and stone and steel and glass—registering the "interpenetration" of "spaces, rhythms or polarities" in Las Vegas since 1905 stand forth as evidentiary clues attached to that mystery. And furthermore, that mystery is a crime story—as we certainly also witness in Leslie Silko's novel *Ceremony* (1977) or director John Sayles's film *Lone Star* (1996)—one whose material evidence composes and decomposes, both "inherits and reorganizes [anew] what has gone before," in the process mutely testifying (like the corpse presented to forensic analysis) to an unacknowledged, usually unredeemed act of prior violence over which

the "superimposed," archeologically layered "spaces of the succession of cities" have been enshrined. From this perspective, then, the "4×4" accident is not so much a mystery that needs a solution, but rather a symptom that reveals multiple pathologies—a rupture that reshapes physical space, reminding us in the process that such space is always already occupied by history, by the traces of a haunted and increasingly haunting past. In *CSI*, the accident or violent event does not erase history, but rather reveals its wreckage, so to speak, its unfolding, serial logic of repetition, superimposing itself on the architectural spaces and narrative rhythms of our society of the spectacle.

The first real clue to the "4×4" episode's subtle immersion in the uncanny return of the heretofore buried past arrives around the five-minute mark, when Grissom suddenly solves the case. Indeed, his solution is trivial and decidedly beside the point, for it turns out that the Fiero simply got in the way of a wannabe gangster's attempted revenge on the taco vendor, who had earlier in the evening thwarted the man's attempt to rob him. Detective Brass confronts him this way: "Let me get this straight: An old man refuses to let you steal his money, so you jack a Hummer and try to run over his taco stand?" When the perp, looking idiotic and sheepish, responds, "Maybe," Grissom raises an eyebrow and announces: "I think this is the dumbest thing we've ever heard." On one level, Grissom's self-reflexive, summary comment is perhaps a wry send-up of the episode's entire opening movement—and perhaps of the crime-show genre itself. But on another level its real function is to open up some narrative, which is to say, temporal space. In other words, rather than a resolution providing closure, his comment represents an undoing or deferral of closure: that is, what we've discovered as a result of his forensic investigation is simply "dumb" (stupid and silent); moreover, the intended crime laid bare by the Hummer/Fiero accident (revenge on the taco vendor), though potentially homicidal, was in fact never committed. So only seven minutes into an hour-long episode, Grissom's inside joke puts us in narrative limbo, with no loose ends to tie and nowhere to go.

But if the accident and the resolution both come out of nowhere at accelerated speed, compressing the usual forty-three minutes of real-episode time into a mere seven minutes, the episode itself quickly crashes and burns, only then to move on. Or, more accurately, as if imitating Venturi's dictum to move backward in order to move forward, it too moves *backward*, the action now rewinding, reversing itself. Bodies seem to speak in tongues as various crime scene investigators walk backward through the *CSI* lab/office central hallway corridor, as the Hummer is being pulled off the Fiero in reverse motion, now magically restored, as the Las Vegas sky-

line at night becomes day, with sunset reversing to a shot of early morning shadows on a hotel casino exterior created by sunrise—and we are left at an automobile show at the Las Vegas Convention Center earlier in the day, where the Hummer sits on a pedestal, the prize in a raffle drawing, hours before its collision with the Fiero ... at which point the action reverses itself again and begins anew in apparent forward motion. What we soon discover in the wake of Grissom's resolution of the case in the episode's first segment is that "4×4" does not unfold so much as it folds and refolds (much in the baroque style adumbrated by Gilles Deleuze). Rewound and replayed four times over the course of this episode, the Hummer/Fiero accident constitutes merely the first visible clue to a series of violent crimes that are embedded in the past, yet display a material impact on the present, which exposes one to the future.

After the opening Hummer/Fiero segment, "4×4" becomes decidedly less funny, revealing over the next three segments that behind the curtains and walls and windows of Las Vegas awaits contagious violence and death. At this point in the episode, however, we have not yet witnessed these crimes, even though they have already taken place by the time of the car accident. By following the nonlinear and oddly meditative "4×4" episode through its hour of repetitions and serial rewinds, this essay will attempt to learn from the episode's self-conscious, rather stylized interpenetrations of place and history with narrative. In modeling this essay on the episode's four interpenetrating segments—its four interwoven stories of violence, ruin, and ultimately death—our desire is not so much to imitate a narrative style as to follow the evidence, much like pulling up floorboards or peeking behind curtains, and then to *process* our findings to discover what we can now learn from Las Vegas about the cultural imaginary of the US West.[1]

And yet we must acknowledge that following the evidence is only occasionally an act of discovery or recognition that leads to some kind of truth; more often, it is an act of interpretation and representation—of reading and writing. That is, by implicitly calling attention to the acts of reading (a crime scene, a region, this essay) and writing (a crime scene, a region, this essay) as detective work, we mean to forward neither a positivist process that leads to a gratifying, if predictable solution, nor a postmodern game that seductively subverts the presumably naïve dream of order or justice. Rather, by emphasizing process and thus withholding or deferring judgment, we hope to work into the in-between spaces of looping repetition and uncertain mobility that may contain surviving traces of and from the past. And it is these narrative and architectural spaces—taking the form of transparent nodes in a permeable spatial network, conduits of power that appear minor or "dumb"—that bear investigation and that become

increasingly important in the remaining three segments of "4×4." But to go forward, as Venturi and Scott Brown noted approximately forty years ago, we must go backward.

