Abstract

The paper reflects on two hackivist projects, an art installation and a performance, which sought to exploit opportunities offered by ubiquitous CCTV cameras in streets and academic campuses in London. Through experimenting with misuse/hacking of surveillance system we start unpacking video surveillance(s) and the surveillance space it creates.

The projects plot two main reflections. Firstly, we suggest that the work of CCTV cameras is contextual to the specific configuration the system takes. Our projects dissected ecologies of video surveillance and, by temporarily complicating roles and accountabilities between 'watchers' and 'watched', favoured the development of hybrid forms of -veillances. We suggest our art projects created a multiple, performative and different surveillance space in which users' experience of surveillance can be observed.

Secondly, we devise art projects as a critical methodology in visual studies. We hope that such forms of intervention contribute to make video surveillance unstable, by investigating its apparatus(es) and by complicating its capabilities as a security technology. In this sense, art interventions are inventive methodologies: they critically engage with a specific apparatus, here and now, rather than becoming tools to be deployed always and everywhere in the same way.
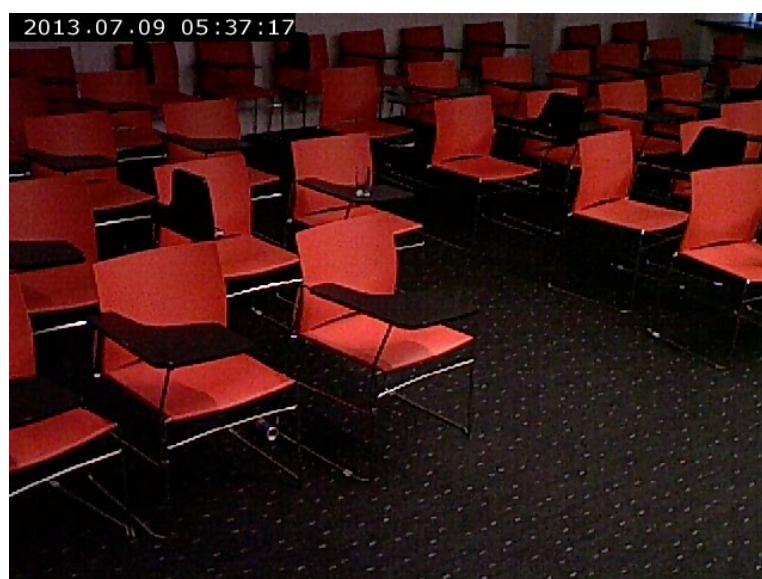

Illustration 1: #OCTV at IVSA 2013

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Setting the field

The paper reflects on two hackivist art projects which sought to exploit ubiquitous CCTV cameras in the streets and academic campuses of London. It aims to achieve two goals. Firstly, it wants to shred to pieces video surveillance *dispositif* and expose its gaze—whether in the control room or in its impossibility of being controlled. By reflexively engaging with our art interventions, we offer a critical perspective on the making and unmaking of surveillance space and the performativity this incorporates. Drawing on work that understands space as a live entanglement of performative actions and practices, we put emphasis on 'surveillance space' as a productive experience rather than on the representational output of the CCTV cameras *per se* (Thrift & Dewsbury 2000; McGrath 2004; Thrift 2008).

The second and consequential theme the paper addresses is the productive work that art projects do as a research methodology. These actively engage with the field from within, rather than just investigating it. In this sense, art projects can be interventions which expose, contest, and re-inscribe the normal functioning of social relationships. Because they generate the 'social'—by opening and performing it—the projects below can be considered also as an inventive form of methodology (Lury & Wakeford 2012). An important disclaimer therefore needs being advanced from the very beginning: as a performance, our interventions—and we believe that this can be extended to most practice-based research—can only be partially translated on paper. These projects were played live and their liveliness is also the materialist energy which characterises them. In other words, readers should be mindful that the art is *in the* performance and installations, rather than *through the* pages of this paper. The intervention is the 'data', so to speak. The best we can offer here is a thoroughly description, images, and links to clips or webpages. The rest has to be imagined by an active reader, who will always be in a space other than the participatory space of the artwork participants.

In the first part of this paper, we look at the making of a socio-technical assemblage of video surveillance by describing an art installation done at Goldsmiths, during the International Visual Sociology Association 2013.[1] #OCTV consisted of six

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1 It was the beginning of July and Edward Snowden's had just started leaking details of the

surveillance cameras streaming live from selected conference rooms to video displays positioned in each of the six rooms. Each camera feed was then linked to a webpage, made visible as a QR-code to scan, that is, as a composition of black and white pixels in the characteristic square shape (see Illustration 2). Any mobile phone was therefore able to connect to the 'control room' page, and then to switch to the desired camera.[2] We highlight the trans-disciplinary environment that permitted the realisation of this experiment and the 'hack' that was crucial in its fabrication. At the same time, we discuss the intense mediation and tensions that went into its fabrication. These curatorial aspects share little with the technical functioning of the system. Instead, they open to new problematics that we can classify under the political, ethical, and discursive. They too are part of the ecology of video surveillance.

