



## Surveillance of Dead Bodies in the United States: An Application to Missing Victim Homicide Searches

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### Introduction

Foucault (1977) lays out a number of ways in which society works to surveil living members of society. Surveillance, however, follows a person into death as well. Understanding how this is carried out and the extent to which governments pursue surveilling the dead has several distinct implications for prosocial research into the recovery of missing homicide victims. Disappearances of victims often occur within a “blind spot” to visible surveillance (Williams & Johnson, 2004, p. 4) and therefore their locations should be identified by first examining where bodies should or should not be. Drake and Shulka (2005) have alluded to these body disposal areas metaphorically as ‘dead spaces.’

Surveillance is defined as the observing, watching over, and monitoring of a space, with the purpose of “influencing, managing or directing” others (Lyon, 2001; Monahan & Wood, 2018; Khan, 2020, p. 26). Surveillance often is increased dramatically following a homicide as searchers scour the landscape for the victim, a practice that often uncovers additional human remains. Such was the case in a 2021 aerial search of the Grand Canyon for missing victim Gabor Berczi-Tomscanyi. During this search, Scott Walsh’s remains were unexpectedly discovered (Associated Press, 2021a). Walsh had been missing for approximately six years prior to his eventual discovery (see table 1). This type of difficulty was first reported by criminologist Marvin Wolfgang in 1958, who observed that many “victims are buried, and a homicide never suspected,” an issue that persists to this very day (p. 284).

As a society, gathering up the dead is an act of exercising complete control and power, but also of exerting a positive form of societal social control to hold criminals accountable. Surveillance is an intrinsic part of the search for missing homicide victims. Investigators often immediately view the closed-circuit TV (CCTV) cameras for observational evidence of a persons’ last moments. Drones armed with camera capabilities are often employed to visually search difficult to access areas closely inspecting search targets like rivers, lakeshores, and mountainsides (Pensieri, et al., 2020).

The body, the corpse, or the remains all have a very strong connection to the living and therefore an “ongoing relationship, at least until burial” (Roberts, 2012, p. 13). Power comes with these forms of observation, the power to find and reunite the deceased body with their family and community, and to help bring offenders to justice.

The purpose of this paper is not to argue against surveillance, but to examine it as a *sociological fact*. Surveillance happens, either surreptitiously or explicitly, and with purpose. Developing a better understanding of surveillance, its uses, operation, and mechanisms will assist investigators in their search for missing homicide victims.

## Systems of Surveillance

One way of controlling a population is by determining and documenting who has died. This begins with establishing an identification system to identify who a person is, using what has been termed “machineries of identification” (Williams & Johnson, 2004, p. 1). These are systematic society-wide surveillance measures that record or track a person’s identity, such as passports and identification cards. In this way, a person’s movement can be regulated throughout society. After death has occurred, similarly, the U.S. government uses a database called the Social Security Death Index to keep track of who has died, with a central motive of using it to prevent the issuance of payments to dead people (Quinn et al., 2008).

In forensic science, criminalists use scientific methods to inspect the dead, watching over them in a sense, but with special emphasis on documentation to prove when and how they died. All of the evidence collected, the photographs and sketches made, as well as observations documented in written reports serve to surveil the organized information about dead persons (Williams & Johnson, 2004). The results fill archive rooms in each city with simply the investigatory data alone. Should the courts be employed, even further documents are produced into the thousands of pages of legal motions and forms, as well as word-for-word trial transcripts, all documenting the dead in excruciating detail. Storage of these audio and visual observations acts as a sort of parallel image or reflection of the dead person—a type of bureaucratic livening. Community activists and homicide researchers work to tally the numbers of the dead due to violence from homicide and suicide. Geographic Information System (GIS) experts map the murders to track when and where the killings occur. The massive databank of the departments of public health administers the National Death Index, which also tracks all deaths through a uniform death certification reporting system (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022).

Genealogists collect and organize personal and family knowledge, making it available for a variety of different uses. Employing volumes of books, index cards, and now computer databases, genealogists are surveilling society for dead people, reporting on family lineages and tracking who is buried in which cemetery. Associated with (Mormon) religious institutions, people and their deaths are monitored as if by the watchful eyes of God. Their site brags of having the “largest collection of family records in the world, with information on more than 3 billion deceased people” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2022). Genealogy workers have begun to perform in a manner like that of police surveillance. One method called forensic genealogy is now being used to track offenders in murder investigations. Forensic genealogy describes the use of genealogical methods to assist in criminal investigations. It is used for wide-ranging purposes, including biometrics, facial recognition, and forensic DNA. These technologies can liven cold case homicides, assist in serial homicide investigations, and aid in the identification of skeletal remains (Kaiser, 2018, p. 1348).