2. Candyman

To repeat, what remains not only different but also uniquely compelling about this TV episode is its alternative, nonlinear temporal and spatial logics defined by feedback loops, narrative rewinds, and visual repetitions.[2] For one thing, certain minor characters, dialogue bits, imagery, and even material objects appear in more than one quarter-hour segment, at moments moving from background to foreground and vice versa, effectively migrating across a particular segment's temporal and spatial boundaries and thus serving to braid together that segment's forensic investigation with two or more of the episode's other segments. For another thing, in addition to commercial breaks, "4×4" formally marks the transitions between the four segments by repeating the same rapid, reverse-motion visual rewind. As one case seemingly reaches closure and a new forensic investigation begins, for instance, an aerial shot of the Las Vegas Strip's fabled skyline and boulevard at night is interjected; then the sequence moves in stop-action format from the glittering neon and LED and streaming automobile head- and taillights in reverse motion to the same scenography bathed in sunlight; the rewind motif then shifts to an interior shot of CSI team members crossing paths in reverse direction in their office and lab complex's central hallway corridor (their brief dialogue exchanges also rewound). Finally, as the rewind motif concludes, viewers are delivered visually to the particular crime scene that materially signifies the onset of a new investigative mystery in a new quarter-segment, at which point the movement reverses itself again, and the plot proceeds in forward motion for the duration of the segment. Such experimentation with the standard temporal and spatial logics of the police procedural genre epitomizes what the episode's producers, director, and writers wanted to accomplish with the fifth season of *CSI*: to enhance the signature *CSI* visual style by "telling stories in a different way."[3]

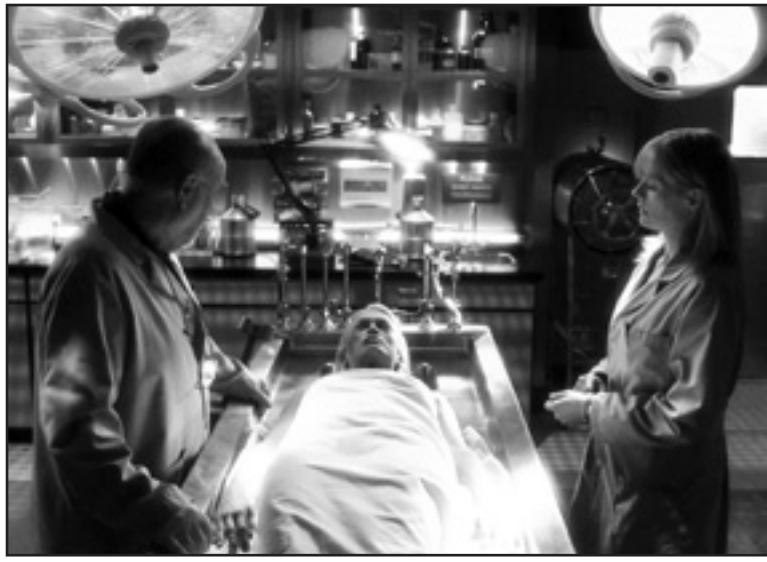
After the opening segment ends with Grissom's remark that "this is the dumbest thing we've ever heard," the narrative and temporal rewind motif courses backward, from night to morning and from the external site of the Hummer/Fiero accident to the interior of the Las Vegas Convention Center, where an overhead panning shot reveals an auto show in progress. The camera follows a path through the festive crowd traced by a convention girl dressed in red top and miniskirt as she walks toward what appears to be the car show's main stage, where a spotlight plays on the CEO of

a luxury motor home company, microphone in hand, poised to reveal to the crowd his company's latest upscale model motor home concealed behind stage curtains. But what meets the crowd's (and viewers') eyes as two other "showgirls" draw back the curtains at his command is not only the customized, domestic interior of a new motor home, but also—nestled center stage on its kitchen floor—the corpse of a blonde female whose name, we soon learn, is Lisa Schumacher. As the episode's second segment devoted to this blonde convention model's murder begins to unfold, CSI investigator Warrick Brown identifies three "persons of interest" in the case: the motor home CEO, who, it turns out, was partying earlier that night in the motor home with Lisa and three other show models; the dead woman's agent, who tells Brown's colleague Catherine Willows at one point that Lisa, now approaching thirty years of age, was "old news," apparently no longer an American beauty; and Lisa's roommate, the very show model who earlier had announced the lucky winner of the raffle drawing for the new Hummer prize that figures so largely in the episode's first segment—and whose smear of instant tanning lotion on her arms matches that found on Lisa's corpse.

In the commodity-saturated, intensified culture of consumption conjured up by the signifiers "Las Vegas" and "the Strip," the significance of luxury motor homes (or Hummers and Fieros) lies not only in their existence as sleek, mobile material objects mutely testifying to their owners' status or performance of individual identity. Rather, in "4×4" their significance centers on how their material presence underlines the episode's overall investment in (1) a rather nested *spatial logic of container/contained* (humans within machines; humans, dead or alive, enclosed in cellular spaces such as bathrooms or interview rooms or autopsy suites) and (2) how a *thematic and imagistic tension* between the binaries of mobility/immobility or circulation/stasis (as in *rigor mortis*) predominates. The visual tableau produced at the Las Vegas Convention Center crime scene centers on an immobile, prone female body, whose murder has removed her literally and metaphorically from circulation; and on the domestic, interior space of the now immobile motor home, a technological achievement whose implicit mobility on the open road promises—as the CEO's sales pitch makes clear—fulfillment of the pastoral dream of the machine enabling access to the New World garden (here, the Las Vegas Strip, technically located in Paradise, Nevada, as metaphorical Eden).

Now on one level, the various mangled or dead bodies in the seats or on the floors of machines such as Fieros, Hummers, and luxury motor homes constitute a return of the repressed, so to speak, their mute, material presence essentially testifying to a perennial human anxiety (and

curiosity) about death per se. Even so, as inscribed on the anxious faces of the convention models or showgirls in this episode's second segment, such repeated crime scenes in this and other *CSI* episodes suggest as well a deep-seated fear of proletarianization—of sliding back down the class scale in a restructured, de-industrialized regional economy marked by the increasing polarization of occupations and classes. Indeed, as an exploited sex worker engaged in what Hsuan Hsu, discussing Asian American literary production in the US West, has called "affective labor," Lisa Schumacher's unhomely fate materially realizes neither the horizontal nor vertical upward mobility so celebrated in the national cultural imaginary about the US West (149).[4] Lying prone on an immobile motor home's kitchen floor—her blood's staining the floor an analogue for her agent's claim that her youthful good looks were "expiring like spoiled milk"—and, later, on the *CSI* lab's autopsy table, this convention model's corpse cri-



tiques the Turnerian dream of rebirth in the West, where the mere fact of so-called free land behind a moving frontier line offered escape from the bondage of the past to a mobile settler culture. Instead, this segment presents her bloody fate via a spatial logic and imagistic tension that discloses a rather *postwestern* perspective, one that emerges, in Neil Campbell's words, "precisely because of its complex, unstable relations with … an inheritance of tropes endorsing settlement against the odds, establishing roots in the New World, transforming the earth from wilderness to garden, taming land from 'savage' populations, expressing a renewing masculinity as the source of these actions, and (often reluctantly) domesticating the feminine

within this new western world" (411). As grounded in the plotline and by the mise-en-scène of the Lisa Schumacher murder investigation, then, *CSI* implicitly asks us to "reflect upon these inherited tropes, interrogate their *afterlife*, and delve into their persistence through a process that begins from a premise of investigative doubt, suspicion, and uncanniness" (Campbell 411–12).

