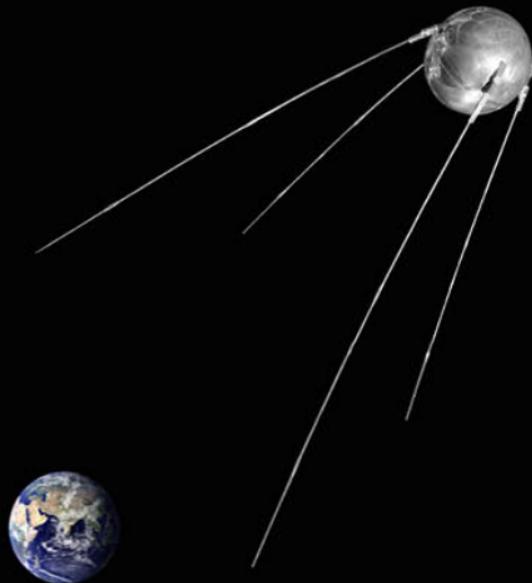


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**OUT OF SERVICE**  
Michael Tauschinger-Dempsey



# *Out Of Service*

A Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Digital + Media in the Department of  
Digital + Media of the Rhode Island School of Design

by  
Michael Tauschinger-Dempsey  
2012

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## *Acknowledgements*

Without the enduring encouragement and unconditional support of my loving wife Julianna, I would have never even come close to writing a dedication for a Master's thesis. It was she who inspired me to take on the endeavor of continuing my educational trajectory, which I had thought concluded nearly two decades ago. It was she who made me work hard on improving my writing and accessing new modes of thought via language and not exclusively via studio practice. In so doing, she has enabled me to push the boundaries of my own creativity and intellectual potential. I am forever grateful to her for the gift of putting wings on my creative practice in practically all ways. I must also thank her for undergoing the feat of editing my written thesis.

I am also indebted to my two lovely children Liesl and Nathaniel for their patience with a father, who is often too preoccupied with his own affairs as to be an exemplary father figure. I hope they will forgive my shortcomings these past two years.

I would like to extend a special thanks to Clement Valla, who was instrumental in honing some of the finer points of my work, who has remained critical, supportive and understanding, and who has pushed me to new heights in terms of quality and artistic output.



## **Abstract**

Surveillance systems are increasingly complex, ubiquitous and surreptitious<sup>1</sup>. Supposedly justified by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, an obscure amalgamate of corporate and political power structures have accelerated their efforts to deploy a host of new, essentially unregulated surveillance systems that are purported to be in the best interests of the public. This monumental technology- and data-driven machinery of control has come to permeate every facet of civil life. Public spaces, e.g. streets, airports, schools and museums, and the private sphere, e.g. private homes, phone calls, email, and financial records, are systematically and regularly the subjects of mostly unknown and almost always personally unauthorized automatic scanning. I challenge the claim that such an immense infrastructure of control has been put in place to satisfy “homeland security” interests. Instead, I argue that they aid the indiscriminate and self-serving profit maximization of corporate entities. With the corporate body seamlessly merging with the body politic, profiteering now dominates what was formerly at least a largely disinterested political discourse.

This thesis discusses my own work within the context of other artist-activists whose practices address the threats unbridled surveillance and systems of control pose to basic democratic values: the right to privacy, freedom of speech, transparency and liberty. The project also investigates to what extent visible surveillance structures such as ubiquitous surveillance cameras and security checkpoints have become a caricature and cheap emblem of power, rather than a truly effective way of controlling and certainly, protecting the masses. Has surveillance turned into yet another prop in the theater of national and international “strongmen” – governments and corporations – flexing their muscles in public and private spaces? Who is in charge of and ultimately interested in really watching others? Or might the part of surveillance that we cannot actually see pose the real threat to civil liberties?

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<sup>1</sup> I focus on developments in industrialized “western” nations, i.e. mainly the U.S. but also Europe. As a dual citizen of both the U.S.A. and Germany, I have personal experience with what is a significant amount of overlap on both sides of the Atlantic.



## Introduction

As an artist, I am interested in multi-directional power relations, as they exist on the macro level between states, corporations, and citizens, as well as on the micro level between the artist and his audience. I focus on technology- and data driven surveillance systems as manifestations and embodiments of these power relations. Today's information society has developed new forms and most importantly, new networks of surveillance, many of which, like social media, are not even considered as such. Critical research has given birth to a number of neologisms that describe surveillance<sup>2</sup>: dataveillance<sup>3</sup>, infoveillance<sup>4</sup>, panopticism<sup>5</sup> and synopticism<sup>6</sup>, to name a few. I posit that all of these modern surveillance technologies and methods share one thing: they are all systems of control that at base, are designed to generate profits for private corporations. For instance, the ultra-popular social networking service Facebook and the ultimate Internet search engine Google continue to achieve ever-higher product targeting accuracy, which translates into the bread and butter of their business. In the cases of defense contractor Textron (producer and seller of cluster bombs) and the private security service provider Academi (formerly known as the infamous Blackwater), these technologies create new marketable products and services. In short, they are geared towards revitalizing an arguably faltering capitalist economy.

Critical research in the domain of surveillance not only continuously comes up with new, specialized terms to describe surveillance; there are also many different and new interpretations of the workings and effects of surveillance on society. French philosopher, social theorist and historian Michel Foucault, coined the term panopticism, which might be considered a more traditional, dystopian take on surveillance. Foucault's panopticism was inspired by Jeremy Bentham's architectural blueprints

2 Oxford Dictionary. (2012). Definition for surveillance - close observation, especially of a suspected spy or criminal; Origin: early 19th century: from French, from sur- 'over' + veiller 'watch' (from Latin vigilare 'keep watch')

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5 Foucault, M. (1977). Chapter 3: Panopticism. *Discipline and punish the birth of the prison* (Vol. 8, p. 18). doi:10.1007/BF00171367

6 Mathiesen, T. (1997). The Viewer Society: Michel Foucault's 'Panopticon' Revisited. *Theoretical Criminology*, 1(2), 215-234. doi:10.1177/136248069700100200

for the ‘Panopticon’: “any sort of establishment, in which persons of any description are to be kept under inspection”(Bentham, 2010). Foucault’s idea of a “single gaze which no detail, however minute, can escape” (Foucault, 1979) has its origins in the modernist society of the industrial revolution and is rooted in the concept of an authoritative presence coercing citizens into self-discipline – a prerequisite in the new world order of democratic capitalism. Closely linked to Foucault’s understanding of societal power structures is the idea of “Big Brother,” a totalitarian leader, ever-present, controlling the minds of the citizenry by ways of bi-directional tele-screens, introduced in novelist and journalist George Orwell’s famous book, 1984<sup>7</sup>.

Over the course of the past few decades, we have reintroduced another, somewhat older approach to our repertoire of mass control and societal surveillance. Contemporary Norwegian sociologist Thomas Mathiesen’s “synopticism”<sup>8</sup> is largely shaped by our current postmodern society. He inverted the “who is watching over whom” from the Foucauldian and Orwellian perspective of *the few watching the many* to the TV reality-show style of *the many watching the few*. This conceptual extension of surveillance points towards yet another, equally dystopian worldview: French Marxist theorist, writer and filmmaker Guy Debord presciently described it as the society of the spectacle<sup>9</sup>, in which reality TV, social media and a constant bombardment of visual and aural stimulation through mass media not only function as silencing systems like those described by Mathiesen in his essay *Panopticon and Synopticon as Silencing Systems* (Mathiesen, 2004), but also as monumental profit generators.

In other words, today’s society is not as different from ancient Roman society as one might like to believe. Once upon a time, the concept of “panem et circenses” (translated from Latin as “bread and circuses”) kept the ruling class at top of their game, so to speak by distracting the citizenry from the endless drudgery and oppressiveness of their many required state and class dues with the promise of dazzling spectacles and free food. Today, we have reality TV, the Super Bowl, the Oscars and every few years, the political theater of “free” elections, indubitably called the true exercise of democracy . It is no coincidence that all of the above are big business for corporations and conveniently, spectacularly effective public silencing mechanism, according to Mathiesen’s understanding. In terms even of basic form, these brilliant and simple systems of control resemble one another, viz. ancient amphitheaters, Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon<sup>10</sup> and modern sports stadiums are all circular structures designed to enclose (read *accommodate*) a maximum number of people.

In 1932, English author Aldous Huxley published game-changing science fiction

7 Orwell, G. (2003). 1984. Madrid: J.A. Mestas

8 Mathiesen, T. (1997). The viewer society: Michel Foucault’s “Panopticon” revisited. Mathiesen, T. (1997). The Viewer Society: Michel Foucault’s “Panopticon” revisited. Theoretical criminology, 1(2), 215–234., 1(2), 215–234.

9 Debord, G. (1994). The society of the spectacle. New York: Zone Books.

10 Bentham, J. (2010). The Panopticon Writings. Verso.

novel, *Brave New World*<sup>11</sup>, in which he made bold predictions about the future. Science and technology would be used to control society through systematic brain-washing, psychopharmacology and elaborate infrastructures of entertainment and consumerism. In his book *Brave New World Revisited*<sup>12</sup>, published 30 years later, Huxley not only concludes that his original ideas were surprisingly accurate, but also that they had become a reality considerably faster than he had ever dreamt possible.

So where do we stand today, over half a century later? Our social networking services and mobile communication technologies have created a new hybrid space of surveillance. In the case of “sousveillance”<sup>13</sup>, both ways of watching others are possible at any given moment by constantly and seamlessly morphing one into the other: the few being watched by the many and the many watching the few form one endless cycle of voyeurism and exhibitionism. Through social media software, for instance, users freely provide the most personal data to whomever or whatever is at the other end of the data cloud. In the best of cases, this hijacking of personal information is performed for the purposes of targeted advertising, i.e. the commodification of personal information; in the worst of cases, this overflowing database of the Ego is essentially made endlessly accessible without a warrant to controlling power structures like the NYPD, CIA, NSA and the FBI. In any case, social media would seem to be the ultimate marketing weapon a great many private corporations, as well as an albeit largely voluntary and desirable version of Foucault’s self-imposed submission to disciplinary domination. Natural human inclinations towards exhibitionism, narcissism and voyeurism have intermingled to form this new hybrid space of grassroots surveillance.

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the military/technological push that followed, we all find ourselves confronted with a new kind of institutionalized, automated and mechanized surveillance that goes far beyond what any East German citizen had to fear back in the days of the Cold War. East Germanys’ secret service, the STASI (Staats Sicherheits Dienst) infiltrated and spied on every aspect of its citizens’ lives. Family members and co-workers were recruited to spy on one another-- artists on other artists; no member of society could at any time be sure of not being watched and told on. The result was a perfect Foucauldian carceral system, morally and physically devastating to the individual and corrosive to the society as a whole. In our current democratic capitalist society, we fancy ourselves far removed from such totalitarian legacies, but in point of fact, our reality is an even more nefarious if carefully veiled and meticulously sugar-coated version of the same. As political philosopher and writer Sheldon Wolin suggests,

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11 Huxley, A. (1969). *Brave new world*. New York: HarperPerennial.

12 Huxley, A. (1958). *Brave new world revisited*. New York: Harper.

13 Mann, S., Nolan, J., & Wellman, B. (2003). Sousveillance: Inventing and Using Wearable Computing Devices for Data Collection in Surveillance Environments. *Society*, 1(3), 331-355. CiteSeer. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.62.5772&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

One consequence of the pursuit of an expansive power imaginary is the blurring of the lines separating reality from fancy and truth telling from self-deception and lying. In its imaginary, power is not so much justified as sanctified, excused by the lofty ends it proclaims, ends that commonly are anti-ethical to the power legitimated by the constitutional imaginary. (Wolin, 2010)

We must avoid the damaging effects that inevitably ensue from such a complete loss of privacy. The time has come to resist this move towards total control. We artists and activist are already leading the way and must continue to do so. This thesis explores various creative approaches to this resistance.

## 1

## Corporate Control

When we think in terms of power, it is clear we are getting a raw deal: we grant private entities -- with no interest in the public good and no public accountability -- greater powers of persuasion than anyone has ever had before and in exchange we get free email. (Furnas, 2012)

This quote from a 2012 article published in “The Atlantic” somewhat comically summarizes some of the problems that confront our information society. “Lead with One’s Chin”, in boxing lingo “refers to a boxer leaving his or her chin, which is a vulnerable point, open and unprotected” (Petropulos, n.d.). Similarly, we citizens are like the boxer, moving through the spaces of this world, leading with our chins. That is to say, when it comes to our civil liberties, it is largely of our own making that we find ourselves in such an increasingly vulnerable position. Enthralled by the products and services a sophisticated capitalist economy has brought forth, we have overlooked the consequences and byproducts of the essentially blind pursuit of our fancies. We have given private entities complete access to our most intimate secrets, and in so doing, we have become commodified. Indeed, we have made ourselves into commodities. At last year’s conference, “Hyper-Public: A Symposium on Designing Privacy and Public Space” at the Berkman Center in Cambridge, MA, Harvard Law School professor Jonathan Zittrain put it this way: “If what you are getting online is for free, you are not the customer, you are the product” (Walsh, 2011). Being considered a product is surely not what the average consumer and citizen might have in mind when s/he gives away vast amounts of personal information. The transparency in our relationship with corporations is blatantly asymmetrical. We share everything and are expected to give away all of our personal detail, whilst corporations leave us in complete uncertainty about their own impeccably guarded agendas and top-secret business tactics. A group of artists/activists decided that this kind of unequal relationship had to be changed.

The Yes Men, Jaques Servin and Igor Vamos, are supported by an international network of artists and activists and focus their attacks on corporations with a track record of covering up their vast portfolios of dehumanizing and otherwise harmful actions against man, liberty and nature. They work hard to debunk the myth of self-regulating markets and the belief in unchecked market capitalism, both of which continue to hold water in our western societies despite the countless historic examples of the utter folly and unsustainability of such practices.

### Identity Correction

Impersonating big-time criminals in order to publicly humiliate them.  
Our targets are leaders and big corporations who put profits ahead of everything else. (The Yes Men, 2012)

This slogan, taken from their official website, expressively summarizes the Yes Men's action plan: to resist and expose the culture of manipulation and misinformation as practiced by the world's largest and most powerful corporations. They most often appropriate the language, business practices and communication strategies of multinational corporations in order to trick, expose and shame them. For example, in 2004, the Yes Men created a fake website that simulated the official website of Dow Chemical Inc., the company responsible for the Bhopal disaster of 1984, in which thousands of people died and hundreds of thousands of people remained in need of constant medical attention owing to the lingering toxic gas release from the company's pesticide plant. Furthermore, the Yes Men qua Dow made a live televised claim, that Dow Chemicals Inc. had every intention of paying billions of dollars to cover the costs of medical care, cleanup and an investigation of the other environmental crimes committed by the company. After discovering the hoax, the real Dow Chemical Corporation had to publically deny these intentions, which were not at all



<sup>1</sup> Television still of the Yes Men's Andy Bichlbaum on the BBC News, 2004

their own, thereby exposing their actual unwillingness to take any responsibility for their crimes. This raised the awareness about a long forgotten ecological and human catastrophe that is still causing immense human and environmental suffering, one notable side effect of which was an albeit temporary drop in the stock value of the company by 2 billion dollars. What makes the Yes Men stand out among other

artists and activist groups is how they so effectively use their understanding of the visual culture of corporate identities to deliver their message. They are experts in making use of the gamut of modern-day communication technologies, including news media hype, which they strategically employ against their powerful corporate targets. By imitating corporate marketing strategies and accessing the inner circle of operations thanks to convincingly fine-tuned fake identities and fabricated yet perfectly credible affiliations, they meet corporate power structures at eye level, beating them at their own game. This strategy of fighting fire with fire, also called “culture jamming”<sup>14</sup>, is capable of reaching vast audiences and making a lasting impact on society. The Yes Men have become so good at their high-level pranks that the subjects of their counter-propaganda have begun to engage in illegal shadow CIA tactics.

Not unlike the Yes Men, though from an entirely different starting point, Anonymous is maturing as a politically critical force that makes a similar use of the visual styles and communication strategies of big globalized organizations such as the United Nations, as is clear from the similarity between their logos (see below).



<sup>2</sup> Left: Anonymous logo, Right: United Nations logo (Huff, 2011)

Again, the idea of fighting fire with fire comes into play.

[...] the similarity to the United Nations logo created in 1945 by Donald McLaughlin is impossible to ignore. For Anonymous, subverting the traditional associations of this international organization’s logo is ambitious and transgressive, but also totally in line with their aggressive stance toward Internet freedom and freedom of speech. (Huff, 2011)

In fact, hackers with a mind for political activism may well be the only people left who are capable enough and technically qualified to wage the coming technological war against hyper-technological and data-driven surveillance systems.

<sup>14</sup> Culture jamming is an anti-consumerist social movement that takes aim at corporate and political interests and the way they utilize mass media to influence and ultimately control society. Jamming subverts the strategies commonly used by such entities with the goal to expose the underlying agenda of commercialism.

As Deleuze presciently suggested, "[...] the societies of control operate with machines of a third type, computers, whose passive danger is jamming and whose active one is piracy and the introduction of viruses" (1992).