In the second part of the paper, we will take apart video surveillance system, by narrating CCTV Sniffing. The project was hosted by Deptford.TV and consisted of workshops and urban walk-performance.[3] Thanks to commonly available digital receivers, workshop practitioners were able to hack into the digital feed of lower-end CCTV cameras in the streets of Deptford (inner city London). The raw clips were then saved onto a memory card for later editing. The workshops managed to redirect the apparently seamless (or arguably useless) flow of digital images into different discourses, those of urban research, art intervention, and hackivist media. The two case studies will unpack issues around the surveillance gaze. We will ask to what extent was the control gaze successfully dismantled, dissected, or rebuilt in hybrid forms of -veillance, that is, in a mix of sous- and sur-veillance where boundaries between watchers and watched are contested and blurred? And how productive is the 'surveillance space' for its users? What kind of experience of surveillance is performed there?

By coupling the technology and the milieu of video surveillance with opportunities offered by digital devices, we enabled such a specific ecology that it becomes

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most comprehensive wholesale blanket surveillance in history, making the concept of 'CCTV archaeology' more poignant.

2 At any time while reading this piece is possible to scan the QR-code in Illustration 2 and be taken to a reconstruction of the #octvivsa original webpage.

3 In collaboration with CUCR and SPC.org, 2007-2010.

impossible to productively clone it elsewhere, or reduce it to a category. Ecology emphasises multiplicity, emergence, heterogeneity, provisionality and indeterminacy. It points to a sense of futurity, of imprecise becoming, in which the experimental ethos of our research is all too evident. Ecology is incredibly multiple and complex, 'a massive and dynamic interrelation of processes and objects, beings and things, patterns and matter' (Fuller 2005). An ecology addresses the materiality of media system, its language and the affordances of its habitat. While assemblage points towards socio-technological complexities, an ecology would also need to take into account institutional constraints and regulations, ethical bindings, materialities of production and circulation of visual output, that is, the context, milieu or habitat on which assemblage nests. While assemblage might start from 'elements that have been selected from a milieu, organised and stratified' (Anderson & McFarlane 2011), an ecology incorporates the shifting milieu on which each assemblage seems to hold: lower ranking arrangements, temporary ethical configurations, and bizarre institutional improvisations. In this sense, our methodology is also inventive, because it detects and actively contributes to the happening of interrelations, events, and debates in that specific space and under specific conditions (of technological, institutional, and ethical assemblages). Because of their experimental nature, art intervention sometimes can fall out of control, reserving unpredictable outcomes. Once removed from their specific context of security—the suspicious gaze and the surveillance representation—CCTVs can reveal places, people and practices that often remain unnoticed. Or it can re-contexualise them in a completely different scenario.

Illustration 2: Scan me and I will take you down the 'Control Room'

At risk of dramatically simplifying a dense debate, we now briefly look at the main theoretical frameworks around surveillance, with emphasis on its visual aspects. This is less an attempt to navigate the field of visual surveillance study[4], than a way of introducing the field and therefore positioning our art projects within a theoretical tradition of critical thinking and art practice around CCTV systems, at the crossroad between art, politics, sociology, and visual studies.

While the Foucauldian tradition nests video surveillance in a more or less coherent apparatus—a disciplinary society of rules, guidelines, and norms—the subsequent strand of research draws on Deleuze's claims around societies of control (2002). For Foucault, the disciplinary society finds its sublimination in institutional places, such as

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4 See forthcoming book collection: CAST, 2016, *Visual Aspects of Security*, with author's chapter in it .

the school, the hospital, the army, and of course the prison (1977). Its most productive determinant is the metaphor Foucault draws from Bentham's architectural and utopian vision: the Panopticon, the central tower overseeing inmates in their bright prison cells. Watchers are imagined (also physically) at the centre of the disciplinary society. Crucially, this disciplinary gaze is thought as a one-way relationship where the gaze cannot be returned to the watchers (Koskela 2003). Although Foucault does not equate power to the surveillant gaze, he sponsors the Panopticon in his quest for modern power: 'the tendency in Bentham's thought is archaic in the importance it gives to the gaze; but it is very modern in the general importance it assigns to the techniques of power' (2002). The surveillant gaze is eventually interiorised 'to the point that each individual exercises this surveillance over and against himself [sic]' (Foucault 2002). As a consequence of this process, people's behaviours and their bodies are eventually modified, regulated, and administered: disciplinary societies express a moral and philosophical program which changes people's bodies and souls from within. It is crucial to address this link between surveillance and people's acting *as if* they were under surveillance. This link shifts the focus on the production of surveillance space itself, as the lived and constructed space where surveillance is experienced (see Lefebvre 1991; McGrath 2004). Foucault, on the other hand, had a rather vague, architectural, conceptualization of space. The metaphor of the Panopticon therefore emphasizes the spatialization of power rather than the effect of power on space (Wood 2007; McGrath 2004).