But on another level, (a) the traces of material evidence involving cosmetics collected at the convention center crime scene, (b) the pervasive visual and verbal discourse about female body transformation through exercise, plastic surgery, and medication, and (c) the libidinal visual aesthetic fostered by this segment's sexualized content and metamorphic visual displays on the machines at the *CSI* lab—all these features of "4×4" serve also to intensify the relay points between various corporeal subjects, the primacy of surveillance, and advanced technology in our contemporary everyday life. Indeed, the technological prosthesis evident in the Lisa Schumacher forensic investigation coheres in large part because everything at bottom is determined by passages of "skin"—by both dermal and architectural and narrative layers whose folds and doublings, whose duplication or reproduction and repetition establish a porous space of crossings between inside and outside, between private and public.[5] In the motor home crime scene, Warrick Brown's forensic work determines that an exchange of fluids (in this case, blood, semen, hair gel) between and across membranes of human skin provides the evidence confirming Lisa's agent as her killer. Similarly, in the built environment of the *CSI* lab and office complex, the clear skins of glass partitions and doors allow for the transfer of gazes, while the central hallway corridor spatially locates, through the episode's visual rewind motif, the crossings and exchanges between the four narrative strands and the different forensic investigators' work.

So all these membranes of skin and glass and doorways and all these zero-grade forms (toilet bowls, used condoms, open mouths, and mouths of champagne bottles) introduced in the episode's second segment produce a paradoxical space, within which material things, storylines, characters, and the built environment are bound together, for better or worse, even as they are held apart. Like the dead convention model whose "insides" (blood, brain matter) are exposed to the "outside," to public view, and like the motor home's interior bathroom (in which Brown discovers a used condom supplying crucial DNA evidence) where hygiene and waste, sanitation and contamination cross over and exchange properties, it is as if all the framed, privatized and segmented spaces constitute metonymies, vital parts whose material existence provides a passageway to the whole, which is to say indexes how all that is internal (the psychological realm

of desire) and interior (domestic and professional space) is nevertheless related to all that is supposedly "outside" or external, out there beyond the crime scene and the spaces bounded by the lab/office complex, such as all the glass screens of television and computer viewing rooms located in suburban houses; all the themed displays in and around the glass storefronts of suburban malls, intended to promote the consumer's passage from the outside to the store's interior, recessed spaces of consumption; all the gamblers staring at the visual displays of slot machines and video poker machines on the Las Vegas casino floors.

With all this in mind, then, the first point to make here is that the postwestern cultural perspective modeled by "4×4" develops through an isomorphic (1=1), or parallel and analogous, relationship between three registers: its emergent narrative logic; its visual representation of the built environment's crime scenes and nested, cellular interior spaces; and both its structural and imagistic leitmotif of circulation and exchange across various "skin" membranes, especially those of glass. Moreover, this episode's production of paradoxical space through both thematic and structural boundary transgressions—especially that of inside/outside—invites us to consider more precisely how *CSI's* vision of Las Vegas (the inside) provides, to use Dave Hickey's words, "a wonderful lens through which to view America" (the outside). He writes, "What is hidden elsewhere exists here in quotidian visibility" (23). Certainly, the tremendous popularity of *CSI*—in large part as a result of its overall visual aesthetic and celebrated use of computer-generated effects—suggests the show has been particularly successful, on the one hand, in making visible in quotidian terms what is *not* necessarily "hidden" in our consumer society at large: that "sleek *frisson* of anxiety and promise," as Hickey puts it, that "quick, feral glamour" emanating from the object world of global capitalism (23), here of course as it has materialized in Las Vegas, "the Detroit of the postindustrial economy," to use writer Douglas Coupland's words (337). On the one hand, its signature visual style seductively fosters the dominant consumer ideology of the spectacle by conflating the intensified object world of late capitalism with an ideology of science and technology. Nevertheless, in episodes like "4×4," *CSI* arguably processes all the evidence involved in crimes against female "affective laborers" so as to forward, on the other hand, a rather cautionary tale about two things: the historical development of social relations under the sign of capitalism and the transformations of space and place as a consequence of a globalizing world system's restructuring of the US West's economic, social, and cultural landscapes.

This restructuring of regional space in the globalizing, postwestern environment is evident in Lisa Schumacher's back-story, which Warrick

Brown uncovers as his investigation proceeds: her nickname was "Cris," short for the brand name of expensive Cristal champagne she preferred when drinking with rich clients; she had arrived in Las Vegas after failing to make it as an actress or model in Los Angeles/Hollywood; her spontaneous attempt at artificial insemination by retrieving a used condom in the bathroom of the motor home on the floor of the Las Vegas Convention Center was a last-ditch effort to salvage her career by blackmail as she prepared to turn thirty. As Lisa Schumacher's back-story illustrates, the so-called unskilled, "surplus" labor force composed of working women who staff a minimum-wage service economy in the urban downtown hotel and convention center entertainment zones of the West do not so much inhabit specific places as "belong to a cross-border culture … embedded in a global network of local places—particularly international financial [and entertainment/media/commercial] centers among which people, information and capital circulate regularly" (Sassen 226). The episode's built environment and its storylines associated with convention models like Lisa Schumacher, tourists like the Chicago couple who won the Hummer raffle drawing, and vendors ranging from a street corner taco man to the CEO of a motor home company illustrate how Las Vegas—with new pathways created by the flows of people, information, and capital—epitomizes "the new geographies of power emerging between the national and the global and the national and the local scales" (Soja 208). Instead of being identified by a specific physical geography and cultural iconography, or as a primary resource subsidy zone for distant metropolitan centers, then, "4×4" produces Las Vegas as a postwestern and postregional "city-region state," one that exists as a nodal point on a networked grid of electronic, communication, entertainment, and transportation networks linking "Sin City" with the San Francisco Bay area's Pixar and Industrial Light and Magic, southern California's Walt Disney corporation and Hollywood studios, and the multinational, corporate gaming economy.

