Hunting for prey

#1: June 2014. I am reading “Such a surveillance escapist might be unnerved to find him or herself retreating into a nature that is itself increasingly permeated by surveillance—populated by film crews, tagged trees, animals implanted with sensors, and overhead satellites, among many other things” (Haggerty and Trottier 2013: 1-2). Finally, an article on surveillance that speaks to what I have been experiencing at home.

My research-creation installation *hunting for prey* (2017) was nominated for the inaugural Surveillance Studies Network Arts Prize Fund and awarded an honourable mention. With this mention, I was invited to present my work during the eighth biennial Surveillance Studies Network (SSN) conference in Aarhus, Denmark, in June 2018. The work was circulated on social media and also featured in the SSN blog, *Blink*. These forms of publication and sharing of research-creation work are imperative to the advancement of academic research because they centre unique and innovative methodologies for knowledge production. In this instance, my scholarly creative practice was recognized as an active and desired producer of knowledges. Forms of programming that include creative outputs such as awards, publications, and exhibitions of creative research are imperative to change academic ecologies and discourses. The academy often privileges traditional forms of research such as theory and writing. Creative forms of knowledge building are often seen as extensions or exemplary of theory or of lesser rigour than their theoretical counterparts.

Research-creation is a scholarly methodology, drawn from creative fields such as fine arts, but centres creative processes and practices as producers of research and new knowledges. As a methodology, research-creation (a.k.a. practice-based research, practice-led research, and artistic research) has been active in Canadian academic institutions, especially in the humanities and social sciences. More specifically, research-creation as a methodology for academic research production has been highlighted by funding agencies such as Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), which provide artist-scholars with opportunities to fund their artistic research. However, with this support, artist-scholars seek/desire to formulate and produce a definition of research-creation that is not only fundable but that can be understood and practised throughout all academic and scholarly disciplines, including surveillance studies.

Research-creation is meant to produce knowledge in its own right and functions in ways that critique and problematize traditional methods of scholarly publications and examinations (Loveless 2015a, 2015b; Manning 2016). It invites spaces for failure, confusion, and discomfort, and audience and readers’ feelings, reactions, and thoughts are an integral part of the creative process. These forms of creative and artistic...
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scholarly interventions provide spaces for contemplation, engagement, and circulation that often exceed the boundaries imposed by traditional scholarly methods (Chapman and Sawchuk 2012). My experience as an artist-scholar has led me to believe that research-creation invites spaces for collaboration and reflection while also encouraging critical engagement, social practice, and analysis beyond the creative process and its publication. Drawing from hunting for prey as representative of my larger creative scholarly practice, in this paper I am advocating for a surveillance studies methodology of research-creation that will address the visual nature of surveillance as a practice. As such, I am suggesting that surveillance studies as a field could benefit from drawing further connections between surveillance as a practice and visual and artistic methods of research production. This paper explores some of the exciting and innovative ways that artistic research can contribute to and expand the scope of critical conversations happening at Surveillance Studies Network’s conferences, publications, and programming.

#2: December 2015, I am walking in the forest of Markstay, a small rural township east of Sudbury Ontario. I stop in front of a tree. A familiar place, and a familiar tree post. A familiar torn sign is nailed to the familiar post. I begin to think, “How long has this sign been here?—it has been here since before I remember. Since—I remember—taking walks with my Nanny—picking raspberries and puckering at the wild taste of chokecherries. There were birds, small rabbits, chipmunks... How long has the sign been here?” The sign reads, PRIVATE PROPERTY.

Figure 1: STÉFY, Private, experimental photography, Markstay, Ontario, 2016.

#3: May 2016, I have completed eleven interviews with ruralists living in the Municipality of Markstay/Warren. Hunting cameras are a familiar method of protecting ruralists and their property from human and non-human interlopers. For these landowners, the visual capabilities of the cameras are
crucial ways of documenting the identities of interlopers. This is a form of DIY surveillance in nature. But what do these cameras look like? What do they do?

#4: May 2016, I am shopping for a hunting camera on Amazon. There are many options. Some are larger than others; some are painted with camouflaged patterns, others are solid black; some are solar powered; and some may connect to cellular devices. They are financially accessible. All these options demonstrate some form of development in these devices. Older models are dark coloured and clunky. Newer models are small and camouflaged. Why would a non-human animal care about the colour and sophistication of these devices?

Figure 2: STÉFY, hunting for prey (detail), Centre for Indigenous Research Creation, Kingston, ON, 2016. Photograph by Chris Miner.

Research-Creation as Collaboration

#5: May 2016, I have installed a hunting camera on my parents’ property—every day in a different location, for two weeks. I caught you: robin. otter. crow.

