Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Ways of being seen: surveillance art and the interpellation of viewing subjects

Torin Monahan

Department of Communication, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA

ABSTRACT
Critical artworks about surveillance introduce compelling possibilities for rethinking the relationship of people to larger systems of control. This paper analyses a number of art projects that strive to render surveillance visible and cultivate a sense of responsibility on the part of viewers or participants. Some of the projects show the human costs of surveillance-facilitated drone violence and urge viewers to take action, others use tactics of defamiliarization to draw critical attention to everyday surveillance that has become mundane, and still others invite participation as a way of producing discomfort and reflexivity on the part of viewers. The potential of such works to engender ideological critique rests in their ability to foster ambiguity and decentre the viewing subject by capitalizing upon multiple, competing forms of interpellation.

In what ways can artistic endeavours alter people's perspectives of surveillance? What is the capacity of art to reveal systems of control and induce reflexivity in others, perhaps leading them to recognize their role in surveillance systems and modify their behaviour? Critical surveillance artwork has blossomed in recent years, pushing inquiry of this sort through a number of different approaches (Levin *et al.* 2002, Brighenti 2010, Bertrand and Bridle 2016, Morrison 2016). Some works enact plays of avoidance (Harvey 2013, Monahan 2015), others expose surveillance practices to heighten transparency (Paglen and Solnit 2010, Barnard-Wills 2014, Kafer 2016), others interrupt or confound data collection and processing (Dewey-Hagborg 2013, Cirio 2016), and then there are those that emphasize viewers' complicity or participation in the regimes in question (Hogue 2016). This final approach is the focus of this paper: artworks that seek to activate a sense of social connection and introspection to make recognition of collective responsibility possible.

In some respects, the so-called big data revolution has set the stage for viewers to process visual imagery and abstract data along these lines. If big data connotes a universe of unintuitive but nonetheless meaningful connections across disparate domains (Andrejevic 2014, Esposti 2014), then the current discursive field affords the *decentring* of subjects, encouraging them to see themselves as nodes in larger, consequential networks that elude their absolute comprehension. In such a space, viewers may more readily concede their relationships – and perhaps responsibility – to others whom they have never met. Surveillance art does not simply convey such messages to viewers through some form of transmission, but rather strives to carefully construct the collision of people, representations and media, such that shifts in worldview are made possible.[1]

This paper serves as an opening gambit in a larger project investigating the proliferation of critical surveillance artworks in recent years. In this project, I seek to situate the emergence of such artworks within the contemporary conjuncture, asking why they are emerging now and what they say about growing public awareness of surveillance as a social problem. While it might be tempting for scholars with progressive leanings to celebrate anti-surveillance artworks because of their implied opposition to state and corporate control structures, I am more interested in exploring how such works construct subjects, structure relations and assert values. In short, this is a project of cultural critique that attempts to grasp the contemporary 'problem space' diagnosed and responded to by critical surveillance art.

Whereas in Berger's (1972) classic work, *Ways of Seeing*, he illustrated the historically contingent ideological underpinnings of viewers' conceptions of art, critical surveillance artworks interrogate *ways of being seen* in the present moment. They implicitly ask, 'What kind of subject is the subject of surveillance?' Granted, as the field of surveillance studies has shown, answers to this question depend fundamentally upon one's social position and the nature of the surveillance apparatus being deployed (Browne 2015, Dubrofsky and Magnet 2015, Hall 2015, Monahan 2017). Still, inquiry into ways of being seen requires attention to complex social relations mediated, oftentimes, by obscure technological systems and protocols. Such processes of mediation do not fit squarely within the conceptual frameworks of *discipline*, which overemphasizes containment and totalizing internalizations of rules and norms by subjects (Foucault 1977, Lianos 2003, Murakami Wood 2007); *control*, which hinges on the translation of individuals into discrete data elements for the profit of corporations but does not allow space for negotiation or contestation (Deleuze 1992, Haggerty and Ericson 2000); or *securitization*, which prioritizes the role of the state in applying reductive risk designations to populations and managing flows based on those measures (Salter 2004, Amoore 2006). Contemporary ways of being seen undoubtedly possess objectifying and controlling valences, but they may

also afford new forms of connection and ethical responsibility among strangers. In this paper, I analyse a set of artworks that take the construction of such a complicit ethical subject as their objective.