Now any emergent postregional US West ought to be regarded as a spectral, rather deterritorialized space imaginatively located somewhere in between a specific geographical reality, the residual traces of the visual images and written narratives associated with the mythic Wild West, and the emergent cultural imaginary associated with the new "wired" technoculture West that we see modeled in the *CSI* crime lab. But with the episode's second segment in mind, what we should further consider is how the visual and verbal terrain of this city-region state's deterritorialized, cultural imaginary appears as a particular type of interface between distinctive geographical realities, mediascapes, *and* emergent types and divisions of labor. As the "non-isomorphic paths" or flows of people,

machines, capital, and images surpass geopolitical boundaries, the *CSI* criminal cases involving working women such as Lisa Schumacher underscore how postregional cultural economies of representation are bound up with the way embodied "laboring populations" are brought "into the lower-class sectors and spaces of relatively wealthy societies" that traffic in information and investment capital (Tatum, "Spectrality" 16). It is a type of labor that indexes the new global capitalism; it is a type of criminal victim that indexes a territorial division or class stratification in the way certain embodied workers are brought into and positioned in relatively wealthy societies.

3. The Attics of My Life

Rewind to the time-lapse traces of neon and automobile headlights and taillights at an intersection on the Las Vegas Strip after dark, *back* through the crime lab's hallway corridor on the previous night when the Hummer crashes into the Fiero; now *back* past the Las Vegas Convention Center's Auto and RV show, with the curtains now seen closing and thus *concealing* Lisa Schumacher's prone corpse in front of a crowd whose horror-at-death gets replaced by an anticipatory ignorance of what is about to be unveiled; then back outside, past the evening's sunset now a sunrise, and then further back, finally, to another narrative beginning, this time to the previous sunny morning in a lush Las Vegas suburban street location (clearly in the Hollywood Hills, where it was filmed). This moment, concluding the rewind motif and initiating the episode's third quarter-hour segment, is in fact the earliest chronological moment in the entire episode to this point. In this seemingly original moment of innocence in one of Sin City's Edenic suburban oases, an emphatically busty model (the same one who will "later"—in segment 2—show up for work at the Auto Show and complain of her "bad day") knocks at the house of her body-builder trainer. Leaning against the door with a look of resigned desire, she calls, "C'mon, babe, let me in, work me out." Her desire, we later learn, is a non-sexual one—she takes pleasure in the intimacy of weightlifting. But "et in Arcadia ego," for death is already waiting in this illusory paradise: peering in through one of the house's ground-level windows, she notices her trainer's battered body on the weight-room floor, his face smashed in, the apparent victim of a homicide. And so we too are "let in" as a different kind of working out proceeds: *CSI* investigators Greg Sanders and Sara Sidle handle this investigation, discovering early on in their work that Paul, the murdered body builder and "Mr. Las Vegas" aspirant, was, in Greg's words, "stacking to get bigger"—injecting steroids.

On one level, segment 3 reproduces some of the key motifs introduced in segment 2. Here, too, there is an opening narrative dynamic of invisibility/visibility and concealing/revealing a murder victim's body that structurally gestures toward the ending promised by traditional crime or police procedural dramas. Here, too, an exchange economy based on desiring bodies is established, functioning both to reinscribe and unsettle conventional notions of labor and the workplace. Here, too, the crime scene's built environment appears as a nodal equivalent of the crime lab, its spatial design similarly suggesting the new organizational logic of a postindustrial society driven by technological advances—though now the space of glass curtain walls and hallways and membranes, of sleek lines and porous intersections, appears in the form of the body builder's Eichler-design house. And as we shall see, the idealized design of this house, "organic" in its transparent, cellular form, belies the fact that it is in fact a "sick" house, a structure with hidden layers of decay and contagion. The nested spaces organizing this crime scene suggest one of the thematic complexes that links this segment of "4×4" with the other three: the ways in which interior spaces—vehicle cabins, bathrooms, hallways, industrial clothes dryers—manifest and occlude the corruption within. In fact, as was the case with the Lisa Schumacher segment, throughout this segment the very notion of private, interior space is itself exposed, brought out into public view. In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin writes:

> The interior is not just the universe but also the etui of the private individual. To dwell means to leave traces. In the interior, these are accentuated. Coverlets and antimacassars, cases and containers are devised in abundance; in these, the traces of the most ordinary objects of use are imprinted. In just the same way, the traces of the inhabitant are imprinted in the interior. Enter the detective story, which pursues these traces. Poe, in his "Philosophy of Furniture" as well as in his detective fiction, shows himself to be the physiognomist of the domestic interior. (9)

Greg and Sara perform here as physiognomists of the domestic interior, investigating the traces of "the most ordinary objects" inhabiting the body builder's modern-style Eichler house. Of course, the traces imprinted on this domestic interior provide evidence, clues to the deceased's habits and behaviors that might provide them, in the end, with a solution to the crime. However, as they process the house, picking up and looking over the victim's personal belongings, they uncover not so much the artifacts and remains of a unique character named Paul, but rather a set of culture codes that seem, contra Benjamin, to accentuate instead an emptiness of

form, an emptiness of character. For the ubiquitous photographs of him on the walls of the house belie the notion of some personal taste in interior decoration, as well as the existence of some "private individual" with an inner life, a mind at work. It appears to be all "surface" in his house, and it is this segment's somewhat brutal joke that the house imprints itself on his physiognomy, not the other way around as Benjamin suggests.