<sup>3</sup> Anonymous's YouTube channel, with their signature aphorism paired with their logo: "We are Anonymous. We are Legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Expect us,"

Anonymous today is a decentralized and still only loosely organized association of activists, firmly rooted in the contemporary culture of the Internet and hacking. What by now has become a kind of movement not unlike that of Occupy, has its origins in the image board 4Chan, where users come together to share images and comments on anything and everything that seems important (Internet memes, games, porn, etc.). From this rather dubious and somewhat vague cultural ecosystem emerged a far more focused and politically engaged movement that securely fits into the wider political context of other contemporary protest movements. Early in 2012, in a surprising move, Anonymous teamed up with Wikileaks and successfully intercepted and gradually begun releasing the so called "Wikileaks Global Intelligence Files": about 5 million emails dating from between 2004 and 2011 by the self described "private intelligence company" Stratfor.

In an unprecedented collaboration between Anonymous and WikiLeaks, the secret spilling site began leaking Sunday night portions of a massive trove of e-mails from the private intelligence firm Stratfor that Anonymous obtained by hacking the company in December. (Norton, 2012)

The millions of intercepted emails revealed a very troubling and previously obscured reality can be extrapolated: omnipotent multinational corporations like Dow Chemicals Inc., hire private spying corporations, like Stratfor, and in turn work closely with government offices to suppress public criticism of their actions and policies. With joint resistance efforts like these, Anonymous and Wikileaks have managed to bring to light criminal and anti-constitutional corporate and governmental activities. The emails also concretely demonstrated how the paranoid and

criminal Dow Chemicals Inc. had hired the services of the “private intelligence” firm Stratfor to investigate the Yes Men in retaliation for their successful campaigns.

For example, Stratfor monitored and analysed the online activities of Bhopal activists, including the “Yes Men”, for the US chemical giant Dow Chemical. (“The Global Intelligence Files - List of Releases,” 2012)

It is in this legal grey zone that all-powerful multinationals, such as Dow Chemicals Inc. come to resemble a sort of vengeful mafia structure, determined to utilize state-of-the-art surveillance tactics to undermine and destroy democratic and legal critique. The importance of the Yes Men’s work in countering and revealing such corporate tactics cannot be overstated.



<sup>4</sup> Anonymous member (so-called Anons), wearing characteristic Guy Fawkes mask.

In our current political climate, where post- 9/11 propagandistic fear mongering continues to dominate the political discourse, the question arises, which independent investigative body remains equipped with enough courage and integrity to defy a rigged legal and financial system that always gives primacy to profit over people? Transparency-seeking non-profit groups such as Wikileaks are being described as public enemies, systematically demonized and legally incriminated. Wikileaks sources for example are hunted down, accused of treason and put in jail without trial as in the case of Specialist Bradley Manning. The founder of Wikileaks, Julian Assange, has been accused of child abuse, arrested in the U.K. and is awaiting extradition to Sweden.

The legal machinery of capitalist and state power inevitably gets in the way, a defining component in their modus vivendi nowadays, unless it stumbles over its own stupidity, as in the memorable case of the Watergate scandal. Former U.S. President Richard Nixon’s inner circle, including the private re-election fundraising organization, ‘Committee for the Re-Election of the President,’ must have believed they

<sup>5</sup> Screenshot of leaked video by Specialist Bradley Manning showing a deadly 2007 U.S. helicopter air strike in Baghdad that claimed the lives of several innocent civilians, including two Reuters reporters.

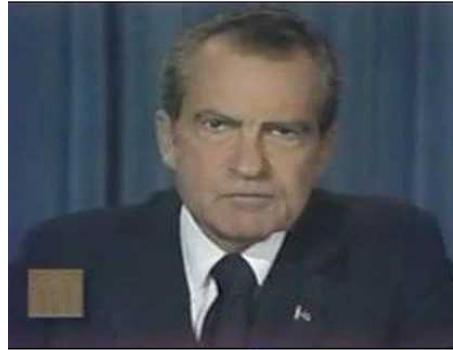


were above the law when deploying all sorts of surveillance equipment against their adversaries, the Democratic Party. What is so interesting about these events is that once uncovered, there were very serious consequences for the people involved. The president had to resign, something unheard of until today, and a total of 43 people were sent to jail. Today, nearly half a century later, as the aforementioned example of Dow Chemical Inc. illustrates, power structures need not fear any consequences, regardless of the gravity of what was once considered a serious social and legal infraction.

Why such a dramatic shift? Today, multinational corporations like Dow Chemical Inc. own the world: their lobbyist push legislation, which will exonerate them in any and all cases in which charges are brought against them. Silvio Berlusconi, Italy's former president, is a shining example of the degree to which such cronyism is not only universally underwritten but also awarded the ultimate judicial and social carte blanche. Berlusconi, one of the richest men on the planet and until recently, leader of a supposedly democratic nation, has allegedly been involved in innumerable crimes: corruption, tax-fraud, false testimony, bribery, sex with minors and abuse of office. It was only by changing the laws of his country that he was able to avoid conviction despite having been found guilty on several of the charges against him. Unlike the Nixon of some 40 years past, Berlusconi did not fall; he only stumbled. Both cases exemplify what can happen in democratic societies when private power structures team up with state power and checks and balances are insufficient and/or wholly dysfunctional.



<sup>6</sup> Silvio Berlusconi,  
former Prime Minister  
of Italy



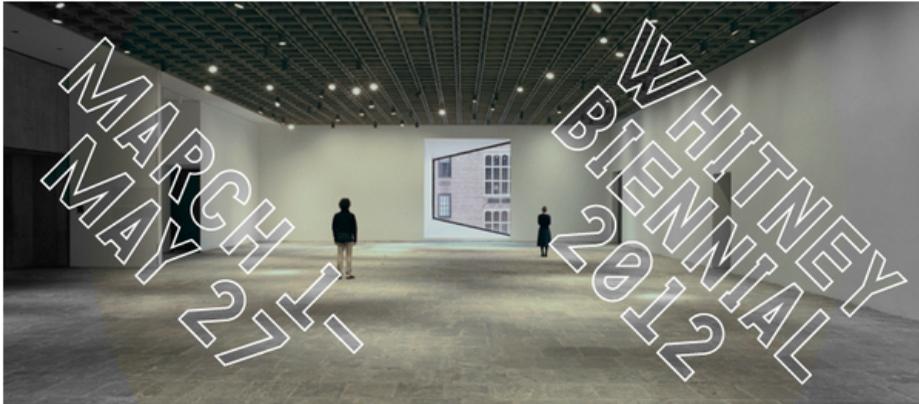
<sup>7</sup> Richard Nixon,  
former U.S.  
President

So if today's system of checks and balances is effectively useless and legal and political accountability are increasingly eroded, what can and should resistance in the information age look like? As absurd as it may seem, our only hope might lay in hacktivist groups like Anonymous.

How then does the hacktivist movement find its way into the world of art? In the information age, the lines between formerly separate "professional" categories have begun to be significantly blurred and all but eradicated. Today's leading Internet artist/activists such as Paul Chan, Eva und Franco Mattes from [www.0100101110101101.org](http://www.0100101110101101.org) and internet art platforms such as Rhizome, founded by Mark Tribe, have become active discussion forums about politically engaged content. The line between participation and activism is a thin one, which some artists are willing to cross, others not so much. Internet art, activist- and hacktivist movements among others, are only remotely connected to the contemporary art market, where capitalist modes of production and principles rule. Within the art market one can also identify a conflict of interests between the corporate moneymaking machine and movements that specifically target these kinds of entities. Indeed, it comes as no surprise that artist/activists would target established art institutions such as the Whitney Museum of Modern Art in a Yes Men-style attack. On a fake Whitney website, unidentified hacktivists made the false claim that the Whitney had severed its association with institutions like Sotheby's and Deutsche Bank due to their deeply immoral business practices:

Reasons cited are the lockout of unionized art handlers and secondary market speculation by Sotheby's, and mortgage fraud by Deutsche Bank. The site goes on to apologize for the Biennial's association with these corporations, and "hopes the participating artists will join us in denouncing the wrongs committed by our former sponsors" (Kaplan, 2012.)

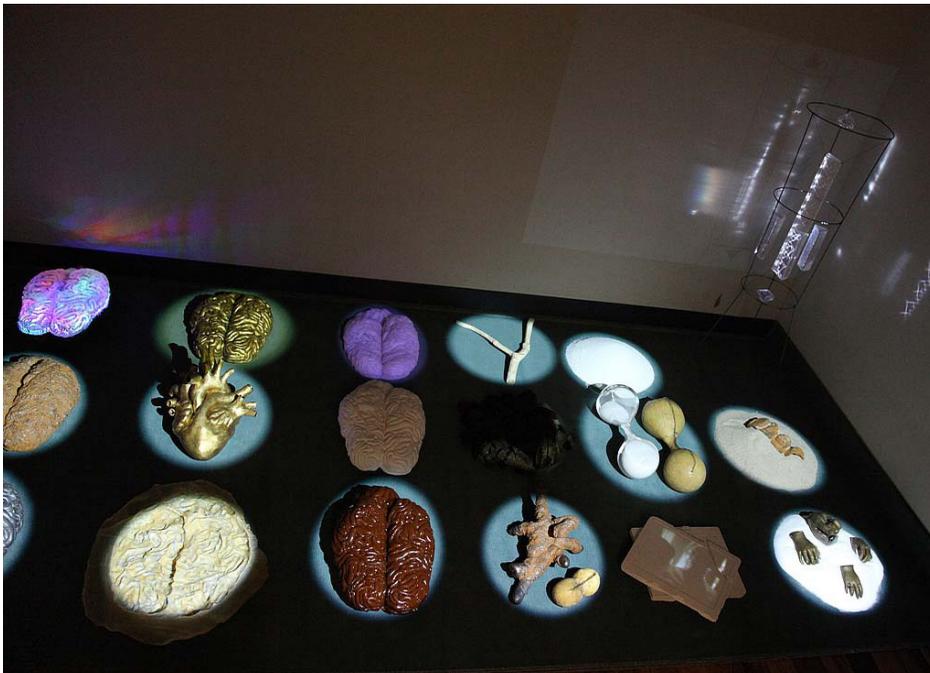
Similar to The Yes Men's successful prank on Dow Chemicals, the "real" Whitney had to step up and issue a public correction of these claims and at the same time confirming that the sponsorship by Deutsche Bank and Sotheby's remained intact, and so, too, the museum's implicit support of these bodies' unethical practices.



### **WHITNEY MUSEUM TO CLOSE FOR MAY DAY; ANNOUNCES GOVERNANCE CHANGES, SPECIAL ADDITION TO 2012 BIENNIAL PROGRAMMING**

In response to overwhelming demand, the Whitney Museum will close its doors on May 1 so that artists, museum workers, and patrons will be able to join the "day without the 99%" and general strike planned for May Day. By taking this action, the Museum acknowledges the labor performed not only by the artists in our exhibitions, but also the labor of everyone who cleans our building; sells tickets and checks coats; guards, handles, maintains, and conserves the art; curates and programs our exhibitions; and educates our public. The Museum also respects the wishes of the artists included in the ongoing 2012 Biennial, who have strongly expressed their demand that the museum either cover or remove their works from the exhibition during this time. The Museum supports their call to cease business as usual and to take art into the streets on this historic day.

<sup>8</sup> Fake Whitney Museum website, 2012.



<sup>9</sup> Michael Tauschinger-Dempsey, *My Mind To Your Mind*, 2011, mixed media installation

The immersive multi-media installation *My Mind To Your Mind* is designed to be shown in a small, very intimate space meant to inspire the sensation of being in someone else's head. Spectators entering the darkened space are confronted with an extraneous visual and auditory world. Monotonous, repetitive or prayer-like voices appropriated from different episodes of the popular TV series *Star Trek* lay an aural blanket over a theatrically staged display of sculptural elements. The sculptures, made from a variety of different materials, resemble oversized human brains, hearts and hands and are aligned in a horizontal grid structure next to piles of sand, coal, sugar, shapes in glass, latex organs and a broken plaster laptop. Multiple layers of video footage projected onto several of these sculptural forms are mixed with very focused spotlights creating a very private and sacred overall sensation. As the spectator begins to relate to these items and build his own network of associations, the initial humor of the work begins to fade and give way to a feeling of soberness. *My Mind To Your Mind* appropriates the semiotics of a popular entertainment show renowned for its focus on philosophical ideas in a future post-ideological society in order to create an environment laden with suggestive meaning and interpretative possibilities, an augmented physio-perceptual hybrid space.

Indeed, as the title of the piece suggests, *My Mind To You Mind* sets the stage for an experience and knowledge transfer between the artist and the audience and seeks to mimic the manipulative “brainwashing” strategies of the all-powerful military-industrial-entertainment complex. The title and some video clips used as projections, also taken from *Star Trek*, refer to one of the main character's well-known ability to perform the so-called “mind meld”. This fictitious act obligates two individuals to access and share their deepest and most hidden thoughts. It is in the nature of this procedure that one of the two individuals involved might irrevocably be lost in the other or at least remain partially under the spell of the other. In this sense, although many of the sculptural elements displayed in this work are recognizable in form and apparently simple, it is through their contextualization and juxtaposition that they open up the disquieting and for many spectators, a variety of unsettling potential interpretations and associations. Looked at in a different way, it is also true that this work is akin to the sci-fi concept of the “mind meld” in that it attempts to create a connection between the inner mind and thoughts of the spectators and those of the artist with regards to related moral and political topics. As Paul Dourish explains in his book, *Where the Action Is* (Dourish, 2001), this artistic assay at a “mind meld”, if you will, could be given the more theoretical appellation, “intersubjectivity.” In referencing a well-known TV show, *My Mind To Your Mind* is an attempt at establishing the first layer of my own discreet semiotic<sup>15</sup> sign system. Indeed, the fictitious act of the “mind meld”, although taken from lowbrow TV pop culture,

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15 Semiotics recognizes that meaning itself is a complex web of significances. It is not simply the things that some information artifact denotes that is important, it is all the connotations that flow from the denotations, turning infinitely back on themselves, that characterizes our understanding and feelings. (Neill, S. O., & Benyon, D., 2003)

serves as a metaphor for the power of any given superior entity to access and transform the deepest and most carefully hidden thoughts of an inferior entity, in other words, to perform brainwashing and to exert mind-control.

MIT engineer and artist Steve Mann, a true pioneer in wearable computing devices, merges the two strategies of art and activist practices that either resist corporate power structures in by appropriating the latter's own communication strategies or that sabotage the efforts of corporate power structures via technological hand-to-hand combat, so to speak. By utilizing portable video and audio equipment to infiltrate spaces of institutionalized surveillance, Mann inverts the classical concept of surveillance--watching from above--to the practice of watching from within or even from below, which he calls "sousveillance". This souveillance tactic is what he characterizes as a way of of holding the mirror up to the 'face' of big, institutionalized surveillers.



<sup>10</sup> "Cyborg"  
Steve Mann  
confronting  
security person-  
nel in store

Sousveillance is the surveilling of the surveillers and raises multiple questions about identity, privacy and agency. For instance, it is queerly notable that we have rapidly got quite used to ubiquitous optical surveillance and generally, do not so much as (seriously) question its appropriateness or legality. This in turn brings up questions about just what our relationship to authority is and to what degree this relationship is directly correlated with and/or actively defined by these technologies? The individual has remarkably little power to effect change regarding the way public life and space are systematically surveilled, evaluated and controlled. Yet the publicity--the visible media value of such interventions are of startlingly long-lasting impact on society. Like the Yes Men, Steve Mann makes use of this publicity power in his version of similarly guerrilla or at least, asymmetrical tactics while underlining an ironic corollary of the practice of ubiquitous public sphere surveillance. The systematic

transformation of public spaces into surveilled spaces also uniquely makes them into interactive or participatory spaces. To what degree this is the case is the somewhat playful topic of the work of artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, who uses cutting edge surveillance and tracking technology to create interactive and participatory experiences and environments. Despite the fact that his body of work is comparatively ‘light’ and entertaining, it is also effective in raising awareness about and inspiring criticism of the ubiquitous and institutional use of such technologies. Play, in the case of Lozano-Hemmer’s work, is a form of institutional critique.



<sup>11</sup> Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *People on People*, 2010

In his 2010 piece, *People on People*, the audience was invited to participate in an interactive shadow play. By walking between a very intense light source and a powerful video projector on the one side and a wall on the other side, the audience’s shadows allowed prerecorded video imagery of people that has been projected against the wall to be revealed. That is, without the audience’s interaction, the projected video stream would be too washed out by the powerful light source to be recognizable. In its play with narcissism and voyeurism, this work made use of a collective concept of being (qua desire to be) in the spotlight or perhaps even under prison searchlights, while simultaneously forcing the audience to relate to projected others thanks to, because and through the fault of their own curiosity and narcissism. *People on People* is yet another take on the idea of sousveillance.

Other “New Media” artists, such as Scott Snibbe and Golan Levin have also investigated participatory and interactive digital environments for what is now over a decade. The questioning of the ethical, legal or spiritual dimension of surveilled space is not at all their driving motivation, however. On the contrary, for Snibbe

and Levin, technology is a pure form of entertainment, electronic gimmickry – eye-candy, pure and simple. Their work must therefore be removed from any fine art discourse and instead fitted into the larger context of commercialism and consumerism along with most blockbuster video games and desktop screensavers. Steve Mann’s artistic approach, on the other hand, lies precisely at the intersection of “organizational observation” and performative “reflectionism” (Mann, Nolan, & Wellman, 2003). His work taps into the Situationist movement of the 1960’s and its practice of *détournement*, the technique of appropriating the tools and methods of one’s adversaries. As such, Mann, the Yes Men, and the Anonymous movement, all effectively appropriate and re-purpose the strategies of organized suppression in order to raise awareness about and thereby combat it. Mann’s wearable surveillance dome, for instance, is a humorous antithesis to the typical surveillance dome found in basically every publicly accessible space in the United States.

