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Introduction. Into the field of surveillance art

In this article I review a series of artworks, artistic performances and installations that deal with the topic of surveillance.¹ My aim is twofold. On the one hand, I want to look comparatively at how different artists interrogate, question, quote, or criticise the surveillance society. On the other hand, I take these artistic actions as themselves symptomatic of the ways in which surveillance interrogates contemporary society. In other words, my claim is that surveillance does not simply produce substantive social control and social triage, it also contributes to the formation of an ideoscape and a collective imagery about what security, insecurity, and control are ultimately about, as well as the landscape of moods and affects a surveillance society like ours expresses.

Broadly speaking, we could call ‘artveillance’ the domain of the reciprocal influences and exchanges between art and surveillance. The recognition of such domain of enquiry has two major implications: on the one hand, more obviously, it invites us to consider art as ‘technological’, in the sense that art is always tied to a technology of production and a technology of mediation (and re-mediation). From this point of view, new visual and digital technologies cannot fail to have profound impact on contemporary art (see, among others, Paul 2003; Wands 2006; Barilli 2007). On the other hand, perhaps less intuitively, artveillance also suggests that we regard surveillance not as a merely technical process focused exclusively on recording images, tracking data flows and processing acquired and stored data, but also as a somewhat ‘artful’ set of techniques, which may be more creative and, with Lévi-Strauss, more similar to *bricolage* than usually assumed in surveillance studies. In this paper I am going to deal only with one side, or one flow, of artveillance, that is surveillance art.

While it is probably an inaccurate tag, for the sake of brevity in the following I am going to use the term ‘surveillance art’ to address every contemporary artwork that in some way hints to or deals with topics, concerns and procedures that fall within the interest of surveillance studies. Clearly, at the present, surveillance art is not a recognised art current or even an art movement. Not only are there many different points of view and attitudes to approach the topic – from the overtly political, through the cynical, to the playful – but the degree of involvement various artists have developed with the topic of surveillance varies widely. Some artists have been increasingly focusing their work on surveillance, while others have evoked it only occasionally or only during a certain period of their production. Still another noticeable difference concerns the fact that, while some artists *refer to* surveillance in their work, others actually *use* surveillance technologies to make art.

¹ I wish to thank all the artists who sent me information about their works, in particular William Noland, Camille Utterback, Marie Sester, Brooke Singer, and 436.

Nonetheless, it is precisely because of these differences that, in my view, the intersection between surveillance and contemporary art can be imagined as a *social field* in Bourdieu's (1972) sense. Indeed, surveillance art is a relational space that can be described on the basis of the positions, dispositions and position-takings it contains. Different artists working in this field can thus be meaningfully compared on this basis. In other words, the just mentioned differences should be conceived as the analytical dimensions to be taken into consideration to map the field of surveillance art. If, for instance, employed media range from painting, through performance and installation, to web applications, it clearly makes a significant difference whether an artist decides to represent or visualise in various guises the 'surveillant gaze' that is disseminated throughout contemporary social sites, whether s/he wants to 'embody' it, or whether s/he decides to build a surveillance system on her/his own, maybe even a twisted one. While in the following pages I am going to address surveillance artworks mainly from a substantive point of view, focusing on themes rather than representational formats, the latter should not be overlooked. Another factor to take into account is that my review covers only a tiny selection of cases. Despite such restricted empirical basis, my general argument is that surveillance art can be interpreted as an attempt to deal with issues of social visibility and invisibility and, more specifically, with contemporary *visibility regimes*. I also seek to examine how these visibility regimes are intimately related to a newly emergent social stratification of motilities, another theme that runs through surveillance art.

