

Nineteen Eighty-Four, by
Surveillance Camera
Players, Fourteenth
Street/Seventh Avenue
subway station,
New York City, 1998.
Photo: Courtesy of
Surveillance Camera
Players

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USER-UNFRIENDLY

Surveillance Art as Participatory Performance

Surveillance, that sociopolitical fixture in our contemporary world, is, by design, participatory. Its many forms—from publicly installed CCTV cameras on streetlamps and traffic lights to online credit checks, personalized Google advertising, and Facebook stalking—demand our participation as citizens in the digital age, asking us to maintain certain standards of safety, mobility, communication, and, perhaps most of all, capitalist consumption. The structure of motivation is not particularly complex: if we participate, we get rewarded. Or we avoid punishment. Its most recognizable form harkens back to Michel Foucault’s theorization of panoptic surveillance in which the visible but unverifiable specter of authoritarian observation prompts the individual to discipline himself.¹ The surveillance camera in your local bodega, which may or may not be recording your late-night indecision in the snack aisle, urges your participation in the performance of proper citizen-consumer; you will pay for the Doritos *and* the Life Savers, even though it would be so easy to slip the tiny roll of butter rums into your pocket while the less-than-vigilant teenage clerk checks his Twitter feed. More positive reward structures have also come to be linked to surveillance: if you check in religiously on Foursquare, allowing your “friends” (and those with access to the Foursquare database) to track your movement through the establishments you frequent, you have the dubious honor of becoming “mayor” of your local Dunkin’ Donuts and perhaps receiving a half-off coupon for an artichoke dip appetizer at a neighborhood bar. Or if you choose not to opt out of cookie tracking on Google, ads for the boots you have repeatedly checked out on Zappos will revisit the borders of your screen as you check the weather, respond to e-mail, and read the latest news bite . . . but wait, the boots are cheaper on this other site! Thanks to the stalkerlike advertising strategy of data mining, you just saved \$21.01. Now you can settle back and watch the new episode of *Real Housewives* in peace.

Clearly, the ways in which we participate and are rewarded for our participation in surveillance society have changed radically in recent decades, not to mention

centuries. The cultural landscape of surveillance has been reshaped by (even as it has shaped) the continued expansion of digital information networks, the post-9/11 political climate, social software systems such as Facebook, Twitter, and Foursquare, and the cultural success of reality TV. No longer is surveillance only a top-down process of discipline in which an unseen body of power polices its subjects, even as this aspect of surveillance has also intensified in response to major terrorist activities. We have become increasingly facile user-consumers of surveillance technologies, encountering them not only in disciplinary exchanges with surveillance cameras or policemen but also in a multitude of quotidian transactions and activities. Digital technologies that are deeply integrated in our everyday lives are nearly all functionally undergirded by technologies of surveillance: cell phones, credit cards, Facebook, Google Maps, E-ZPass, and Amazon advertising depend upon surveillance technologies such as GPS, radio frequency identification (RFID) tags, high-power zoom lenses, and networked systems of personal data. We participate in surveillance society simply by using these goods and services.

Advances in surveillance technologies, first designed for military use and then reformulated for civilian-consumer markets,² do benefit us in many ways: surveillance technologies have come to function socially as tools that enable faster and more convenient communication, commerce, and geographic mobility, as well as produce new forms of entertainment.³ At the same time, this model of discipline-by-participation poses risks, risks that are more or less substantial depending upon your economic, medical, and citizenship status. Based on surveillance of personal data, or *dataveillance*, some individuals will be preapproved for car loans, given priority service through help centers online or over the phone, or fast-tracked through immigration and customs, while others encounter prohibitively high interest rates, long holds in commercial call centers, and impermeable national borders. In the dispersed networks of contemporary surveillance society, a far less visible kind of discipline has emerged, one in which the benefits of participation mask the mechanisms of discipline and the risks of being tracked. The “user-friendly” software interface has become a slick new site of discipline, through which individuals are conditioned to use everyday surveillance systems in ways that are consonant with the financial, legal, and ideological goals of state and corporate entities. Such interfaces subtly dictate modes of usership while simultaneously tracking and sorting individuals according to their personal data, as risk-analyzing algorithms determine the access, mobility, and prioritization an individual user should receive.⁴

Surveillance and our participation in it have become a deeply ambivalent concept and practice. As we have become daily, even hourly, users of social and commercial surveillance networks, it is difficult to critically consider the risks of participation, let alone imagine alternative, resistant methods of usership. There are, of course, a host of recommendations that can (and probably should) be heeded about online privacy settings, location tracking options, and, at their most extreme, ways of living off the grid. However, a more entertaining and, to my mind, effective set of responses to the immersive

surveillance society in which we live comes from a growing number of artist-activists who have reconfigured and reimagined surveillance interfaces in order to critique and disrupt patterns of “user-friendly” participation in them. Not unlike the engineers of state and corporate surveillance systems, these surveillance artist-activists capitalize on the participatory nature of surveillance, only, in the case of surveillance art and activism, participation becomes a tactic of political critique and subversive action.

As of 2013, a wide range of surveillance art is performed in a variety of contexts ranging from national theaters, art galleries, and websites to political protests, academic and corporate conferences, and quotidian urban spaces. Many artist-activists today focus explicitly on revisioning the techno-human interface of contemporary surveillance. Hasan Elahi, Wafaa Bilal, Ricardo Dominguez, Coco Fusco, Steve Mann, the Surveillance Camera Players (SCP), and the Institute for Applied Autonomy (IAA) provide models of usership that urge audiences and participants to engage with technologies of surveillance in user-*un*friendly ways. That is, these artist-activists appropriate techniques and technologies of surveillance from military and commercial contexts to create models of usership and participation that are critical of and disruptive to state and corporate ideologies of discipline and control.