Foucault's work was mostly concerned with textual material and the common language of surveillant machines was the analogical: it therefore left unquestioned 'the various forms of control [that] are the inseparable variations, forming a system of various geometries whose language is digital' (Deleuze 2002). The second framework of surveillance studies picks up from this lack, and expands inserting computational power and circulation as the central elements of media systems. In a general 'breakdown of all sites of confinement' (Deleuze 2002), the simplistic equation gaze=control is demolished into myriads decision makers, pressure points, and technical glitches of a system which coherent is not. In this configuration, 'surveillance applies very little to the act of seeing', the event here and now (Fuller

2005). Rather, 'surveillance is a socio-algorithmic process' and a dynamic composition occurring not so much in the present, at the time of the observation, but in history, backwards, through a process of re-ordering, associating, and re-constructing life of an 'event', and how this connects to a specific identity. Ultimately, what surveillance sees is this backward association, the combination of 'event' and 'flecks of identity' from a database: a number plate or an ID, a post code or a social security number (Fuller 2005). Not just becomes difficult to adjust a surveillance representation to a meaningful 'event', it might be also unproductive: rather than 'ideological' positions on visual surveillance, McGrath invites us to take a pragmatic approach to what he calls 'surveillance space' by looking at the experience of surveillance and the performativity that it induces (2004). Our art projects recall video surveillance as a complex, messy, and undetermined socio-technological assemblage (see Legg 2011). In this framework, forces of stability and sedimentation —the will-to-power of CCTV recording—go alongside tendencies of obsolescence of, resistance to, and creative engagement with such a system. While the disciplinary model of surveillance maintains the one-way-ness of the gaze, in the control societies the surveillant gaze is a complex fabrication in a shifting socio-technological relationship.

Illustration 3: Probably the most famous spectacles at IVSA

There is a long tradition of arts engagement with the surveillant gaze, its transmission through technological devices, and its reception from a more or less participant audience. At the crossroad of various disciplines, art-veillance has produced numerous models of interpretation, dissection, and re-assemblage of the apparatuses of video surveillance. Although there is no space for a comprehensive review here, we want to position our work along the main trajectories at the intersection between art and surveillance studies. In 2001 the massive exhibition 'CTRL [SPACE][5] explored the wide range of practices from more traditional imaging and tracking technologies to the largely invisible but infinitely more powerful practices of what is referred to as data-veillance. The exhibition and voluminous publication that followed recall a trend in art practices which puts technologies at the centre of this exploration: from TV monitors and cables to wireless digital creations (Levin et al. 2002). The other strand of creativity around the themes of video surveillance is the direct intervention and disturbance: from theatrical performance to the use of 'pranks' or *detournement*—diverting bland or oppressive materials for subversive purposes. These art practices draw from the Situationist International and their project of turning to the streets: for these artists everyday life is now the battleground. Famously, the Surveillance Camera Players (1996-2006) performed theatrical plays in front of CCTV around the world, especially in the subway in New York City, in order to redeem the watchers from their own surveillance system: 'How boring it must be for law enforcement officers to watch the video images constantly being displayed on the closed-circuit television surveillance systems?'[6] McGrath's book (2004), *Loving Big Brother*, is a key work in this field taking up the notion of art and performance as a productive way to think through and critique surveillance: 'surveillance space' is therefore co-produced by the technological apparatus and through practices of its occupants; it is a lived and experienced space crossed by power relationships as well as by performativity.

While our first project falls into experiments with technologies of surveillance, the second one is decisively hinged within the tradition of play and disruption. Both projects produced CCTV images: for a video-surveillance circuit to produce

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5 http://ctrlspace.zkm.de/e/
6 http://www.notbored.org/the-scp.html

'authentic' images, the codes of surveillance images need to assume a self-evident place in our perceptual repertoire. Surveillance apparatus circulates a distinct aesthetics of CCTV-based films and stills (Leblanc 2009; Brighenti 2009; McGrath & Sweeny 2009). By now this aesthetics is consolidated in our perceptual imagery with its stereotypical qualities: lo-Fi and low resolution, lack of continuity and time-code bars, flickering images and silent stillness. Surveillance images are poor images, compressed for space and velocity of circulation (see Steyerl 2009).
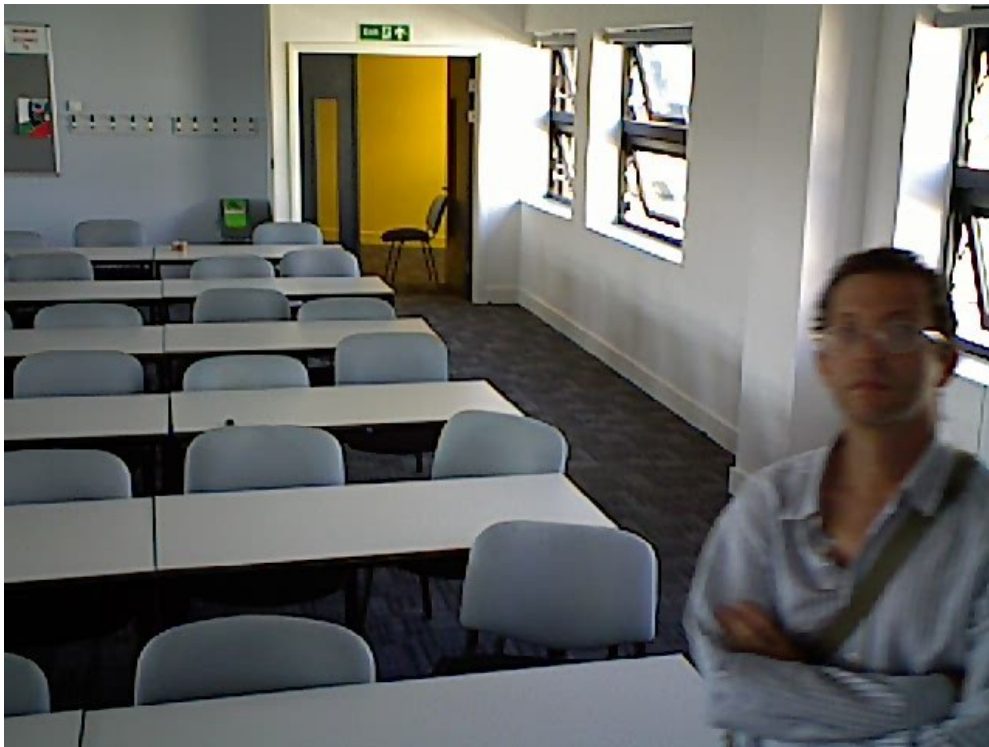
Illustration 4: Selfie with a CCTV at IVSA 2013