An online service called ‘Find A Grave’ hosts a database containing millions of burial records, this fits neatly within an informational surveillance bureaucracy. Some Internet search results contain photographs of decedents or of their burial marker. Within each cemetery, burial spaces are laid out with bureaucratic precision using carefully mapped sections, plots, and graves. All these systems work to monitor and surveil dead bodies to pinpoint their exact current location. Exactly how everyone in life had an address, these are the addresses of the dead. As people were controlled by surveillance in life,

graves and markers are controlled in death, with each cemetery or mausoleum having posted rules of proper behaviors associated with how to honor the dead (Yalom, 2008).

### **Acceptable Locations for Dead Bodies**

Before delineating where the bodies of missing victims are to be searched for, we must first examine the locations in which dead bodies are socially allowed. This is not expressly indicated by the surveillance structure, but rather, through a series of societally constructed patterns of constraints using laws, rules, norms, and more. These are not in replacement of the information bureaucracy, but rather they contribute to it.

Few of these social controls are explicit within the law. However, deaths that occur outside of professional care must be reported to the coroner or medical examiner. Deceased individuals are required to be buried within a certain number of hours, unless they are embalmed or cremated. This typically requires the intervention of a professional mortician, for which money must be rendered, and paperwork must be completed. Dead bodies are allowed to be buried or cremated without embalming if the burial occurs “within 24-hours,” a practice common among Muslims (Yalom, 2008, p. 39). Obviously with suicides or homicides, police are required to be notified. Although most states do *not* have laws prohibiting burial on one's private property, there are zoning regulations controlling where and how a body is to be buried (Lee, 2016). A completed death certificate is required before burial, continuing the surveillance after one's death, but also documenting the legality of the after-death processing. If a house is being sold where a home burial occurred, it must be noted on the deed that there is a burial site on the property. A home burial site is still considered a cemetery, and disturbing as it is, it can be legal under certain conditions. It varies by state, but certain zoning regulations may require where and how the person can be buried in one's backyard. Some examples include specification of the distance between a neighboring property and the grave, the minimum depth of the grave, or the required distance between a grave and a water feature (Rome Monument, 2022).

Other than these previously mentioned exceptions, bodies may be in a variety of locations before, during, and after an individual's death. Bodies may be in hospitals, clinics, medical emergency rooms, hospice facilities, or in home hospice during the apparent downward spiral toward the actual moment of death. Very sick people may travel about freely in an open society knowing that they are about to die. This may be true of indigent citizens, or persons with acute chronic conditions like alcoholics or drug addicts. One might wander for a short duration after a violent injury, either accidental, like from a car crash, or after mortal wounding from an assault. An individual can even legally decline treatment by paramedics or medical professionals, leading victims to be in unexpected locations when found dead. Of course, homicide victims may also be discovered in a variety of locations.

Once dead, human bodies, observed or discovered, can be in limine for a short time (not more than two hours), during which a process must have begun via contact with authorities. Bodies then can be in a hospital room, inside a place of residence, placed in a hospital morgue cooler, an ambulance, rescue boat, a hearse, or other medical examiner transport vehicle. Victims of a medical or trauma incident may have to wait for investigational staff or the coroner to arrive. Bodies can be transported to a medical examiner's office (or other medical facility) or a funeral home. It is only during this time of transport that the body is alone, apart from an assigned guardian. The occupied transport vehicle is never left unattended.

Each of the remains are documented into the surveillance system, by which the body is monitored and recorded, and treated within a certain regiment of norms and morality. They may be sent for organ harvesting in a valid organ donation system or sent to be studied by a university's forensic pathology program. The brains of some decedents such as criminal offenders, athletes, or boxers who were subjected to historical patterns of blunt force trauma may be studied for evidence or for

abnormalities (Henne & Ventresca, 2020). Dead bodies are notated for other forms of research like those sent to “body farms” where corpses are used in research to better evaluate questions about the post-mortem interval or about patterns of decay (Byard, 2017, p. 473). During this phase, bodies may be in-transit in a special vehicle such as a dark colored Suburban or a hearse. Bodies are then placed into a morgue-type cooler to prevent decomposition, until they can be autopsied for whatever scientific purpose they are assigned, often being photographed, and further documented. While most of this activity occurs behind the public veil, it is typically observed by assigned officials and relentlessly documented within the surveillance bureaucracy.