<sup>12</sup> Steve Mann’s wearable surveillance dome, personal safety device, equipped with 180-degree field of view camera and sensors, akin to black box in aircrafts, and as such is the quintessential “sousveillance” gadget



Indeed, his sousveillance mindset allows for the democratization of an apparatus of control that was formerly reserved only for the executive branch (the military, the CIA, the police, etc.). The documentation of public servant perpetrators, as in the case of the 1991 Rodney King beatings or the more recent and heinous images from Abu Graib, invert the cycle of control sufficiently if only momentarily to become part of the still latent collective unconscious.

The effect of Wikileaks’ publications is similar in that they expose pure-form, unembellished data from and imagery of human rights violations by corporations, state functionaries or military personnel. The consequences for individuals engaged in such activism--individuals considered by power structures to be “acting up”, tend to be very severe and even life-threatening. Such disruptive ‘press’ tends to be very bad for business, and those in power go great lengths to make such agitators disappear, either by having them sent to prison, as in the case of Julian Assange, or

else, they resurface in a morgue, as has been the cases with innumerable embedded journalists and activists in the field. The video footage ‘leaked’ by Bradley Manning displayed one of the more memorable recent examples of such an ‘elimination’: it showed two Reuters journalists being killed by U.S. helicopter 30mm machine gun fire.

For much of the time since his detention beginning in May 2010 in Iraq, Manning was held on a charge of improperly obtaining a classified gunsight video that showed a 2007 helicopter attack that killed a dozen people in Iraq, including two Reuters journalists. The video was released publicly by WikiLeaks (Stewart, 2011).

YouTube Videos from Occupy Wall Street protests across the United States showed the world repeated and violent transgression made by so-called officers of the law (YouTube, 2011). An Internet meme came to life after one of the more photogenic incidents took place: a police officer was photographed and videotaped pepper-spraying non-violent protesters, most of them students, on the University of California Davis campus.



<sup>13</sup> Left: police officer pepper sprays student protesters, <sup>14</sup> Right: resulting Internet meme with pepper spraying police officer composited into a famous Manet painting

In the pepper-spray instance, mass mediated imagery was instantaneously digested into a trigger-ready Internet culture, so to speak, satirized and ultimately, forced into the collective consciousness by being made into a modern classic worthy of the classification, fine art. In fact, this latter juxtaposition of current event amateur (smartphone) photography or videography with so-called popular fine art standards, e.g. Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, Monet’s *Waterlilies*, Seurat’s *A Sunday Afternoon*, is another fascinating example of asymmetrical resistance to ruling power structures by mostly anonymous authors through the medium of what is most classic and modern about art and technology.



<sup>15</sup> Michael Tauschinger-Dempsey, *A Walk of Life*, 2012, mixed media installation

My multimedia installation, *A Walk of Life*, is the second part of a series of works inspired by the current state of the economy. In this site-specific work, shown in 2011 at the Sol Koffler Gallery in Providence, RI, consists of three main stations. An oversized, mirrored litter bin contains a stack made up of tarp, a wool blanket and a butter knife. The infinite reflection of this stack within the reflective bin creates a regular grid similar to the utilitarian architecture of refugee camps. Shelter and food are fundamental to human survival. The current predatory greed of our financial elites has caused even these basic existential human needs to become effectively inaccessible to a growing number of citizens. On the opposite side of the gallery, a video projection shows powerful machinery performing mining operations. The video's audio accompaniment consists of a stock operator's voice reacting to the unprecedented price fluctuation of the 2008 stock market crash. On that particular trading day, over one trillion dollars were evaporated over the course of only a few minutes of trading activity. The events in this space have a cause and effect relationship to the reflective litter bin described earlier.

The second component of the installation consists of a sculpture and video projection set up in the center of the exhibition space. The sculpture is a three-piece reflective table, one end of which has collapsed and has Jell-O for table legs; several other flabby architectural shapes made of Jell-O sit atop the reflective table, giggling and melting -- an allusion to the precariousness of the artificially inflated housing market of the most recent financial boom-bust disaster. That one end of the table has collapsed and a partially disintegrated skull in Jell-o is still be identifiable communicates the fact that the predatory greed

of modern capital markets has a built-in self-destruct sequence. Success is at best temporary, the final outcome of which will most likely be the destruction of nature, Man and the capitalist system itself. The table also represents a sort of conveyor belt, delivering abstract goods from the video, which is playing in an adjacent, connected gallery space, showing mining operations. During the course of the open installation, some shapes thaw to an almost liquid state, like one of the Jell-o skulls at the far end of the table, literally demonstrating how natural resources, so-called human resources, and essentially any other commodity in today's capital markets, can be liquidated at any given moment, creating an environment of perpetual uncertainty and fluctuation.

The third station in this installation is a mirror suspended from one of the galleries walls. It has 14 motion-triggered point and shoot cameras attached to it that constantly take pictures of spectators approaching the mirror. This interactive mirror speaks to the narcissistic tendencies of our times, where navel gazing self-preoccupation is amalgamated with a playful omnipresent of surveillance. The true introspection required to effect change in our society is not part of this form of self-observation.

In the case of the anarchist artist/activist group Voina, subversive interventions and public protest events have come with the potential for high personal risk. Members of the artist group Voina were severely beaten whilst in police custody after having being arrested for one of their interventions. An anonymous report summarized the events:

Oleg Vorotnikov, Natalia "Kozlionok" Sokol, and Leonid Nikolaev were arrested during the peaceful demonstration against violations of article 31 of Russian constitution (freedom of peaceful assembly) along with many other protesters. Oleg Vorotnikov and his 2-year old son Casper were taken to the police station #28. Two policewomen took Casper to a separate office, and Oleg hasn't seen him since. At the police station, Oleg was severely beaten. (Anonymus, 2011)

All this goes to show that the stakes could hardly be higher when it comes to challenging ruling power structures. If we assume an 'us versus them' stance with regards to current social, economic and political conditions in the U.S. and other Western industrialized nations, Steve Mann's sousveillance stands out as one of the more powerful tools in the realm of artistic expression qua political resistance.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Tauschinger-Dempsey, *The Feet Sneak a Peek at Shoes and Lingerie*, 2011, dual channel HD video projection



In the video piece *The Feet Sneak a Peek at Shoes and Lingerie*, I approached filming in the public sphere, and thus, per default, surveilled space of a shopping mall in a subversive, stealthy and undercover way . In this video, several things come together: simulating the stereoscopic and spatial perception of the human eye, I used a pair of spy cameras to record the footage. Instead of attaching the cameras to the side of my head, or onto a helmet, I attached them to my feet. Viewed from the inverted perspective of a body part in charge of locomotion and not sight, the very banal world of the mall all of a sudden became a very charged and ambiguous space. The shoe perspective provides the viewer not only with an imaginary of how the world might appear to different parts of the body, had they only eyes, but also the animalesque perspective of a parasite or bug sitting on the floor or rug of an enormous hostile world. In this work the domestic narrative of home video aesthetics is questioned and mixed with the more serious questions of secrecy that go along with covert filming of others in prohibited spaces. The perspective of the feet automatically evokes the viewpoint of the voyeur, looking or even filming up someone's skirt. The choice of covert filming in the lingerie section of a department store immediately evokes a certain kind of overstepping of boundaries and social and sexual taboos in a society that is at least on the surface deeply prudish.

The artist Jill Magid made the idea of a literal surveillance the center of a complex work titled *Surveillance Shoe*. In this work, Magid custom-designed a wireless camera system that attached to the lower part of her right leg, thereby literally filming up her skirt and effectively transforming any and all surrounding spaces into sexually charged spaces. By running a live feed of her crotch, framed by an amorphous skirt, to a publicly visible large screen in the lobby of the Museum where she performed the piece, Magid automatically engaged the audience in a dialectic between her explicitly exhibitionist display and the audience's tendency toward voyeurism. As architectural theorist and critic Philip Tabor suggests, "The algebra of surveillance structures the reveries of voyeurism, exhibitionism and narcissism" (1995). Since public exhibitionism (aka flashing) tends to be more male dominated, whether deliberately or not, Magid engaged her audience in a line of reflection on the topics of gender and sexuality, gender politics, as well as introducing the topic of sexualized surveillance. In his article "Surveillance is Sexy" David Bell describes how

the culture of surveillance has created certain surveillance aesthetics that have the 'look' of porn: reality porn, found and covert footage, and the explicit aesthetics of actual amateur porn (Bell, 2009).



<sup>17</sup> Jill Magid,  
*Surveillance  
Shoe*, 2000

In the case of the video piece, *The Feet Sneak a Peek at Shoes and Lingerie*, the implicit eroticism seems more coincidental as it might have been pure chance that the footage was recorded in the lingerie section of a department store. The work instead focuses on the quotidian and banal use of optical surveillance technology and the essentially unnoticed and very often, accidental cycle of filming and being filmed. Instead of engaging in actual industrial espionage for instance, where certain trade secrets are stolen from a potential business competitor, this video piece raises questions about the actual legality of ubiquitous videotaping. In public spaces, it seems that anything goes as long as private parts are not exposed or in this case, filmed or photographed, unless of course one is a real and true law enforcement agent, in which case, capturing even those parts is legitimate:

12/23/2004--Public Law. Video Voyeurism Prevention Act of 2004 - Amends the Federal criminal code to prohibit knowingly videotaping, photographing, filming, recording by any means, or broadcasting an image of a private area of an individual, without that individual's consent, under circumstances in which that individual has a reasonable expectation of privacy. (Defines a "private area" as the naked or undergarment clad genitals, pubic area, buttocks, or female breast of an individual.) Makes such prohibition inapplicable to lawful law enforcement, correctional, or intelligence activity ("S. 1301 [108th] - Summary: Video Voyeurism Prevention Act of 2004 (GovTrack.us)," 2004.)

This law plays an important role in how the new, state-of-the-art full body scanners at airports and other public spaces can legitimately be used. On another occasion in the same shopping area, I began filming with a large professional shoulder camera and was immediately approached by the department store director and forcefully urged to stop filming. According to shopping mall policy, as in any publicly accessible yet enclosed space, filming is generally prohibited as it ‘invades’ the privacy of other customers:

Photography on private property that is generally open to the public (e.g., a shopping mall) is usually permitted unless explicitly prohibited by posted signs. Even if no such signs are posted, the property owner or agent can ask a person to stop photographing, and if the person refuses to do so, the owner or agent can ask the person to leave the property. In some jurisdictions, a person who refuses to leave can be arrested for criminal trespass, and many jurisdictions recognize the common-law right to use reasonable force to remove a trespasser; a person who forcibly resists a lawful removal may be liable for battery, assault, or both. (Waston, 2012)

Curiously enough, it is considered legitimate for the department store or other storefront business to film and track customers. This inevitably begs the question: on what legal grounds can business owners, banks (or, as I came across recently, even mobile sandwich trucks equipped with camera arrays!) legitimately film and/or photograph customers when the law would seem to rule out the soundness of such behaviors? Taken further, is product tracking via Radio Frequency Identification Tags (RFID) supported by the law once the product has been purchased and legally removed from the store<sup>16</sup>?

RFID tags come in two varieties, active and passive. Passive tags report back a 10-digit unique identification code when pinged by a RFID reading device; active tags typically carry more information and have their own power source, capable of broadcasting signals up to a mile. Since RFID does not require a clear line of sight to work, RFID tags can be embedded in packaging, sewn into clothing labels, and hidden in shoes and purses, thereby identifying these items by their unique ID numbers (in contrast to UPC, which merely provides generic identification). (Hayles, 2009)

The power relations between a natural (real) person and a corporate entity is quite obviously asymmetrical in the sense that legislature has provided corporate bodies with far more “civil” rights than it has natural people. The mere existence of so-called corporate personhood, which only exists in the United States of America as

<sup>16</sup> Although RFID tags are theoretically removable, in most cases, they are inserted inside a product, like a stuffed animal, such that their continued working presence generally remains unknown to the consumer and their removal is nearly or completely impossible without destroying or at least, damaging the product. Merchants rarely go to the trouble of locating, deactivating and/or removing such tags upon the purchase of their merchandise.

a legal condition, highlights this asymmetry brilliantly. Another example, taken from the world of U.S. campaign financing, is the super PAC (political action committee), which enables ultra rich private entities to indirectly provide unlimited amounts of money to the political campaign of their own candidate(s).

Super PACs are essentially another bank account for candidates — one that, because of *Citizens United*, can accept unlimited money. The court created a constitutional right for corporations and unions to make “independent expenditures” that are not really independent. Such spending links candidates to major funders who want something from government, and this may be corrupting. (Potter, 2012)

Undeniably, the exponentially increasing monitoring and control of citizens is directly proportional to the increase in the secrecy, lack of transparency and non-accountability of the corporate and government body. As postmodern social and literary critic Katherine Hayles writes,

RFID instantiates the transition that Gilles Deleuze foresaw from a carceral system of discipline, in which individuals are controlled by physically enclosing them in schools, barracks, prisons, etc., to a control society where citizens are disciplined through a real-time monitoring of their behaviors as they move with apparent freedom through space. (2009)



**Step One - Print out**

**Step Two - Cut around dotted lines and cut out eyes.**

**Step Three - ????**

**Step Four - Profit**

## 2

*Institutional Control*

In which I discuss the issue of institutional entities' vested interest in moving synergistically with the corporate body in terms of keeping an eye (and a strong arm) on the general public.

Panoptic control systems have not only maintained relevance but have actually experienced a renaissance of sorts among today's military and law enforcement agencies. This development is closely linked to the exponential increase in technological innovation by both government and private sectors: sensing cities, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV's) and the database driven dragnet investigations carried out by increasingly militarized police forces, to name a few. These all fall into the category of a select technologically and financially empowered few, watching over the politically and financially disenfranchised multitude. Jeremy Bentham's architectural blueprints for such surveillance systems strongly rely on the perceived, perpetual presence of control. Foucault extended this architectural model to society as a whole, defining it as one coherent carceral space. In this sense, today's weaponized technological wonders, e.g. fully autonomous combat drones, which are so effectively used abroad by the U.S. military, are the ultimate metaphor for the punitive gaze from above. Interestingly, this foucauldian gaze no longer emanates from any literal "above"; rather, it can be located anywhere thanks to tele-presence technology and computerized sensing. Weaponized technology, as fantastically lucrative and devastatingly effective as it may be, has converted the entire globe into a panoptic space.



<sup>18</sup> Drone operator in Virginia, U.S.A. engaged in targeting routines (in this case simulated) to kill a suspect located anywhere in the world

<sup>18a</sup> Left: Guy Fawkes cut-out mask

Aside from the tectonic shifts taking place in the public and private domain due to corporations' well-organized efforts to control and further exploit the masses, a much more massive and covert shift is taking place on the state level. Not only have a great many corporations capitalized on the politics of fear, unleashed by the enormous post-9/11 propaganda, but public servants, despite media accounts to the contrary, have also benefited handsomely. The Pentagon remains the world's largest employer with over 3.5 million employees (with benefits), even in the midst of a nation's suffering from historically high unemployment rates. Needless to say, government business continues to do well, but the information (read diversion) thirsty public is no more enlightened now in an age when we supposedly applaud and demand transparency, then it was fifty years ago when high level secrecy was the unquestioned *modus operandi*. The difference is, secrecy or privacy, a delicate matter of legal semantics, is completely one-sided nowadays: the average citizen is expected to live in all spheres transparently in relation to its government and large corporations, consumer and otherwise, whereas the latter are privy to any and all forms of privacy (read secrecy) protection.

The artist, writer and researcher, Trevor Paglen is interested in increasingly fortified edifice of secrecy. He has conducted rigorous investigative research into military and state secrets. His interest in "black" military projects (Paglen, 2012), a category of classified military and defense projects with unaccounted for funding, has lead him to the darkest corners of clandestine government and corporate power structures. His book, *Blank Spots on the Map*, investigates a trail of classified and clandestine military sites that is closely linked to illegal practices "run by an amorphous group of government agencies and private companies" (Paglen, 2009). In the underground world Paglen describes, democratic principles cease to exist; checks-and balances are unheard of, and as the title of another of his books puts it: *I could tell you but then you would have to be destroyed by me: emblems from the Pentagon's black world* (Paglen, 2007). Aside from engaging in this kind of risky and serious research, Paglen also works as a more traditional visual artist. He takes fascinating photos of secret military sites, for the which he has had to develop special camera technology to shoot over unusually large distances.