#OCTV: making video surveillance

In conversation with media artist James Steven from the collective SPC.org, we managed to set up a provocative artwork with CCTV cameras at Goldsmiths, University of London. This experiment complemented a panel discussion on video surveillance that we organised at the International Visual Sociology Association annual conference 'Public Image' in July 2013. The aim was to raise awareness of the complexities of CCTV systems and to open up a debate beyond the discourse of power and control, which CCTV is usually associated with. In order to start unpacking

a dialogic, although unequal, process of gazing the Other via CCTV, we wanted to create a sort of playful and democratic control room. We invited participants to reflect on the possibilities offered by the open network and on the 'surveillance space' that this created: *To what extent are by-standers involved in a performance, returning the gaze to the cameras? O*ur installation worked with the concept of the 'mutual gaze', which Koskela summarises well in an early article: 'A camera represents total one-way-ness of the gaze by making it impossible to look back. One may see the cameras but an eye-contact with it is impossible. There is no 'mutual' gaze. It would feel ridiculous to try to flirt with a surveillance camera. Its objects are constantly seen but with no possibility to 'respond' or 'oppose' the gaze' (2003:298).

This view seems to reflect the 'normal' functioning of the controlling gaze: one-way, top-down view, watchers solidly in place at the centre of the 'Urban Panopticon'. We contend that, in order to investigate the opportunities and complexities of surveillance gaze/system, we need to leave behind the technological determinism implicit in the disciplinary gaze. This refashions a linear equation: production of images, transmission, and their reception as meaningful 'event' (see Fuller 2005, 23–24). The 'event' is what the apparatus of surveillance eventually sees, the final stage of a wholesale process.

Illustration 5: Playing with OCTV at IVSA 2013

Illustration 6: Playing with OCTV at IVSA 2013

We eventually had six of our own CCTV cameras positioned in six different conference rooms over two buildings on Campus.[7] These used the college network and were linked to a set of large computer screens positioned in the same rooms where the cameras happened to be. Conference delegates saw a poster about the installation featuring a QR-code (see Illustration 2). This would link them to a 'control room' page which offered camera switch options while inviting comments to @octvivsa Twitter stream (Illustration 7). *De facto* we managed to enable a digital system of switches connected to participating individuals' mobile phone and these somehow fed into the public Internet. As one of the hackers who worked on the project explains with a large smile: 'Whoever pushes the button first wins'.

Coders from the SPC collective exploited an under-the-hood feature of our CCTV cameras. These would send a random snapshot to a Twitter feed called @octvivsa. In other words, the #OCTV project created a simple open circuit which gave viewers control of its own control room, but leaked random snapshots outside for potential use as 'public image' (the theme of the conference). The algorithm governing this exchange uses a simple affordance of the digital cameras: a sensor would trigger a snapshot whenever a movement in the room is detected, even at night-time. We can think of algorithm as another, increasingly important, element of media ecology:

'[algorithm] can never be understood as a simply technical, objective, impartial form of knowledge or mode of operation' (Kitchin 2014:10). The snapshot from our CCTVs would eventually appear as a link in the micro-blogging feed, which we then collected and analysed. Each still had a quote taken from main video surveillance twitter accounts:

> *cam1: concentrated attention of you all*
>
> *cam2: sees your mood*
>
> *cam3: can see you are restless*
>
> *cam4: observer of ordinary lives*

As a result, the surveillance system we created burst out from its enclosure, into a new ecology. This hidden affordance of the cameras tweaked the 'normal' working of surveillance: given its representational output, surveillance gaze is confined within the suspicious field of operation it feeds upon.

We want to highlight three sets of initial findings deriving from our experimental methodologies. Firstly, the ludic element of engagement and surprise, which we briefly cover in the next paragraph: people started returning the gaze to the cameras. Secondly, experimental methods generate controversies and are often ethically troubling: we address this below, talking of the process which made the installation possible, our curatorial hack. Thirdly, we reflect on experimental methodologies as critical and reflexive performance: these might generate unexpected results which disrupt or reinforce our understanding of how surveillance systems work.