Visibilities and recognition

As a compass to navigate and make sense of the cases presented below, I suggest to use a distinction between three models, or paradigms of visibility: the visibility of *recognition*, the visibility of *control*, and the visibility of *spectacle* (Brighenti 2008). In the first model, visibility is essential to secure one's social recognition. From this perspective, being visible is essential to obtain respect from others and being empowered as a subject. In short, visibility determines access to social existence and, conversely, social exclusion can be conceptualised as a form of invisibility. This type of visibility seems to be linked to the basic, immediate presentation of people to each other through direct eye-to-eye contact, as initially described by Georg Simmel (1969[1908]). In the second model visibility is, on the contrary, seen as a form of social control that disempowers the subject. Being visible means being under control by the agency that looks at us – even when that agency presents itself as 'looking after' us. Notably, new technologies extend visibility-as-control from the human sense of sight to the act of tracking and tracing apparently abstract information data. In practice, there is a shift from sensorial to intellectual seeing: a disembodied view appears that ideally resembles God's infallible vision. Whereas the first model entails reciprocal inter-visibility, the second model clearly depicts a situation of deep asymmetry in visibilities. The third model focuses instead on the degree of separation that exists between the viewer and the viewed. In practice, the spectacle exists in a regime that is utterly separate from everyday life. In particular, for critical theorists, the spectacle is a set of images detached from life and simultaneously falsely proposed as an illusory form of unity of life. The regime of visibility associated with mass media is the nearest example of visibility-as-spectacle, although clearly not the only one.

The degree of asymmetry between looking and being looked at reveals the deep, intricate relationship between vision and power. *Recognition* plays a pivotal role in this process. There are at least four types of recognition, which we may call categorical, individual, personal, and spectacular recognition. To begin with, *categorical* recognition is founded on the simple and almost always routine typification of people. When one walks down an urban street, one encounters dozens of biographically unknown others and in order to navigate the complexity of city space one resorts to quick, stereotypical profiles to recognise people. Often, this fact generates tensions and involves the negotiation of the thresholds of what Erving Goffman (1959) first called 'civic inattention', which regulates recognition in the public domain. Second, *individual* recognition, or identification, is typically exercised by the State with regard to its own population. This type of recognition reaches its most complete form in the early 20th century thanks to instruments of classification and control like registry office records, identity cards, fingerprints – tools whose function is performed today by sophisticated biometric profiles and digital searchable databases. In

practice, the individual conceived through these technologies of power is a *dividual*, a social entity that can be segmented into traits to be controlled selectively in each relevant dimension that is currently examined and which – most importantly – can be calculated in an aggregate way (Deleuze, 1990). Third, *personal* recognition derives from what sociologists usually call ‘personal knowledge’. Goffman (1963) provided a most detailed description of the norms associated with acquaintanceship, and in particular with the ‘right to initiate a direct relationship’ (e.g., speaking to someone) to which only personal recognition entitles beyond a basic formalistic degree (e.g., asking for directions). Interestingly personal recognition does not coincide with individual recognition, given that it is well possible to develop an acquaintance even without knowing one’s tax code or residence address. Personal recognition is a form of interaction that calls into play the moral dimension of the Self and involves a ‘facework’ (Goffman 1955), that is a type of interaction aimed at saving the integrity and respectability of all the parties involved in the interaction itself. Facework is required when personal recognition takes place in the public domain (also in mediated public arenas: facework on FaceBook). Notably, this type of recognition can also take place in the domestic domain, where it occurs in an extremely informal, often implicit way (e.g., within a family). Fourth, *spectacular* recognition has to do with the distinction between the two regimes of the ordinary and the extraordinary, or between the profane and the sacred. While celebrities are personally unknown to their audience, they are clearly different from anonymous strangers subject to categorical recognition. Indeed, people develop a peculiar sense of intimacy with celebrities that generates a tension between the ordinary setting of everyday life and the ‘sacred’ appearance of ‘very important people’. In the model of spectacular recognition, the viewer is in fact a spectator of a spectacle that is offered to him/her, or which s/he aspires to watch. The ‘spectacle of power’ is very old and includes the most diverse forms of parades and *mises en scène*, in which the spectator participates precisely only as separate viewer. Clearly, also phenomena like voyeurism and scopophilia are located in the field of spectacular recognition.

It is interesting to notice that each type of recognition has a specific ‘mood’ attached to it and it develops specific affects. In particular, individual recognition is in some way the most impersonal and abstract form of recognition, as well as the one most closely associated with surveillance. Indeed, contemporary surveillance is based on the deployment of a technical and technological apparatus that is close to the impersonal classificatory apparatus developed by the modern state and other control agencies that form the ‘surveillant assemblage’ (Haggerty and Ericson 2000). Clearly, such apparatus also involves categorical, personal and spectacular elements, but the individualising/dividualising factor seems to remain prominent, not simply at the operative level, but also at the imaginative one. As far as the latter is concerned, in/dividual recognition typically tends to generate a sense of *Unheimlichkeit*, to use the effective psychoanalytical term. The *unheimliche*, or the uncanny, resides in the fact that whenever, as Elkins (1999) phrases it, the ‘the object stares back’, in practice we are in touch with the alien. Not simply are we ‘in touch’ – in fact, *we are touched*: it is precisely the ‘fear of being touched by the unknown’ that Canetti (1973[1960]) describes at the beginning of his *Crowds and Power* as the foundational experience of individuation.