And yet, at such distances, the photographed images themselves start to break down, as does our understanding of what might be going on at the specific sites. Forms blur into each other, like imagined oases in a desert—one is easily fooled into believing he sees something that does not really exist. And yet, the imaginings are almost unavoidably more horrific than remotely idyllic. They inspire questions like, can the citizenry trust its leadership if the leadership does not trust its citizens? Why are governments doing things the average citizen is not considered entitled to know about or to morally ponder and take action for or against? Are we in danger? Paglen describes his special photographic technique:

Limit-telephotography most closely resembles astrophotography, a technique that astronomers use to photograph objects that might be trillions of miles from Earth. In some ways, however, it is easier to photograph the depths of the solar system than it is to photograph the recesses of the military industrial complex. Between Earth and Jupiter (500 million miles away), for example, there are about five miles of thick, breathable atmosphere. In contrast, there are upwards of forty miles of thick atmosphere between an observer and the sites depicted in this series. (2012)

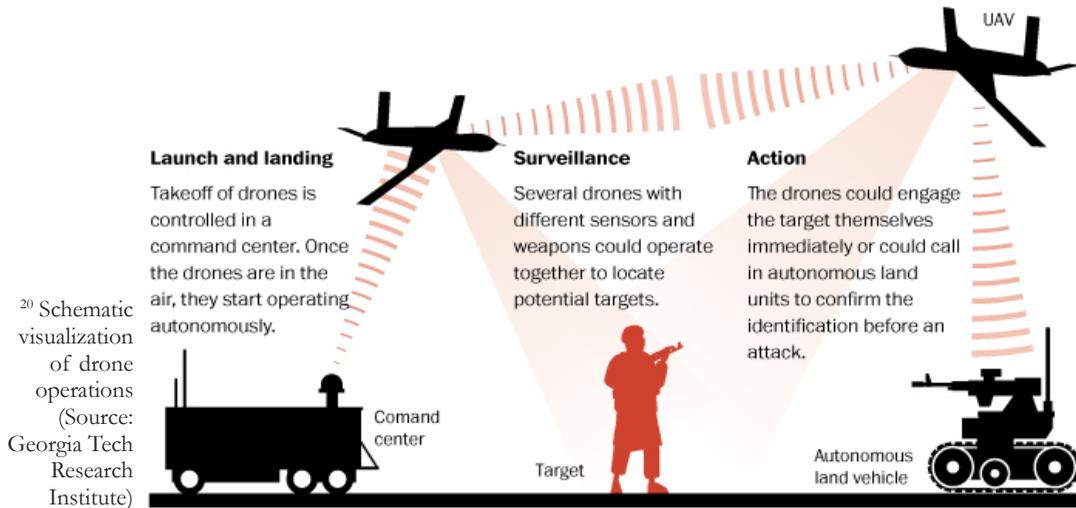


<sup>19</sup> Trevor Paglen, *Limit Telephotography*, 2010

Indeed, these photographs raise deeply unsettling questions of trust. Can you trust your eyes, your own thoughts, your leadership, and your judgment? In the case of this work, the answer can only be no.

How is it possible that the military industrial entertainment complex is allowed to be submerged in such secrecy and that citizens can no longer reasonably trust the judgment of the (only sometimes elected) people in charge? Why must we engage in covertly proactive research and information gathering to obtain vital information about fully autonomous new weapons systems, for instance, in which even the decision about whom to kill is left up to the machine? Up until now, ethical concerns have prevented our leaders from allowing the machines make the final decision about whom and when to kill; but the seeds of change have already begun to bloom, making this critical shift more a matter of time than of ethics.

Future war: drones that talk to each other and coordinate an attack.  
 Researchers are working on software that ultimately could allow drones to work autonomously to hunt, target and kill enemy forces (Peter Finn, 2011).



My thesis project, *Out Of Service*, raises questions about the weaponization of technology as an end in and of itself—a movement fueled by the profit-hungry weapons industry and legitimized by irrational, selfish and inhumane government officials. Presented in the style of a trade show booth, nota bene, the show will be held in the Providence Convention Center, the installation is designed to look and feel like a run-of-the-mill gun shop. The mixed media installation will use surveillance equipment to capture live video and images of the audience approaching and looking at the work. This visual material will be subsequently displayed on flat-panel screens in a visual feedback loop. In past works, such as *Paparazzi Mirror*, I utilized multi-camera set-ups to capture images of the audience, for the audience. Once aware of the digital feedback loop, spectators unfailingly responded with a various degrees of surprise and in some cases, distress and irritation. The idea of provoking such visceral emotional responses was to trigger a critical reflection about what is too often unexpected and unwanted surveillance.

In my thesis work I revisit these ideas in a way that is both conceptually and technically more ambitious. In the center of my designated 10' x 15' x 10' exhibition space, I will install a large, multi-functional showcase constructed of steel, wood and glass; it will serve as a display surface for several glass boxes filled with what I call “weaponized” media - cell phones, cameras and laptops cast in iron - and shuriken in the shape of U.S. military combat drones. The cast iron



<sup>21</sup> Michael Tauschinger-Dempsey, *Paparazzi Mirror*, 2012, compound image taken by mirror with 14 point and shoot cameras triggered by motion detection system

electronics will be accompanied by a video in the style of a traditional in-store product advertisement, demonstrating and lauding their capabilities. This serves as an allegory for the inclination of power structures to push technological progress towards new weapons systems instead of towards constructive advances for humankind. Some of the “fake” electronics will be actual functioning recording devices that secretly take stills of the spectators. A monitor, hidden in the accessible interior part the showcase will live-stream these images. Moreover, the showcase doubles as a display and surveillance space: the audience looks at it and it effectively looks back at the audience.



Michael Tauschinger-Dempsey, *Out Of Service*, left: <sup>22</sup> Drone Shuriken collection, right: <sup>23</sup> cast iron electronics, 2012

A wooden shelving system hung from the installation space walls will exhibit a collection of artistically refurbished Home Depot gardening tools. This, the second part of my ‘weapons arsenal,’ is composed of allegedly standard tools for domestic tasks such as raking, mowing and hedge trimming. In reality they could be used as deadly weapons. A wooden shelving system hung from the installation space walls will exhibit a collection of artistically refurbished

Home Depot gardening tools. This, the second part of my 'weapons arsenal,' is composed of allegedly standard tools for domestic tasks such as raking, mowing and hedge trimming. In reality they could be used as deadly weapons.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Tauschinger-Dempsey, remodeled gardening tools qua weapons, 2012



This arsenal is a reference to past and present conflicts in the Third World, where such ordinary tools are transformed into devastating weapons of mass destruction (e.g. Rwanda). In fact, thus far in human history, such makeshift tool-to-weapon WMDs have been used to take more lives than any high-tech smart bomb or nuclear bomb. I envision this combination of electronic technologies, built sculptures and ready-made objects as a means to engage and inspire the audience to critically reflect on how the 21st century is still so irrationally war-torn and with what quiet agreement we accept the very policies, attitudes and practices that reinforce the grossly inhuman policies that play out every day around the world.

My focus on weaponized technology has inspired me to develop my own weapon systems, thereby mimicking and recreating the aesthetics of the arms fetish that is uniquely popular (and stringently protected) only in the United States. U.S. Americans have a very distinctive relationship to weapons, no doubt owing to its rebellious explorer history and the right to keep and bear arms clause included in the original Bill of Rights and later added as a Constitutional Amendment.



<sup>25</sup> Generic gun shop in the U.S.



guarantees that U.S.-enemies will remain off the client list, as has always been the case in the business world of weapons development and sale.



Left image:  
<sup>27</sup> Gunship  
 AutoCopter  
 founder  
 Jerry Baber;  
 right image:  
<sup>28</sup> Robotex  
 founder Adam  
 Gettings



[...]the Gunship AutoCopter's virtual pilot can not only see and photograph the enemy, he can now seek out, locate, identify, and destroy/terminate (i.e. kill) the enemy with extreme prejudice at 300 rounds-per-minute (and potentially tens of thousands of actual projectiles per-minute), and he's got a rather large 12-gauge ammunition suite at his disposal (a veritable ammo smorgasbord, if you will) with which to accomplish this. (Gunship AutoCopter, 2012)

My work speaks to the problems that arise as a consequence of uncontrolled proliferation of state-of-the-art weapon systems for the sake of military, political and monetary ends versus humanistic principles or even, the oft-cited Homeland Security prerogatives. The *4th of July Femur* alludes to cost in human lives justified by the United States' endless fight for freedom and its ongoing "just" wars. These wars are morally no longer justifiable by the overused and misapplied argument of the 'preemptive strike', particularly in the face of such ambiguous enemies (—the public enemy/private friend dichotomy).

<sup>29</sup> Michael  
 Tauschinger-  
 Dempsey,  
*4th of July  
 Femur*, 2011,  
 hand-blown  
 glass femur  
 with inserted  
 'Stars and  
 Stripes' flag



Computer scientist and robotics expert Noel Sharkey posits: “Lethal actions should have a clear chain of accountability” (Hennigan, 2012). He continues: “This is difficult with a robot weapon. The robot cannot be held accountable. So is it the commander who used it? The politician who authorized it? The military’s acquisition process? The manufacturer, for faulty equipment?” (Ibid.). Troubling also is the increasingly seamless integration of curious civilians into what was formerly a military only operations web:

America’s growing drone operations rely on hundreds of civilian contractors, including some — such as the SAIC employee — who work in the so-called kill chain before Hellfire missiles are launched, according to current and former military officers, company employees and internal government documents (Cloud, 2011).

There are more constructive and ethical ways of employing Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV’s). Artist and MIT engineer Chris Csikszentmihalyi shows us how in his *Freedom Flies* project, which is thematically akin to Steve Mann’s “sousveillance” tactics. Csikszentmihalyi designed an affordable do-it-yourself (DIY) UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) prototype to watch over a notorious right wing civilian border patrol group, the *Minuteman Project*<sup>17</sup>. *Freedom Flies* is a sub-\$2000 UAV design for journalists, human rights monitors, or other groups interested in remote sensing” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2012).



<sup>30</sup> Minute-man Project homepage, 2012

The *Minuteman Project* is an organization of white supremacists and anti-immigrant vigilantes, mostly from the U.S.-Mexican border area, who use their so-called “border hawk” UAV to surveil and patrol the border for illegal immigrants. Once an undocumented (presumed) individual has been spotted, they inform local authorities to arrest and send him/her back to the home country. Sometimes, the 17 Jim Gilchrist founded the multi-ethnic *Minuteman Project* on Oct. 1, 2004, after years of frustrated efforts trying to get a neglectful U.S. government to simply enforce existing immigration laws. (Gilchrist, 2012)

individual is only videotaped for future identification and detention. In a way, Csikszentmihalyi's project functions as an antidote to ruthless and unregulated fringe groups that feel entitled to assume the duties of the Executive Branch.

Such attempts to militarize the border are extremely corrosive to the communities on or around the border. Moreover, while such systems were developed to detect illegal border crossing, they did not report cases of illegal actions by anti-immigrant groups like the Minutemen or the misleadingly named 'American Border Patrol'. Symmetry seemed in order. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2012)

Extremist and right wing Para-military organizations like the Minutemen have begun to officially team up with state officials (border patrol, police, and immigration officers) and to employ surveillance technology that is supposed to be strictly regulated. Freedom Flies and other similar projects, whose goal is to hamper such developments in an artistic and activist manner, will become indispensable to a future that permits "private" and public use of UAV's. Indeed, the future is now, according to the legislative decision of February 2012, effective date February 2015 (Talking Points Memo, 2012). Although this decision may have been geared towards opening up business opportunities in a hugely attractive new market, the obvious corollary, a point that was certainly not lost to supposedly well-intentioned legislators, is that it also encourages and officially if indirectly authorizes precisely the sorts of activities championed by the Minutemen and their like.



<sup>31</sup> Chris Csikszentmihalyi, *Freedom Flies*, 2008

The *Freedom Flies* project is another great example of technology being used as a tool against anti-democratic movements. It also demonstrates that society is in need of more of this sort of courageous, creative and focused activism. Indeed, if ever there were a time when art was needed as a means of educating the public,

initiating social change and critical reflection, and communicating with burning intensity a moment of truth, this is it. The image and role of the artist have changed dramatically over the last two decades, and today, there is room for, interest in, and a ready niche for contemporary artists who work at the intersection of technology, fine art and activism. Art, technology, politics, anthropology and sociology are just a few of the overlapping disciplines that comprise today’s “battlefield” of meaningful art. Art must extend beyond the primacy of material experimentation, aesthetics and the narrative of I.

Jill Magid’s use of surveillance and her artistic reflections on control may seem dramatically divergent from those discussed so far, but at their core, they share more similarities than not. In one of her works, *Evidence Locker* (2004), she managed to translate her experiences at a governmental spying agency into a visual language for meta-surveillance. During her two-year residency at the Dutch Secret Service, she asked secret agents to track her movements through the urban landscape. To make the tracking easier, she wore a red rain jacket. Later she compiled all of the footage recorded by the Closed Circuit TV (CCTV) system, which showed the unsettling efficiency of such surveillance infrastructures and yet, raised doubts about its usefulness and purpose. In infiltrating a system defined by its secrecy and hidden agendas, she was able to gather unique information about the philosophy behind such institutions.

Video Stills, Installation Views of Evidence Locker



Incident\_Retrieved. 7:00 loop. | Final Tour. Police CCTV footage, audio track. 2:14 min.



<sup>32</sup> Jill Magid,  
*Evidence  
Locker*,  
2004

In what is barely a decade since Magid presented this piece, the capacity of modern-day police forces to employ sophisticated ubiquitous surveillance technologies has become nearly universal and even standard practice. The technology, databases and scanning algorithms necessary to track any and all individuals in essentially any setting is getting more refined by the day. By inverting the source of agency, Magid’s

piece exposed and questioned a system that built around agency control and superiority. Put another way, much like Mann's sousveillance, Magid's work turned the watcher into the watched, the observer into the observed and in so doing, exposed such systems of control as immoral, anti-democratic and strikingly ineffective. Another part of her *Evidence Locker* was a series of letters written to her invisible friends, viz. the secret agents watching her. Visitors to Magid's website can sign up to receive a continuous stream of letters from this exchange, written very much in the same bureaucratic style as one might imagine coming from her surveillers:

Dear Observer,

Make me a diary and keep it safe. Take care it is mine.  
Hold this photograph of my face. Keep all our entries in order.  
Put the letters in your desk file and the images in your evidence locker.  
You can edit everyone else out.

I will fill in the gaps, the parts of my diary you are missing.  
Since you can't follow me inside, I will record the inside for you.  
I will mark the time carefully so you will never lose me.

Don't worry about finding me. I will help you. I will tell you  
what I was wearing, where I was, the time of day... If there was anything  
distinguishing about my look that day, I will make sure you know.

Hold onto my diary for at least seven years.

I am enclosing a cheque. Use it for whatever expenses you have.

Sincerely,

JSM

(Magid, 2004)

Her relationship and strangely covert encounters with the special agents assigned to her gave birth to her piece, *I Can Burn your Face*. This phrase is AIVD<sup>18</sup> secret-agent jargon for blowing their cover, which Magid was capable of doing, at least theoretically, since she was among the select few who actually knew the faces of the secret agents. In consequence, she received passive aggressive warnings not to expose the agents, which reveals an almost disarming fragility – an unmistakable and fascinating fear and vulnerability on the parts of the agents, in particular and the institution, in general. This begs the question: just how many secret agents are actually needed

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18 AIVD stands for "Algemene Inlichtingen-en Veiligheidsdienst" which is the Dutch Secret Service



<sup>33</sup> Jill Magid, *I Can Burn your Face*, 2008

to go through the video footage collected by thousands and millions of surveillance cameras around the world? Shall we assume that the next step will (therefore) be to replace humans with machines in the tedious and insurmountable task of careful screening? And if so, who will create and be held responsible for the algorithms that determine who and what should be surveilled? Furthermore, is an optical monitoring system even adequate to protect society from hostile or criminal activity? What constitutes criminal or hostile behavior, and what makes a random person suspicious? By voluntarily requesting to be surveilled, Magid highlighted the need for input and agency in such systems—for not just the human touch, but a checked and well-reasoned human touch. Without a proper algorithm, CCTVs will inevitably record the wrong person, which means that the actual act of surveillance must happen offline, in the mind of the surveiller. It is he who creates a profile of a suspect, and it is his political agency that defines to what extent a group or an individual need be surveilled and thereby, controlled.

Jill Magid's choice to be surveilled was obviously voluntary; she knew she was not at any risk, nor was she being followed for any reason other than her having explicitly asked to be watched. For most people, however, this is not at all the case. Most are unsuspecting, involuntary targets without the 'free world' or legal choice of simply opting out. For instance, the NYPD profiling of Muslim students at major U.S. universities has just come to light and has rightfully sparked a bit if not yet a reasonable amount of discontent. Typical media coverage has assumed the following tone:

As part of this secret program, the NYPD generated weekly reports about the Muslim student groups at these schools. They even set up an undercover "safe house" near the campus of Rutgers University to spy on students. Ironically, that operation ended when the building superintendent became suspicious and called the police thinking the NYPD officers were part of a terrorist cell. ("When 'studying while Muslim' is probable cause - CNN.com," 2012)

Profiled student reports have received far less press and inspire considerably less public sympathy. Profiled surveillance therefore dons the mantle of desirability and correctness so long as it fits into the dominant socio-political rhetoric.

The German newspaper, *Die Sueddeutsche Zeitung* recently published the results of an internal investigation by a parliamentary control panel into the activities of the nation's secret service agency. According to the report, the success rate of having scanned 37 million emails in 2010 for suspicious keywords resulted in 0,006% hints, not actual proof, of some kind of criminal activity ("Datenschutz - Geheimdienste überwachten 37 Millionen E-Mails - Digital - sueddeutsche.de," 2012). The cost of such carelessly discriminatory dragnet operations, aside from breaching privacy laws, is estimated to be in the millions of Euros. In her work, Magid makes it clear that this apparatus of control, which is extremely profitable to corporations and which wastes large amounts of taxpayer money, cannot actually be justified by its usefulness, but rather (and only) by its financial profitability. Magid even goes so far as to mock optical surveillance technology by offering to decorate existing CCTV cameras with sparkly plastic gems.