Illustration 7: Random snapshot to a Twitter feed called @octvivsa
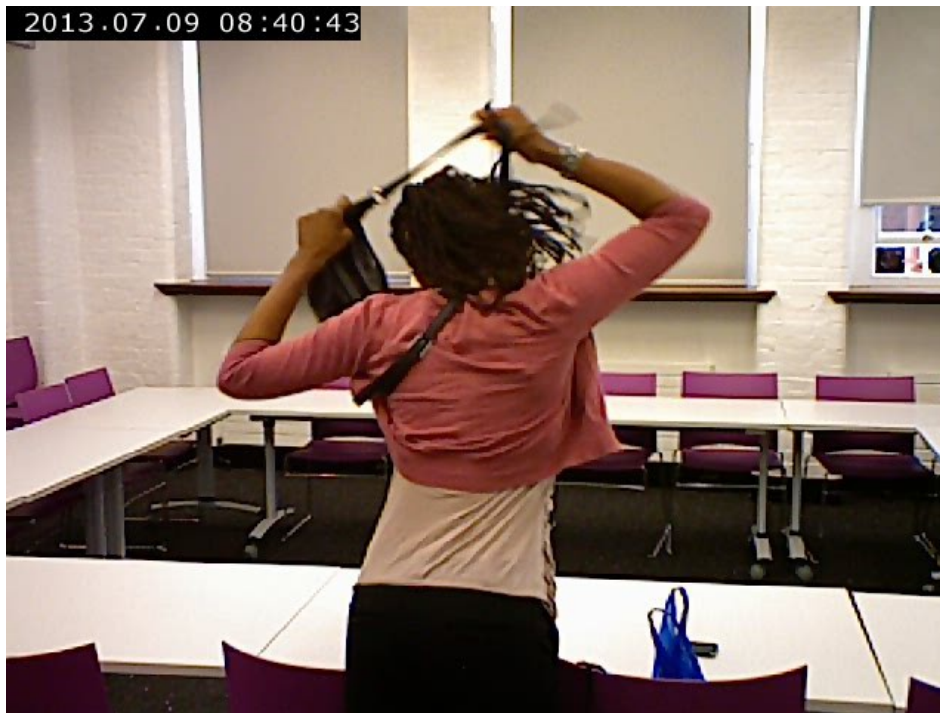
Illustration 8: IVSA conference early start (#OCTV 2013)

1. The event had to be played live during the unfolding of the conference, it became a performance. The camera feeds were intrusive: once escaping the normality of being a fact in people's everyday life, surveillance becomes visible, right up in one's face. Seeing themselves watching someone speaking can be disturbing, annoying, and invasive. It distracts from the talk. Sometimes CCTV needed to be switched off. Questions were asked, especially on the first day, when delegates were not familiar with the workings of the device. More often though, especially towards the end of the three-day conference, we noticed a sharp increase in interest and participation: people started appearing closer to the cameras, selecting options, broadcasting their own appearance, even asking for stills. Some expressed their disappointment for not being able to broadcast themselves over the Internet to their loved ones and colleagues in other parts of the world—Brazil, US, and Canada, among others. That is to suggest the confounding nature of contemporary surveillance—between geeks' curiosity and unexpected spectacle—where people in the know will somehow play along with surveillance all the while knowing that it's deeply problematic. The installation created a live and performative space for re-enacting issues around surveillance while, at the same time, opening to the technological proneness of

creating and sharing our own image (a 'selfie' with a CCTV, basically). It started producing its own debate, becoming 'a mode of research' in itself (Puwar, in Back et al. 2012, 50).

Illustration 9: Night time shift at IVSA 2013

2. In order to make this CCTV system work this way, meetings had to be arranged, numerous requests to college staff had to be initiated and followed, ethical and bureaucratic entanglements (rightly or wrongly) had to be by-passed and tweaked. This intense process of negotiation is important because it shows how many people, protocols, and competencies went into the making of this new surveillance ecology. Our aim to experiment with digital surveillance technology, codes, and images was already producing contention. Or rather, it was reproducing the specific habitat on which the socio-technical assemblage of video surveillance would eventually sit. We would argue that two distinct and interrelated 'hacks' were eventually put in place in order to produce this installation—and these are very much a trans-disciplinary outcome. The first one is the 'proper' hack, implying the writing of a code which linked cameras to screens, to a webpage, and eventually to Twitter. The second hack is more subtle and involved the process of acquiring permissions, of presenting the project to various by-standers and stakeholders in acceptable terms, and finally of re-

mixing results in a critical way: it is a curatorial hack. 'Curating sociology' is about moving research questions into different fields of creative practices, in which the researcher-curator has an active role as producer (Puwar in Back & Puwar 2012). This curatorial hack is about knowing who to speak to, about moving into different areas of competence, and about conquering the hearts and minds of few people whose everyday job is to make things happen: technicians, IT personnel, second and third grade decision-makers. Without a precise plan of action—which would have implied, for instance, a precise inventory of the technology available at college and a prior knowledge of our experiment's outcome (we were actually asked those questions!)—everyone had to add some degree of improvisation and risk.

Latour suggests that scholars are limited by 'the modes of cultural critiques they are schooled in' (2010, in Back and Puwar, 2012:10). Scientists collect proper data with a proper ethical protocol. Scientists design their protocols. They stick to it, or so it seems. This is imperative in order to maintain the status of a Science. The 'hack' then is also knowing that—by framing the installation as *just another* art project in an art-based college, by wearing the artist's apron rather than the scientist's hat—it allows you to get away with things that traditional sociology would not: such as data collection, operationalisation, consent forms, ethical approval, solid evidence, statistical relevance, wordy publications, etc. To what extent is #octv a sociological project or rather an art installation? Are the two things interchangeable? Or else, where is their borderline? Les Back writes in his 'Live Sociology': *We need to move from the arrogant convention in sociology to assimilate other practices on its own terms and within its own image (i.e. a 'sociology **of** art' or a 'sociology **of** computing) to a more collaborative practice that is mutually transformative (i.e. sociology **with** art or sociology **with** computing)' (2012, 33 emphasis in the original)*.