Whereas segment 2 is about skin, semen, and risky sexual business, this segment is about muscle, mold, and sexual dysfunction. The convention models in segment 2, who engage in sexual performance for money, are now replaced (or "pre-placed") by the male body builder whose steroid use leaves his body toned but impotent. As one character will say, "There's one muscle that's not working." Incapable of erection and hence reproduction, his energy is put into "self-love," as Greg somewhat naively puts it. Although Sara points out that "the killer didn't even have to be his size, it could have been a little guy or a woman," "getting bigger" is what matters here. At one point caught gazing at his skinny arms in a mirror, Greg recognizes that "no matter how hard you work to get big, there's always someone bigger." Even at this early moment in this segment, Greg's narcissism is the parodic mirror of the body builder. Moreover, his line points to two of this segment's crucial intersections of tropes: (1) between the power of capital and the power of physical anatomy and (2) between occupational opportunities and laboring bodies. Even the model's opening line, "work me out," plays against the implicit "work me in": that is, *all* the characters and their social relationship in this segment are defined by this doubling of professional occupational identity and displaced sexual desire.

Thus when Sara, speculating on the motivation of body builders, reminds Greg that, "like Freud said, anatomy is destiny," she proposes yet another form of biological and, in this case, narrative closure—another rather utopian promise of determinable resolution by means of an invocation of destiny or fate. But it makes more sense here to believe the inverse, that destiny feels anatomical: which is to say, wildly unpredictable, fragile, and entirely mortal. For one thing, her reference to Freud is ironic, to say the least: Freud in his context was arguing that girls suffer from feelings of inferiority because the clitoris is so much smaller than the penis, leading to a compensating narcissism. But in this case, the narcissism belongs to the male, the body builder whose sexual diminishment (we learn later of shrunken testicles as one symptom of steroid abuse) apparently leads him to seek other, unnatural forms of being "bigger." Paul reproduces himself through contrived representation: he utilizes technology (steroids, the camera) to aestheticize his anatomy through physical enlargement and then reproduces that enhanced anatomy in aesthetic terms by means of

photographic enlargements. So to borrow a term from Marx, "enlarged reproduction" occurs, spawning in turn further cycles of reproduction and growth.

To an even greater degree than the first two segments of "4×4," the human characters take a backseat to the physical spaces predominant in segment 3: the interiors of the autopsy suite, the *CSI* office and lab complex, and of course the Eichler-house crime scene. Paul literally is a shell of a character, a point made clear during a gross-out autopsy of his gorgeous body. At the same moment that Greg and Sara are looking through the house for clues, handling the enlarged photographs of the victim, the camera cuts to *CSI's* forensic specialist Dr. Robbins as he performs the autopsy, investigating the cranial spaces behind the body builder's face. The synthetic development of body-muscle leaves Paul not so much a cyborg as a networked series of spatially defined cells that foment and collapse. When Dr. Robbins applies pressure to the corpse's swollen eye, the eye socket starts to collapse, and a black, viscous liquid oozes, like an oily tear, down his cheek. The bruises on his face, we discover, are not bruises at all; instead, his face has largely collapsed, imploded. Viewers are then invited through computer-generated special effects to tour the channels behind his face, passageways so corrupted by the steroids and, as we soon discover, by a virus-like mold, that the facial walls, honeycombed from the chemical decay and organic growth, crumble and collapse. Paul's body is represented in architectural terms, and his face exemplifies its compromised, not up-to-code exterior.

But if Paul is a mere empty shell—and there are no other characters in this segment to speak of—the Eichler house manages by contrast to evoke "character," or at least *cool*. As in segment 2, it is the spatial logic of the buildings (and the bodies) that matters. The influential California real estate developer Joseph Eichler, whose houses and planned communities in the 1950s and '60s came to define "California Modern," used glass interiors, windows, natural light, and open floor plans, epitomizing the ambitions of high modernist architecture (think Philip Johnson), though emphatically middle-class in its audience. In their materials (especially glass) and designs, the Eichler homes served to "bring the outside in," as Eichler liked to boast. And "bringing the outside in," it turns out, is exactly the problem throughout this segment, for not only are spatial boundaries permeable, but they are also repeatedly violated. The black puss oozing out of the corpse's eye reverses the Eichler idealism by bringing the inside out.

In a sense, this moment in the autopsy theater turns the segment inside out as well. Quickly realizing that some sort of toxic airborne agent

may be at work in the house, Robbins phones Greg and Sara to order them out of the house and to sanitize themselves by showering together in a Hazmat tent set up outside on the front lawn. He then proceeds to saw the top of the body builder's skull off, pulling out and exposing the gooey brain. Robbins soon solves the mystery, or rather re-names it: the body builder died not from blunt-force trauma to the face delivered by some unknown killer, but from mucormycosis, a deadly disease that afflicts those with immune system disorders. Though invisible from the outside, the body builder's steroid use had caused the membranes inside his skull to decay and collapse. What causes mucormycosis? Airborne mold, common fungi, spores, *rhizopus oryzae*. What triggers the growth of these spores? It turns out they like human tissue. Where in the house might they find the *rhizopus* spores, spreading like a virus, activated by organic tissue such as human flesh? Hidden behind an interior wall, of course, where a bullet with human tissue on it had become embedded in fiberglass insulation under a leaking water pipe. A bullet? It turns out that the body builder, weeks before his own death, had murdered a prostitute named Tiffany. The bullet he fired at her was a "through and through," piercing her body and carrying small bits of her flesh through the hallway wall's sheetrock and into the frame of the house.

So: the *CSI* forensic team's investigation of a murder exposes a toxic pathology; the victim in this case also turns out to be a murderer; this third segment's *actual* criminal event and crime scene turns out to be hidden from view; the solution to the segment's initial crime scene investigation unveils another murder mystery originating in the recent past, one which refuses to be buried or repressed, concealed behind a domestic

interior's wall. Furthermore, the crime lab's essential design principles get reproduced architecturally in the form of the Eichler house; the Eichler house imprints traces of itself in the body builder's body via airborne fungi; the body builder's internal cells and membranes collapse on each other, revealing that the Eichler house also has its secrets. Like Paul's face, the membranes/walls of the house are cut into to reveal the true nature of the crime; the murdered prostitute—who, we learn, has her own active missing person's file—is now accounted for; and we end up back at the forensics lab, with *two* cases solved. "Very good," says Grissom to Greg and Sara, eyebrow raised in interest and appreciation, apparently offering closure to segment 3.