The concept of *interpellation* – if pushed beyond its original emphasis on unconscious participation in ideological structures – can assist with this inquiry by directing attention to the ideological significance of relationships between watchers and the watched. In Althusser's (2004) formulation, interpellation signifies the process by which ideology transforms individuals into subjects. As with a police officer's hail, 'Hey you', the target recognizes in that moment that she is a subject embedded in the power relations of social and political institutions and that she always has been (Althusser 2004). Although the emphasis with interpellation is on the role of discourse in constituting subjects – or, in Stuart Hall's words, '[addressing] how ideology becomes internalized, how we come to speak "spontaneously"' (Hall 1983, p. 64) – discourse, broadly construed, also operates through non-verbal sign systems and visual imagery (Purvis and Hunt 1993, Mitchell 1994). Thus, scholars have mobilized interpellation to analyse how advertising images position subjects (Pajnik and Lesjak-Tušek 2002, Sturken and Cartwright 2009, Wenner 2014). Others, such as Mitchell, write of the interpellative capacity of paintings, whereby 'the image … takes the beholder into the game, enfolds the observer as object for the "gaze" of the picture' (Mitchell 1994, p. 75; see also Doy 2005). Finally, visual culture scholars like Mirzoeff (2005) have used interpellation in an expanded sense to stress the non-verbal 'visual surveillance' implied in moments where one is positioned by being watched by others and by being enjoined to watch things like scenes of war.

Therefore, along with ideological reinforcement by institutions such as education or religion, visual imagery performs interpellative functions. For instance, even if someone might dismiss an advertisement for a product or disagree with a media message, they are still 'hailed' as subjects who are targeted as part of a group; they are placed within the social system and in the process contribute to that system's maintenance (Sturken and Cartwright 2009). This insight into interpellation productively emphasizes the role of social practice in the reproduction of ideology. In the words of John Fiske: 'Ideology is not, then, a static set of ideas through which we view the world but a dynamic social practice, constantly in process, constantly reproducing itself in the ordinary workings of these apparatuses' (Fiske 2004, p. 1270). By attending to processes of interpellation, therefore, cultural critics can trace the workings of ideology in semiotic systems, social relations and everyday practices. But in order to view interpellation as a technique for artists to use to transform common-sense understandings of surveillance, the concept must be recast such that its limitations are interpreted as possibilities for political intervention.

Rather than being singular, there are frequently multiple interpellations operating simultaneously (e.g. those positioning the subject as citizen,

consumer or criminal). The various discourses of which people are a part are constantly working, oftentimes in tension with each other, to constitute subjects both directly and indirectly, with or without an audible 'hail' or dyadic confrontation between people (Hall 1985, Grossberg 1993, Butler 1995). Moreover, not all efforts at interpellation succeed, as one may reject the position ascribed or the authority of the agent or discourse in question. As Butler (1995) explains, whereas discussions of interpellation typically yoke it to 'the law' and perceive the law as having the force of conjuring subjects into existence, this effectively insulates the law from critique because an attack on it would destabilize the conditions for one's (social) being. Butler asks:

> Under what conditions does a law monopolize the terms of existence in quite so thorough a way? Or is this a theological fantasy of the law? Perhaps there is a possibility of being elsewhere or otherwise, without denying our complicity in the law that we oppose. Such knowledge will only be answered through a different kind of turn, one that, enabled by the law, turns away from the law, resisting its lure of identity; an agency that outruns and counters the conditions of its existence. (Butler 1995, p. 25)

Although the law, singular or multiple, may interpellate individuals, one need not view it as holding a monopoly on the constitution of subjects.

If one views the contradictions and tensions with interpellative processes as both unavoidable and empirically grounded, this can direct attention to the mechanisms by which these elements hold together and potentially resolve. In his influential analysis of the Quebec sovereignty movement in the 1970s and 1980s, for example, Charland (1987) notes how pro-sovereignty documents instrumentally deployed a 'constitutive rhetoric' that presumed, and thereby called into being, a subject who was supportive of the cause. This was a mode of interpellation that capitalized upon the contradictions in subject positions (e.g. competing national and ethnic identities) to reorient the subject and present new avenues for political action. For the purposes of interpreting critical surveillance artwork, then, we could question the extent to which artists invoke contradictions in multiple modes of interpellation to destabilize viewers and suggest possibilities for resolution or containment, perhaps through recognition of complicity and collective responsibility.

Philosophical conceptualizations of aesthetics complement such theories of interpellation. As Rancière (2006) explains, aesthetics performs a 'distribution of the sensible', normalizing ideology through manipulation of the sensory realm (e.g. what one can see, hear or say). Rancière approaches aesthetics as an ordering function that enforces a restrictive 'symbolic constitution of the social' (Rancière 2010, p. 36), thereby delimiting what thoughts and actions are conceivable at any given moment (Birchall 2014). Nonetheless, Rancière expressed a belief that art movements could open up space for political change and catalyse forms of radical egalitarianism

(Rancière 2006). This presents a potential contradiction because such an intervention would require not just the inclusion of excluded voices, but a shift in the aesthetic terrain, a recalibration of regimes of perceptibility and consciousness (Sayers 2005, Rancière 2006), which, by Rancière's logic, would become the foundation for a new aesthetic (police) order. As with Butler's observation about the overdetermined force of the law, the elusive task of moving within and beyond such orders remains.