The interactive work, *Me Seeing Us* consists of glass panes in wooden frames placed in the center of a table with four chairs. The glass panes are coated with very thin, mirrored strips, which allows spectators sitting on opposite sides of the frames to simultaneously see the person on the other side and their own reflection. Despite the apparent technical simplicity of the work, the human brain is incapable of separating these two images. The reflected image merges with the projected image and creates a composite of both—an unexpected hybrid

being. The participant sees a hybrid image of him/herself and the person sitting in front of him/her, bringing to mind questions about our identity and its relative (in)stability. Sitting at a table, being face-to-face with another person from whom one is separated only by slightly obstructive glass conjures (mostly thanks to movies) the association of the visiting room in a penitentiary. What in the latter association is a clear distinction between who is 'in' and who is 'out', who is free and who is captive remains, in this case, ambiguous. The hybrid is a disturbing *mélange* of traits and features and visible back-stories; it is only as individuals that we distinguish ourselves.



<sup>35</sup> Michael Tauschinger-Dempsey, *Me Seeing Us*, 2011, installation with custom-made mirrors in wooden frames

The wooden frames also function like windows in that they give the participant the impression of looking outside from a perceived inside (or vice versa), while at the same time, owing to the reflective strips, acting like an unusual 'window' into the self. In *Me Seeing Us*, the voyeurism/exhibitionism dialectic is as important as the issue of surveillance, for there too, the two participants develop an unlikely intimacy through their simultaneous acts of surveillance and being surveilled. At base, underlining this entire act of creation and discovery is the implicit reminder of the endpoint of this sort of deep exploration: self-destruction. Recalling the fate of Narcissus...



<sup>36</sup> Michelangelo Merisi da Carravaggio, *Narciso*, 1597-1599

In countries like Russia, where ‘free’ qua critical self expression is violently discouraged, making art that questions the legitimacy of the governing structures is not only dangerous, but also tends to command a certain indelicacy. Previously mentioned anarchist artist collective Voina (literally, “War”) challenges and rebels against the ruling power structures, the technological systems and the social constraints they have put in place to exert and maintain control. Performance art like *How to Snatch a Chicken: A Tale of How One Cunt fed the Whole of the Group Voina*, carried out in a supermarket as the group’s members were monitored by CCTV security cameras, graphically illustrates their aggressive method of disruption. In this intervention, the group set out to steal a chicken from a supermarket by stuffing it into the genitalia of one of the group’s female members. Several members of Voina distracted the security personnel by feigning a fake protest action, whilst others documented the actual theft.

In this and similar actions, Voina uses the language of more traditional voyeuristic industries, namely Russia’s incredibly lucrative pornography industry and one of the nation’s top employers, the multi-layered, multi-million dollar prostitution industry. Further, by throwing such vulgarity and crude imagery at their audiences, they unmistakably point their finger at social and economic inequality, lack of opportunity, societal corruption and several other social dilemmas facing modern Russia. They explicitly walk the line of legality, which has led to over a dozen criminal investigations against the group and which has afforded them extraordinary publicity. Several of their members await long prison sentences; all the while, the international art establishment is becoming increasingly interested in their actions. What makes Voina’s artistic approach so radical and effective is that they engage in performance and live interventions rather than an elaborate studio practice. They target high profile figures and institutions such as the former KGB and current president-re-elect Putin and they harvest their wrath. They expose them as anti-democratic agents of suppression because they fall into their “anarcho art-traps”. Voina brilliantly channels contemporary media-centrism into corrosive institutional critique.

<sup>37</sup> Voina,  
*How to  
Snatch a  
Chicken: A  
Tale of How  
One Cunt fed  
the Whole of  
the Group  
Voina*,  
2010



Pussy Riot, a Voyna spinoff, engages in an institutional critique on a slightly different and arguably more (lightly) entertaining level. Their members dress creatively; they cover their faces so as to remain unidentifiable, and they perform unauthorized punk rock concerts that are politically critical. “Pussy Riot’s members are cagey in their relations with the press, simultaneously seeking attention while avoiding direct engagement. They...operate under nicknames such as Balaklava, Cat, Seraph, Terminator, Blondie, and Garadzhare” (Singer, 2012).



<sup>38</sup> Pussy Riot, 2012

More often than not, the individuals and groups critical of today’s status quo must hide their identity to evade the repressively and violently investigative and ultimately suppressive practices of police and so-called homeland security forces. Despite the fact that the expression of reasonable (non-exclusionary or bigoted) disagreements with the existing state should be embraced as an important part of a liberal democracy and the legal privilege of a free society, there is no such accompanying (ideal) precedent with regards to the right to remain anonymous or not to be wrongly incriminated (profiled). Groups like Pussy Riot and Anonymous must therefore conscientiously hide their identity in order to continue functioning as critical agents of their society. Their attempts are largely futile since police forces systematically use their technological superiority to track down and neutralize such subversive elements by weighing them down with hefty prison sentences and fines.

It should come as no surprise that even among the general non-activist public, there is a growing desire to be simultaneously visible via the endless online sharing/communication portals, including the ability to publicly comment on articles, and invisible via being encouraged to assume creative, non-revealing online aliases and most recently, an increasingly popular Central European import, the Morphsuit.

## Choose the suit for you



**Latest Morphsuit**  
The **Tuxedo Morphsuit** has arrived for the slightly more sophisticated Morph!

[► More about this suit](#)

**BUY NOW**

<sup>39</sup> Assortment of Morphsuits, 2012

These full-body nylon stretch suits allow individuals to hide their identity from surveillance cameras and camera-equipped mobile devices. Aside from the fact that these costumes mostly come to dubious use as an opportunity for carelessly uninhibited behavior, they do offer a cheap and easy way to escape the daily routine of control and suspicion. The appeal and growing popularity of the Morphsuit hearken back to the days of the Venice Carnival, a sensationally popular annual festival that began as early as the 11th century and has been copied and exported most notably to Brazil (Carnival) and New Orleans (Mardi Gras). Then as now, Carnival of Venice served the dual purpose of temporarily loosening social strictures and creating an official occasion to succumb to uninhibited pleasures of the flesh. Though rather less nowadays, Carnival once upon a time represented the total if very temporary suspension of all of social and legal rules and controls.



<sup>40</sup> Venice Carnival, 11th century

Krzysztof Wodiczko is an artist, activist and MIT engineer whose interest in social anonymity is quite different from that represented by the Morphsuit. His work explores the recurring cultural phenomena of involuntary anonymity, otherwise known as social exclusion. His artistic interventions, which often take place in the public sphere, address the issues arising from immigrant integration in industrialized nations. General ignorance about both the culture of immigrants and the native culture of the immigrant has the well-known effect of marking them as ‘foreign’ and thereby, ostracizing them, leading to a kind of collateral anonymity. At the 53rd Venice Biennial, Wodiczko presented *Guests* (e-flux, 2012), giving for the European/global art community the opportunity to reevaluate many of its preconceived ideas about what its relationship to the growing number of immigrant workers from so-called developing nations should be. *Guests* also created a space for civil ‘eavesdropping,’ as it were – a rare opportunity for the privileged citizens of the European/global community to listen to the conversations and thoughts of their all too unfamiliar ‘foreign’, ‘developing’ neighbors. In spite of the fact that the piece consisted of pre-recorded footage, projected onto a series of large arches, it nonetheless created the convincingly intimate illusion of an interior ‘Us’ and an exterior ‘Them’, as if there were an actual barrier separating what are, in essence, two separate and mutually unknown worlds.

Whether consciously or not, Wodiczko’s piece, *Guests*, also represented the unique surveillance space generally reserved for police officers, social workers, unemployment agency investigators, and immigration officers. ‘Guest workers’, as they are called, no matter how long they remain in residence, working or not, are regularly spied upon, their intentions and acts questioned, and their culturally defined morality and virtues undermined by a suspicious and ignorant system focused on controlling and protecting from the ‘other’. Neither the practice nor the concept of integration forms any part of such policies. Rather, they are based in a heightened matrix of control, put in place by legislatures throughout Europe.



<sup>41</sup> Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Guests*, 2009

In my interactive installation *Quarantine*, 2010, a full-sized shipping container made of wood and plastic sheeting serves both as accessible space and projection surface. In the inside of the container, a fog machine creates a thick, almost impenetrable haze when spectator activated by the push of switch; on the outside, an HD projector functions not only as projector but also as a sort of search light.



<sup>42</sup> Michael Tauschinger-Dempsey, *Quarantine*, 2010, multimedia environment

The creation of a ‘Them versus Us’ stance is at the core of the work and serves as a reminder of Europe’s not so distant, dark past in which intolerance and autocratic surveillance and control apparatuses led to genocide and the complete destruction of civil(ized) structures.

Shipping containers symbolize many things: globalization, the concept of “Us” versus “Them” due to increased economic inequalities, progressively more strict (anti-)immigration policies, and historically recurring minority racial/cultural demonization and genocide. Several of these themes blend in with each other. For example, globalization often includes the perpetual transport of “human resources” into intentionally sub-human conditions from “third” world countries to “first” world countries, perpetuating and strengthening the “them” versus “us” dichotomy.

Integration into a new country/culture/language is almost always a monumental challenge, not so much owing to the inevitable cultural and language differences, but because of strict, dehumanizing Kafkaesque immigration laws, which are unfailingly more harshly applied to individuals from less desirable countries, who are of a less desirable skin tone and/or religious orientation. To obtain American citizenship, for instance, applicants are required to undergo a series of highly invasive, outrageously expensive medical examinations and unnecessary vaccinations. The applicant is examined for his or her physical health and the robustness of his/her morality and ethics. The obvious purpose of the many

questions, exams, quizzes, background checks, and top-dollar payments is to determine whether or not the applicant is sufficiently 'upstanding' and financially secure to be granted full legal citizen status. To a considerably more dramatic and dehumanizing degree, in today's Germany, Middle Eastern immigrants are labeled genetically inferior by default and are repeatedly said to be responsible for the dumbing down of German society and culture. In this context, the container serves as a reminder of one of Germany's darkest chapters. Moreover, Middle Easterners in Germany are socially, politically, linguistically and economically marginalized to a degree that is almost inconceivable in the so-called enlightened modern "first" world, until one makes the comparison with Native Americans and Mexicans in the United States and Tibetans and political liberals in China, and so on and so forth.

In a very similar context to Krzysztof Wodiczko's work *Guests* (and also at the 49th Venice Biennial), the artist Santiago Sierra made an unusual piece in which he paid 133 non-white, non-European street vendors to have their hair dyed blond. It is easy to imagine what a stark contrast their new hair color created in the streets of Venice.



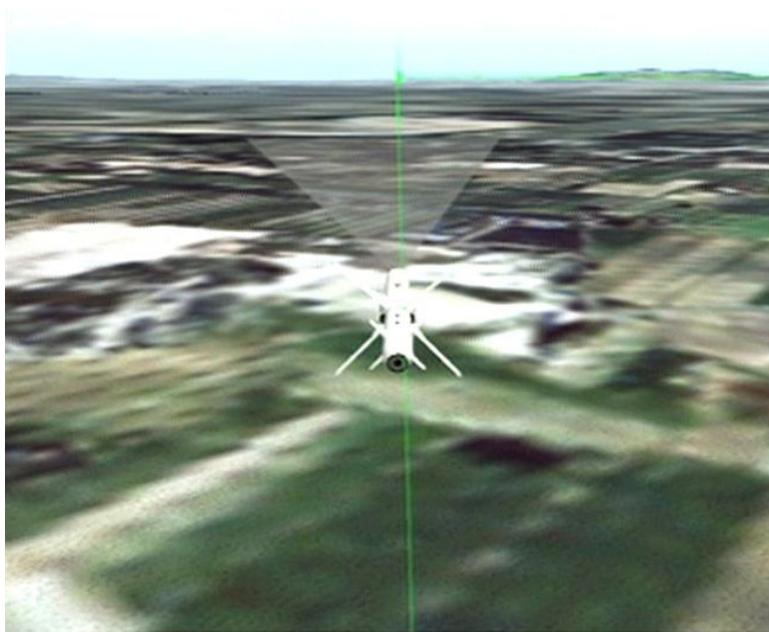
<sup>43</sup> Santiago Sierra,  
*133 persons paid to  
have their hair dyed  
blond,*  
2001

Sierra's work often addresses issues of labor conditions and power relations that derive directly and indirectly from such conditions. In this case, he managed to direct a considerable amount of attention on individuals who are otherwise largely unnoticed and culturally invisible in terms of the dominant culture, who spend their days selling cheap goods on the streets of Venice (--such peoples exist in every moderate- to large-sized city). His work questioned a growing xenophobia, the sub-human working conditions, a shocking lack of economic opportunity, and a number of other controversial issues. Not unlike Wodiczko's *Guests*, Sierra's work also entered the dialectic on surveillance. Immigrant workers are always potential crime

suspects: before 9/11, they were mainly linked with illicit drug sales and prostitution; post-9/11, they are potential terrorist sympathizers or collaborators. Explicit propaganda ostracizes these groups, which in most cases, have left their homes and often, their families to work in industrialized countries in the hopes of achieving some economic stability and not uncommonly, greater freedom and a better life and education for their children.

A lot of Sierra and Wodiczko's work capitalizes on media effective/centric and critical imagery, with its characteristic shock effect potential. The purpose is to disrupt established notions of hot social and political issues using the same mass-media pathways institutions use to manipulate public opinion. German documentary filmmaker and artist Haroun Farocki has also made the criticism of media the prevalence of imagery in today's society the focus of much of his work. For instance, his cycle *Auge Maschine I, II and III* (literally, "Eye Machine") (2001-2003), toys with concepts of institutional manipulation and control through his use of mass-mediated imagery and a critical examination of their visual language. If art is primarily visual, the visual images that are the art are containers of meaning; art is, in other words, a messenger. It is no wonder then that corporate and government power structures have long been masters at creating appealing and marketable imageries for delivering, viz. "selling" their messages.

In *Auge Maschine I*, Farocki showed images from the first Gulf War, many of which were shot directly from actual projectiles being deployed. Farocki states on his website: "In the footage of the projectiles en route to their target, the bomb and the reporting device were identical/(In den Aufnahmen von Projektilem im Zielanflug waren Bombe und Bericht-erstatter identisch)" (2001).



<sup>44</sup> Haroun Farocki, *Auge Maschine I, II and III*, 2001-2003

In *Auge Maschine II*, Farocki extended the notion of the ability of machines to ‘see’ into the civil sector (versus the military sector), such that machines are equipped with an intelligence and computational ‘sight’, as it were, and virtual realities blend seamlessly with actual, non-simulated reality.

In *Auge Maschine III*, the incorporation of an understanding of this new kind of imagery was used to indicate a new functionality for images in which they have become “part of the process” (Farocki, 2012) and no longer serve as means of documentation. He writes, “[m]any operational images show colored guidance lines, intended to portray the process of recognition. The lines tell us emphatically what is all-important in these images, and just as emphatically what is of no importance at all. Superfluous reality is denied - a constant denial provoking opposition” (2012).

What is so fascinating about Farocki’s way of describing this fundamental change in how reality is being documented is that he paid very close attention to new broadcasting technologies and new methods of visualization and representation. The virtual, fictional and real merge to form a single amalgamate from which it is almost impossible to extract the truth. That said, the “real” truth is hardly what the people in charge are interested in communicating; rather, they seek to distract, entertain, and confuse the public in order to achieve their goals. For instance, the propaganda-fact that the U.S. military was actually preoccupied with whom not to kill in Iraq won them tremendous moral (and therefore, socio-political) clout. Smart bombs, the latest high-tech wonder, are outrageously expensive, true, but much more importantly, they allegedly make it easier not to kill innocent civilians, and the worth of a human life has no price. Or at least, so read the marketing strategy of the new line of intelligent weapon systems that the taxpayer would hopefully be ready and willing to subsidize; the promise of a clean conscience goes a long way in the land of marketing—irrationally expensive but morally hygienic. Farocki’s title, *Auge Maschine*, speaks to this new technological, cross-haired gaze in which the optical receptor has become the broadcaster of the big message and the envoy of laser precision death.



<sup>45</sup> Remotely controlled Predator Drone firing a laser guided Hell-fire missile

Today however, Farocki's 1990's "Eye Machine" metaphor might need to be reformulated into an "eye-less machine": modern day combat drones distinguish themselves by their apparent blindness or 'eyelessness'; they are designed without exterior windows because they are effectively unmanned and 'see' via sophisticated 'invisible' cameras. Because visual (and most other) information is increasingly channeled by external computer algorithms (versus the internal ones that are our brain and conscience), the act of 'seeing' has, in a sense, been technologically internalized and physically—that is, humanly externalized. For instance, drone data are collected by highly sophisticated sensor arrays; their 'sight' is optical video data, among a multitude of other sensors.