Many bodies are openly displayed for family and friends for days at a time prior to the funeral ritual (Verdery, 1999). During the time between one's death and their funeral, mourners often sit vigil over the body, constantly observing it and situating it as the center of activities. While contemporary Christian society does leave the body unattended after-hours or overnight, some Native Americans watch over the body uninterrupted for at least 24-hours, and sometimes even days at a time (Springer, 2014). This vigil of the body, sitting awake with the body, was the means by which survivors ensured the decedent did not awaken (Anderson Funeral Home, 2016).

In the normal processing of the dead, bodies can be expected to be found at operating funeral homes, within motorcades during funeral processions, or at crematoriums or cemeteries. Even at cemeteries, bodies are only within their graves, or marched from the hearse to the casket-rigging just above a burial lot, all which are publicly observed by various family members, funeral managers, friends and sometimes dignitaries. Cemeteries are typically kept with grass neatly cut and graves orderly arranged, promoting the ability of caretakers or the public to properly surveil for the disordering of corpses. Corpses should never be outside of their assigned plots. There should not be bodies buried under a casket, nor multiple corpses within each lot, though caskets are sometimes stacked (Davidson, 2010).

Interestingly, cremated remains can be stored or even displayed at home, usually in an urn, or buried at a cemetery or interred at a mausoleum. Cremated ashes are problematic within the surveillance system as they can interfere with the proper identification of illicit remains spread by murderers. Every state has its own specific laws about spreading ashes. This serves to prevent comingling with unauthorized disposal of human remains or that could lead to misidentification of *criminal* disposals of skeletonized remains. Cremated remains are also governed by laws and rules that prevent cremains from being spread over certain environmental features. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has specific federal regulations for at sea burials. Loved ones who choose to legally spread ashes at sea must file a report to the EPA within a month of burial (Brooks & Sreter, 2021).

### **The Collecting of Human Remains**

Human bodies or remains are not left unattended in public places. Instead, they are reported and collected. This can occur in several ways, but most typically the citizens will contact the police if they find an unattended corpse or skeletal remains with the special concern that a crime may have been committed. Urban areas usually lead to a rapid discovery of the body because the surveillance across the urban landscape is quite extensive. Areas wherein these recoveries are made include places such as residences, alleyways, roadsides, yards, vacant lots, inside parked cars, public parks, beaches, rivers, ponds, and lakes. Rarely, they are discovered within cemeteries, although suicides sometimes occur there (Boracchi et al., 2017). Homicides also occur in cemeteries. In Springfield National Cemetery in Missouri, two men who had been living together were found shot dead (Meier, 2022). Police organize the collection process along with other emergency services and the medical examiner or coroners' offices. Interestingly, bodies are recovered and removed from public observation, as that is reserved for

government officials. At the scene, privacy screening may be erected, and most media outlets are reluctant to publish photographs of the decedent or videos of the killing.

In rural or remote areas surveillance can be more difficult due to the vast areas of agriculture or wilderness. The locating process can not only take longer, but so too, can the body collection process. Finding a corpse down a 500-foot ravine in a mountainous area presents an unusual strain on the collection process as officials work to clear the environment of dead bodies. In some cases, bodies are never collected due to the dangerous or hazardous terrain. For example, 39 sets of human remains have been unretrieved from Alaska's Mount McKinley (Fleming, 2020), along with the 45 bodies on Mount Rainier, in Washington State (Associated Press, 2014). Extreme effort is undertaken to retrieve the corpse and move it to a socially acceptable and more convenient location for death investigators. In some wilderness retrievals, workers need to hike dozens of miles on foot, up and down hills, to recover the remains, but usually within several hours the corpse is recovered.