Yet, oddly, this segment is not quite over. Although Grissom seems to close the books with his authoritative "very good," then turning his eyes and body away from Greg and Sara as if to move on, Greg interrupts, saying, "This is just like that Edgar Allan Poe story, where the victim's heart under the floorboards betrays the murder." Grissom looks surprised: "'The Tell-Tale Heart.' I thought you didn't like reading the classics." "I do," says Greg, "when they're about dismembered bodies." And here, on a light intertextual note, ends segment 3. Yet this banter also introduces a bit of misdirection, because while the Poe comparison has merit—after all, the immured evidence in the Eichler house walls betrays the murder—this third segment of "4×4" doesn't produce any dismembered body. In Poe's tale, the narrator, obsessed by an old man's "Evil Eye," kills him, dismembers the corpse, places the body parts under the floorboards, and then replaces the boards "so cleverly, so cunningly that no human eye—not even *his*—could have detected any thing wrong" (556, 558). He left "no stain of any kind"—the traces of the criminal act are only imprinted on the narrator's interior world. But in segment 3 of "4×4," such is the unimportance of the prostitute Tiffany that her death—the *real* murder-mystery of the segment, as we discover at the very last minute—produces no psychological discontent whatsoever. No one asks what happened to her body or whether she had any surviving family members to contact. Thus, Greg's allusion to Poe effectively reminds us of a strange absence. For what *is* "dismembered" in the third segment of "4×4" (and not in "The Tell-Tale Heart") is the house itself, its drywall and framing lumber cut up with saws and pry bars so as to make visible what has been hidden just as, in the second segment, the drawn curtain on the convention center stage makes visible a convention model's heretofore concealed corpse.

Finally, if the Poe reference underscores the ways in which buildings and bodies are anatomized throughout this episode, made to correspond through a series of metonymic substitutions, and also the ways in which

some kind of interior "personal" life gets occluded in our contemporary, postindustrial culture of the image or of simulacra, this reference also returns us to *tale-telling* itself—to narrative, even if a narrative of and for death. For if Morta, the Roman goddess of death, invariably cuts the thread of life, she is herself a character in the larger Parcae story: Nona spins the thread, Decima measures the thread, and Morta cuts it. They are not only the dreaded Fates, but they are also artists or artisans, crafty in their skills. "4×4" is likewise crafty: even as its overall structure formally subverts linear narrative, it also forcefully reminds us that narratives claiming to represent our phenomenological experience of the built environment are themselves spatialized. From this perspective, the analogy drawn in segment 3 between human bodies and the built environment (the Eichler house), along with its plot dynamic centering on the porous nature of membranes revealed by the threat of airborne outbreaks, suggests a particular tale being told, one whose predominant tropes allegorize how—as was the case with Lisa Schumacher's back-story in segment 2—the distinctive spatial logic spawned by globalizing finance capital development imprints itself on Las Vegas domestic interiors. Consider, in short, the viral outbreak of *rhizopus oryzae* here in relation to Jameson's characterization of our predominant globalizing mode of economic production as one of "spasmodic historical developments and mutations," whose "leap[ing] from geographical space to space" discloses how "the system is better seen as a kind of virus ... and its development as something like an epidemic" (*Cultural Turn* 139–40).

4. Brokedown Palace

As the "4×4" episode's third segment ends, the narrative's rewind motif that marks a transition into the episode's final segment delivers us back into the darkness, where a black female street person discovers a young boy's corpse lying under a blanket on a bus stop bench. The medium camera shot of the distraught woman holding the dead boy across her lap presents a western American version of the Pieta tableau. Behind this human dyad in the foreground, we glimpse a portion of sidewalk and narrow strip of grass, behind which is a mostly empty parking lot that fronts a single-story strip mall featuring a 24-hour clothes laundry. As investigator Nick Stokes processes the crime scene through the early-morning darkness and on into the full light of day, he discovers the faint impression of tracks in the grass behind the bus-stop bench. He reasons that the tracks were made by a cart from the nearby laundry; he further learns, from a homeless man on the scene, that the laundry's carts are equipped with electronic locking mechanisms, which get activated any time a customer tries to move the

cart beyond the laundry's electronically patrolled property line. Thus the "key" to unlocking the mystery of the boy's death is literally the remote control key to the carts that the laundry's business manager possesses. Only someone with access to such a device, Stokes reasons, could unlock the wheels of a laundry cart so that it could be used to dump a blanket-covered, heavily bruised corpse on the bus bench just beyond the laundry's electronic frontier. "I was just hoping that somebody would find him and take care of him," the manager confesses during an interview with Stokes. "Hey," Stokes firmly answers, "*You* found him"; and as he finishes his next sentence—"*You* put him in the dryer"—a masterful jump cut reveals Stokes speaking not to the business manager, but rather to the dead boy's best friend, Andy, who tearfully confesses that he shut the industrial dryer's door and turned on the machine at his friend Chase Ryan's urging and then abandoned the scene when he realized that the machine's combined heat and motion had killed his friend.

"Just another day in paradise," Stokes quips to Grissom as they pass each other in the lab/office hallway in the concluding scene. Another day in which a twelve-year-old boy has been abandoned behind the glass door of a clothes dryer and then dumped on a bus-stop bench like so much dirty laundry; another day in which a twenty-nine-year-old has been strangled and then abandoned in a deluxe motor home parked behind a convention center stage curtain. And too: another *CSI* shift during which a young man lies mangled inside a wrecked Fiero and a body builder lies dead near an exercise machine in his suburban Las Vegas house. Taken together, these scenes, along with Stokes's ironic comment, reveal not so much a paradise lost—for in *CSI* there never has existed in the Las Vegas Strip's zip code of Paradise, Nevada, a prelapsarian, originary moment of grace or innocence from which to chart a later decline—rather, as is the case with the complex pastoral of Nicolas Poussin's famous painting of shepherds in Arcadia, even amidst the pleasure zone architecture of *CSI*'s Las Vegas, (1) death has always existed and (2) the paradisal dream has always already been commodified, the dominant ideology of youth and beauty enmeshed in a system of planned obsolescence as destructive in its passage as is time.