Walls and videos: surveillance imagery

Having thus set out a few conceptual guidelines for our enquiry, I would like to raise the following questions: which model of visibility is adopted by surveillance artists? Which moods of recognition can we find in surveillance art? Which aspects of the surveillant assemblage or the surveillance process do surveillance artists emphasise more? Which attitude do they take towards the cleavage between the in/dividual and the person in the context of surveillance-aimed recognition?

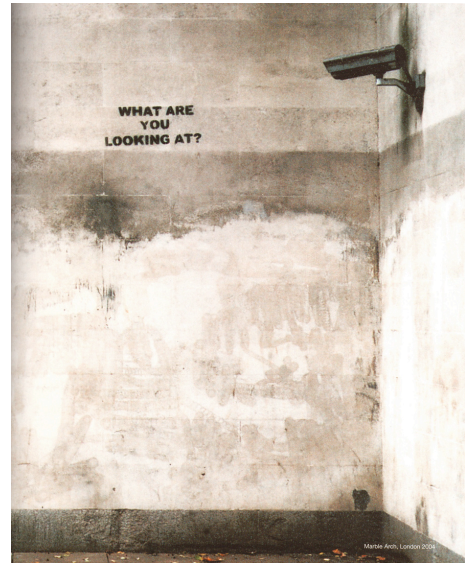
To begin with, I would like to consider some works of anonymous street art which can be found on the walls of many European cities as well as elsewhere in the world. For the most part, these works aim to criticise – often, satirically – the obsessive thrust towards surveillance which in urban environments has gained its momentum over the last decade. The privileged object of these critiques is visual surveillance. Because CCTVs have become an everyday presence in contemporary urban space this interest is

understandable. It is precisely the uncanny feeling of (the idea of) being observed by a machine that these artworks address. In the two examples from Paris below we see, respectively, the drawing of a camera growing out of a common plant vase (*Picture 1*), and the shape of a heart, the universal symbol for love and affection, placed just below a CCTV, but in a way that the CCTV cannot actually ‘see’ it (*Picture 2*). So, while in the first case it is the infiltration of the technologies of surveillance in everyday life to be underlined, in the second case it is the contrast between human affection and human feelings and the impersonal vision of a CCTV – a ‘vision machine’, in Virilio’s (1988) terms.



Pictures 1 and 2: Anonymous street art in Paris, 2009 (photos by the author)

The British street artist **Banksy** has become famous for representing in his works not simply the obsession with surveillance cameras which pervades the surveillance society, but also the very logic of surveillance. For instance, placing a surveillance camera right in the middle of a classical bucolic painting by Constable (*picture 3*), Banksy seems to understate huge questions about, on the one hand, the real aim of the surveillance (‘What is surveillance actually for?’, ‘Surveillance for whom?’, etc.) and, on the other hand, the aesthetic quality of the surveillance society (‘What type of visual landscape has surveillance created?’, ‘Would we push ourselves so far as to install CCTVs everywhere including a forest?’, ‘Where would we stop?’, etc.). In another work (*Picture 4*), Banksy puts in front of a CCTV a stencil that reads ‘What are you looking at?’. Here, it is the sightless vision of the CCTV that is called into question, together with the asymmetric visibility created by the practice of control. Introducing the possibility of ‘replying’ to the fact of being scrutinised by surveillance cameras – especially in the form of an impolite and rude but ‘healthy’ reaction – Banksy evokes personal recognition as a reply to or even a nemesis for the in/dividual recognition exercised through surveillance.



Pictures 3 and 4: Two works by Banksy. (Source: www.banksy.co.uk)



Similarly, the young Italian street artist **436** draws stencils with CCTVs, but in his version the machines run out of control and turn themselves into ‘spray vandals’.