Influential artist-activist group Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) has termed the work of artist-activists such as these *digital resistance*, in that they “challenge the existing semiotic regime by replicating and redeploying it in a manner that offers participants in the projects a new way of seeing, understanding, and . . . interacting with a given system.”⁵ CAE argues that by replicating and redeploying dominant technologies and techniques of surveillance, amateur engineers, artists, and activists can expose the capitalist interests driving dominant systems of surveillance while simultaneously building alternative, resistant models of participation. The IAA, SCP, Mann, Fusco, Dominguez, Elahi, and Bilal have variously taken up CAE’s tactics of exposure and intervention as they critique and interrupt contemporary surveillance society in three central ways: (1) physically intervene in habitual patterns of movement and usership that have been conditioned by state, military, and corporate design of surveillance interfaces in real and virtual space; (2) insist upon a materialist approach to technologies, rather than a determinist one, as they encourage participants to appropriate available surveillance technologies and reapply the surveillant capabilities toward politically subversive ends; and (3) strategically highlight blind spots in surveillance societies, drawing attention to the ubiquitous yet often ignored presence of surveillance cameras in urban centers, the significant military involvement in designing and producing civilian-consumer surveillance technologies, and the discriminatory and repressive effects of surveillance systems on particular social, political, racial, and economic groups. Through these tactics, they create alternative models of participation and usership in surveillance society that challenge preprogrammed limits of sociopolitical discipline.

A MODERN-DAY TROJAN WAR

One of the greatest challenges facing critics of contemporary surveillance society is the way in which modes of participation have become so habitual as to escape recognition. New models of digital discipline are predicated on user-friendly interfaces that condition users to move, behave, and see according to predetermined architectural and technological interfaces. Commercially designed spaces, such as shopping malls or online shopping sites, are visually streamlined to ensure that there is nothing to slow one's constant circulation as a consumer, leaving no time or space open in which to take on an alternative or critical viewpoint. Should a shopper pause for a moment to think of something else, an advertisement will soon enter the visual field to bring him or her back to the consumerist task at hand. Personal communication interfaces, such as cell phones, Gmail, and Facebook, increasingly mimic the built environment of the shopping mall, as these interfaces constantly provide advertisement-laden portals through which users can reenter the "user-friendly" avenues of capitalist consumption. The pull of these digital advertisements is all the stronger as word recognition software applied to e-mails and other interpersonal messages personalizes the products and services advertised, seeming to speak to the inner desires of a given user. One only needs to announce an engagement on Facebook to have ads for bridesmaids' dresses pop up on the sidebar of her Gmail account within a few hours.

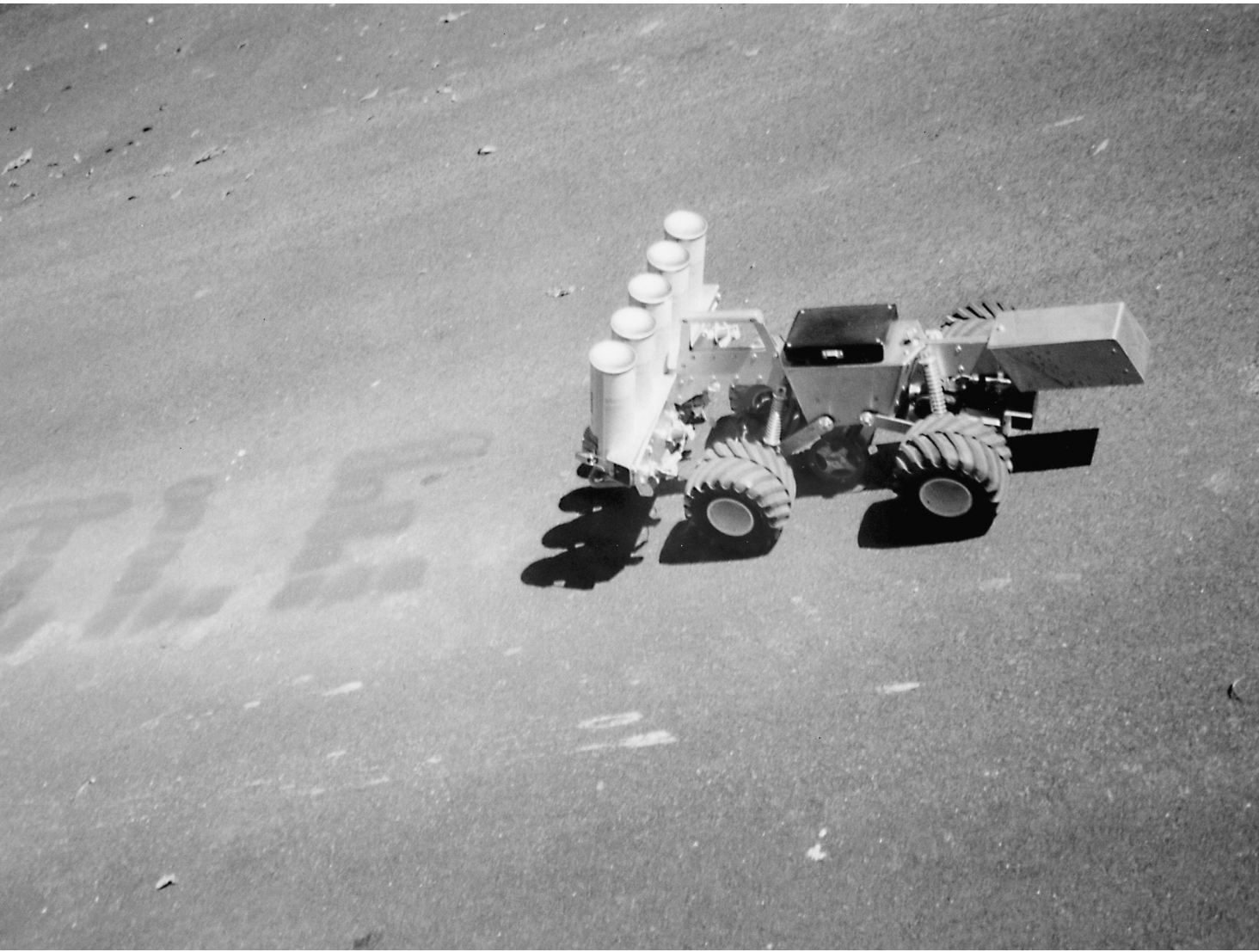
As we supply state and corporate entities with personal data, we gain benefits of efficiency and convenience when using virtual and automated digital surveillance technologies to perform our communication, travel, and commercial transactions; what we do not see are the processes by which we receive (or do not receive) these goods and services. Contemporary surveillance theorists have identified the lack of transparency in the processes by which surveillance data is gathered, shared, and acted upon to be the most insidious aspect of contemporary surveillance systems.⁶ Assessments of personal data, performed in virtual obscurity by various interconnected state and corporate entities, come back to bear on the material lives of social subjects in the form of permeable or impermeable barriers to mobility and opportunity.⁷