If ideology is understood as being reproduced through interpellation and aesthetics, then artworks could never truly function outside it, but they might nonetheless agitate from within, or on the margins of the perceptible. They could trace the hegemonic operations of capital, truth and value, or trouble the comfortable status quo positions of subjects within institutions and symbolic systems. They could unsettle conditioned ways of seeing the world or the visualities that are 'historically specific formulations of sense' (Halpern 2014, p. 23). They could achieve, in other words, 'countervisuality'. Whereas dominant regimes of visuality reaffirm the ideological order (e.g. through the imposition of categories or assertion of police authority), forms of countervisuality challenge those regimes through discourses and practices that refuse to accept as legitimate the grounds for that order. Mirzoeff explains: 'Countervisuality seeks to resituate the terms on which reality is to be understood. … Countervisuality is not … simply a matter of assembled visual images, but the grounds on which such assemblages can register as meaningful renditions of a given moment' (Mirzoeff 2011, p. 28).

Edward Snowden's 2013 revelations about the National Security Agency's (NSA) spying programs offer an example of just such a moment of rupture to dominant regimes of visuality, where suddenly the surveillance state was cast in a new light and individuals were momentarily afforded space to recognize the ways that they were marked as suspicious and their data indiscriminately included in state surveillance programs. While not an artistic exercise in any obvious way, although documentaries and art projects followed (e.g. Poitras 2014, 2016), the NSA revelations were certainly *aesthetic* in that they catalysed the possibility for the redistribution of the sensible, for new forms of thought and action on the part of surveillance subjects (Birchall 2014). This potential – which Birchall aptly terms 'the aesthetic of the secret' – was quickly neutered as the debate over state surveillance was folded into legal and technical discourses (e.g. about the meaning of 'metadata' or about procedures for court-approved searches) (Birchall 2014). If critical art projects seek to materialize potentials for the redistribution of the sensible, then the lesson from the outcome of Snowden's revelations would be to hold resolution in abeyance for as long as possible and resist the impulse to (quickly) translate art projects into policy recommendations or legal demands.

'Participatory art', which clearly is part of a longer history of performance art, may offer one avenue toward achieving these goals. As summarized by art historian Claire Bishop, with participatory art,

> the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term *project* with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a "viewer" or "beholder," is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*. (Bishop 2012, p. 2, italics in original)

By decentring both the artist and the artwork, participatory art uses first-hand experience as a mechanism for raising consciousness and altering social dynamics (Perucci 2009, Bishop 2012). Some of the configurations might be performances that enlist viewers as participants or community-based projects that have explicit emancipatory goals, among other things. The focus on the transient or opaque (e.g. experiences, relations, energy) is what makes this mode of art so apt for the topic of surveillance, where the trope of invisible watchers with unknown purposes is fundamental to the anxiety that surveillance can produce. If surveillant relationships can be visibilized and contested through participatory art, this supports critique of their underlying conditions. This harmonizes with the aspirations, if not the achievements, of participatory art, where: 'The desire to activate the audience in participatory art is at the same time a drive to emancipate it from a state of alienation induced by the dominant ideological order … ' (Bishop 2012, p. 275).

Although there are numerous critical art projects engaging with surveillance, the concentration of this paper is on those that strive to render surveillance visible and cultivate a sense of responsibility on the part of viewers or participants. Some of the projects show the human costs of surveillance-facilitated violence and urge viewers to take action ('#NotABugSplat'), others use tactics of defamiliarization to draw critical attention to everyday surveillance that has become mundane (Jakub Geltner's 'Nests'), and still others invite participation as a way of producing discomfort and reflexivity on the part of viewers (Dries Depoorter's 'Sheriff Software'). Through closer inquiry into these art projects, I seek to understand not their affordances for policy change but instead the mechanisms by which they attempt to frame and enroll subjects. I explore the potentials of such projects to mobilize contradictions or tensions among forms of interpellation as a means of contesting the contemporary distribution of the sensible.

Facing drone violence

As a response to civilian deaths caused by the U.S. drone program, in 2014 an artist collective unveiled in Pakistan a project called '#NotABugSplat'.[2] This

project involved the reproduction of a young girl's portrait on a massive vinyl poster, measuring roughly 90 × 60 feet (D&AD 2015). The girl, whose name is unknown, was an Afghan refugee who lost her parents and two siblings to a 2010 drone strike in a North Waziristan village in Pakistan (Saifi 2014). While not legible close up, this blue and white pixelated image comes into focus from a distance, like a pointillist artwork, revealing a bushy-haired girl with a plaintive expression and wide eyes looking directly back at the viewer (see Figure 1). She appears to be wearing a pale printed dress, from which her hands emerge, holding an unidentified darker object, perhaps a piece of food, close to her chest. Because the artists could not secure access to the North Waziristan region, this print was briefly displayed in a field outside the city of Peshawar in Pakistan (Saifi 2014), some 150 miles from the site of the attack that killed the girl's family. According to the artists, the villagers at the site of unveiling participated in the staging process and were 'highly enthusiastic locals' (#NotABugSplat 2014).