Even prior to death, searches are undertaken to locate missing people. In many instances, as in suicides or homicides, death is assumed, and searches can continue for years during repeated attempts to find and collect the corpse. Searches reveal how determined citizens and families are to remove a corpse from such a profane environment, but some searchers have also described their fears of actually locating the searched-for body. In the search for a Kansas City, Missouri, missing woman case in 2017, one of the searchers was heard saying, "it has always been a fear to find a dead person" (Wooston, 2017, p. 1). Fear of finding the dead corpse forms a cognitive bias to prevent the searcher from visually detecting it. In this respect, the surveillance structure is reinforced by civilians who themselves are often fearful of death.

The primary purpose of the initial law enforcement investigation is to document the removal of human or skeletal remains from unacceptable, and perhaps inhospitable, environments. It is our sentient nature that steers us from leaving a body "out there." But for homicide detectives, collecting bodies serves another purpose—to cleanse the environment of undetected criminal homicides and prevent further murders. Alternately, medical examiners and coroners seek to remove all component parts of human or skeletal remains from the environment for a different purpose. They do this because as medical pathologists, each piece helps to reassemble a great puzzle, without which they cannot fully apprehend the cause and manner of death. The motive of pathology is to develop knowledge that can lead to better medical treatments or prevent premature death.

### **The Movement of Dead Bodies**

Human remains are thought to belong to one permanent place, their family's eventual burial location. Therefore, bodies are moved from point to point as the family attempts to "repatriate" them—to disinter and reinter them. In that sense, dead bodies have social and even political lives to which we account. While this occurs mostly of those who died due to war, wherein hero soldiers were eventually located, identified, and "brought home" (Wagner, 2015), it can also be true of the victims of serial and other types of homicide offenders. We seek to redress the grievance by taking the victim away from the perpetrator who is trying to permanently possess the victim's corpse. In a sense, this is a form of anti-surveillance that prevents victims from being further observed. Offenders may view hiding the location of the victim as a relational secret between the victim and himself, which in his own mind constructs a form of intimacy—the kind that surveillance by the masses would destroy.

Many murder victims are buried by an offender, only to be disinterred and reburied in a differing location. This happens more often than one might think. A man long suspected of killing a missing female college student at California Polytechnic State in 1996, was arrested in 2021 after police found blood evidence and a human-sized soil disturbance under a deck on his family's property, suggesting that a body had once been buried there (Associated Press, 2021b). Victims of murderers who are buried

by an offender are, if eventually recovered, dug up and moved to a more acceptable and formal family gravesite within an official cemetery (Powell, 2010). This represents a locational choice whose contradictory agency is exercised by the survivors, rather than by the predator himself. Exhumation by local law enforcement authorities can also occur, but even that must be observed, usually by homicide investigators, medical examiners or coroners, and a funeral director.

Sometimes families choose to have the remains of a family member moved from one burial plot or cemetery to another, either to bring them in closer proximity within home or due to intra-familial squabbles. Removal of remains can also occur when cemeteries close or are moved, which although rare, can happen. Discovery or removal of remains of First Peoples is highly surveilled and controlled within the context of archaeology and anthropology. It can typically only occur under the observation of an appointed representative of a recognized tribe.

Occasionally remains are uncovered during construction of buildings or highways. When this occurs, construction must stop, and most states have laws that require the intervention of the state anthropologist and others (DeVries, 2012).

During floods and hurricanes, dead bodies can move in the water when victims drown as the result of the disaster. High water can also cause caskets with dead remains to float to the surface like a cork and travel great distances. After these natural disasters, caskets have even been discovered hanging open for trees, blown there by the incredible winds of the storm. It is a central responsibility of the Federal Emergency Management Agency to recover and identify the remains, returning them to 'where they belong' (Morgan et al., 2006).

### **Mechanics and Mechanisms of Surveillance**

The exact process of how persons or spaces are monitored can occur in several differing ways. While CCTV or surveillance cameras are what most people think of, it can also involve the introduction of capable guardians like nosy neighbors who always look out from behind their curtains to see what unusual commotion is occurring. Sometimes they get a license plate number, or even record them, along with car description and notes, in a running journal.

In that same vein, police often monitor the scenes of a street homicide in the days following a shooting to record the license plates of passing vehicles, because suspects routinely will return to the crime scene (Douglas et al., 2013). In arson homicides, investigators may photograph crowds gathered to watch the fire, or to watch fire suppression efforts (Boal, 2017; DeHaan, 1997; Dept of Justice, 2000). Homicide investigators sometimes attend funerals to observe the behavior of mourners for unusual responses to the death or to see who is affiliating with who. Investigators also conduct stakeouts to monitor suspect behavior prior to their arrest, hoping the offender will lead them to a body (Gartrell, 2020).