Pictures 5: Untitled piece by 436. (Picture provided by the artist)

The photographer, sculptor and video artist **William Noland** has worked on the theme of surveillance pervasiveness directly using camera footage. His video *Occulted* (2007) (*Picture 6*) shows the routine infiltration of surveillance practices in public space at each social and temporal scale, down to the tiniest details of everyday interaction. The work is presented by the author as follows:

Occulted immerses the viewer in the streets of London during the winter of 2006, barely six months after the traumatic subway and bus bombings of 2005. The strategy is to surveil those who are already willingly surveilled, with periodic reminders that cameras are scanning the surroundings. Narrative is forsaken in favor of observational threads in which close and intimate watching takes place. Movement is slowed, as the daily commuting routine is frequently interrupted and punctuated by shopping—obsessive,

repetitive, ubiquitous. Dense layers of sound join with the image to reveal the individual being observed, leaving us to ponder what it is that is being thought, felt and lost. (From <http://www.williamnoland.com/writing/read/occulted/>)

Using excerpts from surveillance videotapes Noland, who had already worked on the topic as a photographer in his series *Seeing and Seen* (1994-2001), carries out a critique of the permanent visibility of people under contemporary surveillant regimes and the resulting ‘docility of bodies’ Michel Foucault (1975) first talked about.



Picture 6: Still from William Noland's *Occulted*. (Source: www.williamnoland.com)

In a different but related type of artwork, **Gary Hill's** 12-minute video *Blind Spot* (2003) presents in slow motion (actually, at a changing speed and pace) the story of a single encounter between the artist's camera and a Maghrebi man in traditional attires on a street in Marseille. The man stares straight into the camera and a series of emotive reactions to the fact of being observed can be read in his eyes, ranging from curiosity, through fear, to rage. It is a rapid series of imperceptible movements of subsequent attraction and repulsion that determines the peculiar tension of the dialectics of categorical recognition. Again, the camera provides a vision that cannot be challenged, a gaze which is never averted, and it is precisely through such direct contact that, although strictly speaking the video is not based on surveillance material, the theme of asymmetrical vision of a visibility-as-control type is explored.

Mukul Patel and **Manu Luksch**, who co-direct the London-based production centre Ambient Information Systems (AIS) and have written a *Manifesto for CCTV Filmmakers*², focus their work on issues that arise at the interface of social and technical infrastructures, including surveillance, privacy, data protection and access to data. In particular, the rules of CCTV filmmaking prescribe that it must use exclusively the ‘omnipresent existing video surveillance already in operation’. In her 50-minute work *Faceless* (2007) (*Picture 7*), Manu Luksch constructs a sort of psychological sci-fi narrative compiled from surveillance video footage. The plot is simple: in a dystopian society everybody is faceless; one day a woman wakes up

² Manifesto for CCTV Filmmakers <http://www.ambienttv.net/content/?q=dpamanifesto>

with a face and begins her quest for a different humankind with a face, during which she is constantly thrust into a startling escape from a perpetually administered present of 'Realtime'. It is interesting to recall that the video material was recovered by the artist through the UK Data Protection Act, which gives individuals the right to access their own personal data held in computer databases. Thus, the plot of the story skillfully plays with the fact that, in order to comply with the same legislation, all other individuals beyond the main character are anonymised, that is, rendered faceless. The alienating image of a world populated by people without a face raises once again the tension between the in/dividual, subject to surveillance, and the person with all its richest moral connotations, a 'face' in Goffman's (1955) sense.

In another project, *Mapping CCTV*, Ms. Luksch initially attempted to document through maps the diffusion and the range of CCTVs around Whitehall, London but was soon stopped by the police and intimidated under counter-terrorism legislation to immediately stop the project. The artist decided to continue without using her own recording devices ('acting less suspiciously', as she puts it) and proceeded to mark the perimeter of public space on the street that falls within the space surveilled by a given camera. Subsequently she performed the handing out of leaflets which alerted passers-by to the camera's presence.