It is our contention that, in the mutual exchange between art practice and social science research, a methodology that is inventive and lively has to maintain its radical contextualisation. The context in this case was and remains that of an academic conference in which visual-oriented scholars from different parts of the world gather to discuss, among many other things, visualisation of security and surveillance. Within this milieu, we pulled a socio-technical assemblage (CCTV) out of its context of being just video surveillance. In this apparent contradiction—

installation's milieu vis out-of-context media system—the tension between disciplines can be reworked.
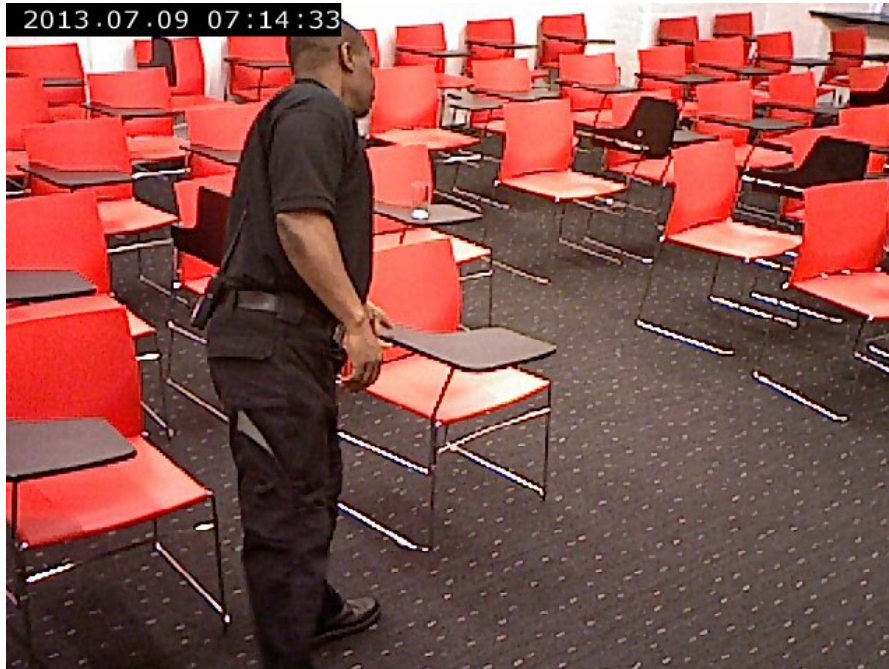
Illustration 10: Early morning shift at IVSA 2013

3. In this final part, we want to focus on very few instances of our CCTV visual output, teasing out 'content' that started to appear. Filtering our CCTV stills by day/night, we noticed two very distinct sets of people: academics and manual workers that make college function everyday. Hacking into the semiotics of identification from a video surveillance system, we can force a new procedure of observation which makes visible the night shift of maintenance, room cleaning and safeguard of equipment— that includes our hard-working CCTV cameras too. This can be analysed in terms of rhythm-analysis (Lefebvre 1996): attuning our senses to the different noises, smells, visions, and dynamics of the city at night, we become aware of the ebbs and flows of the city, its economic and social dimensions, its ontological layers that are subsided during everyday routines.

This is an unexpected result of our inventive method, which prompted a serious discussion among scholars giving their thoughts and feedbacks on the installation. Night shift manual workers remained unaware of the recording CCTV cameras and

therefore excluded from the playful performance. At night, in fact, the same security staff that we involuntarily filmed while patrolling college facilities had to switch computer screens off. They were not able to watch themselves. They were somehow excluded from the 'right to look', their autonomy from the surveillance gaze of an undetermined watcher compromised (Mirzoeff 2011). An interesting sociological problem is therefore invented beyond the original goals of the installation: artists and academics attending a major international conference have the ability to 'play' with surveillance; but this appears in direct contrast to the reality that the traditional subjects of surveillance are those without such cultural and economic capital.