Camera surveillance has increased dramatically with the advent of the increases in cell phone technologies. Every cell phone has a camera, and many murders are now captured on cell phones such as in the killing of George Floyd where a teen girl filmed what would become a pivotal piece of evidence in convicting the offending officer (Knowles, 2021). Increasingly police have not only cameras in mobile squad cars but are also wearing body cameras. In Louisiana in 2015, body-cam footage caught the shooting by deputies of a six-year-old boy (Livni, 2015). The officers were subsequently convicted of negligent homicide (Chawla, 2017). While body cameras might film unfolding homicides during police response, urban bicyclists are also beginning to wear bodycams as a means of protecting themselves from car-bike crashes including some homicides (Wingfield, 2012). While most car-bike crashes result from negligence, some involving minority victims may be criminal homicides where the offender, leaving the body in plain view, flees the scene. Many intersections in major U.S. cities have now installed area cameras controlled from real-time crime centers which are directly communicating

with dispatch centers. Although rural areas may have fewer cameras, many businesses are employing them to prevent outdoor afterhours thefts. Some companies have installed cameras to prevent illegal dumping (Sciacca, 2022), which inherently would discourage the use of such a site for homicide body disposal.

Unexpected forms of surveillance occur every time you check in at a workplace using a timeclock. A timecard is considered proof that you were in fact at work, although there are known cases where a confederate punched the timeclock for a murderer. Many businesses have sign-in logbooks to document who comes and goes at corporate headquarters, and which can later be monitored for illicit activities. The same is true of air flights, bus, or train tickets, or fare pass-cards, which register the date and time (Utsunomiya et al., 2006), that when combined with security camera footage, can capture pictures of a person using the card during criminal behavior.

Another unique form of surveillance occurs every time your motor vehicle is ticketed. Most commonly, these people are issued parking violations that detail the date and location of the vehicle, and that can place a suspect in proximity to the homicidal act or body disposal location. Other kinds of tickets can serve the same purpose. Cars passing through toll plazas also have cameras which have been used to convict or in some cases clear a suspect from consideration (DiBiase, 2014; Sullivan, 2020).

A newer form of surveillance that has become common place is the tracking of social media. Social media activity provides a time-stamped log of when an individual was on their device. In some cases, offenders have been known to hint at what is to come or to brag about their crimes after-the-fact. This was true for one teen offender working in a pack, who posted a video to Snapchat after murdering a young adult, confessing to the stabbing, and bragging “Should have seen the way that I kweffed [*sic*] him, man” (Rodger, 2020).

Live streams on websites such as Facebook or Instagram are particularly useful in homicide investigations since they show in real-time what an offender or victim was doing before, during, or after the criminal event. Occasionally, these videos even capture the murder weapon, the presence of additional accomplices, or potential witnesses who can then be tracked down and interviewed. This was the case for a 55-year-old man in North Carolina who unintentionally filmed his own murder on Facebook while live-streaming his walk home (NBC News, 2018).

The locations of cellular phones can reveal the location of the phone by examining the pinging of cell signals off cell phone towers. These signals must connect with three towers thus creating the opportunity for triangulating the location of the phone, though not necessarily the user. This is a powerful tool in tracking deceased homicide victims while their batteries last. Last phone call data and texted messages can sometimes expose potential suspects or predict general locations. Certain phones also have reverse tracking built into the individual phones to help trace stolen phones. Sex workers have been known to use phones, typing in the license plate numbers of cars they get into, begging to use the offender’s phone in which they call someone they know to register it on the offender’s call record (Magg, 2020). Offenders also try to manipulate these forms of surveillance by texting or posting from a victim’s phone after the murder as they attempt to confuse the crime timeline, or to make it appear that the victim is still alive. Offenders also sometimes disable their own cell phone to prevent it from tracking their movements.

Phones of any type can also provide call details by use of what are called LUDs. This acronym stands for “Local Usage Details” and are obtained by police through court order. These contain the logs of dates, times, and phone numbers of incoming and outgoing calls.