Picture 7: Still from Manu Luksch's *Faceless* (2007).
(Source: <http://www.ambienttv.net/content/?q=node/439>)

Security CCTVs have also been used by **Francis Alÿs** in one of his *Seven Walks* in London, *The Nightwatch*, in which a fox is seen exploring the Tudor and Georgian rooms of the National Portrait Gallery at night (Alÿs 2005; Roush 2007). The effect of the installation (four screens side by side to each

other capturing the animal as it roams among the classical artworks) oscillates between the prototypical imagery of a surveillance system and that of a hyperrealist account of nature in Renaissance painting. Another episode in the series, *The Guards*, led sixty-four Foot Guards from the Coldstream Regiment into a walk in the hyper-surveilled streets of the City of London and was originally supposed to use the CCTV footage of the event (although finally it was filmed by an ad hoc crew, due to difficulty in accessing the tapes). Here, the element of spectacular recognition comes to the fore in the Guards have a sort of iconic status in collective memory and are counted as tourist ‘must’ for London. In a 2007 project called *(in)visible*, **Brooke Singer**, digital media artist and assistant professor at SUNY-Purchase, built some pins with infrared LEDs which cannot be seen by human eye, but are recorded by surveillance cameras as white spots. On her website (www.bsing.net), Ms Singer gives detailed instructions to self-construct the pins and invites to wear them to demonstrate in a playful, performative and colourful way against the invasive use of CCTV cameras in everyday life. Categorical recognition here occurs in a politicised form, in that the filmed person with the IR led instantly qualifies as a ‘demonstrator’.

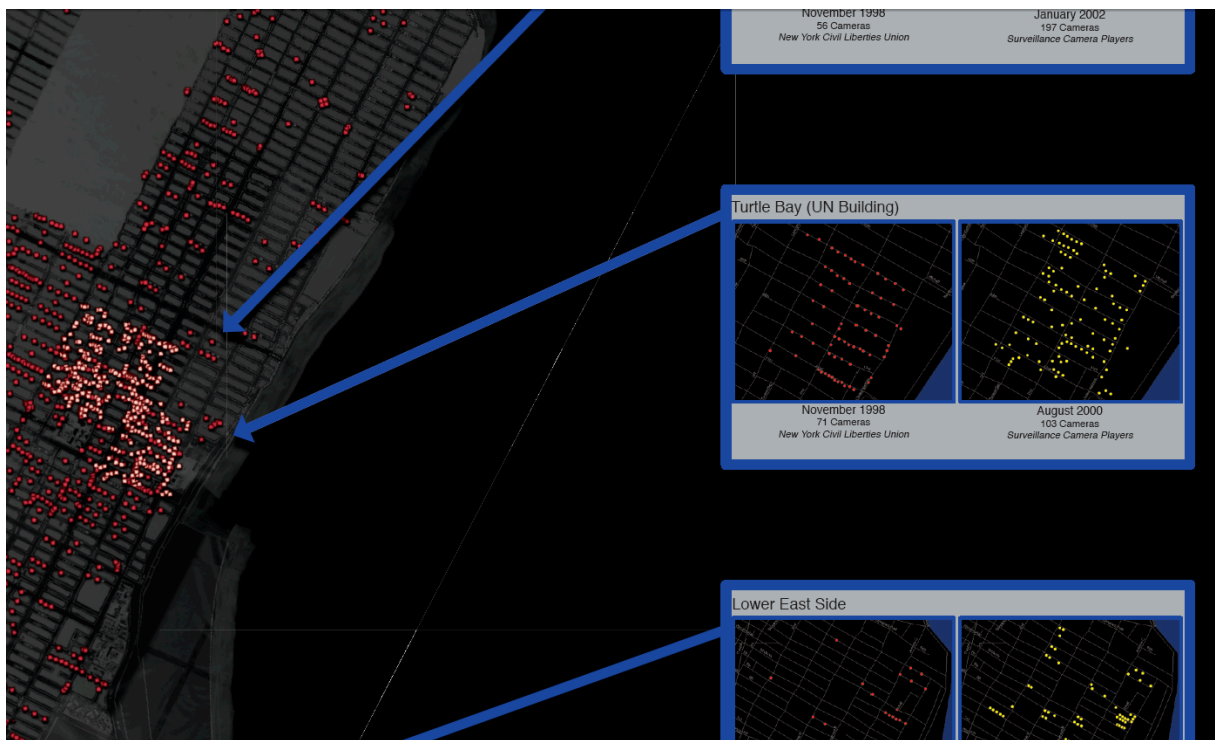
A technically more complex production has been developed by **James Coupe**, a Seattle-based artist and researcher at the University of Washington who builds self-organizing and interconnected art systems. His *(re)collector* (2007) installation in Cambridge UK used ten custom-built cameras to capture specific human behaviors that occur within their range. The footage was then automatically cut into a film based upon master narrative templates from classic films such as *Vertigo*, *Alphaville* and *Blow Up*. The properly ‘public’ aspect of this work consists in the fact that the *(re)collector* films were subsequently projected in Cambridge city centre as an event in which the public found itself to be, almost literally, the protagonist. Coupe’s project thus employs the element of spectacular recognition, too, revealing the complex interplay between the in/dividual, which can be easily subjected to surveillance, and the type of roles and expectancies involved in the paradigm of the spectacle. In this vein, the British artist **Stanza** has used streams from online CCTVs to compose an ‘urban tapestry’ in a project significantly entitled *Urban Generation; trying to imagine the world from everyone else’s perspective, all at once* (2002-2005), while in *Public Domain* (2008) he has proposed to employ surveillance cameras and projectors to mirror visitors as they interact with art works in the public space of the art gallery.