A particularly insidious aspect of dataveillance, sometimes called *panoptic sorting*,⁸ is that individuals may not even be aware of the effects on their daily lives. As David Murakami Wood and Stephen Graham put it, "These techniques of prioritization and inhibition are often so invisible and automated that neither the losers nor the beneficiaries are even aware that they are in operation within the complex sociotechnologies that increasingly constitute the ordinary and taken-for-granted environments of contemporary societies."⁹ While it is not difficult to observe the ease with which first-class or Global Entry-approved travelers move through check-in or customs lines, the means by which other passengers are deemed to be low or high risks remain a mystery.¹⁰ The cloak of invisibility falls even more densely on virtual environments, such as online call centers, as individuals will likely not realize that their Internet or phone wait time is a

result of the prioritization they have received based on real-time, corporate judgments of their potential profitability. Such systems result in what is known as a “digital divide” or “differential mobility,” a social order that threatens to subtly yet decisively divide contemporary societies into classes of high-speed, high-mobility “kinetic elites” and disconnected citizens further disadvantaged by barriers to mobility and limited economic opportunities.¹¹ The relative invisibility of surveillance networks that enable this process of social sorting makes the discriminatory effects all the more alarming.

Issues of sight and oversight, visibility and invisibility act as barbed points that motivate political critique in many surveillance art works. The IAA, a dispersed network of activist-engineers, appropriates and redesigns military robotic systems and surveillance interfaces in order to infiltrate and actively combat state and corporate control of privatized space. The IAA has consequently termed their products “Trojan horses,” applying the term from the Bronze Age story described by Virgil in his epic poem *The Aeneid* more broadly to mean any trick that causes a target to invite a foe into a securely protected area.¹² In the process of reengineering existing surveillance technologies and interfaces, the IAA appropriates and transforms familiar digital technologies into politically visible and “user-unfriendly” Trojan horses,

GraffitiWriter,
“Reclaim the
Streets” demo,
New York, Courtesy
of IAA, 2000. Photo:
Courtesy of the
Institute for Applied
Autonomy



poised to ambush and disrupt the smooth flow of capitalist systems of commerce and surveillance.

In their project iSee, the IAA used real-time GPS mapping technologies (developed by the military for use in combat situations) to provide civilian users with a software interface that can interactively map “the path of least surveillance” through urban centers around the world.¹³ This software application can be downloaded for free onto any wireless tablet or smart phone, allowing mobile users to avoid as many publicly installed surveillance cameras as possible.

Other IAA interventions provide tools of expression to subjects who are typically marginalized, criminalized, and silenced—unseen and unheard—in mainstream, dominant society. Projects such as LittleBrother and GraffitiWriter borrow military combat tools and strategies and reappropriate them for civilian political protest situations. Their robotic invention LittleBrother—which rhetorically miniaturizes the Orwellian propaganda machine Big Brother—is a redesigned copy of a military robot created to go where soldiers cannot. The IAA took this military idea and redeployed the design to infiltrate areas of “denied access” within public space, such as malls, public parks, and squares. The robot is designed to go where it is not safe for protesters and activists to go, shielding their identities and keeping them from physical harm. The robot functions as a propaganda machine, capitalizing on its “robotic cuteness” to distribute subversive pamphlets.¹⁴

Graffiti, like subversive pamphlets, can involve a risky process of infiltrating spaces that have become increasingly privatized and surveilled. In a 2002 interview with Erich W. Schienke, one of the IAA members described the logic of GraffitiWriter: “Due to surveillance a person can’t really go in and tag a bank or a shopping mall, so we intended to make a disposable robot that an activist could use instead.”¹⁵ The interview describes GraffitiWriter as “a jacked-up Mars Pathfinder of a remote controlled hotrod mounted with five orange Krylon spray paint cans and a 16k brain—used for tagging the street, park, or indoor carpet alike.”¹⁶

Other examples of reengineered “Trojan horses” come from the laboratory of Steve Mann, professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at the University of Toronto. In his discursive works Mann argues for a dispersal of hierarchy in surveillance culture, stating his ideal as a society in which everyone would watch everyone else through instruments of surveillance distributed at all levels of society. To describe this social architecture, Mann has changed the French *sur* into *sous*, coining the term *sousveillance* (watching from below).¹⁷ Working as an artist-engineer, Mann engineers personal sousveillance devices, which he patents and then shares freely with willing participants, to express his critiques of surveillance and invasions of privacy. He has integrated this challenge to sociopolitical hierarchy into his own life: Mann requires identification scans of police officers in order to access his own personal information (his wallet holding his ID will literally not open unless another ID is scanned).¹⁸

He has also built a host of other sousveillance technologies that he shares with volunteers. In order to further his goal of subjecting authorities to the gaze of the public and of empowering everyday user-consumers with visual authority in public and semi-public spaces, Mann has developed a line of functional dome-shaped surveillance cameras, which he calls wearcams, worn by users to *sousveil* state and corporate surveillance systems. He has affixed these dome cameras to backpacks, pendants, shirts, and, for himself, a pair of glasses that he wears at all times.