The stated intended viewers of this artwork are drone pilots who might see the girl's face when flying their aircraft overhead. In the words of one of the

Figure 1. #NotABugSplat (2014).

artists, 'We want to shame drone operators and make them realize the human cost of their actions' (Saifi 2014). Instead of perceiving the humans moving on the ground as akin to insects that could be crushed with little remorse, the artists want to rehumanize the people in these spaces and catalyse empathy – or even 'shame' – on the part of pilots. This project, therefore, recognizes the deeply surveillant nature of drone warfare, where the monitoring and tracking of people, vehicles and terrain constitute the bulk of the activities of drone pilots (Gusterson 2016). Drone operators watch to amass intelligence and direct interventions, sometimes violent ones (Niva 2013), so the artists seek to short-circuit that feedback loop.

Beyond the idealistic objectives of the artists, #NotABugSplat cannot extricate itself from the cultural context that motivates drone warfare in the first place. The 'war on terror' is sustained by masculinist tropes of rescuing helpless girls and women from fanatical religious men in backwards and uncivilized places (Puar 2007, Wall 2011). Articulations of this rescue complex, which have a long and sordid history (Spivak 1988), infuse judgments of ethnic Others in Western settings too, as seen with debates over headscarves worn by Muslim women in countries like France (Zine 2006). Thus it is not incidental that the artists behind #NotABugSplat chose – or produced – an overexposed image of a young girl to stare back at pilots and represent the art project to the media and the world. Her face seems both light-complexioned and luminous, signifying innocence, purity and vulnerability. She is integrated into existing visual economies that understand her sex, age and simple rustic dress to connote someone in need of saving from the violence and violation of men. Her light skin-color amplifies this drive, positioning her as someone close to whiteness who can be assimilated readily into a more 'civilized society' and have a 'promising future' if only she were granted the opportunities she rightly deserves. Seen from this angle, it is not contradictory when the artists say, 'it is only the loss of a child that can show the impact that drone strikes have on the residents of these regions' (Saifi 2014). The child depicted actually survived the attack that killed her family, but she suffers a social death in that she cannot be rescued from her cultural context. What #NotABugSplat adds to the standard heroic narrative is the addition of new categories of violent men that girls like this one need saving from: drone pilots, directly, and Western militaries and policymakers, indirectly. This addition reinforces more than challenges the imperial rescue complex, especially given that militaries blame civilian 'collateral damage' from drones on suspected terrorists or enemy combatants using civilians – and populated villages – as shields (Gregory 2011). Therefore, the imperative to rescue innocent girls and women from abusive men remains.

Orientalism saturates the work in other ways as well. The pixilated, monochrome image stylistically references older black-and-white photographic media, thereby conjuring a sense of nostalgia for a distant, lost

past. The child's image is static and fixed, arrested forever in a moment of simple innocence. The lack of modern adornment situates the girl, along with the other children in need of saving, in this innocent past, while the insertion of the image into contemporary media streams carries that sense of timelessness into the present and future.[3] Similarly, while the location used to display the image may have been selected for pragmatic reasons, there is an implied interchangeability, as if one region of Pakistan (or any neighbouring country) can substitute for any other without a loss of meaning. The artists' claims about the villagers' eager participation in the project support this conclusion, as if the people at the site of the drone attack were the ones symbolically rising up against imperial powers, when in fact there have been few documented cases of drone attacks around Peshawar where the artwork was displayed (Bureau of Investigative Journalism 2016). By invoking a sense of both timelessness and placeless-ness, #NotABugSplat reproduces some of the same Orientalizing rhetorics that were used to justify the 'war on terror' in the first place and allowed it to spread to countries like Iraq. This does not mean that these rhetorics are ineffective, as the attention this project has received suggests that they are quite successful, but their palatability alone should be reason for disquiet on the part of critical viewers.