Dear otter,

What were you thinking about while you playfully swam across my lens? Was the water cold? It was 21 degrees on shore. Quite a lovely, warm, quiet evening. 05/16. Late spring, not quite summer. The evening has always been my favourite time to swim. I hope to see you again soon—with my own eyes.

Stéfy
My Master of Arts project, *Organic Surveillance* (2016), is a series of multi-media and experimental artworks (including *hunting for prey*) that demonstrates the ways that ruralists in Northern Ontario, Canada, use surveillance practices, such as hunting cameras, to document human and non-human animal presence on their property. This project prompted collaboration between myself (the artist), land (Municipality of Markstay/Warren), technologies (hunting/scouting cameras), and ruralists. In the creation and production of my work, I often think about its role and dialogue within the larger field of surveillance studies. In the context of this field, research-creation may determine the ways that visual products and texts can produce knowledges that demonstrate the ubiquitous and documentative nature of contemporary surveillance practices. Scholar David Lyon (2007: 142) writes in *Surveillance Studies: An Overview* that we need to acknowledge what forms of surveillance are present in cultural texts (e.g., lyrics, film, literature) and how we interact with these forms of media, while also recognizing the ways that these mediums influence contemporary surveillance practices. For creative research projects, cultural texts are creative objects produced as processes of research and data aggregation. Creative academic projects and cultural objects centre art and research as contributors to cultural, political, and social dialogues progressing in surveillance studies and beyond.

During the research phase of my project *Organic Surveillance*, I thought carefully about which artistic mediums would best investigate my proposed research questions. These research questions were vague in nature to provoke moments of flexibility and to adjust my creative practice and methodology, to reflect my findings as they were produced at all stages of the creative research process. While formulating my research questions, I travelled to my area of analysis, Markstay/Warren, to begin preliminary research in the form of
photographic sketches. With the permission of several ruralists, I took photographs of their properties, focusing on deterrence mechanisms such as “no trespassing” signs, red circles, chains, and electric fences (McKnight 2016). This process revealed that ruralists are using hunting cameras as deterrence and surveillance mechanisms. I received ethics approval to conduct interviews, with the desire to understand the ruralists’ motivations for using hunting cameras as a surveillance practice. As a curious artist-researcher, I did not feel as though speaking to ruralists and documenting the cameras was adequately addressing the research questions at hand. I needed to know how the cameras functioned. To address this, I bought a personal hunting camera, then produced several video performances, and thousands of photographs, using the hunting camera as my medium (McKnight 2016). I created an online archive of my research-creation project (www.organicsurveillance.com) to promote community engagement beyond the data collection phase of my research.

Knowledge production and research in academia is often led by collaboration between communities, disciplines, and subjects. As such, research-creation recognizes the importance and academic rigour that stems from collaborative work, by collaborating with technicians, scholars, artists, and disciplines (Chapman and Sawchuk 2012). Artist-scholars often work in collaboration with organizations and institutions, such as being invited to present at the Surveillance Studies Network conferences or publish in its journal. When artist-scholars work and collaborate with non-artist-scholars, work and research reaches and engages with a variety of communities and perspectives. Since surveillance itself is ubiquitous and is questioned, critiqued, and centred in many fields of research, including fine arts, these collaborations allow for knowledge to circulate politically, socially, culturally, and creatively. These scholarly interventions create networks for input, publication, diversification in methodologies and knowledge production, and intersectional modes of inquiry.

These forms of collaborative interventions, as seen in my project Organic Surveillance, are necessary to research and academic integrity because they draw knowledges from several sources, such as technology, community interaction, and artwork. Further, they allow scholars to physically explore the social, political, and cultural functions of surveillance technologies and manipulate them creatively in order to fully understand their purposes. Research-creation in the context of surveillance studies seeks to draw knowledge from the collaboration between objects and subjects, artwork and audience, and technology and user/consumer. Surveillance studies and research-creation methodologies work cohesively to produce knowledges through interaction and experience. Artist-scholars, like myself, who draw from research-creation and surveillance studies, bridge the gap between theory, inquiry, research, and practice to produce intersectional and interdisciplinary work that can be circulated and published beyond academic institutions. These forms of creative output allow knowledges produced and interrogated by creative means to circulate broadly and productively complicate traditional fields of inquiry. By doing this, we can generate new knowledges and questions that are only possible after the creative output has been circulated.