In this ongoing project, which he has titled *Shooting Back*, he encourages participants to wear these mobile surveillance cameras to school, work, and the shopping mall. If their motives are questioned, Mann instructs them to explain that they are wearing the sousveillance cameras in accordance with the orders of their supervisor from the local SMO (Safety Management Organization). Mann's wearcam challenge effectively pits two hierarchical structures of vision and power against each other. In bringing his own user-*unfriendly* logic into the dominant hierarchy of corporate or state-owned public space, he shows the normalized hierarchy of the shopping mall to be as unfriendly as his own. He explains,

Shooting Back,
by Steve Mann,
Roots Store,
Toronto, 2001.
Photo: Steve Mann

If an INDIVIDUAL complains about video surveillance systems in use by a CLERK, then the CLERK will simply refer the INDIVIDUAL to management, and management will likely be available only during certain limited hours and only after extensive delay. . . . However, if the INDIVIDUAL takes out his or her own personal handheld camera and photographs the CLERK, indicating that the SMO requires it, . . . quite often the MANAGER will immediately become available.¹⁹

Mann calls this tactic “empowerment through self-demotion, . . . in the same way that clerks facilitate empowerment of large organizations, I was able to facilitate personal empowerment by being a clerk. My self-demotion provided a deliberate self-inflicted dehumanization of the individual that forced clerks to become human.”²⁰ His reimagined hierarchy of power—in which an imaginary supervisor requires him to wear the sousveillance camera around his neck when shopping—is clearly invented, and yet Mann uses it to performatively challenge the equally abstract and dehumanizing hierarchy of corporate public space. Mann’s appropriation of dome surveillance cameras for his wearcam line, coupled with his revisioning of corporate structures of power, turns the corporate space of the shopping mall into an artist-activist battleground.

But lest we jump too quickly on a shiny Trojan horse and ride off into the sunset of artist-activist utopianism, let us look again at the stakes of participation in the digital-age Troy. In our updated, downloaded, and reconfigured city-state, we have become the citizens of a new digital mythology; cast as unwitting Trojans asleep in our beds, we trust that the gifts showered upon us by advances in digital technologies—gifts of credit cards, online banking, e-zpasses, and cell phones—are boons to our social, political, and economic lives. Yet, the benefits we gain from these user-friendly personal gadgets and software systems have led us to largely forget that these digital gifts to civilian life and leisure are, quite literally, the fruits and spoils of war. Nearly all of the digital technologies that we enjoy are the products of particularly rapid advances in surveillance technologies and techniques developed for military purposes.²¹ While this in and of itself is not necessarily bad (after all, the computer and the Internet were also initially created for military use), the programming and marketing of surveillance technologies as tools of communication, commerce, and entertainment often obscure the connections between consumer and military markets and shroud ethical questions regarding these connections in the shadowy balance between commercial benefits and martial costs.

Civilian surveillance systems, both disciplinary and user-friendly, tend to be promoted as unbiased, logical, and ethically neutral: if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear. But then, who or what entities are responsible for the discriminatory effects of dataveillance? In *The Panoptic Sort*, Oscar Gandy asserts that these invisible and dispersed processes of sorting and dividing social subjects are the product of the engineering and programming of surveillance-software systems.²² This might suggest that the ethical weight should fall collectively or individually on programmers and



Dolores from 10 to 10,
by Coco Fusco with
Ricardo Dominguez,
Dundee
Contemporary
Arts Center,
Scotland, 2002.
Photo: Coco Fusco

engineers. The IAA takes this stand, as it proclaims in its article “Engaging Ambivalence: Interventions in Engineering Culture.” In this and other publications, IAA confronts the “service industry” mentality of engineers who develop products regardless of the political aims of their employers, and critique the related assumptions that technology is “value neutral” or that technological development is “an ethically indifferent activity.”²³

The IAA’s technological inventions suggest that usership should likewise not be an ethically indifferent activity. With its street-ready inventions such as the Graffiti-Writer and LittleBrother robots and iSee app, the IAA pointedly redeploys military and consumer surveillance technologies to actively support strategies of political protesters, as well as to directly confront political passivity and ethical neutrality in military-funded engineering culture. In order to do so, the IAA tactically co-opts and refashions military surveillance technologies for consumer use, but rather than demilitarizing the surveillance technologies (as corporate entities have done with RFID tags, cell phones, and consumer GPS technologies), it carries over the combative strategies and military tactics associated with surveillance technologies to civilian arenas and actions. The IAA also uses its members’ technological savvy to good advantage by engineering sophisticated, functional products that gain them entry to military engineering circles. The group shares accounts of its subversive products in academic and engineering trade journals and conferences, aiming to reach professional engineers with their critiques of the ethical ambivalence that surrounds the engineering and marketing of surveillance technologies.