The artists produce a specific sort of subject through their framing mech-anisms. By asserting that the goal is to make drone pilots confront the human cost of their actions, this ignores the ways in which pilots already grapple with these realities. Practically speaking, drone pilots do have close-up and sus-tained views of damage they inflict, which can be profoundly visceral and psy-chologically disturbing for pilots, regardless of whom they hit (Wall and Monahan 2011). Counter to mythologies that position them as generating dis-embodied representations for remote killing, drone systems are deeply material communication infrastructures (Parks 2012). This suggests that while the artists claim that drone pilots are the intended audience of this inter-vention, the real one is the larger public exposed to media reports of the work. Indeed, the artwork has received significant mainstream press coverage (e.g. CNN, *Newsweek*, Democracy Now!), in addition to it being shared widely on social media. The larger viewing audience is enjoined to watch a performance of drone pilots being assailed as culpable agents of unjust violence. In the process, the art project interpellates the audience, calling it out as responsible for ending drone violence through image viewing and sharing – as safe forms of political action in online spaces, in the vein of what Morozov (2013) has termed 'solutionism'. This does not preclude, of course, other forms of political action or activism, but as the hashtagged title for the piece illustrates, image circulation and consumption are the fundamental performative avenues offered to the audience.

Nesting in the surveillance landscape

Whereas repeated exposure to dedicated surveillance devices, such as public video cameras, can cause them to fade from active attention or recognition, uncanny and unexpected configurations of such devices can snap awareness back into place. This is the conceit of Czech artist Jakub Geltner's public art series titled 'Nests'. For these installations, Geltner places a surfeit of video cameras and satellite dishes in unusual positions and sites, densely clustered along the walls of buildings, on rooftops, along walking paths or even on rocky outcrops along seashores. The tactic is one of defamiliarization, or making strange, which follows from a mode of literary theory that finds the value of art in its ability to shift perception and understanding of everyday things (Kolesnikoff 1993). Because Geltner's works appear in public places, their success at defamiliarizing is readily observed in the behaviour of passersby who look up, point at and take photographs of the arranged surveillance devices.

For some of his most powerful installations, Geltner places surveillance devices in natural settings and openly evokes the genre of landscape painting to situate the viewer and direct her attention. Landscape, however, is more than an artistic device; it functions as a medium that produces certain kinds of subjects who are granted a position of dominance over the terrain before them. As Mitchell eloquently explains:

> Landscape as a cultural medium … has a double role with respect to something like ideology: it naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site. (Mitchell 2002, p. 2)

Harmonious as the settings depicted in landscape paintings might seem, they have often been linked to imperialist and capitalist logics that they both mask and make possible (Barrell 1980, Mitchell 2002, Gustafsson 2013). Landscape paintings tend to present relatively unpopulated scenes of naturalistic purity, scenes that willingly unfold for viewers and invite them to perceive the world as a resource rightfully belonging to them.

Referencing a history of concerns about the disruptive force of 'the machine in the garden' (Marx 1964), Geltner upsets these logics of landscape by placing unnatural technological artefacts in natural settings and having them look back at the viewer, as if they are the rightful inhabitants who are disturbed by the viewer's presence and might turn on him at any moment. For example, the work titled 'Nest 5' depicts a calm ocean view from the position of someone on the shore (see Figure 2). Gentle waves lap at the sand, nudging a line of broken shells, rocks and other detritus on the shoreline. The sea's clear water extends before the viewer as its colours gradually mutate to take on subtle variations in hue: browns, greens and finally blues

as the ocean meets a thin sliver of land on the left before transitioning to the cloudy sky above. Creating a stark contrast, the centre of the frame is dominated by dark brown rocks, stretching from the right, just past the shoreline. Green- and ochre-coloured algae mottle some rocks, but the most conspicuous presence is what appears to be a flock of about two-dozen white surveillance cameras perched on the rocks. Situated like seagulls, the cameras in this vaguely Surrealist work each look in different directions – some up, some down, some sideways and at least one directly at the viewer. Apparently indifferent yet aware, the cameras convey uneasiness, as if they are shifting about and ready to take flight at any moment should they feel threatened.

By having cameras mimic the posture of birds, Geltner's installations challenge assumptions about naturalness, perhaps destabilizing the centrality of humans as viewers and introducing doubt about humans' place of dominance in an evolutionary progression that might include machines. If landscape is a fluid 'medium of exchange, a site of visual appropriation, [and] a focus for the formation of identity' (Mitchell 2002, p. 2), then the human identities – and modes of perception – shaped by scenes like Nest 5 are decidedly more fragile and vulnerable than those that came before. Visual appropriation may be occurring in the other direction, with the machines surveying viewers and assessing their threat or worth.