With today's technology, we seem to have the ability to see through things, possibly even our own reality. In his 1982 book *Neuromancer*, William Gibson, the author who coined the term "cyberspace," described a parallel universe of pure data. In this world, normal human beings have no place; only specially gifted individuals, who have ingested special drugs, can interact with, navigate and to a certain degree, manipulate this data-based reality. The movie *The Matrix* also plays with the concept of an apparent reality that is imagined and an actual reality that is essentially coded data. And in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), Jean Baudrillard goes so far as to say that there is no longer an actual reality because it has been replaced by signs and symbols: "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (Baudrillard, 1994). The reality Farocki's work transcribes is akin to Baudrillard's concept of the "hyperreal" in that the modern world seems to be defined by and made up of exceedingly encoded and disjointed images that the human mind and spirit can no longer logically string together and weave into a sound narrative.

### 3

## *We Live Publically*

Attention by other people is the most irresistible of drugs. To receive it outshines receiving any other kind of income. This is why glory surpasses power and why wealth is overshadowed by prominence. (Franck, 1999)

Not only have our understanding of reality and concept of what is truly valuable changed dramatically over the past decade, so too have our appreciation for and definition of the private and public spheres. Digital technologies, the Internet and more recently, social media have blurred the lines between the private and the public to such a degree that one could argue they have become one. With a few notable exceptions, it is astonishing with what compliance the vast majority of people in the industrialized world have accepted and assimilated such a complete redefinition of these two spaces. Several artists have taken this new reality to heart and have made the creation of critical works about these seismic societal shifts their focus. One such work is the intensely rigorous surveillance society project by Internet pioneer and artist Josh Harris.

Harris used part of an immense fortune he had made from an early Internet boom start-up, to finance an unprecedented and visionary experiment about surveillance societies. With uncanny strictness, he created a concentration camp-like facility in a downtown Manhattan basement and had a hundred artists, critics, and celebrities live there for several months at the start of the new millennium, the year 2000. Aside from completing a 360 point ultra-detailed and inquisitive questionnaire, designed to expose every detail of the participant's life, participants also had to sign a waiver not to leave the premises under any circumstances; they basically renounced their civil liberties, which reveals a lot about how hype and art markets work in New York. Joining the fascist world of this New York City basement meant that the project participants had given up all rights to privacy. Everything that took place in this underground living space was broadcast and visible to anybody involved in the project. Every sleeping cubicle was wired with surveillance cameras and screens, enabling everybody to see everything anybody else was doing at any given time. Showers were communal: eating, going to the toilet, and even sex were subjected to the collective gaze. After the initial period of generalized hype, partying and enjoyment, people started losing their minds, including Harris himself. Reminiscent of military facilities, a shooting rink, featuring any sort of shooting weapon imaginable was part of the infrastructure. A former CIA agent performed regular psychological humiliations disguised as interrogatories. Participants lost their center and became psychotic. And yet, remarkably, no one was hurt during this experiment.

Josh Harris' *The Capsule Hotel* (2000), as the basement project is called, was in many ways groundbreaking: the way in which he used state-of-the-art video and broadcasting technology to disrupt “normal” social interaction; the way the participants’ psyche was severely strained by simulated autocratic power plays; the frighteningly effective stimulation of proto-fascist behavior through the combination of proximity to and use of loaded weapons, living in enclosed spaces, ever-present free food and free sex but limited freedom, to name but a few.



<sup>46</sup> Josh Harris, *The Capsule Hotel*, 2000, authentic Ex CIA agent performs interrogatory

Harris simulated an Orwellian society that not long ago, seemed utterly undesirable, but today, has become socially desirable and almost praise-worthy, as the immense popularity of the experiment vividly demonstrates. His experiment offers an ominous caveat to a society which is all too eager to march down the paths described in George Orwell’s 1984 and Aldous Huxley’s *A Brave New World*. This and the collection of works documented in Ondi Timoner’s exciting and award-winning film, *We Live in Public* (2010), not only offer a disquieting look at a reality that in the time since they were created, has actually come to be, but they also serve up a very potent and transparent reflection on the painfully—the disastrously high cost to the individual, his relations and to his society of ‘living in public’.

The interactive time-lapsed video installation, *Interrogatory* offers the viewer/participant a platform to explore spatial, temporal and social displacements by blurring the perceptual boundaries between reflection and projection, inside and outside, actor and spectator, present and past, object and subject. Form: the work *Interrogatory* consists of an inside and an outside space sepa-

rated by a projection screen. In the darkened outside space, the viewer/participant can see a live video projection that is being captured by a video camera located inside the space, so that somewhat like people and their fish tanks, the outside viewers/participants have been given the perfect setup for voyeurism (of the inside viewers/participants).



<sup>47</sup> Michael Tauschinger-Dempsey, *Interrogatory*, 2011, interactive, time-delayed video installation

Because the live video feed is delayed in real time by Max/MSP Jitter video processing software, viewers/participants are able to observe themselves performing, as it were, which proves to be irresistible to our naturally narcissistic tendencies and therefore, spectacularly self-inspiring and -amusing. The enclosing walls and floor of the inside space are fully mirrored, with the exception of the projection screen, which nonetheless operates as a mirror, since it shows the video projected from the outside. The interior space functions, then, as an endless mirror with one fundamental difference: the almost infinite loop of reflected images are played back with a time delay of two seconds, allowing the spectator/participant to observe and respond to his/her own past movements and actions. The viewer/participant experiences and reacts to him/herself, slightly time displaced.

Another layer is the visible, silhouetted movement of the outside spectators/participants who are in front of the projector. Their shadows are cast onto the projection screen, which then is infinitely reflected by the inside mirrored space. Inside and outside spaces start communicating with one another through the

screen membrane. The viewer/participant experiences a spatial and a social displacement. If in the outside, s/he assumes the role of voyeur/spectator, observing the larger than life projections of the people inside the space, this role changes abruptly when entering the container. There, suddenly, s/he becomes the actor, the observed, and the object of interrogation. On the one hand, his/her presence is the subject of scrutiny for the people standing on the outside, who remain anonymous and invisible; on the other hand, once inside, s/he is has also become the object of his/her own observation and that of all of the other people inside.

Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn is yet another artist who engages in a recurring critique of the public versus private realm within the context of the global economy. In the piece, *Hotel Democracy*, showed at the Art Basel in 2008, the similarity to Josh Harris's *Capsule Hotel* is not only evident in the title but also in its formal and conceptual focus. Hirschhorn compartmentalizes an imaginary living space into smaller-than-life cells, which the audience can freely gaze into. Aside from the small TVs found in most hotels, no high-tech equipment was used—a notable difference from Harris' *Capsule Hotel*. Needless to say, technology is not a prerequisite for a proper



<sup>48</sup> Thomas Hirschhorn, *Hotel Democracy*, 2008

surveillance situation; neither is the presence of humans, as we have learned from Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. In Hirschhorn's piece, humans have seemingly left traces of their identity in the living spaces of the hotel: memorabilia, belief icons, i.e. a cross or a swastika. The audience becomes the embodied intruder in a private world that would rather remain obscured from the public eye for the sake of preserving its secrets. Hirschhorn's work displays a concept of society very much like

that of a beehive in which the many tiny cells of individualism together comprise a collective identity that is, then the cultural backbone of that society. It follows that Hirschhorn's piece is set up in a way that makes the audience complicit in what, after the initial period of excessive nosiness, as it were – looking into each room, accounting for each little object, and putting together little narratives that sadly, do not have any real time little actors, reveals itself to be a violation of privacy – a non-technological act of surveillance. That the audience was, in a way, tricked into this role is not at issue; rather, it is its willingness to actively, hungrily participate rather than politely opting out.

Although now better known for their contributions to contemporary architecture and urban design, once upon a time, Diller and Scofidio were artists whose work probed the quotidian architecture of surveillance and control. Their projects, *Overexposed* and *Fourth Window* speak to the historical shifts in the perception of the public and private spheres. The former is described in the following way:

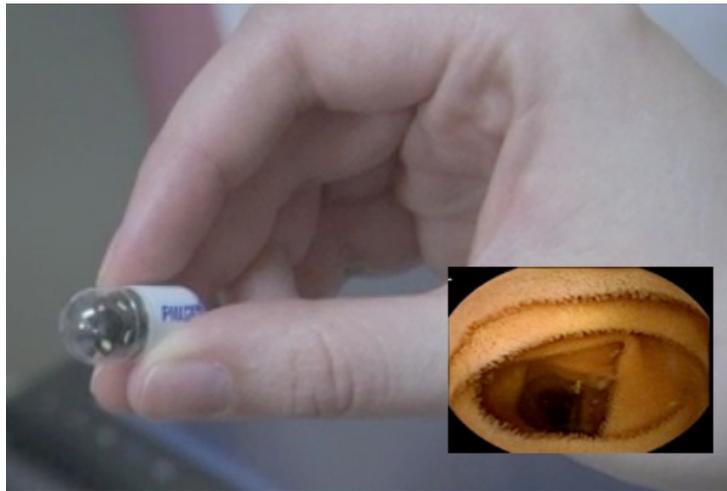
*Overexposed* is a 24-minute continuous video pan across and up and down the surface of Gordon Bunshaft's Pepsi-Cola building, one of the signature curtain wall buildings of the 20th C. The pan briefly pauses at each office to recount the flashback witnessed by a fictive viewer from a neighboring building. The accompanying voiceover reveals observations of post- voyeuristic vision, a hyper-sightedness attracted to unexpected stimuli, infinite detail, and readings formed by a new set of hierarchies (diller scofidio + renfro, 2012).



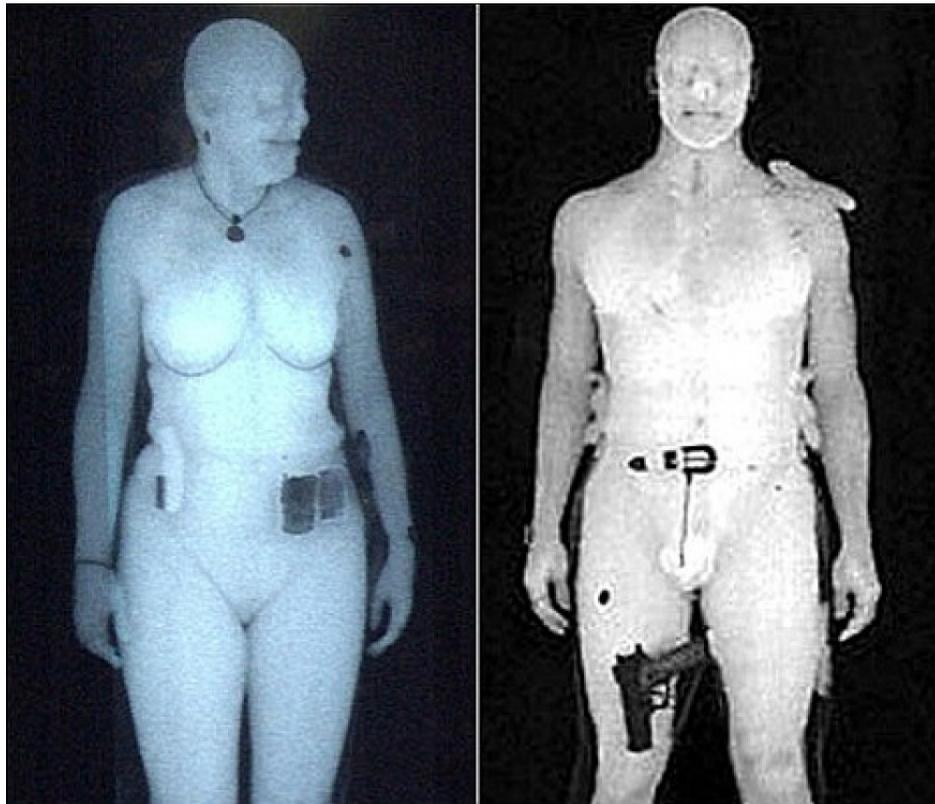
<sup>49</sup> Diller and Scofidio, *Overexposed*, 1995

Whereas at the beginning of the 20th century, glass was considered an innovative building material, e.g. high-rises curtain walls and cathedral-like glass ceiling train stations, held to embody truthfulness and democracy, by mid-century, this notion had degraded to its dystopian antithesis: the ubiquity of glass left citizens feeling overexposed and ‘watched’. Ironically, the start of the new millennium heralded a return to the other extreme. What had come to be considered a threat to privacy has now become desirable and praiseworthy. Now, there is a moot difference between physically being seen through a windowpane or virtually through a CCTV security camera or smartphone or laptop. In fact, modern technology has made our bodies like glass paned buildings, potentially transparent and open to the public’s gaze. Radiology, Ultrasound, MRI (Magnetic resonance imaging), CT (computed tomography), and machines for DNA analysis are all high-tech devices designed to see into our bodies. And now, there is the PillCam, a tiny camera that is swallowed and thereby activated to transmit live images from within the body (PillCam, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Pillcam,  
ingestible;  
takes images  
from within  
your body



We can scan, monitor and control certain bodily functions with the help own cell phones or wireless connections and a remote physician. And on the battlefield, a soldier’s heart rate, stress and fear levels can be remotely assessed and to a certain degree controlled. Governing power structures have already made full body scanning equipment readily available to airport security corporations, prisons and in the near future, public courthouses. More of such low-level x-ray mobile scanning devices are put into service every day, to allegedly protect citizens from potential bombs in trucks or underneath clothing. Interestingly, full body scanners images found on the Internet always show heavily armed individuals, as if it were commonplace for citizens to run around fully armed with an assortment of concealed weapons. The clear and oft repeated message is that this procedure, a negligible inconvenience, may save our lives and is for our protection, despite the fact that facts seem to contradict this point on both counts, to say nothing of the added radiation exposure.



<sup>51</sup> Full body image scans, 2011

On the other hand people today can easily and freely expose all sorts of intimate information about themselves thanks to social media software, online chats, matching sites, human resource sites, and other advanced data-mining algorithms. Corporations that provide such online services claim data are secured and clients' privacy is respected and protected and yet, they never provide evidence about the veracity of such claims. Wired contributor, James Bamford reminds us that "[o]nce the communications are intercepted and stored, the data-mining begins. [A]s data like bookstore receipts, bank statements, and commuter toll records flow in, the NSA is able to paint a more and more detailed picture of someone's life (March 15, 2012)". Whether or not wish to believe it, the truth is that we have all become transparent citizens, and the last real bastion of personal private space is one's own mind—one's thoughts and subconscious. And yet, as Orwell colorfully described it in *1984*, there are ways of extracting thoughts through torture and altering one's ideas through mind control. Is not torture for the purpose of retrieving the truth a method regularly if illegally employed by U.S. military units in the Middle East? Surely, water-boarding falls under the rubric of what Orwell described in his fantastical future world. Are we really so far from being a totalitarian society?

Today's technologically enhanced gaze is more akin to the x-ray vision that was the subject of the 1960s film, *X: The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* (Corman, 1963). In the

movie, the capability to see through everything: walls, people, even the mysteries of life itself, drives the protagonist mad. His act of self-mutilation – tearing out of his own eyes – at the end of the movie relates closely to the legend of Oedipus, who in the face of discovering his disgrace of killing his own father to marry his mother, tears out his eyes. Neither can bear his own shame. The self-effacement that is undertaken in recognition of the truth for Oedipus is therefore also an act of *face-saving* before the audience of gods, oracles and Thebans, which demand their own version of truth and permit him, either in spite of or because of his injuries, to go on living (Aladjem, 2011).

Left: <sup>52</sup> *The Man with the X-Ray Eyes*, 1960, right: <sup>53</sup> *Oedipus*, old theatrical interpretation



In an interview with Corman, the film's director, he confirms rumors that he had actually planned to end his movie quite differently. His original idea was that after the protagonist tears out his eyes in order to stop “seeing”, he would come to the horrific realization, “But I can still SEE!” (Erickson, 2001). Not only would this ending have been psychologically more daring and complex, but it would also have offered a dark comment on the fate of those who overstep boundaries that were never intended to be crossed. In fact, stripped of its the Hollywood glaze of a pleasingly clean resolution, it is not difficult to see a real-world parallel to the movie as a caveat against Man's overstepping certain moral and ethical boundaries, that once crossed cannot ever be reestablished. Interestingly, the original ending was no more palatable fifty years ago than it would be now, largely because the underlying truth of it is so chilling.

The seemingly endless freedom of expression afforded residents of the Western world, professed and closet extroverts—our indiscriminate sharing of nearly all that is ‘personal’ has created a database of the “I” that would have been unimaginable only 10 years ago. Katherine Hayles reminds that privacy

is not merely an individual right but a positive social good, for it is the cradle from which can grow the resistance, creativity and innovation essential for the renewal

of a society. That it necessarily can also foster rebellion, deviancy and crime does not negate its positive potential; this is the price we pay for diversities of thought, varieties of practices, and differences of views. Without privacy, the coercive force of hegemonic power to control not only behavior but the innermost thoughts of citizens becomes absolute. (Hayles, 2009)

And although the powers that be continue to work in the opposite direction, individuals are increasingly aware of and frightened about our narrowing prospects vis-à-vis our own privacy and its inalienable, unfailing protection. Diller and Scofidio's *Blur Building* is a brilliant architectural metaphor for this desire to regain privacy and even, a certain anonymity. The 'Blur Pavilion' of the *Blur Building*, which lies in Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland, is barely visible. The building consists of a 60 x 100 x 20 - meter metal construction that sprays innumerable tiny drops of lake water from 31,400 jets.