Another possibility, a complementary point to the previous one, is to evaluate this unexpected glitch in an unstable surveillance ecology as a resurfacing of the will-to-power of the machine: in this case, a recording machine with an under-the-hood affordance to the open Internet. Cameras are devices that maintain a drive to power, a will to record: they are persistent in the function they were made for in the first place (Flusser, cited in Fuller 2005).
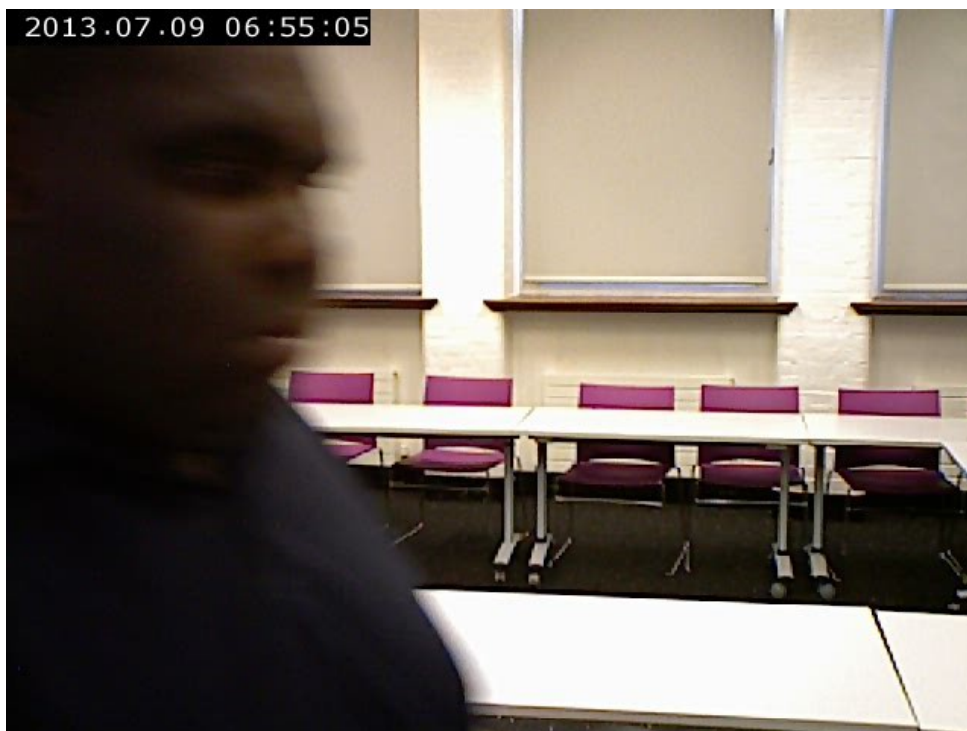
Illustration 11: Early morning shift at IVSA 2013

'CCTV Sniffing': unmaking video surveillance

We will now briefly analyse a second hackivist project, in order to show the *unmaking* of a video surveillance system. This second example draws on a series of practice-based workshops (2010-2012) on collaborative filming and CCTV 'sniffing' with the aim 'to store, share and re-edit the documentation of the urban change of South East London'.[8] Most of the considerations made with regard to the first installation are applicable to the 'CCTV sniffing' performance and we will not repeat them here. What is really different is the level of engagement with the 'surveillance space': participants and shop attendants, in the streets, playfully performing the experience of being watched by anonymous and unaccountable CCTVs. Our workshop *ethos* was also peculiar: to look, in an unusual way, at the process of urban change in Deptford, an area of inner city London undergoing sustained gentrification. Cardullo has discussed the urban milieu in which the workshops took place as well as the symbolic strengths of the hacked videos (Cardullo 2014).

We first describe the functioning of this unusual video surveillance system. We then discuss this in relation to the dynamics of the gaze that this new ecology generated. In this paper in particular, we look at the possibility of an inversion in the control gaze, from the watchers to the watched: so called 'sous-veillance'. The gaze from below attracted some interest, mostly from artists and activists, and it can summarised in a generally human-centred technology, open source protocols, shareable content, and use of affordable devices (Mann et al. 2013).

8For further information on Deptford TV projects and platform, see this interview to Adnan Hadzi: http://tinyurl.com/ccwt3zj

Illustration 12: Sniffing device (courtesy of Deptford.TV)

Workshop participants walked through the streets of Deptford equipped with digital video receivers connected to digital cameras.[9] These cached surveillance camera signals from public and private spaces which are not visible from the street (Illustrations 13-15). Workshop participants were led through inner city London by the uncertain signals and glitches captured by the device. The raw feed from random CCTV cameras was then edited by workshop participants divided into groups, and re-presented on the Internet as short films.[10] These contained no clue of places or people, they were presented *as if* they were original feeds from random CCTV cameras. The project combined the practice of walking through the city, with De Certeau and the Situationist derivé in mind, and the skilful hacking of commonly available digital CCTV cameras.

The technology which produced these images has crucially contributed to a specific ecology of video surveillance: a redundant and probably pointless system of security. Small private shops usually deploy the cheapest digital systems available, with a low level of protection that hackers were quick to exploit. Cameras' bad positioning, overflowing of light or darkness, and lack of maintenance (e.g. dirty lens) contribute

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9Three sets of workshops were arganised by Deptford.tv, the Centre for Urban and Community Research, and SPC.org in 2007-2010.

10Some of the clips can be seen here: http://edit.deptford.tv/node/229; http://edit.deptford.tv/node/204; http://edit.deptford.tv/node/197; http://edit.deptford.tv/node/208; http://edit.deptford.tv/node/209.

too to the bad quality of images we managed to reproduce. Moreover, hackers used a sniffing device which is cheaply available from any computer store (Illustration 12). The 'poor images' that CCTV cameras transmitted convey the aesthetic feel we wanted to achieve: low resolution, speed of data over wireless connections, and everydayness of their subjects and scenes. In addition to this, one can imagine the CCTV digital card being re-flashed every time it fills up—maybe every day by default—and its content relentlessly deleted. These images are probably unusable for surveillance purposes.

Illustration 13: Deptford High Street CCTV Sniffing

Illustration 14: Deptford High Street CCTV Sniffing

Illustration 15: Deptford High Street CCTV Sniffing

The predominance of family-run shops in the hackers' reach gave our film clips their peculiar flavour. Working-class and migrant Deptford started to appear. The scenes captured from CCTV cameras give texture to this changing urban landscape. The clips reveal inner-city London's diversity and some of its manual work practices in mundane places of encounters: the 'local', the familiar place of everyday dwelling, the corner shop, the halal butcher and the African hairdresser, the East Asian nail parlour and the Chinese take-away. These are the involuntary actors of an unpretentious surveillance system, which was opened, at least temporarily, by the inventiveness of a few hackers and urban researchers.