Another of Geltner's pieces, Nest 6, makes the predatory appraisal of the human viewer overt (see Figure 3). Here, a tight cluster of cameras droops

Figure 2. Jakub Geltner, 'Nest 5' (2015).

downward off a pole, almost like a prehistoric creature scanning the ground below for a worthwhile scrap of food. Beneath its gaze a concrete walking path heads downward in a slight curve as it descends to the idyllic Bondi beach in Sydney, Australia. Pedestrians peer up and take photographs of the machinic animal above them, but the tableau of that mutual observation is an ominous one, seeming to reproduce a scene from a horror film. From our vantage point, the human in the frame is dangerously close to being viscously attacked and consumed. Because the cameras of the creature are fully functional and routed to an online webcam interface, this installation is participatory in multiple senses. First, those walking under its gaze cannot help but note its presence, which is designed to make them feel small, exposed and possibly in danger. They respond by photographing the installation, looking back from a position of disadvantage both physically and figuratively: the people in the scene are dominated by the installation looming over them and are also unable to track or regulate the circulation of images taken of them. Second, viewers of the webcam site become extensions of Nest 6, observing through its many eyes the people who pass beneath – who, it must be said, appear all the more defenceless in playing their expected role of tourist documenting their own exposure. Third, media stories and analyses such as this one assume the position of second- or third-order spectator, affirming the importance and persistence of audiences and spectators even within the genre of participatory art (Bishop 2012).

Figure 3. Jakub Geltner, 'Nest 6' (2015).

The term 'nest' cleverly symbolizes the tensions produced by these works. Nests are places of safety, shelter and propagation. By placing surveillance devices in nest arrangements or suggesting that they possess attributes similar to (other) nesting creatures, Geltner naturalizes the potentially predatory behaviour of surveillance as an expected, instinctual response to threats, such as humans who might seek to challenge the need for or appropriateness of surveillance. The hint of natural configurations for surveillance technologies defamiliarizes them for viewers, opening them up to renewed attention and inquiry. In the process, however, the nesting of technology and nature, machine and human, calls into question the primacy of the human. After all, when nonhuman creatures in the landscape look back, the viewer is interpellated as a decentred subject, as one actor among many, and possibly as prey. Given that modes of perception develop alongside technological tools for apprehending the world (Crary 1999), the nesting arrangements highlighted – and made strange – by Geltner constructing a discursive space for tracing the emergence of new ways of seeing and new subjectivities.

Troubling the watcher within

Most forms of technological surveillance evade scrutiny because their operations are hidden from view. This is true across the spectrum of surveillance possibilities, especially at the institutional level, ranging from national security programs, to social media algorithms, to workplace surveillance applications (Lyon 2007, Amoore 2013, Gilliom and Monahan 2013). To the extent that people are aware of everyday surveillance, it is often normalized as mundane, as with frequent-shopper cards used by grocery stores, or as discrete, as with people assuming that data collected for one purpose will not be used for alternative purposes (Graham and Wood 2003, Nissenbaum 2010, Staples 2014). In the era of big data especially, these are dangerous assumptions given that the emphasis is on unanticipated and unintuitive discoveries that combinations of data may reveal, not on the initial purposes for data collection (Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier 2013, Andrejevic 2014, Lyon 2014).

The art installations by Belgian artist Dries Depoorter disturbingly and effectively probe the ethics of surveillance made possible through the combination of public data sources. For instance, his 'Jaywalking' piece takes advantage of open video feeds from cameras at city intersections in different countries to 'catch' pedestrians in the act of jaywalking across streets (Depoorter 2015a, Greenberg 2016). If pedestrians cross without the proper signal, Depoorter's algorithm will automatically flag that violation and take a screen capture, thus producing legal evidence; next, it will ask museumgoers whether they would like to report the infraction to the local police department with jurisdictional authority (see Figure 4). Should viewers press the red

button indicating their assent, the image will be emailed to the police department, which could then ostensibly cite the person guilty of the offense.

Although it is unlikely that images sent to police from this art installation will result in fines for the identified jaywalkers, this participatory art project reveals the promiscuous logics of data systems and interpellates subjects as potential complicit actors in those systems. The innocuous-looking camera on the street corner can easily be integrated within larger systems of control, perhaps – as shown here – completely unbeknownst to the people being watched or the very owner of the camera in question. If an artist could capitalize on such technological affordances, then so too could those with institutional authority or others with malicious intent. In this case, the point is not simply that technological systems can be combined or data exchanged without checks, but rather that such systems and data can be appropriated by others and made to serve radically different institutional agendas than their originally intended ones. This is not anomalous; it is the driving logic. Technological protocols and contemporary economies facilitate and reward such data flows (Fuchs 2011, Mosco 2014, Monahan 2016).