Domestic Tension,
by Wafaa Bilal,
FlatFile Gallery,
Chicago, 2007.
Photo: Wafaa Bilal

As ethically engaged engineers, IAA members are committed to performing what they call “militarized appropriation of consumer technology by civilian actors.”²⁴ In their article “Defensive Surveillance: Lessons from the Republican National Convention,” IAA members describe their projects as supporting existing activist strategies: “Activists counter police tactics with increasingly sophisticated tools and strategies. . . . These tactics rely on intelligence gathering and information sharing to coordinate actions and react quickly to changing conditions.”²⁵ For example, the group developed *txtmob*, a free service to assist protesters during the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City to more efficiently and safely perform the protest tactic of “swarming,” a tactical model described by military theorists as “the dispersion of command among many small, autonomous units that are able to collectively attack an enemy from all directions.”²⁶ *txtmob* facilitated a more decentralized approach for the protesters, helping them to evolve their tactics in response to changes in riot police tactics.

Activists using `TXtMob` at the convention utilized “command-and-control” techniques that are similar to the vision of Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) for small, highly mobile groups of soldiers to use communication technologies to “identify and engage moving targets at moments of heightened vulnerability.”²⁷ The IAA describes the product as it functioned on the ground:

Significant [`TXtMob`] traffic was dedicated to identifying undercover officers, reporting on police activity, and monitoring delegate movements. This enabled activists to coordinate a variety of actions across the city. Warned of police blockades and impending mass arrests, spontaneous demonstrations dispersed at a moment’s notice, only to regroup minutes later several blocks away. Responding to reports of police violence, independent journalists were dispatched to videotape arrests all over the city, providing documentary evidence of police misconduct. Text message reports of delegates sitting down to brunch in quiet East Side restaurants resulted in groups of more than fifty demonstrators waiting to greet them by the time the check arrived.²⁸

Using alternative modes of communication and surveillance is, of course, not unique to surveillance art-activism. As has been widely documented in analyses of recent political protests, from the Occupy movement to the various civic revolutions of the Arab Spring, it has become standard practice for protesters to use video and still cameras to record police activity during demonstrations. This tactic of inverse or countersurveillance is a valuable and compelling form of civilian oversight of police action outside of protest situations as well: the 1991 Rodney King beating serves as one of the first widely circulated examples of a civilian video used to capture police brutality in the United States, and countless others follow. Activists and passersby wielding cameras have provided crucial evidence of police brutality, documenting state-sponsored violence against citizens that has led to successful lawsuits against local and national police departments. Over the last decade and a half, volunteer organizations such as the Copwatch Database have formalized this practice, as civilian members make a point of policing the police. Copwatch has been described as a kind of countersurveillance as the program embodies “the use of surveillance technologies and tactics by the lower classes for the purposes of increasing equality through making public the hidden workings of powerful institutions and groups.”²⁹

REVISIONING SURVEILLANCE

Other surveillance artists have confronted the discriminatory aspects of contemporary surveillance through a focus on inter- and intranational conflict and racial tension. Coco Fusco’s *Dolores from 10 to 10* (2001), Wafaa Bilal’s *Domestic Tension* (2007), Hasan Elahi’s *Tracking Transience: The Orwell Project* (2008 to present), and Ricardo

Dominguez's Transborder Immigrant Tool (2009 to present) restage bodies and spaces that have been disempowered through government practices of either invisibility or hypervisibility. These projects engage a radical politics of vision, as these artist-activists work to expose various practices of selective vision and blindness in sociopolitical surveillance; they bring to light situations such as the twelve-hour interrogation of a Mexican maquiladora worker accused of attempting to unionize the workforce at her factory, the entrapment and torture of imprisoned Iraqis by American military forces, the unceasing and invasive surveillance involved in the formation of an FBI dossier, and the extreme physical and mental trials of illegal border crossings of Mexican immigrants. In these projects Fusco, Bilal, Elahi, and Dominguez create highly politicized artist-activist works that frame issues of visibility and invisibility in terms of life and death, imprisonment and empowerment, exile and citizenship.

In *Dolores from 10 to 10*, Coco Fusco staged a live webcast in which she reenacted the confinement, interrogation, abuse, boredom, and isolation of Dolores, a Mexican maquiladora worker who was accused of union organizing.³⁰ Fusco's piece labored to make visible for online witnesses an event that had been socially and politically covered over. By choosing to broadcast her performance on a live online webcam, Fusco showed Dolores's experience of isolation and silence to a dispersed international audience. In doing so, she worked directly against the strategies of invisibility, isolation, and silence employed by the Mexican government and several multinational corporations to quell unionization efforts and hide harsh interrogation techniques.

Using similar techniques to share his performance with online participants, Iraqi-American artist Wafaa Bilal locked himself in a warehouse studio filled with live web cameras for a full month in the spring of 2007 to perform *Domestic Tension*.³¹ Drawing on the familiar rhetoric of multiuser online games, he invited users to shoot him with paintballs through remote-controlled paintball guns. Bilal aimed to make a statement about the situation of Iraqis under American occupation and to instigate political dialogue through interactive art, juxtaposing his isolated, vulnerable physical state with the casual sport of Western Internet users.

Taking a more mobile approach, Hasan Elahi's ongoing *Tracking Transience* uses consumer GPS tracking technologies to trace his movements in physical and virtual space.³² After being questioned and spied upon repeatedly by the FBI, Elahi decided to take control of his own visibility by creating a website that updates his location on a detailed world map at every hour of every day. In doing so, he aimed to critique the FBI's "secret" surveillance techniques by rendering them redundant. The extreme choice to put himself under constant social surveillance suggests that his online visibility and the public eye of the Internet provide a much better means of personal protection than the FBI.