Our experimental approach puts emphasis on ordinary practices of surveillance, affordable security and involuntary participation of shopkeepers and customers. These were sometimes co-opted in the project by showing them the feed from their own CCTV being recorded live on the remote screen of our digital cameras. But was shopkeepers' occasional involvement in our performance a way of making a collaborative video? And would the watched—in this case, urban researchers and hackers walking and shopping in Deptford—enact surveillance on the watchers—in this case, corner shops attendants, who are also the owners or keepers of those private surveillance cameras? Our replies are temptingly negative: it is hard to frame this intervention as a participative effort or to neatly distinguish between watchers and watched. By reshuffling the role of author and audience (in terms of alternative

media production), or watched and watchers (in terms of surveillance space), we however opened up both private surveillance system and its 'surveillance space' to new configurations.

Concluding Remarks

The experimental research practice we describe here reflects upon the performative space of surveillance and the ever changing technology of visual recording, in this case two video surveillance systems. These systems are similarly using CCTV cameras, but they are also differently put with regards to all the determinants that make their ecology. They create peculiar surveillance spaces in which participants, more or less with awareness, experience surveillance in distinctive and unpredictable ways. They engage at various level with the idea of being under, or of creating, the surveillant gaze. Our projects exploded the singularities of each video surveillance system, its composition, layers, technological affordances, aesthetics, ethical contexts, and the discursive deployment of its visual output.

We would argue that, in order to investigate the opportunities and complexities of video surveillance, we need to leave behind the technological determinism implicit in the disciplinary gaze. This fosters a linear equation: production of CCTV images, their transmission, and eventual reception as meaningful 'events' (see Fuller 2005). Taken together, the elements of this equation make the ontology of visual surveillance. Dissected, they can give scope to myriad different ecologies. We hope to have contributed to unpack the elements of video surveillance as a complex and, at the same time, specific process. One of the benefits of understanding video surveillance as a potentially indeterminate ecology is to be able to acknowledge its virtualities, the potential configurations its space might take at any stage.

From the perspective of whether the gaze was returned to the cameras, we would need to ask also to whom, if ever, such a gaze would be returned? The totalitarian will-to-power of the CCTV machine to see the whole from above, here and now, is at odds with the way in which visual scholars construct the workings of the gaze—for instance, in terms of its positionality in space (Bell 2006)—and the power relationship implicit in exchanges with the camera—for instance, the relationship that visual

ethnographer builds over a period of time with her subjects (Back 2007). Our #OCTV project used everyday digital media, a social media platform and mobile phones. It enabled users to access a piece of code by simply scanning and then selecting the icon on the screen. It exploited digital technologies embedded in mundane communication practices, in this case Twitter. Since digital devices are so ubiquitous and easy to use, Koskela claims, the boundaries of surveillance gaze are getting blurry, to the extent that 'the differentiation between watchers and watched has disappeared' (2008:163). The everydayness of surveillance has, in Koskela's mind, moved away from the critical counter-surveillance of 'vigilant individuals, NGOs and artists'. Ordinary people's surveillance does not form 'any critical or other statement', since it has 'no agenda', and 'it is not used for political aims, it presents no claims, has no objectives and there is no organisational structure behind it' (ibidem). At the opposite end, we find Mann's determinism: the proliferation of digital devices implies a 'critical mass' of sous-veillance, which becomes a 'political force' (Mann & Ferenbok 2013).

The argument of our paper is rather that video surveillance can give space to performative and unpredictable experiences of surveillance. Questions around technology, gaze or 'right to look', interconnections with other media systems (e.g. the Internet), everyday overflowing of images, and ubiquitous presence of digital devices, are all loose elements of ecologies of surveillance. The outcome is therefore generative, rather than deterministic. It is difficult to assert *a priori* where and how such a production can be meaningful. To the extent that our artworks created reflexivity around and awareness of the functioning of visual surveillance, we would argue, they started a process of disruption and appropriation. Confusion between watchers and watched, as well as the ethically contested outcome from CCTV feeds, were intruding and productive achievements.

Another consideration to be made is with regards to the methodology we used. This is obviously experimental, as already suggested. Hacking in itself can be seen as an experimental performance which becomes critical to the extent that generates reflexivity and contradictions in the *dispositif* of surveillance. It becomes a political stance by making an intervention (see Aradau & Huysmans 2014; Back & Puwar 2012; Lury & Wakeford 2012). We hope to have contributed to opening CCTV

systems to scrutiny. We tried to show how contingent, diversified and ephemeral video surveillance can be. Consequently, we also attempted to reclaim the non-linearity and unpredictability of the gaze in relation to video surveillance systems.

We want to finally spend a thankful word for the IVSA contribution, a small grant that made #OCTV possible. Among understandable concerns about the setting up of a video surveillance system within the walls of an international conference, pragmatism and forward thinking prevailed: we can only suggest that the relatively large archive of snapshots from our six CCTV cameras are ready to be stored in the IVSA archive and shared with its affiliates and others who might be tempted to clone this experiment (under Creative Commons Share-Alike Attribution, of course: ethical terms and consensual conditions apply).

Illustration 16: #octv at IVSA 2013

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