Depoorter's Jaywalking piece also constructs viewers as subjects who are responsible for the outcome of the interaction and charges them to reflect on their ethical roles in the systems presented. Once a jaywalking match is
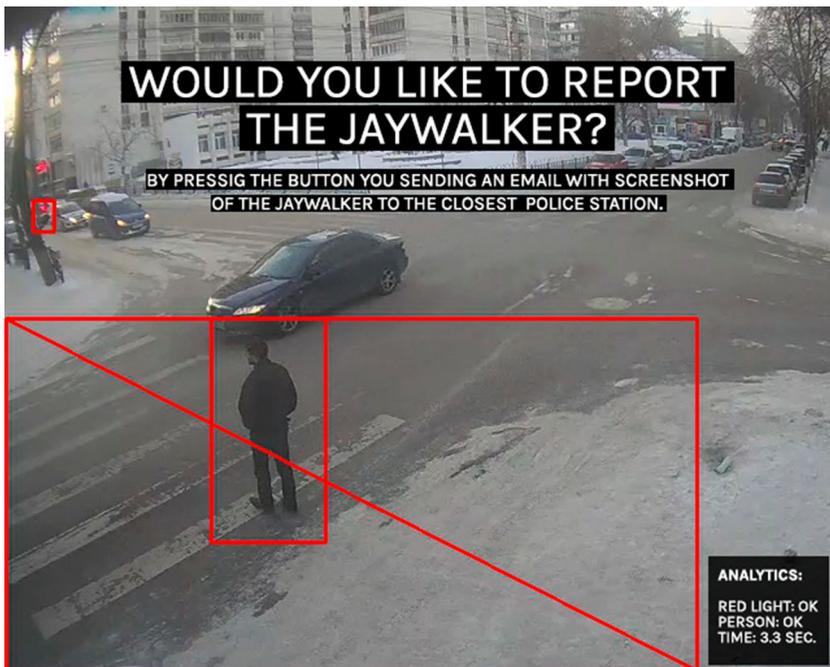

Figure 4. Dries Depoorter, 'Jaywalking' (2015).

found, the system hails viewers in this way: 'Would you like to report the jay-walker? By pressig [*sic*] the button you [will be] sending an email with [a] screenshot of the jaywalker to the closest police station' (Depoorter 2015a).[4] The decision rests with the person being hailed whether to act as a geographically removed 'sheriff' to police the actions of others or to let them off the hook.[5] Regardless of the decision, the person is interpellated such that the role of passive viewer is foreclosed; one must decide to press the button or refrain from doing so. One must recognize that he is an agent. Thus in generating discomfort for viewers by design, the artwork hints at the collective responsibility people bear for the effects of the largely opaque surveillance systems that permeate contemporary life. More subtly, this piece illustrates how abstract technological systems categorize people in non-negotiable yet significant ways. For instance, the pedestrian crossing the street becomes a 'jaywalker' only once the system algorithmically classifies him as such. The system interpellates the pedestrian as a law-break-ing subject even if the hail is silent and the person unaware, or aware only after the fact.[6]

Beyond art projects, public participation with actual disciplinary surveil-lance systems is not that far-fetched. Indeed, there have been a few well-pub-licized efforts to outsource to members of the public the labour-intensive monitoring of live video feeds. For instance, the state of Texas briefly ran a 'Virtual Border Watch' program that allowed anyone with access to a compu-ter and an Internet connection to monitor cameras along the U.S.-Mexico border and report suspicious sightings to law enforcement (Koskela 2011, Sandhu and Haggerty 2016). In another context, in Shoreditch, London, com-munity members in council estates were given access to closed-circuit televi-sion (CCTV) feeds from cameras in the neighbourhood so that they could inform the police of any suspicious behaviour they witnessed (Murakami Wood 2012, Trottier 2014, Debatty 2015). Rather than being a new idea, this is a recurring motif dating back at least to similar failed experiments with piping closed-circuit video feeds into New York City public housing apartments in the mid-1970s (Musheno *et al.* 1978). Beyond the official ratio-nales for these programs, it is easy to imagine that they cultivated fear and prejudice on the part of viewers. That said, there are fundamental differences between Depoorter's system and these other schemes. First, with the Jaywalk-ing installation, the actions of participants are semi-public, occurring in a space where others can observe and question one's actions. The situation of recursive watching – where others watch you watching others – could engender feelings of responsibility and conversations about choices made. Second, with Depoorter's work, viewers are encouraged to imagine the roles reversed, such that they were the ones being reported by unseen and unknown others. Viewers are implicitly asked to see themselves in the other and act accordingly. Thus the Jaywalking piece has the capacity to produce

empathy and compassion or possibly compunction if one does press the button to report the stranger. It does this by setting the conditions for self-reflexivity and an expanded notion of who is included in one's social sphere.

Seen as an intervention, Depoorter crafts performative pieces that generate discomfort in the service of ethical reflection. The participants are confronted with a decision they must make and likely experience a lingering sense of doubt about whether the decision had consequences beyond their brief moment of interaction.[7] The unavoidability of the choice positions viewers as agents in relationship with people they do not know and who are oblivious to the calculations that are being made about them. While not explicitly stated, this relationship is structurally similar to the one being made by countless other systems and viewers, where decisions based on partial data and reductive criteria have profound consequences for life chances (e.g. who gets a loan, who is granted asylum, who gets a job, who is targeted by the police). Just as those enrolled in Depoorter's system may be haunted by their actions or inactions, his work suggests that viewers should question both their complicity in and the justness of other systems of control.