Again: with *CSI* as evidence, what can we learn from Las Vegas and, by extension, from the cultural imaginary being produced about the contemporary US West in the new millennium? In the first place—as is the case with such writers as Cormac McCarthy, Luis Alberto Urrea, and Charles Bowden—we can learn that there is neither a time nor a space that is not also a time or space irradiated by the human encounter with death: death as image and as theme centered on a violent event of the

end; but also, as "4×4" particularly dramatizes, death as a formal problem of or crisis in narrative representation. As image and theme, it is as if *CSI's* repetition compulsion with the varied faces of death stems from an urgent need to ensure that such everyday events do not become invisible and hence forgotten—which is to say disappear before the show's implicit utopian dream of justice can be realized. And as a reality existing beyond representation, death's repetitive presence in "4×4" forces an exploration of exactly what metaphors, narrative models, and visual strategies can best convey its particular logic and language.

Whether considered as image, as theme, or as formal problem, death's constant presence in *CSI* decomposes social, ethical, and legal order, essentially inaugurating a moment of boundary confusion—this visualized at the crime scene by the abject corpse's disfiguration, by its internal bodily fluids leaking out, violating the victim's boundary of skin. As we have suggested here, in "4×4" the repetition of two tropes in particular relays the affective intensity of death as an emergent, irruptive force: that of *the accident* (bodies in machines involving accelerated motion or heat); and that of the *serial logic of (re)production or viral contagion*, where both material objects and human bodies circulate and migrate across not only dermal but also geopolitical boundaries, in the process suggesting the literal and metaphorical corruption, from the inside out, of both the individual and the social body. Contending against this systolic rhythm of decomposition and boundary disruption inaugurated by death is, of course, the diastolic rhythm of composition, the restoration of order via forensic science and technological prosthesis—this latter rhythm materially represented via the show's repetitious images both of *crime scenes* cordoned off by yellow tape and of opened-up bodies lying on *autopsy tables* (Tatum, "Spectral Beauty" 127–28). In *CSI*, in short, a particular crime scene exists as a metonymy for the greater epidemic of urban violence and hence represents *the ruined face of the city*, its cordoned-off architecture of abandonment paralleled by *the ruined face and body of the dead victim on a table* in the *CSI* lab/office complex.[6]

By focusing on the show's central chronotopes of the crime scene and the autopsy table, then, we can learn from the *CSI* preoccupation with death the specific lineaments of what Mark Seltzer has called our contemporary "wound culture." But by considering further the thematic and formal prominence of the technological prosthesis attached to this show's central chronotopes, the second thing we can learn about the cultural imaginary of Las Vegas and, by extension, the US West is this: the show's aesthetic power and its critical interest depend on the success with which it diagnoses "a whole new postmodern space in emergence around us." As Fredric Jameson for one has argued, architecture "remains

in this sense the privileged aesthetic language; and the distorting and fragmenting reflexions of one enormous glass surface to the other can be taken as paradigmatic of the central role of process and reproduction in postmodernist culture" ("Postmodernism" 79). Analogous to the face and body of the dead victim on the autopsy table and crime scene, whose void spaces display a literal sacrifice of matter, there is in *CSI* the corresponding sacrifice of the substantial architectural body: the replacement of brick and solid curtain walls with modular transparent cells demarcated by clear glass skins, their functionality determined by the visual displays of electronic machines dedicated to reproducing virtual metonymies (for example, DNA bar codes) of the dead victim's body.

Memorialized by the scene of the crime and by the dead victim lying on the autopsy table, singular "accidents" and, in their aftermath, forensic acts of extended surveillance circulate across spatial registers and boundaries in lateral or dispersed manner, "transforming all that once seemed solid and secure into liminal transitions in networks" (Taylor 329). Indeed, the

glass partitions and hallway passages of the *CSI* lab/office complex, the "4×4" plotlines, and the specific crime scenes at the Las Vegas Convention Center and the Eichler-designed house all suggest that in "the whole new postmodern space in emergence around us," the local or regional must be regarded neither as discrete and autonomous, nor as fixed on a geographical scale that clearly differentiates between local, regional, national, and global registers. Rather, as the accelerated motion of machines, or as a convention model's back-story of migration from Los Angeles to Las Vegas, or as the spreading contagion infecting a body builder's body discloses, the ruined face of the city and of the victim always already *interfaces* with these other geographical registers. From this perspective, Las Vegas constitutes a nodal point where the disjunctive flows of information, capital, humans, and cultural productions come together on a regional

and global tourism and entertainment grid organized by multinational corporate capitalism. So the third lesson we can learn from the recursive narrative logic of "4×4" and the architectural logic of the modular spaces, the glass skins, and the hallway passages of the *CSI* lab/office complex is how this "whole new postmodern space" of the technological sublime is at the same time a *postregional* space. As produced by *CSI*, then, Las Vegas represents the detachment of an urban space from what Krista Comer has called "the regional West and its historical linkages with discourses related to the nation-state" and its re-positioning "in close relation to other global cities and to global capital and labor movements" linked by the flows of people, commodities, capital, and images (246).

Even so, there is at least one more lesson to be learned in addition to those that focus on how the *CSI* external (crime scene) and internal (lab complex) scenes of forensic surveillance diagnose the emergence of the US West as a postwestern and postregional networked city-region. For we need to remember that like all police procedural and murder mysteries, the *CSI* forensic way of seeing operates according to a hermeneutic of suspicion. And when combined with repetitive visual images of the contemporary *noir* urban wasteland, this prevailing hermeneutic of suspicion effectively renders *all* urban (and even suburban) space as a potential crime scene—effectively transforms all postregional urban space into an edgy *riskscape* whose visible, perhaps even by now familiar, features are haunted by the spectral residue of past actions and accidents.[7] From the risk theory perspective that has emerged in the past two decades in a variety of disciplines, the assessment of risk, hazards, and accidents links up with theories of modernization and, more recently, of globalization.