In an ongoing project aimed even more directly at subversive political action, University of California at San Diego professor Ricardo Dominguez retools cheap

cell phones and redesigns them as mobile GPS devices that help Mexican immigrants safely cross the us-Mexico border. In a 2009 interview with *VICE* magazine, Dominguez described the Transborder Immigrant Tool, which he developed in collaboration with members of Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT) and his b.a.n.g. lab at UCSD:

We looked at the Motorola i455 cell phone, which is under \$30, available even cheaper on eBay, and includes a free GPS applet. We were able to crack it and create a simple compass-like navigation system. We were also able to add other information, like where to find water left by the Border Angels, where to find Quaker help centers that will wrap your feet, how far you are from the highway—things to make the application really benefit individuals who are crossing the border.³³

With the Transborder Immigrant Tool, Dominguez radically recasts the usership and purpose of GPS technologies in cell phones. The inclusion of GPS was intended by cell phone manufacturers to help users navigate urban and commercial centers, to help find friends and favorite businesses, or, in criminal cases, to enable state and federal agencies to track and monitor cell phone users. In contrast, Dominguez reformulates the material and ideological construction of widely accessible GPS-enabled cell phones, turning them into tools to make high-risk border crossing safer.

Perhaps the most subversive aspect of the Transborder Immigrant Tool is the way in which Dominguez reframes the ideological stakes of illegal border crossing. Instead of focusing on the illegality of the action of crossing the us-Mexico border, Dominguez addresses the devastating risks that such a journey poses to the bodies and minds of Mexican immigrants. Once activated, the cell phone emits a single ping to a GPS satellite (more than one ping would enable officials to track the location of the user), loading an up-to-date map of water locations and potential help stations. The cell phone is also outfitted with audio tracks that share practical survival tips for the desert journey and poems about fortitude and endurance. Dominguez's redesign of the Motorola software interface humanizes the experiences of immigrants and challenges the dominant ideology of border control and surveillance, which tends to figure immigrants as enemy targets.³⁴

While surveillance is not necessarily the primary subject of inquiry for Fusco, Bilal, Elahi, or Dominguez, they each employ tools of surveillance to mobilize a politics of vision. Each of their projects utilizes social surveillance systems in order to counteract regimes in which invisibility can be tantamount to political vulnerability, disappearance, and even death. These artists recast digital interfaces—the Internet and GPS-enhanced cell phones—as publicly accessible, worldwide webs of surveillance through which participants can look critically at structures of state power and the roles and rights of individual subjects within them.

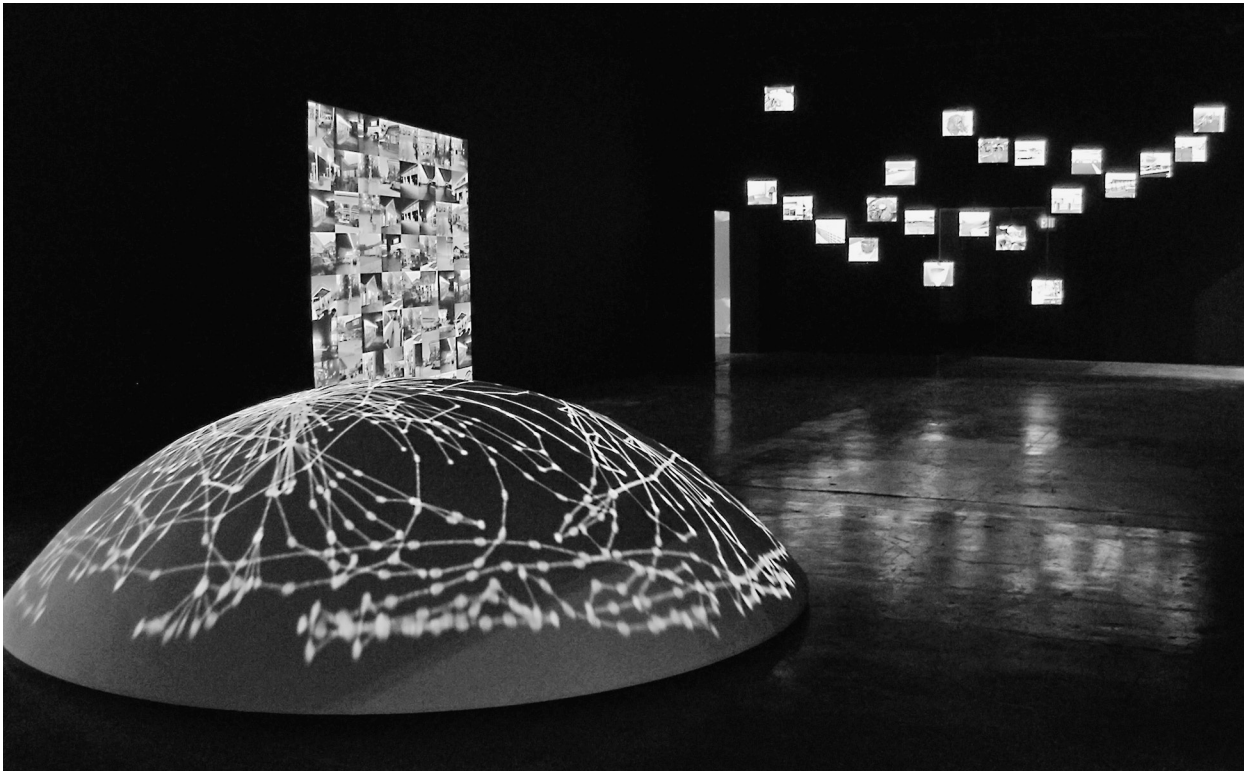
DIY SURVEILLANCE ART

At this point, the reader may be wondering how she or he can participate in the surveillance arts-activism revolution. As impressive as these projects are, perhaps tagging your local shopping mall, even with the help of GraffitiWriter, is not your thing; perhaps you are not planning to trek across the us-Mexico border anytime soon; perhaps reengineering surveillance cameras or smart phone software is beyond your technical abilities; or perhaps a durational online performance will not fit into your schedule. The good news is that there are also models of surveillance art and activism that have much lower technological and financial bars to entry. The New York-based Surveillance Camera Players do not work at the technologically complex level of the IAA, Mann, or Dominguez, yet their works show that even simple acts that disrupt the anticipated, normalized visual field of the everyday can politicize and make visible for critique the techno-human interface of surveillance.