Conclusion

Critical artworks about surveillance introduce compelling possibilities for rethinking the relationship of people to larger systems of control. The objective of this paper was to explore the ways in which some of these works frame and enrol viewing subjects, particularly through participatory techniques, in order to foster self-reflexivity and a sense of responsibility. By juxtaposing multiple, competing forms of interpellation, these artworks provide a different, if necessarily partial, perspective on the aesthetic orders that are coproduced by technological systems and institutional practices. They call into question the hidden logics of surveillance systems, which reduce people to decontextualized data elements to facilitate manipulation or, in the case of drone-based surveillance, elimination. By revealing some of these rationalities and pushing people to question their places within the systems, these art projects create a space for ideological critique.

If the goals are to challenge viewers and generate critical insights about surveillance, then the projects that nurture ambiguity seem best equipped to achieve these goals. For instance, the works by Jakub Geltner and Dries Depoorter each fashion ambiguous situations that engender discomfort, reflection and participation on the part of viewers. With Geltner's Nests installations, viewers must make sense of atypical arrangements and locations of video cameras that do not fit within standard explanatory models. Viewers appear to find the pieces oddly illegible and are kept ignorant about whether the cameras are real, if the footage is being watched, what the

messages of the works might be, or perhaps even if the camera configurations are an artwork. With Depoorter's Jaywalking piece, viewers are forced to make a decision that might affect someone else's life, someone whom they see but who is completely unaware of them. The ambiguity rests in whether the action of pushing the red button will or will not generate a chain reaction for which the participant would be responsible. #NotABugSplat, by contrast, is much more explicit with its messaging, which makes it easier to process by viewers even if the content is more disturbing.

Another theme pertains to the decentring of subjects. In the spirit of participatory art, each of the pieces reviewed here enroll viewers as participants who are parts of larger networks that extend beyond the locally sited artwork and which exceed absolute comprehension. The artworks interpellate viewers into their surveillance schema, where roles are assigned and difficult to contest. Put differently, the works reproduce some of the protocols of mainstream surveillance systems but in a way that instils both awareness and discomfort. #NotABugSplat temporarily decentres the viewer by directing attention to the viewing practices of drone pilots; however, it quickly recuperates the viewer as an agent responsible for bringing about change or pressuring others to do so. This work is clearly effective at bringing renewed attention to drone violence, but unlike the pieces by Geltner or Depoorter, it relies on a stable construction of the liberal subject who is called upon to act based on the information relayed by the artists. Geltner takes a different tack by underscoring the agency and naturalistic community of surveillance apparatuses that might take an interest in humans but are certainly not controlled by them. With Depoorter's work, dissonance adds to this dynamic by lending the impression that viewers are in control of a particular instance of surveillance while also profoundly powerless within the larger matrix of surveillance systems that govern their lives.

By fostering ambiguity and decentring the viewing subject, critical surveillance art can capitalize on the anxiety of viewers to motivate questions that might lead to greater awareness of surveillance systems, protocols and power dynamics. Works that use participation to make viewers uncomfortable can guide moments of self-reflexivity about one's relationship – and obligation – to others within surveillance networks. The task seems to be to find ways of extending states of dis-ease beyond momentary encounters with artworks or installations, thereby setting the stage for the emergence of a new aesthetic landscape.

Notes

1. Following from Andrea Mubi Brighenti, I use the term *surveillance art* to describe a broad range of art projects that engage with 'topics, concerns and procedures' relevant to the critical study of surveillance in society (Brighenti 2010, p. 175).

2. #NotABugSplat is an international project with representatives in the U.S. and Pakistan (#NotABugSplat 2014, D&AD 2015). I am grateful to Zac Parker for bringing this project to my attention.
3. The emphasis on girl children in need of saving is a rhetorical device that reproduces a set of implied binaries: between adults and children, men and women, Western and Other. It suggests that there is no innocence or humanity in adults, especially not in men, who in this frame cannot inspire empathy, only fear.
4. While perhaps unintentional, one could read the spelling and grammatical errors as subtle critiques of the fallibility of surveillance systems, which can generate and act on 'noise' with material effects for targets.
5. This installation is part of a larger suite of projects called 'Sheriff Software' (Depoorter 2015b).
6. See Gunders (2000) for reflections on how interpellative functions are delegated to CCTV in other contexts as well.
7. Depoorter's 'Jaywalking' piece is monitoring live video surveillance feeds and does really send emails to the police. Even if it did not do these things, the ambiguity surrounding its functionality could still produce malaise in viewers who were uncertain about the ethical implications of their (in)actions.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

Torin Monahan is a Professor of Communication at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His research focuses on institutional transformations with new technologies, with a particular emphasis on surveillance and security programs.

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