An unexpected method of surveillance comes in the form of Fitbits and Apple Watches, which can show an offender or victim’s previous location and movement. For example, in 2018 a man was convicted of his stepdaughter's murder after her Fitbit showed that her heart rate spiked then suddenly stopped during the time she was known to be with her stepfather (Dancyger, 2018). Alternatively, these devices can also exonerate the innocent, such as when a man was acquitted of his wife’s murder after his

Fitbit showed that he was asleep at the time (Moriarty, 2018). Location tracking services are not unique to Fitbits and Apple Watches; however, these devices are unique in their ability to pinpoint the exact time of death.

Location tracking has become increasingly common in recent years. While it is generally known that our phones are constantly being tracked, it is less well-known that our cars are often being tracked as well. In recent years, automotive companies have included clauses in their contracts stipulating that the automobile's movements will be tracked (Holley, 2018). This feature could also potentially be useful in locating live missing persons or fugitives.

Computer search histories can leave a trail detailing a person's thought process before and after committing a crime. Digital forensic crime analysts can identify and recover this data for use in victim searches even when it has been supposedly deleted, but this is predicated upon prior identification of a suspect to focus on. Many times, the footage is too grainy to be useful (Dooley & Yamada, 2020) or the cameras are not working.

### **Surveillance Breakdowns**

Surveillance is not a certainty (Williams & Johnson, 2004), and these instances can be called violations of surveillance. They are gaps in the surveillance process that are either accidental or purposeful. Cameras particularly can be overly problematic. Motion sensors sometimes do not trigger the cameras or alarms. The perpetrator might be too far from the sensor, or a tree branch may be interfering with the sensor. Cameras are often inoperable. Guards from the security team are not always fully alert. Sometimes they are sitting in the room without a supervisor and not paying attention, or not making rounds like they are supposed to. Blue lights, also known as Public Emergency Response Telephones (PERT), found on most college campuses, often do not work, thereby preventing citizens from reporting criminal activity (Russo, 2017; The Diamondback, 2019).

Making matters worse, offenders have become accustomed to camera surveillance. An example from a Philadelphia double homicide shows the shooters no longer attempt to hide their identities from the cameras during a killing (Steele & Tillman, 2009). In less risky crimes, offenders commonly wave at, smile at, or gesture toward the security camera (Gallegos, 2016). This shows a form of disregard by the offender as they are clearly acknowledging the existence of a camera, yet they do not feel deterred by it. In another example, during a 2013 Waterford, Michigan home invasion, the male offender is caught flipping off the home security camera as the family slept (Today, 2013). Offenders are not always threatened by the power of the camera, though it is not clear whether being viewed on camera necessarily leads to higher rates of apprehension. Furthermore, many criminals are unaware of the presence or location of these various cameras (Gill et al., 2006).

One type of surveillance breakdown involved the business conditions at the Tri-State Crematory located in Noble, Georgia where the incinerator stopped working and bodies began to backup. Once discovered, at least 57 corpses were discovered stacked in and around the property, with some stacked topsy-turvy inside of outdoor sheds, and even more parts were discovered in a nearby pond. Some of the dead bodies were sold and transported to science laboratories (Ripley et al., 2002). Clearly, these bodies should not have been stored at such a site.

Grave robberies are another form of violation. While theft or dislocation of remains does not happen often, we really do not understand the scope of such activity because of the stigma surrounding it and the grief it causes to families. Thefts of human remains from legitimate burial sites is likely to be much more common than is widely reported. This repositioning of the corpse is problematic to the overall surveillance process. Parts end up emerging where they are not supposed to be and it interferes with monitoring for criminal activity, though grave robbery itself is a crime (Seidel, 2018) and labeled as "interfering with a corpse," or of simple theft (Conway, 2016). Most robberies of graves are of the



decedent’s possessions or of the burial lots’ ornamentation of statues, fountains, bronze vases, and the like (Stanley, 1996; Tetrault, 2021). When human corpses are stolen from cemeteries, it is typically for ritual purpose (Griffith, 2020). In one case, two men were found with stolen body parts in their home that they intended to use in a ritual as part of a religious cult. Apparently, these human remains are used to invoke spirits of the dead and to cast spells on others (Smothers, 2002).

Concealing a murdered victim’s remains could be characterized as a form of grave robbery. It is taking the body of the victim and preventing its reunification with the family. This also prevents the ritual and “decent” burial, as may be religiously required. Body concealment violates surveillance by preventing or interfering with successful or valid observation. As such, it is intentional and purposeful, with multiple motives, such as to allow more time for extensive decedent decomposition and furthering the destruction of other kinds of forensic evidence. Criminal concealment is likely the primary cause of dislocated, missing, and illegitimate distribution of dead bodies.