Technology on technology: surveillance practices

Video is not the only media used in surveillance art. More interdisciplinary works, in which technology is used to talk about surveillance technology and its social effects, are also well represented. A famous case is the work by the artist and San Jose State University assistant professor **Hasan M. Elahi**. Coming from the traumatic experience of having been interrogated in 2002 by the F.B.I. as a suspect terrorist – an obviously absurd charge from which he was ultimately acquitted – Mr Elahi decided to transform his art into a systematic inversion of surveillance into self-surveillance or *sousveillance*. On his website³ the artist provides overabundant details not only about his current location and what he sees just in front of him at the moment, but also about the most various aspects of his everyday life, including his finances. The endless series of pictures – more than 20,000 images – of airports, meals, and toilets posted on his website documents everything Mr Elahi does and provides the viewer with a caricatural but undoubtedly real instance of systematic surveillance. This also connects to the theme of the emergent stratification of motilities and the dramatically curtailed freedom of movement migrants and minorities enjoy. The artist has provocatively turned himself into a high-visibility man, constantly intermingling the features of the in/dividual recognition of surveillance with aspect of categorical and even personal recognition linked to the domestic domain and the regime of the familiar (e.g., airports we’ve been at, food we’ve eaten). It has also been observed (Thompson 2007) that the operation undertaken by Mr Elahi has been quite successful, not the least because that he has not been detained since.

³ Tracking Transience, <http://trackingtransience.net/>

While Hasan Elhai's work clearly contains critical elements, a more openly engaged work has been developed by a group devoted to develop projects on urban public space, the **Institute for Applied Autonomy**. The Institute does not confine itself to document or denounce surveillance, nor to provoke discussion on sensitive topics. Rather, taking up a 'do-it-yourself' attitude, it actively promotes and develops resistance tactics and counter-surveillant techniques, or what it calls 'technologies for the public' (Schienke and IAA 2002). The Institute for Applied Autonomy designs solutions that pokes fun at the culture of surveillance mixing ironic and critical overtones, but with relevant practical application. For instance, *iSee* (2001-2005) (*Picture 8*) – 'Now More Than Ever', runs the subtitle – is a web-based application that maps the locations of surveillance cameras in urban environments (currently, the only active map is that of Manhattan island; but similar mappings are developed for instance by the Surveillance Camera Players at <http://www.notbored.org/the-scp.html>). Its aim is to enable users to draw their own 'paths of least surveillance' through the city, where they can walk without being surveilled. While the objective is similar to Manu Luksch's work, here the user is also provided with a practical device which should enable him/her to avoid unwanted attention at each moment.



Picture 8: Screenshot from I.A.A.'s *iSee* Documentation Map (2001-2005).
(Source: (<http://www.appliedautonomy.com/isee.html#references>))

Other artists who use new media technologies seek to produce specific events or encounters with surveillance technologies rather than avoiding it. For instance, **Christian Moeller** aims to produce intense physical events which involve moving and interacting objects presented as architectural scale installations. His *Mojo* (2007) is an outdoors robotic arm holding a spotlight that by night can flash along a stretch of sidewalk. While in operation, *Mojo* tries to follow the passers-by with its light beam thus provoking their immediate reaction of surprise. Similarly, **Camille Utterback**'s *Abundance* (2007) is an interactive installation commissioned by the City of San Jose, California, installed in the main square of the city. A video camera mounted on the City Hall captures the movements of people in the plaza below. A dynamic animation generated in response to this movement is projected onto the façade of the town hall building. As participants walk through the plaza they locate their brightly colored silhouette in the projection above their heads. The artist explains:

By providing a way for participants to temporarily inscribe their movements on the facade of City Hall, *Abundance* personalizes the site, altering participants' sense of ownership and belonging to a place that is already theirs as a public civic space. (From <http://www.camilleutterback.com/abundance.html>)



Picture 9: The spectator 'under attack' in Marie Sester's *Threatbox.us* (2005-2007).
(Source: <http://www.threatbox.us>)

While Ms. Utterback's work stresses the positivity of meaning entailed by the fact of being visible in public (visibility-as-recognition), the indoors installation by the Los Angeles-based French artist and architect **Marie Sester** *Threatbox.us* (2005-2007) clearly has a different flavour. At first sight, the installation looks like the screening of excerpts from war videogames mixed with real wars, including bombings, explosions, plane crashes and so on. But whenever the spectator enters the detection zone and gets tracked by the hidden video camera on the ceiling, the projector turns into a spotlight that swiftly points onto the viewer's body, a moment Ms. Sester describes as 'the attack' (*Picture 9*). A very loud, frightening noise is produced, to which people react instantly. The installation can be read as a criticism of the 'industrial-entertainment-military complex', as the artist declares (Regine 2006). But the device exploits a very physical, instinctive reaction to motion all human beings have. Like in Moeller's and Utterback's installations, it is a reaction to the act of being seized, which is caused by the sudden shift from the state being a detached, safe observer to the state of becoming a prey. To use the terms introduced above, it is the shift from spectacular to in/dividual recognition: people arrive as free, independent subjects who have certain expectations about the regime of visibility they are involved in, but in fact – just like

Hasan Elahi – they are already the object of an ongoing surveillant scrutiny. Thus, what these installations perform is the actualisation of a virtual relationship of power that is already always present within every surveillance system.

Conclusion. Moods of artveillance

In this short essay I have reviewed some artworks that address surveillance issues and I have reported on how different artists (by no means an exhaustive list) have chosen to represent the surveillant gaze. I have suggested to interpret these artworks through the notions of *visibility regime* and *forms of recognition*. Contemporary visibility regimes are shaped by specific asymmetries of social inter-visibility, and these asymmetries assume very different meanings according to which type of recognition – categorical, in/dividual, personal or spectacular – takes place. Admittedly, I have paid less attention to more specifically aesthetic aspects of surveillance art. Recently, Roland Schöny (2007) has rightly observed that a specific ‘aesthetic of surveillance’ has been born and is by now consolidated in our perceptual imagery: ‘a few seconds of footage suffice to construct the intended framing’, given that ‘[t]he codes of surveillance images have begun to assume a self-evident place in our perceptual repertoire’, characterised as they are by stereotypical qualities like lo-fi, flickering images, time-code bars etc. Thus, surveillance art should also be analysed in terms of its codes, ‘stylemes’ and clichés.

However, my point is that we should not underestimate the diversity of moods that can be conveyed through the same aesthetic of surveillance. Indeed, these moods range a lot from the dark and the gloomy, through the outraged and the sceptical, to the playful and even the enthusiastic. Thus, notably, surveillance produces not only social control but also an ideoscape and a landscape of moods. While a large part of surveillance art is still, as Martin Jay (1993) would have it, in an ‘anti-ocularcentric’ period, focused as it is on the denigration of the surveillant gaze, it seems to me that some notable artworks in this field also aim to explore the most often ambiguous and complex feelings associated with surveillant visibility regimes, as well as the implications these regimes have on the stratification of motilities and the freedom of movement in the contemporary city. At the centre of these reflections is the uncanny fact that in some way, through the technological setup, the object ‘stares back’, or, as Virilio (1988) suggested, the machine gains a vision of its own. It is a feeling of *Unheimlichkeit*, which questions the changing boundaries of the human itself within complex socio-technical assemblages.

Ultimately, I contend, the ambiguity that is inherent in all the dynamics of observing and being observed leads us to recognise the *haptic* component of the gaze. As Canetti (1960: 15) once wrote: ‘There is nothing that man fears most than the touch of the unknown. He wants to *see* what is reaching towards him, and to be able to recognise or at least classify it’. Here, only apparently is sight opposed to touch. In fact, what Canetti is suggesting is that regards are themselves social forces, and that, consequently, the model of the visible is the *haptic*, the gesture that seizes – which is also the basic movement of power.

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