<sup>54</sup> Diller and Scofidio, *Blur Building*, 2002

What makes this architectural structure stand out is that at some point in the process of entering the cloud, visitors' vision becomes almost entirely obstructed, effectively making them invisible or anonymous to each other. It is only by means of specially designed rain jackets fitted with proximity sensors can visitors identify the other visitors, meaning that electronic interactivity takes the place of the functioning human eye. One of the many associations this elicits is that associated with the saying, 'the fog of war', used to describe the human and machine behavioral miscalculations that result from warfare's implicit chaos.

Iraqi artist and NYC resident, Wafaa Bilal explores the ambiguous worlds of the real and the virtual, the perceived and the "seen", the lived and the surveilled. For his latest project, *3rdi*, Bilal temporarily had a video camera surgically implanted on the back of his head for an entire year. The camera "spontaneously and objectively

captures the images – one per minute – that make up my daily life, and transmits them to a website for public consumption”, he explained (Wafaa, 2011). The *3rdi* is a platform for the telling and retelling of another story” (Ibid.).



<sup>55</sup> Wafaa  
Bilal,  
*3rdi*,  
2011

In the *3rdi*, a strange kind of inverted surveillance takes place, since the audience cannot actually see what the artist sees since the transmitted images come from the back of his head, Bilal’s fictitious *3rdi*. In a way, therefore, it is a disappointing view for the audience because it misses out on the interesting things that the artist is currently doing. So the audience is made into a kind of useless appendage, present but not informed. In this sense the audience is suffering from an implicit information lag or even lack, which is somewhat metaphorical for the actual physical pain the artist is suffering because of the camera implant. This questions the effectiveness and truthfulness of surveillance in general. The observer/voyeur thinks he is seeing it all, but actually sees very little or sees the most uninteresting things.

In an earlier work, *Domestic Tension* (2008), Bilal built an interactive installation consisting of a room and a remotely controlled paint gun that he inhabited for a month. Participants could log onto the corresponding website as a remote and virtual presence and interact with via chat or simply shoot at Bilal in real time with the paint ball. The interactive installation is accompanied by a book, *Shoot an Iraqi*, which gives the project a significantly more unsettling edge than that of *3rdi*. In an excerpt from a 2008 interview with the artist, Bilal explains this work:

Q: In *Shoot an Iraqi*, you speak about your brother’s death, which ultimately inspired *Domestic Tension*. For someone who has not yet read the book, can you explain what happened to him, and how you came to conceive of this project?

A: In 2004, my brother was killed by an American bomb at a checkpoint outside

our hometown of Kufa. An unmanned drone had flown over just minutes before the bomb was dropped. In early 2007, a TV news segment grabbed my attention: a soldier was sitting in Colorado dropping bombs on Iraq from behind a computer screen. She said she had no doubts about her work because she trusted the people giving her orders. The drone that preceded the killing of my brother could have been deployed by that very woman in Colorado, or someone like her – remote from the conflict and horror they were about to help create. So I wanted to use my art to make people aware of not only the horrors of war but also the remote and technological nature of modern warfare. (Bilal & Lydersen, 2008)

There are those who find pleasure in having access to a tool that allows them to shoot at somebody they don't even know. For those it is as if they are playing some standard ego shooter video game. They might not even reflect upon why they would want to shoot at somebody, yet the detachment from this virtual and remote space is sufficient to find shooting acceptable. Then there are those amidst the audience who suffer from the idea of other people's cruelty and try to "protect" Bilal by aiming the gun somewhere other than at him. Bilal explained his motives thus:

In *Domestic Tension* I adapted the idea of "aesthetic pleasure vs. aesthetic pain." We exist in a comfort zone [and are] unwilling to engage in a political dialogue. The idea was to create an encounter where a person finds him/herself on a platform unknowingly participating in the very thing they refused to be part of. (Ibid.)

Although Bilal intentionally gave up his right to privacy and self refuge by putting himself in this situation, in so doing, he was also able to indirectly communicate that certain basic rights should be inalienable and that fellow humans should instinctively identify and respect them, but sadly, do not, as a general rule. In essence, a typical drone operator and the remote audience member shooting at Bilal could be said to be one in the same.



<sup>56</sup> Wafaa Bilal, *Domestic Tension*, 2008

This stark disconnect between the ideal and the reality was graphically demonstrated in an experiment conducted nearly four decades earlier. In the *Milgram Experiment*, test subjects were made to believe that they were physically punishing – via electroshock – another test subject for having not answered a question correctly. After being coerced to continue with the punishment ‘protocol’, most punishing test subjects would continue administering electroshocks even to the supposed death of the learning test subject (Milgram, 1974). This proved the immense influence of authoritative structures on the personal conscience of an individual. Authoritarian structures lend themselves to abuse because they create hierarchies and chains of command that annul common ethical sense.

With *Access Project*, French artist and fellow-New York City resident, Marie Sester, speaks to a remote presence that “targets” other humans in a similar, but much more subtle manner: with a spotlight.

*ACCESS* lets you track anonymous individuals in public places, by pursuing them with a robotic spotlight and acoustic beam system. *ACCESS* presents control tools generated by surveillance technology combined with the advertising and Hollywood industries, and the Internet. It refers to political propaganda and media manipulation. Beware. Some individuals may not like being monitored. Beware. Some individuals may love the attention. Scary-fun / obsession-fascination / control-resistance: it is impossible to determine who is actually in control. (Sester, 2012)



<sup>57</sup> Marie Sester, *Access Project*, 2003

The strong impression this combined surveillance and tracking system has on the public is based much more on collective imaginings than is Bilal’s *Domestic Tension* project. In the case of the latter, the impact of real projectiles on the artist’s body caused actual PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). In the former, the built in playfulness of the surveillance system still allows the mind of the audience to wander to spaces

that have more pleasurable connotations, like standing in Hollywood's fame and glory spotlight, as well as toying with well-known shared movie associations about Hollywood, exciting or frightening prison escape scenes, event Broadway hits like *Cats* or *Les Miserables*. In terms of tapping into both pleasurable and menacing surveillance associations, Sester's work runs the gamut, but importantly, stops short of the extreme physical, tactile dimension that is so prominent in Bilal's work.

Sester's piece also anticipated the digital billboards and ad screens equipped with integrated tracking and facial/gesture recognition hard- and software, which have just begun to pop up around the country. The focus, then, is less social/military and more commercial/capitalist and therefore more socially and personally if not so physically and culturally trenchant. "Immersive Labs software can anonymously determine age, gender, attention time and adapts content on digital signs automatically based on who is looking at the screen" (Immersivelabs, 2012). One cannot help but ask, if companies have the technological means to track, filter and profile pedestrians in public spaces with such incredible accuracy, what are national security agencies really capable of doing? In a recent episode of CBS's popular *60 Minutes*, there was a segment on the NYPD's new state-of-the-art headquarters that curiously, was presented much like a promotional video. Spectators were selectively shown and in no uncertain terms informed that the NYPD is outfitted with the most sophisticated, cutting edge panoptic equipment money can buy.

### **In 60 Minutes feature on NYPD anti-terror arsenal, top cop claims ability to "take down a plane"**

By **Xeni Jardin** at 6:52 pm Monday, Sep 26



<sup>58</sup> *60 Minutes* documentary on new NYPD headquarters, 2012

Kelly has built something else that most New Yorkers never see. It is nearly impossible now to walk a block in lower Manhattan without being on television. There are 2,000 cameras, and soon there will be 3,000 - all of which feed into this control

center housed in a secret location. [T]his [is a] \$150 million surveillance system that monitors the cameras and all those radiation detectors. A powerful computer, using artificial intelligence actually watches all of the cameras at once and it knows if a package has been left in one place too long (Jardin, 2011).

It is reassuring that not all reactions to this *60 Minutes* documentary were uncritical. People like *Mother Jones* online magazine writer, Adam Serwer are beginning to be aware that the accumulation of such great masses of information in the hands of secretly operating entities might have a serious downside. He reported, “The show wasn’t the slightest bit interested in examining how much of what Kelly was doing actually deterred terrorism, or how much of it might violate people’s basic individual rights. [T]hat not a single dollar spent on Keeping Us Safe is ever wasted or misused seemed to be the order of the day” (2011).

In my thesis project at the Convention Center in Providence, RI, the viewer involuntarily becomes the center of attention, the object of an invisible gaze. The sculptural, discretely displayed technological devices in the center of the exhibition space can of course, be observed by the audience; however, the devices also secretly stare back at the audience from the ‘back side’ of a two-sided mirror, projecting the captured images back into the audience’s visiting space. At first glance, the unknowing audience might assume that s/he is being confronted with a typical sculpture or (inactive) display. Eventually, however, s/he realizes that the object is in fact watching him/her. This sets up three ontological moments: 1) the ‘magic lantern’-like projection, 2) the actual showcases and tradeshow-like displays, and 3) the how-to video, shown on a TV monitor, which shows the use of the very home-made “weapon systems” displayed in the glass boxes.

Not all surveillance is imposed from the top down. Artistic pioneer, Julia Scher focuses on surveillance situations that are imposed from within. “[H]er artwork is about creating a ‘cosmology of surveillance’ that makes people aware of the web of surveillance we inhabit. [T]he trope in all her work is to make clear that data gathered through surveillance systems can be manipulated without the subject’s proper prior consent”(Kimmerling, 1998).

Despite the fact that surveillance technology in *The Surveillance Bed III* is so prominently visible, it nevertheless hints at the unseen, unknown workings behind such infrastructures. They are only the surface of things to come, they are foreboding in a way of times when everything might seem private on the surface but in reality will be utterly public, with or without ones consent. Moreover, Scher’s implied critique of surveillance highlights a very important feature of modern-day surveillance technologies: the data captured by such systems are mainly obtained without the prior

knowledge or permission of ‘the observed’, who is supposed to be comforted by the myth of transparency, viz. plainly visible cameras (that belie the presence of countless invisible others).



<sup>59</sup> Julia Scher,  
*The Surveillance Bed III*,  
2000

In all social media portals and networked telecommunication technologies, the user expects to be benefiting from a given infrastructure and not vice versa. In point of fact, however, it is the service provider, who is generally in cohorts with some other larger, non-commercial enterprise, like the U.S. government, that is benefitting disproportionately from releasing its client’s “confidential” information. Nowadays, Internet corporations’ data-mining services, like Facebook, are generally free to consumers who are essentially tricked into ‘selling’ their information to 3rd party businesses that have no privacy or confidentiality agreement with the users who have become their clients without even knowing it.

Although leading social networks such as Facebook have refrained from selling the information to advertisers, they have created systems that enable advertisers to run highly targeted social advertising campaigns. Not surprisingly, the goals of enabling highly targeted advertising and protecting the privacy of users’ personal information entrusted to the company are at odds. (Korolova, 2010).

Facebook does not only empower corporations to make more money by given them new clients; it also enables institutions and human resource agents to collect very useful data on current or potential students and employees. It is no wonder Facebook has been called a “leaky container” (Lyon, 2001) of data.

Users openly criticize schools, workplaces, and corporations, and these are retained and easily accessible through the site’s search function as well as through external

search engines like Google. Institutions and individuals may be mutually transparent, as both are made visible through social media. Yet institutions develop practices to manage risks on social media, while exploiting the visibility of individual users (Danezis & Gürses, 2010).

Autonomous and algorithm-driven data-mining opens up a completely different subset of intrusion possibilities.

Stereotyping is alive and well in data aggregation. Your application for credit could be declined not on the basis of your own finances or credit history, but on the basis of aggregate data — what other people whose likes and dislikes are similar to yours have done. If guitar players or divorcing couples are more likely to renege on their credit-card bills, then the fact that you've looked at guitar ads or sent an e-mail to a divorce lawyer might cause a data aggregator to classify you as less credit-worthy. (Andrews, 2012)

My video work *Fate (f8)* (2011), which refers to the 2011 Facebook Developers Conference f8, takes on Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg's presentation of the advantages of his social media platform. The video takes snippets from the actual conference and remixes in a way that underlines the actual message rather than the promotional gloss that obscures it. At the conference, the value of shared Facebook user content is so inflated that for the sake of explanation (viz. marketing), it is reduced to its extraordinary monetary potential, which in turn, legitimizes the company's staggering \$100 billion net worth. What is truly mind-boggling



<sup>60</sup> Michael Tauschinger-Dempsey, *Fate (f8)*, 2011

about Zuckerberg's Facebook is the sheer number of followers. Not unlike the giganto-numbers that were thrown around during the most recent financial melt-down, 800,000,000 – eight hundred million – users is a number the average person simply cannot fathom. Edward Bernays, father of the term 'public relations', master of modern day propaganda and Sigmund Freud's nephew, would be simi-

larly astounded by the exploitative power Zuckerberg and his “friends” effectively hold in their hands. If one ignores the risk of posting and essentially, advertising one’s personal data for review by the world’s secret service agencies, one cannot help but be awestruck by the enormous capitalist potential for new and mass-marketing strategies made possible by Facebook. Zuckerberg tries his best to convince the public of his noble intentions – of his well-intentioned (non-commercial) goal of building a thoroughly modern, personalized, safe and fun platform for expanding, renewing and maintaining friendships and collective experiences. *Fate (f8)* exposes the rather less philanthropically friends and family agenda of his evermore ambitious and finely tailored social interface: financially/commercially capitalizing on gobs of personal information without paying users for it and thereby selling its eight hundred million users stuff they hadn’t yet dreamed of.

In the prognostically dystopian work of Jon Kessler, algorithmic data-mining surveillance systems that is social media software is juxtaposed with their mechanized sibling: robotic drones, dolls and networks of optical surveillance hardware. In his *The Blue Period* (2007), the audience was disoriented and made to feel “overexposed” (recall earlier mention in Diller and Scofidio’s work) by a complex mix of footage, recorded by a network of live surveillance cameras and prerecorded imagery. Kessler splashed blue paint wildly across the walls of the gallery space, the white spaces between which function like cutouts or windows through which additional footage, live and pre-recorded was screened. These “blue screen” transparencies, onto which other recorded imagery could spill, were almost aggravating reminders that reality is always mediated. The quotidian perceptions of modern individuals are a jumble different layers and sorts of optical information—advertisements, billboards, signs and symbols, and the augmented reality that we tap into each time we access our smartphones and other handheld devices. In effect, our visual and mental reality is constantly under attack by vast infrastructures of manipulation.



<sup>61</sup> Jon Kessler,  
*The Blue Period*,  
2012

Unlike the so-called 'blue period' of Picasso and Yves Klein, Kessler's *Blue Period* refers more to a technique used in video and movie production involving selecting and cutting out a certain area of footage for use in postproduction. This technique is called "keying" and is usually performed with either blue or green color backdrops. As the title and his use of blue screen blue suggests, digital imagery is no longer trustworthy; it can easily be blue screened and altered. And yet, surveillance images, the typical split screen we all know from supermarkets and banks, are believed and trust to be truthful – that what they record is accurate and unfalsifiable. But, as Kessler illustrates, in a world dominated by the digital image and a wealth of editing software, truth is no longer a prerequisite.

Kessler uses this digital misrepresentation of life in fascinating ways. For instance, with the help of chromatic keying, objects lost their physical integrity in much the same way people and their belongings do in x-ray vision screening. Hyper-realistic, life-sized photos of "visitors" on stands seemed to mingle with real visitors. The personal space of the visitor was also attacked by Kessler's camera and projection arrays such that the privacy of the individual was blue screened with the public realm, creating an indefinable chimera. Indeed, reality appeared to be shifting on the fly. And confusion of the senses is part of this new reality in which nothing seems stable or trustworthy. Very much like our own identities in this heavily manipulated world, the identities of visitors to Kessler's installation were blurred and remixed into a liquid, transitional and profoundly unreliable new reality.

## 4

**Breach of Privacy**

At the core of the works I described in the previous chapter lies the artists' and activists' desire to critically examine our rapidly shifting concept of privacy. Our increasingly digital world is unquestionably characterized by a progressive loss of privacy, both through our own efforts and the more powerful efforts of a socio-economic infrastructure that is not motivated by what lies in the best interests of those it should serve, the people. On the one hand we readily give away private information and let institutions gain access to our bodies, bank accounts and correspondence; on the other, we are unwillingly being made the subjects of a growing number of formalized inspection and control procedures. These procedures come in a number of flavors from the hand-delivered variety, i.e. a handbag search by human hands, to the fully automated variety that includes the digital/x-ray search and data-mining engines. They all share one important characteristic: they constitute a breach of privacy.

Of the several artists who have investigated this attack on the private sphere, NYC-based artist and architect, Vito Acconci, is among the first. His work often made use of imaging technologies, documentary photography, and video, which was just emerging as an expressive medium. In the late 60's and early 70's, his work was truly groundbreaking. In *Following Piece* (1969), Acconci followed random people on the streets of Manhattan for as long as he could, viz. until his subject entered the private space of an apartment building.

What seemed to designate a public space for Acconci was his ability to gain access and to not be noticed. Private space begins where one might be denied access or forced to identify oneself. Invisibility is paradoxically present in Acconci's definition of publicness. As Acconci remains public, unnoticed and unidentified throughout the piece, so does his subject, typically seen from the back, faceless and anonymous. (Stakenas, n.d.)

This description reveals an interesting parallel with Wafaa Bilal's *3rdi*. The images that the camera on the back of Bilal's head transmitted were also mostly faceless; the scenes lacked any specific point of interest. In both works, the mere presence of an observer creates an intimate yet disturbing and invasive situation, even though the subject of observation is not aware he is being observed, as in Acconci's piece or even though the subject and initiator of the observation is one in the same, as in Bilal's case.