One effect of the social transformations accompanying the creation of large-scale, complex transportation, economic, and communication systems guided by sophisticated technological advances is, in Ulrich Beck's term, "reflexive modernization." Beck's term refers to how hazards or accidents—such as dead bodies in machines and the viral contagion or reproductive logic of ruin dramatized in "4×4"—emerge as the very effects of the modernizing process, their existence constituting a sort of feedback loop that reflexively confronts modern societies with the visible and volatile evidence of their modernization.[8] The problem, as any number of ecodisaster films and books disclose, is that as modernization has proceeded, such large-scale systems become too complex to be fully controlled, managed, and understood. In addition, with technological advances accelerating the speed at which such systems operate, there is an increase in the system's instability and, hence, its vulnerability to failure. As Mark Taylor observes, in increasingly complex economic networks, communication webs, and

information systems like those that predominate in our contemporary everyday lives, a distinctive logic guided by certain new rules applies: the rule of nonlinearity (feedback loops and repetitions lead to effects disproportionate to causes, as in the "butterfly effect"); the rule of the aleatory (the complexity of highly networked systems leads to chance, random and often violent collisions); the rule of contestation ("networks are sites of contestation that sometimes turn violent") and the rule of vulnerability (the more networked systems are, the more vulnerable they are to disruption, as we see in power outages or viral pandemics) (327–28).

Dave Hickey suggests that Las Vegas "floats on a sleek *frisson* of anxiety and promise," its existence representing a "last refuge of unsanctioned risk and spectacle" and a "less class-ridden sense of American possibilities" (23, 175, 180). Yet this summary view remains a minority one among theorists and cultural critics commenting on Las Vegas. If Las Vegas arguably can be said to represent a spatial utopia, for most critics and theorists it represents a degenerate rather than the redemptive one that Hickey for one reads into such shows as "Siegfried and Roy at the Mirage" or sees epitomized by the Strip's bright lights. "Degenerate" because—like the spatial utopias of suburban malls and fantasy theme parks such as Disneyland—Las Vegas cultivates nostalgia for a mythical past, perpetuates commodity fetishism, and promotes uncritical sensibilities.[9] "Degenerate" also because it represents the triumph of the simulacra, a space where not just any so-called "real" history gets sacrificed, but reality itself gets murdered.

Let us consider again in this context Mark Taylor's description of the new rules organizing the distinctive logic of contemporary riskscapes: that they are nonlinear, aleatory, contested, vulnerable. His key terms could well be describing the nonlinear, cross-temporal, and cross-modal feedback loops of images, characters, and dialogue exchanges that define the distinctive narrative logic of "4×4." Thus we might say that in addition to the specific features or distinctive logic of the postmodern technological sublime, "4×4" displays a set of new tropes and a new narrative model for articulating the emergence of the postregional riskscape that defines the everyday space of the US West. Furthermore, in concert with the detective or police procedural genre's focus on how a violent crime sutures psychology (motive) with history, the rewinding and repetitions of the "4×4" narrative—its interfacing of its four discrete segments—suggest a narrative dynamic centered on the necessity in the present of repeating, remembering, and working through haunting, uncanny acts of past violence. Just as the individual segments of "4×4" interface with each other, just as the lab/office complex interfaces cellular spaces with hallway passageways, so

too the face of the victim on the autopsy table and the face of the city materialize the interface of past and present.

As a model for articulating the logic and language of death, "4×4" points toward how, as Benjamin suggests about the *Trauerspiel*, or German mourning play, "history has merged into setting," its script displayed on the countenance of ruins and fragments—think crime scenes and body parts—rather than being lost in the desert's mirage of heat waves or the Strip's bright lights (*Origin* 177). Like the ghostly phantasmagoria effect Benjamin saw projected by the Parisian Arcade's juxtaposition of the old (for example, horse carriages) and the new (plate glass window displays) at the advent of modernity, so too we discover the distinctive spatial and temporal logic of "4×4" to be of a piece with the continuously rewound literary, cinematic, and televisual images that embed Virilio's concept of "the accident" in the Las Vegas built environment: the YouTube videos reproducing the images of hotel casinos being imploded, these images later replayed in Hollywood movies. The obsolescent neon signs of the Neon Boneyard. The vacant, undeveloped lots and stalled construction projects juxtaposed to the new City Center, or the aging Riviera and Circus Circus hotel casinos juxtaposed with the sleek new Wynn and Encore properties. The detritus of the Atomic West surrounding its Las Vegas epicenter, its imagined past scenario of environmental collapse uncannily repeated in the present-day medical misfortunes of Downwinders and the future projections of Las Vegas as a ghost town buried in the sand of the Mojave Desert, the tip of the Luxor pyramid barely visible. So the final of the four lessons we can learn from *CSI*'s version of Las Vegas is this: seen rightly, the narrative and architectural model displayed in "4×4" illustrates anything but the so-called sacrifice of history or the murder of reality in the society of the spectacle.

NOTES

1. In his book *CSI*, Derek Kompare studies the different depictions of Las Vegas in the television show, arguing that in CSI, "Las Vegas itself is ... part of the evidence under investigation" (39).

2. Other episodes worth mentioning besides "4×4" that depart from the traditional narrative logic of the police procedural/murder mystery genre are "Viva Las Vegas" (season 5; aired 9/23/04) and "Rashomama" (season 6; 4/27/06). Like "4×4," the "Viva Las Vegas" episode includes four murder investigations instead of the show's standard one or two, whereas "Rashomama" deploys multiple perspectives on the same crime (thus adopting the format Japanese director Akira Kurosawa uses in his classic movie *Rashomon* (1950).

3. This quote is from the audio commentary by Terrance O'Hara, David Rambo, Dustin Lee Abraham, and Naren Shanker that appears as an "extra" attached to Episode 519 ("4×4") on disc 5 of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. The Complete 5th Season*, CBS Broadcasting and Alliance Atlantic Productions (2005).

4. See Hsu 148–49.

5. See Tatum 131 and Seltzer 10.

6. In discussing Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Mark Seltzer notes how Benjamin's discussion of Atget's photographs of deserted city streets likens them to scenes of a crime. But, Seltzer adds, "what surfaces here is perhaps something more: something like a resemblance between the face and the scene of the crime." Seltzer is interested in the relays between the personality and space, which in "pathological public spheres" is evident in images of empty crime scenes testifying to "a wounded sociality" (150).

7. Arjun Appadurai has argued that in a global economy of flows, a particular "imagined world" gets produced by the interaction of various "scapes": a financescape of capital investment; an ethnoscape of human populations; and a distinctive mediascape created by an integrated global media's circulation of imagery (33–35). Here we are adding to this list the idea of a particular regional geographical imaginary as also produced as a "riskscape."

8. For "reflexive modernization," see Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition, and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (1994). The summary description here is indebted to Heise's overview, 750–52.

9. See Harvey 164–66.

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