Concealment also occurs as offenders in urban centers work to move the body to a disposal site. In several and perhaps even many cases, offenders have zipped remains into wheeled travel luggage, often dismembered. Some offenders were discovered only after the fact by viewing CCTV footage. Such was the case in one Los Angeles area case in 2018 where the offender boarded a Metro light-rail train. Police matched the discovered suitcase containing remains with transit video to identify their suspect (Mather & Panzar, 2018).

Evading surveillance for a considerable time, six bodies found in an Arizona desert were traced to a defunct corporation in Seattle, Washington, whose owner is alleged to have dumped them there. The company, which went bankrupt, still had at least a dozen donated bodies on dry ice in a trailer—bodies normally sold for training or research. Uncertain what to do with the bodies, they were scattered near his former personal property (Ingalls, 2022). Although the owner didn’t kill any of these victims, he is alleged to have leveraged weaknesses in the surveillance system to abandon the bodies, since they were ‘off the books.’ Despite this shortcoming, the remains were eventually discovered and placed into proper graves.

### **Surveillance Breakdowns in Homicide Victim Searches**

Homicide offenders who evade surveillance often reveal the most salient forms of systematic surveillance failures—those that take place in the interstitial in-betweens. Murderers take advantage of the liminal spaces that exist between observed and unobserved areas. They do so intuitively and, at least temporarily, effectively. Many of these failures take the form of cognitive errors that thrive when searchers rely only on visual observations.

One can point toward a phenomenon that was mentioned earlier, that when searching for a body, a second set of remains are sometimes discovered even when searchers are trained professionals (see Table 1). This shows how poor surveillance in society can be, regardless of how the victim died.

**Table 1**

*Searches for An Initial Victim That Resulted in Finding Additional Undetected Bodies or Remains*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Name of Initial Victim</b>	<b>Additional Victim Found</b>
2021	Gabor Berczi-Tomscanyi	Scott Walsh
2021	Brian Laundrie	Unidentified homeless man
2021	Daniel Robinson	Unidentified femurs, hips, & vertebrae

2021	Daniel Robinson	Unidentified skull
2020	Unidentified woman (skull)	Unidentified woman
2020	Unidentified man	Unidentified woman
2017	Jessica Runions	Brandon Herring
2017	Jessica Runions	Unidentified man
2016	Michael Hennager	Hannah Udvig
2005	Jessica Lunsford	Donna Julane Cook

Note. This is an availability sample for illustrative purposes, not a census of all possible cases.

Failures by police and search parties also occur. In Washington, D.C. police searched for missing murder victim Shandra Levy. She was found much later in an area just yards outside of where police had previously searched (Shapiro, 2016). See Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Missing Victims (All Types) Recovered in Areas Police Had Already Searched*

Year	Victim Name	Jurisdiction	Note
2021	Lisa Hagerty	Greenville, SC	Wooded area
2021	Braylen Noble	Toledo, OH	Apt. complex pool
2021	Kathleen Moore	Pasco Co., FL	Wooded area on off prop
2020	Chad Austin (wallet)	Amherst Co., VA	Wooded recreational area
2020	Harley Dilly	Port Clinton, OH	Residential chimney
2020	David James Markham	Indianola, MS	Abandoned structure
2019	Devin Bond	Rutherford Co., TN	Roadside area
2018	Brandyn Foster	Catskill, NY	Buried on offender's prop
2018	Timothy Cunningham	Atlanta, GA	Riverbank near his home
2018	Antavious Love	Wetumpka, AL	Caught on a tree in a river
2017	Aramazd Andressian Jr.	Santa Barbra Co., CA	Area near lake
2017	Dawn Carlson	Lake Bronson, MN	Bottom on river inside car
2017	George Louissaint Jr.	Jacksonville, FL	Murky apt. complex pond
2016	Toni Schorr	Hadin Co., TX	On victim's property
2016	Karen Graffeo	Morgan Co., CO	Inside a covered boat
2015	Omar Meza	Palm Desert, CA	Golf course pond
2013	Mandy Matula	Stearns Co., MN	Shallow grave in park
2012	John Lucas Edwards	Westminster, CO	Lake by dive team
2007	Elaine Pierson	Perry Co., PA	Down roadside embankment

Note. This is an availability sample for illustrative purposes, not a census of all possible cases.