Using the surveillance technologies most readily available to anyone in an even remotely urban or suburban setting, the SCP has been performing for publicly installed surveillance cameras for over a decade. The group first started to perform for CCTV cameras out of ironic sympathy for the unseen labor of those paid to watch the streets and inhabitants of New York City. Their early performances—versions of Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu Roi* in 1996 and George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1998—were ostensibly performed for surveillance guards who, the SCP worried, might be getting bored by watching surveillance cameras on which nothing threatening or out of the ordinary ever happened. Tongues partially in cheeks since then, the group has performed regularly in front of publicly installed surveillance cameras in New York City and many other American and European cities,³⁵ entertaining the odd surveillance guard that catches a performance and, more frequently, groups of passersby walking in the busy urban centers where they stage their performances. For these varied audiences the SCP has adapted nine works for performance (including an adaptation of Wilhelm Reich’s *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* and Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*), and written seven original plays (including *It’s OK*, *Officer*, which has been translated to several other languages).³⁶

In addition to performing for surveillance cameras and the guards who monitor them, the SCP regularly leads tours around urban neighborhoods, pointing out the abundance of state, corporate, and private cameras in a given area. In their ten-year report, the group wrote, “Virtually every Sunday since Thanksgiving, 2000, and using its own maps for guidance, the group has given free walking tours of heavily surveilled neighborhoods in New York City. These tours have concentrated on what the things look like, how they work, and how they will work if they are improved (‘smart cameras’). Over the years, approximately 3,000 people in total have attended.”³⁷

While the tours sometimes attract tourists passing through a city, the audiences most often comprise residents of the city. The tours revision the urban landscape for



people who may have ceased to see or have never looked for the surveillance cameras with which they tacitly interface every day.³⁸ SCP street performances and tours also serve to create new communities of passersby, as audience-participants stop and gather together on strange, new common ground, peering up at the surveillance cameras on the sidewalks of their neighborhoods or urban centers.

Like any good community theater, the SCP also makes an effort to extend an invitation to interested participants to join their ranks. The group readily shares their methods and techniques to amateur “surveillance camera players” around the world. Visitors to their website are urged to download and copy their projects and ideas freely; the group has even published an online handbook titled *How to Stage Your Own “Surveillance Camera Theater” in 10 Easy-to-Follow Steps!*³⁹ The low-budget, DIY (do-it-yourself) aesthetic of the SCP illustrates that critical interventions can be made using only cardboard, markers, and existing publicly installed surveillance cameras. In contrast to more sophisticated digital technologies that tend to be the property of economically empowered classes, publicly installed surveillance cameras are encountered by and accessible to nearly everyone in contemporary urban and suburban areas around the world.⁴⁰ This commitment to providing a usable model of interventionist art is perhaps the biggest and farthest-reaching impact of the SCP, as it extends an invitation to anyone to participate.

*Tracking Transience:
One on One,*
by Hasan Elahi, SITE
Santa Fe, 2010.
Photo: Courtesy
Hasan Elahi and
Michael Klein Arts,
New York

God's Eyes Here on Earth, by Surveillance Camera Players, St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York City, 2000. Photo: Courtesy of Surveillance Camera Players



In contemporary surveillance society, nearly all of us have taken up the invitation of participation. Most of us tend to use the software-ideology interface of digital surveillance in ways that are complicit with the smooth operation of capitalist and nationalist systems of power. Though diverse in their specific aims and methods, surveillance artist activists such as the IAA, SCP, Mann, Dominguez, Fusco, Bilal, and Elahi offer alternative models of participation—situations, interfaces, and technologies that invite users, audiences, and online witnesses to join them in reimagining surveillance society and the power dynamics within it. They turn “user-friendly” technologies such as cell phones, remote-control cars, webcams, geotagging, MapQuest, and CCTV cameras into “Trojan Horses”; from within the sleek exteriors of familiar, everyday surveillance technologies, they reconfigure user interfaces to create tools with which participants can get *unfriendly* with state and corporate systems of control. Surveillance society, and the myriad disciplinary interfaces that comprise it, rely upon participation; the choice of what kind of participant you will be is, often quite literally, in your hands.