<sup>62</sup> Vito  
Acconci,  
*The  
Following  
Piece*,  
1969

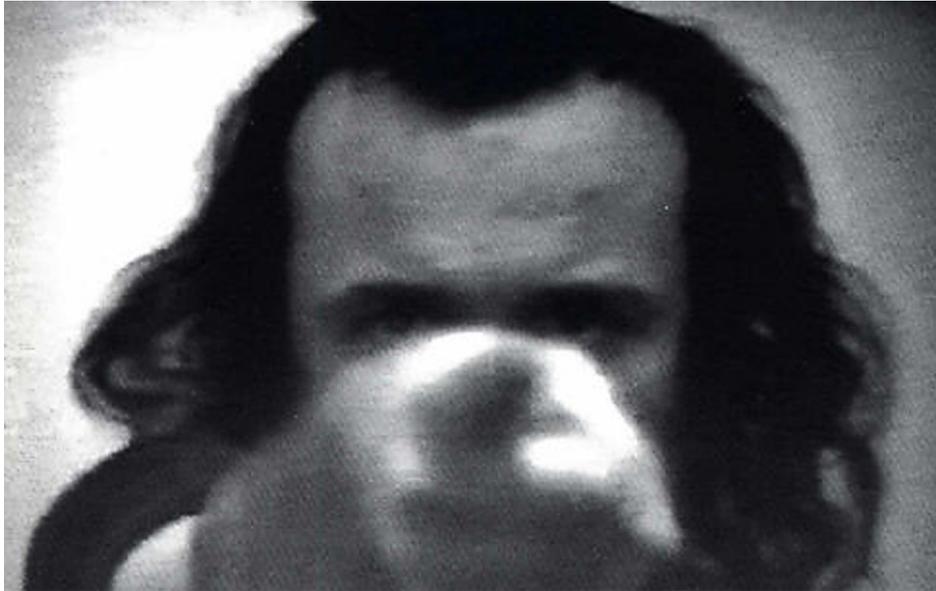


This description is also telling in that although it stretches what was then the current notion of privacy – he continued filming as long as he went unnoticed, and he went unnoticed essentially until he and his subject occupied different spatial realms—inside/outside, there is an implicit sacredness to the idea of being unnoticed and to the truly private interior space –the space of the home. As if to presage what was to come, Acconci’s daring invasiveness represents the modern smartphone version of the much more sophisticated and sinister surveillance of the gigapixel camera and video. The newest state-of-the-art gigapixel camera and the video feed it facilitates are equally invasive as a constant and invisible presence in the sky. The truth is, this camera could be located anywhere in the sky above any mayor city; it has the ability to provide dozens of separate video feed cells, allowing for large surface and centralized surveillance by any military or police force that can afford it. The qualitative, invasiveness and quantitative leap from Acconci’s private eye kind of surveillance to that by a remotely operated gigapixel eye-in-the-sky is extraordinary.

<sup>63</sup> Argus-IS (Autonomous Real-Time Ground Ubiquitous Surveillance Imaging System) is based on a 1.8 Gigapixels video sensor(DARPA Inc., 2012)



*Centers* is another Acconci work that dealt with early imaging technology and the dialectics of the observer and the observed. In this work, Acconci finger points directly at the recording camera lens as if to say that he can see the person watching him, which is an attempt, at least psychologically, to transcend the displacement of time or the divide between the real present and the virtual future, if you will. Anyone who watches the video sees and feels Acconci pointing directly at him.



<sup>64</sup> Vito  
Acconci,  
*Centers*,  
1971

Acconci was very literal in his approach to his gallery space audience in and viewers of his video works. Doing so anticipated the most popular ways individuals of today publically share their sense of self on the Internet (YouTube videos, for instance) and in reality TV shows. For instance, he often used explicitly sexual insinuations and evocative body language in precisely the same way as participants in today's chat roulette or a myriad of other adult content sites.



<sup>65</sup> This might  
actually be an  
Acconci puppet  
masturbating at  
the peep show.

Rather remarkably for the era, Acconci actually sexually interacted with his invisible—virtual, if you will, audience. In another piece featuring his own masturbation, the audience had to walk over him on a slanted fake floor while he was wanking underneath them. What is interesting about this is that throughout, Acconci remains invisible under the wooden floor, making his presence essentially ‘virtual’, though without technical interventions. His murmurs are the only confirmations that he is, in fact, actually there. The world of virtual sexuality had not yet come to be, but has developed very much along the lines envisaged by Acconci and occupy a surveillance niche whose growth seems directly proportionate to that of all other types of surveillance.

Today, thanks to CCTV cameras, following people through a public space, watching them expose their private parts or have public sex or rob a liquor store is only a click away and can be shared via YouTube an hour later. In fact, trying to move through a city without being filmed would be a nearly impossible challenge and would require careful planning. Luckily, the Institute For Applied Autonomy has developed a free web resource for just that purpose. Called *iSee*, the application allows users to plan “paths of least surveillance” through major U.S. cities:

*iSee* is a web-based application charting the locations of closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance cameras in urban environments. With *iSee*, users can find routes that avoid these cameras (“paths of least surveillance”) allowing them to walk around their cities without fear of being “caught on tape” by unregulated security monitors. (Institute for Applied Autonomy, 2012)

French artist Sophie Calle also followed people over extended periods of time. But unlike Acconci, she was far more discriminating about her choice of subjects, invested far more time observing them and thus, established a certain intimacy with regards to them. Indeed, at the end of an observation period, Calle generated elaborate visual documentation about the subject and the process itself. If Acconci’s work is akin to that of a stalker, Calle’s is akin to that of Sherlock Holmes. Most of Calle’s work focused on how the private and public sphere interface with one another and how a sense of intimacy can be created artificially through her artistic process, something that should resonate with anyone who has watched detective shows like *Columbo* or *Law and Order* in which detectives develop a similar if odd sense of closeness. Her meticulous identity profiles and her work process are remarkably similar to that of modern-day investigative and forensic CIA and FBI agents and NYPD officers. In *The Hotel* (1981), Calle used her temporary employment as a chambermaid to gain access to the hotel guests’ privacy and take pictures of their belongings and writings. In another project, entitled *Address Book*, (1983) she called numbers from an address book she had found on the street. In her conversations with complete strangers, she asked questions about the owner of the address book, thereby creating a phantom image of the owner. Ultimately, the owner discovered this breach of privacy and threatened to sue Calle.



<sup>66</sup> Sophie Calle,  
*The Hotel*,  
1981

What is so fascinating about these projects is that the entire process of research, following, taking pictures and later documenting – this complex identity profile creation happens today in microseconds through digital technologies like Facebook. One's behavioral patterns can easily be extrapolated and identified with this data and with surprising accuracy, future behavior can be predicted. Calle used her data for artistic purposes but foresaw the interest in and popularity of this sort of data-mining, as we now call it. Intimacy and privacy are lost goods in a world where every move we make is analyzed and incorporated into statistical spreadsheets for further commercial or investigative evaluation.

If in the world of Acconci and Calle and even in our present social media reality, there is still a degree of privacy, there nonetheless exist a (growing) number of spaces in which this is not at all the case. In today's prisons, for instance, the loss of privacy is absolute, now more than ever thanks to the widespread implementation of x-ray technology. Bodily cavities were formerly known to be the last remaining spaces of private possession and could be used as a secrete container to transport illegal items like cash, drugs or weapons. But with the introduction of full body scanners, prisoners have become completely transparent to the prison ward. Hierarchies are strictly enforced and rehearsed in the prison context, perhaps with the somewhat unrealistic idea that prisoners will have been made better citizens once released. These artificially maintained hierarchies recreate a societal model that is decidedly autocratic and therefore desirable in a capitalistic democracy.

The infamous Stanford Prison Experiment (Zimbardo, 2012) was a laboratory reconstruction of the psychological processes of transformations that takes place when rigid authoritarian structures and hierarchies are established and lived out. The results were shocking as it demonstrated to an unbelieving scientific community that it is the autocratic structure itself that promoted and facilitated deeply immoral, unethical and sadistic behavior. What happened in Nazi Concentration camps and more recently in Abu Ghraib are just two real world examples of these findings.



<sup>67</sup>Torture  
in Abu  
Ghraib by  
U.S. army

Polish artist, Artur Zmijewski tried to recreate the Stanford Prison Experiment in *Repetition*. Like Santiago Sierra's paid humiliated and lightly abused workers, Zmijewski hired unemployed Polish men to participate in his two-week prison experiment, carefully maintaining the element of economic inequality and discrimination. By contrast, in the Stanford Prison Experiment, not only did the head researcher, Zimbardo, hire students but the entire experiment was halted after only 6 days owing to the extreme and dangerously troubling results: the guards became truly sadistic and after only 6 days, the students/'prisoners' were traumatized for life. Disregarding the deep immorality of this experiment, Zmijewski carried out his version in much the same way: the men were split into two groups: one of which was made into prison guards, the other into prisoners. The 'prisoners' then were put under

the constant surveillance of their 'guards', hidden cameras and infrared cameras. Zmeijewski assumed the position of artist as autocratic puppet master, taking the artist/audience dialectic to an extreme. One can only wonder if he was merely providing a sadistic spectacle to a potentially uninformed viewership or did he have hidden desires to become a fascist leader who prospers (at least career-wise) from the suffering of others? These are, of course, very legitimate questions, even in an art context. Why then are they not forcefully asked and rigorously pursued in socio-political contexts in which such torture, extreme surveillance and hierarchical structures are deeply embedded?

World champions of liberty and freedom, the United States of America holds over 2.3 million people in prison, more than in all western nations combined (Liptak, 2008). As Foucault predicted,

On the whole, therefore, one can speak of the formation of a disciplinary society in this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines, a sort of social 'quarantine', to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of 'panopticism'. Not because the disciplinary modality of power has replaced all the others; but because it has infiltrated the others, sometimes undermining them, but serving as an intermediary between them, linking them together, extending them and above all making it possible to bring the effects of power to the most minute and distant elements. It assures an infinitesimal distribution of the power relations. (Foucault, 1977)

In the late 90's the British artist group Blast Theory used surveillance, kidnapping and game narratives as their artistic tools. In the work *Kidnap*, they came up with a project that essentially precedes authentic secret service anti-terrorist practices in the post-9/11 world:

In 1998 Blast Theory launched a lottery in which the winners had the chance to be kidnapped. Ten finalists around England and Wales were chosen at random and put under surveillance. Two winners were then snatched in broad daylight and taken to a secret location where they were held for 48 hours (Blast Theory, 2012).

The idea of abduction and incarceration, as playful and temporary as it might have been, pushes art to its limits. The lottery participants later stated that they actually suffered very real anxiety and fear from being kidnapped. They also described the 48 hours in isolated captivity as gruesome and cruel. Despite their best attempt, Blast Theory failed to really blur the lines between art, play, games and the reality of a looming loss of civil liberties once incarcerated because of the indisputable negativity of participants' very real experiences of dominance, violence, and fear.

In their award-winning project *Can You See Me Now?* (Golden Nica at Prix Ars Electronica, 2004), Blast Theory explored surveillance, video game-play, and mobile communications technologies in very experimental and groundbreaking ways:

*Can You See Me Now?* is a game that happens simultaneously online and on the streets. Players from anywhere in the world can play online in a virtual city against members of Blast Theory. Tracked by satellites, Blast Theory's runners appear online next to your player on a map of the city. On the streets, handheld computers showing the positions of online players guide the runners in tracking you down. (Ibid.)

<sup>68</sup> Blast Theory, *Kidnap*, 1998, Lottery "winners" with hoods.



Blast Theory used current technological conditions, like those in lower Manhattan, where every move can be tracked by a kind of “cyber” police officer. Video game play that is both virtual and real by way of GPS and mobile technologies that allow us to track, look up, record, and store just about anything have become almost second nature. And of course, if we can do all this, so can the executive branch.

The Obama administration is moving to relax restrictions on how counterterrorism analysts may access, store and search information about Americans gathered by government agencies for purposes other than national security threats. [...] The guidelines will lengthen to five years — from 180 days — the center's ability to retain private information about Americans when there is no suspicion that they are tied to terrorism, intelligence officials said. The guidelines are also expected to result in the center making more copies of entire databases and “data-mining them” — using complex algorithms to search for patterns that could indicate a threat — than it currently does (Savage, 2012).

Counterterrorism analysts also identified U.S. artist and professor at the University of Maryland, Hasan Elahi, as a terror suspect. The internationally renowned artist was detained on the Detroit airport in 2002 while returning home from a trip to the Netherlands. Because of his name and his extensive international travel, the FBI suspected he was planning a terrorist attack. For six months, he was subjected to extensive interrogatories about every detail of his life. His experiences with the

FBI brought about his idea to create an art project entitled, *FBI here I am!* (ongoing):

Figuring once in the system, never out, he decided to turn the tables and cooperate – with a vengeance. Starting with constant phone calls and emails to the FBI to notify them of his whereabouts, what started as a practicality grew into an open-ended art project. He began posting photos of his minute-by-minute life, up to around a hundred a day, on TrackingTransience.net – hotel rooms, train stations, airports, meals, beds, receipts, even toilets – generating tens of thousands of images in the last several years. Just for good measure, he also wears a GPS device that tracks his movements on his site’s live Google map. And as if to prove his point that “the best way to protect privacy is to give it away,” Elahi – while still being watched by the authorities, according to server records – hasn’t been bothered since. (TED, 2011)

Although the exaggerated efforts give this project an element of humor, it may well be that such an approach is the only option to invalidate the amassed data that our executive branches and private corporations are hoarding about us. Like the Yes Men and the DoS attacks (“denial of service” happens when there are so many simultaneous website requests, that the site crashes under the data load) by Anonymous, Elahi’s art project fights fire with fire. Elahi swamped the FBI with so much irrelevant information that it rendered all of their efforts completely useless.

## Conclusion

Technological progress is not, in and of itself, a bad thing. It goes without saying that we all enjoying a way of living that is far safer and healthier than it was only a century ago. As with all other behaviors and developments, taken to its extreme—untempered by sound ethics and what might even be called common sense, this progress becomes frightfully reactionary. Just imagine to what good use the technologies described in this thesis could be put were the motivations and intentions given a different focus: our oceans could be monitored around the clock with utmost detail to inform our scientists about miniscule changes that are taking place due to global warming and pollution; endangered species and illicit hunting and deforestation practices could be monitored by 24/7 video surveillance from an “eye in the sky” blimp or special drones. Just imagine what new industries, jobs, businesses could develop from ideas that use technology to undo some of the damage we have done to the environment during the industrial revolution and beyond. One rather novel but nonetheless scientifically useful application has been the creation of the world’s largest video database of footage by animals with “crittercams” (custom made cameras attached to the body of the observed animal) by American artist, Sam Easterson. Similarly, the vast and unfathomable universe of the Internet is also not, in and of itself, a threat. Social media can be a good thing if offered and used



<sup>69</sup> Sam Easterson, Turkey filmed by camera attached to its back

tastefully, with sensible and respectful restraint, for it does indeed have the power to bring people together, who would likely rarely or never be able to do so in real time, and could theoretically allow them to share personal information with each other and no one else, as if on a private, personal visit. Unfortunately, business goals and capitalist philosophy trump everything, making technology in all of its applications, including safeguarding pregnancy (ordering countless expensive prenatal tests and imaging) and childbirth (early induction and convenience and “preventive” C-sections), principally and fundamentally the tool of ultra-capitalist practices. Businesses build new weapon systems; businesses mine, track and sell personal data; business interests run the government; businesses own the rights to public policy. Thousands of corporate lobbyists make sure that their idea of good business is made into and enforced as law. The Berlusconi and Murdochs of the world privately own mass media, so it should come as no surprise that consumerism has become fetishized and the public discourse is frighteningly limited and disinterested, just as Aldous Huxley proposed in his 1932 a tale of the future.

As a whole, society has turned a blind eye to the recent developments in the surveillance and control tactics imposed by corporate and state power structures. The early promises of the Internet Age – that of a wealth and wonderful diversity of information, of a political and intellectual transparency as had never existed before – are fast evolving to be just the opposed. Information is severely reduced by “smart” algorithms (e.g. Google analytics) and national safeguards; content is manipulated and mediated by the combined interests of large big business and government, and data, particularly personal data, are the hottest commodity on the world market. Private corporations, who by curtailing information and knowledge have “cornered” the market, reap the real benefits of technological innovation: healthcare providers need to know what your chances are of getting seriously ill so they can avoid covering you or increase your rates accordingly; banks need to know if you are credit worthy and if you should be given breaks or penalties, inversely proportional to your net worth, i.e. if you happen to be black and poor, you will have to pay many times more for the same or lesser service purchased by someone who is white and wealthy; the police need to know what your political ideas are, what books you buy, where you travel, and your email content and recipients so that they know how closely to watch you or if they should issue you your unwarranted arrest. The era of the constant automated tracking and evaluation of citizens has begun; only time will tell what the consequences of this new reality will be. One thing is clear: artists and activist, like the ones described in this thesis, are needed more than ever to show society new ways to reflect upon and take action against the hostile takeover of omnipotent corporations unfolding right under our noses.

*There is no fear or hope,  
but only to look for new weapons.*

–Gilles Deleuze, 1992

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