In general, surveillance failures occur within a wide variety of liminal spaces. These are the gray areas that occur in the in-between. One notable example is that of security cameras that might capture the abduction of a person at a convenience store. Although there may have been multiple cameras, there may have been no overlap between the camera views, thus obscuring the removal of the victim. There are many similar surveillance flaws including an accumulation of leafy foliage (Peak, 2017). A cemetery worker who digs graves may be involved in burying bodies underneath the burial vault, an illegal act they could do in the relative privacy the day before the delivery of the vault. In a similar situation one serial homicide offender is known to have disposed of at least one corpse in this manner. Although he did not work for the cemetery, he would monitor the cemetery for a burial and time his killing appropriately. He “would take the body to the local cemetery...and place it in the new grave. He covered the body with a little dirt” (Geberth, 2003, p. 507). In one 1987 Wichita, Kansas case, an employee working as an usher at a crematorium lured his wife to his workplace where he was able to kill and cremate her (Geberth, 1996).

In a hypothetical example, a grandparent might allow his grandson liberal access to his farmland where the boy could easily bury a murdered victim in relative privacy. Someone doing construction work on a farmstead or ranch could conceal a body under the guise of installing a new septic system, thus burying the remains in a deep hole no one will ever check.

Found in some institutions, inmates were routinely buried on the property, and this was used as a way of covering up homicides. Sometimes graves were marked, but all too often they were not. At the Dozier School for Boys (a reform school) in Florida which closed in 2011, over 80 unmarked graves have been uncovered, many of which are outside the confines of the cemetery, and some of which past inmates believe resulted from murder (Montgomery & Moore, 2019; Scutti, 2019). Many activists believe there are similar graves on sites of former Indian boarding schools around the country that were part of the genocidal destruction of Native American culture (Associated Press, 2021c; Griswold, 2021; Zialcita, 2021).

In Faribault, Minnesota, property at a former state school for the mentally retarded contains graves marked only with numbers, which apparently correspond to entries in a logbook. They include the cause and manner of deaths, but inmate records are embargoed for 75 years, meaning they are not public. Until the hospital’s closing, this log was kept relatively secret in an obscure location (Lanpher, 1996; Rosario, 2013). It is unclear whether all graves were indeed marked. Similar sites exist around the state and likely exist in every state.

African American slave cemeteries and burials can be found in most southern states, many of which are unmarked graves. In 1964, a massive search was carried out by the federal government to find missing civil rights workers. U.S. sailors joined in dragging the Pearl River in Mississippi in their search for bodies. The corpses of *several* dead African American men were soon recovered, none of whom they were looking for. Some had been shot (Drake & Shulka, 2005; Weisbrot, 1990). Two additional bodies were discovered nearby in the Mississippi River, “found with wire and rope tied around them” (New York Times, 1964, p. 37). These were none of the individuals for which they were searching.

A serial homicide offender monikered the Green River Killer murdered 48 victims, many of whom were not known to be missing until their remains were discovered years later. This type of detection failure allows murderers to continue disposing of bodies for long durations without being detected. Serial offenders often do this by targeting people who ‘won’t be missed’ such as travelers, sex-workers, or homeless people. We do not know the number of serial offender victims still missing, though some academics have sought to quantify that (Quinet, 2007). Some murdered victims are seemingly discovered only by accident long after the disposal of a serial offender’s “first” victims.

## Conclusion

The systematic surveillance system in society works relatively well but not without problematic flaws. It is not known how frequently the disposal of homicide victims goes undetected. Eventually though, most body disposals or concealed remains are discovered. Many mechanisms of surveillance have been discussed including contemporary technology, along with cognitive errors that take advantage of liminal space. The search for human remains can be informed by where we know remains should or should not be and where remains have been placed in past cases.

Ultimately, the search for murdered victims is at best inadequate with many victims being overlooked in the initial search attempts. Minority victims, children, the elderly, and physically unattractive victims have historically been more problematic to locate. Groups performing searches should undergo training beforehand, even if cursory. It might be better to have permanently organized groups with a higher level of operational training to conduct these searches.

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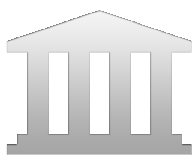
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