NOTES

1. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 201.
2. Manuel de Landa, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 179–82.
3. For more on new forms of surveillance-inspired entertainment, see Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).
4. David Murakami Wood and Stephen Graham have described this process as “differential mobility” in “Permeable Boundaries in Soft-ware Sorted Society: Surveillance and Differentiations of Mobility,” in *Mobile Technologies of the City*, ed. Mimi Sheller and John Urry (London: Routledge, 2006), 177–78.
5. Critical Art Ensemble explores the generative aspects of digital age hackers in *Digital Resistance and Electronic Civil Disobedience* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1996), 8.
6. David Brin, *The Transparent Society: Will Technology Force Us to Choose between Privacy and Freedom?* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1998), 13–15. See also David Lyon, *Surveillance Society: Monitoring in Everyday Life* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001).
7. Wood and Graham, “Permeable Boundaries,” 179.
8. Oscar Gandy, *The Panoptic Sort: A Political Economy of Personal Information* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 15–18.
9. Wood and Graham, “Permeable Boundaries,” 188.
10. Global Entry is a program developed by us Customs and Border Protection that allows preapproved, low-risk travelers, identified through fingerprint and facial recognition technology, to enter the country through an expedited system. Developed as a replacement for the Immigration and Naturalization Service Passenger Accelerated Service System (INSPASS), which was dissolved in 2002, Global Entry is used by over thirty international airports in the us and Canada. Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and Taiwan have similar systems that use biometric passports and “smart” national identification cards to fast-track preapproved citizens. See www.globalentry.gov (accessed September 14, 2012).
11. Wood and Graham, “Permeable Boundaries,” 177–78.
12. The computing software trade has also adopted the term *Trojan Horse* to describe a kind of malicious software—known as malware—which appears to perform a desirable function but in fact allows computer hackers unauthorized access to the host machine.
13. Institute for Applied Autonomy (IAA), “i-SEE ‘Now More Than Ever,’” www.appliedautonomy.com/isee.html (accessed August 25, 2010).
14. IAA, “Engaging Ambivalence: Interventions in Engineering Culture,” in *Engineering Ambivalence: On the Author as (Digital) Producer*, ed. Geoff Cox and Joasia Krysa (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2005), 97.
15. Erich W. Schienke. “On the Outside Looking Out: An Interview with the Institute for Applied Autonomy,” *Surveillance and Society* 1, no. 1 (2002): 107.
16. *Ibid.*, 102–3.

17. Mann defines the term as follows: "Sousveillance: the recording of an activity from the perspective of a participant in the activity; the recording or monitoring of real or apparent authority figures by others, particularly those who are generally the subject of surveillance; watchful vigilance from underneath; a situationist critique of surveillance." Steve Mann, "Sousveillance," wecam.org/sousveillance.htm (accessed August 25, 2010).
18. Steve Mann, "Existential Technology: Wearable Computing Is Not the Real Issue!" *Leonardo* 36, no. 1 (2003): 21–22.
19. *Ibid.*, 24.
20. *Ibid.* Mann describes this structure as "humans being clerks can make clerks be human."
21. Lyon, *Surveillance Society*; de Landa, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*; and James Rule, *Private Lives and Public Surveillance* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), among others, have explicated the ontology of surveillance technologies as they have historically been developed in service of military operations, crime prevention, judicial evidence, and national security.
22. Gandy, *Panoptic Sort*, 18–20.
23. IAA, "Engaging Ambivalence," 98.
24. IAA, "Defensive Surveillance: Lessons from the Republican National Convention," in *Surveillance and Security: Technological Politics and Power in Everyday Life*, ed. Torin Monahan (London: Routledge, 2006), 167.
25. IAA, "Defensive Surveillance," 172.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. IAA, "Defensive Surveillance," 170.
29. Laura Huey, "Cop Watching in the Downtown Eastside," in Monahan, *Surveillance and Security*, 150.
30. See *Dolores from 10 to 10* by Coco Fusco, www.thing.net/~cocofusco/video/dolores/dolores1.htm (accessed July 10, 2010).
31. See "Domestic Tension" by Wafaa Bilal, www.wafaabilal.com/html/domesticTension.html (accessed July 10, 2010).
32. See "Tracking Transience" by Hasan Elahi, trackingtransience.net (accessed July 10, 2010).
33. In November 2009 Alex Dunbar interviewed Dominguez and published "Follow the GPS, Ése: The *Transborder* Immigrant Tool Helps Mexicans Cross Over Safely," *VICE*, www.viceland.com/int/v16n11/htdocs/follow-the-gps-225.php?page=2 (accessed August 10, 2010).
34. This is in contrast to other forms of civilian surveillance participation: Texas sheriffs recently erected a series of surveillance cameras along the Rio Grande and connected them to the Internet. Through this virtual border patrol, accessible at www.blueservo.net, everyday users can log on and participate in "guarding" the US-Mexico border.
35. American performances include Peekskill, NY; Baltimore, MD; Jersey City, NJ; San

Francisco, CA; and Boston, MA. In Europe, the group has performed in Amsterdam, Holland; Bologna, Italy; London, Bristol, Manchester, and Leeds, Great Britain; Mannheim, Munich, Nuremberg, and Leipzig, Germany; Graz, Austria; and Barcelona, Spain, among others.

36. Surveillance Camera Players (SCP), "Ten-Year Report," December 10, 2006, www.notbored.org/10-year-report.html (accessed August 25, 2010).

37. Ibid. The group has also given similar walking tours in Portland, Chicago, Boston, Providence, Cincinnati, Graz, Mannheim, Leipzig, and Leeds.

38. The group has also made maps of heavily surveilled neighborhoods in New York City and other American and European cities, all of which are available to download by residents, tourists, and other interested parties on their website, www.notbored.org/the-scp.html.

39. SCP, *How to Stage Your Own "Surveillance Camera Theater" in 10 Easy-to-Follow Steps!* www.notbored.org/scp-how-to.html (accessed August 25, 2010).

40. Anthropologist-activist Faye Ginsberg has cited access to digital technologies as one of the biggest challenges to wider participation in information-age activism. In her chapter "Rethinking the Digital Age" (in *Global Indigenous Media*, ed. Pamela Wilson and Michelle Stewart [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008], 287–305), she describes a "digital divide" created through unequal access to digital technologies that is reflexively involved in reproducing divides and inequalities in global power. She raises an important problem, however, cautioning that providing access to Internet and digital technologies, technologies that are programmed to be used in culturally specific ways, may function as a reinscription of Western practices and ideologies onto indigenous and politically/economically marginalized groups.