Collaboration is a transdisciplinary field and not limited to human-to-human interaction. My research-creation practice draws knowledge and support from a variety of academic disciplines and fields, as well as material forms and technologies. Similarly, Torin Monahan and David Murakami Wood (2018: xxi) call surveillance studies a “transdisciplinary field,” because it draws ideas, concerns, and frictions from several disciplines. Aside from working collaboratively with scholars, artists, technicians, producers, and community members, research-creation suggests collaboration between disciplines, fields of knowledge production, and methodologies. As such, research-creation troubles traditional ideas that practice and theory are binary (Boon and Levine 2018: 12). I valued my time engaging with land and technologies as collaborators and interlocutors of knowledges, as well as thinking through theories and ideas offered by the field of surveillance studies.

Research-Creation as Function Creep

For my art project, I adapted the concept of function creep to expand on the ways that technologies function as tools for the practice of surveillance but also how they can be manipulated creatively to explore new uses and inquiry. Christel Backman (2012: 277) writes that function creep is “a process in which a procedure designed for a specific purpose ends up serving another purpose for which it was originally not planned to perform.” The purpose and intent of the object is modified by the creator knowingly or accidentally. Function creep is often theorized and interrogated in surveillance studies, but I believe this concept has a lot to offer when thinking of the ways in which art practice can critically rethink and revitalize surveillant modes. Thus, I implemented creative function creep in my art to experiment with and understand the ubiquity of function creep as a practice. Further, I demonstrated the ways that surveillance theories can contribute to creative scholarship and how art can offer surveillance studies new ways of thinking about knowledge production and the practices surveillance scholars theorize.

In many ways, function creep and research-creation are parallel methodologies. Both are contingent on improvisation, experimentation, and the transformation and/or building of new objects and knowledges. Stephen K. Levine (2013) asserts that improvisation in arts-based research gives artists and viewers new ways of seeing what is old. Somewhat similarly, Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson (2006: 19)

Figure 4: STÉFY, stopmotion, Markstay, ON, 2015.
emphasize, “function creep tends to operate in a localized ad hoc and opportunistic fashion.” They further claim, “new tools create a new environment of monitoring possibilities that were perhaps unanticipated by the original proponents of the system.” Function creep (also known in surveillance studies as surveillance creep or control creep) has been critiqued as negatively expanding technology to further control and surveil citizens (Yttri Dahl and Rudinow Saetnan 2009). However, as scholars Johanne Yttri Dahl and Ann Rudinow Saetnan (2009: 85) argue, “how democratic or undemocratic the function implementation process has been may also be linked to the outcomes—how we see a given function as affecting distributions of power, autonomy, knowledge, access to resources.”

I suggest artist-scholars think about our practices as a form of creative function creep, where we manipulate ideas, processes, and methods to best address the research questions at hand. In their article “Creation-as-Research: Critical Making in Complex Environments,” Owen B. Chapman and Kim Sawchuk (2012) highlight the critical engagement that may happen when we explore technology through a creative lens. Artists and creative practitioners purposely and critically expand the anticipated function of technologies and objects to unsettle and unpack their intended functions. We do so by removing objects or technologies from their intended places; using technologies for artistic purposes rather than their intended manufactured use; and experimenting with form, materiality, audience reception, and artist and manufacturer intent.

My work hunting for prey elucidates my thinking on this notion of creative function creep. In addition to recording images on hunting cameras in situ, I also install cameras within the art gallery setting. This installation fixes a hunting camera to a tree branch and monitor in a gallery space. The hunting camera is intended to capture the movement and identities of audience members who enter and leave the gallery space. hunting for prey demonstrates the abilities of the camera and its new intent to capture gallery-visiting interlopers. Inspired by landowners’ use of the technology, hunting for prey provides audience members with the opportunity to engage with the surveyor (the artist[s] and audience member[s]). The hunting camera acts as a form of CCTV camera, with the purpose of capturing the identities of those who enter the gallery space. In this instance, I have creeped the intent of the camera and produced a new object that unpacks the utility of the hunting camera and how its function has been creeped by landowners.

Function creep as an application of research-creation draws connections between the field of surveillance studies, technology, and creative practice. Art created with function creep in mind contributes to new ways of thinking through moments of surveillance and technology. Creative function creep is a hybridized method of drawing from both surveillance studies and fine arts to productively examine the possible outcomes and applications of function creep as used for surveillance purposes. These forms of artistic intervention contribute to surveillance research because they use surveillance and its technologies as formal applications and methods of interrogating how surveillance and its processes function in creative, political, and social contexts.

#8: November 2016, hunting for prey.

Dear exhibition and gallery interlopers,

Once you enter this space, you are under constant surveillance. The camera will continue to follow you—activated when it senses your presence near. Though, there is no one watching you on the other side. The footage is public for all audience members to see. This is what being on the other side of the camera is like. Today, you are hunting. Today you are hunted.

S
Moving Forward

Programming and interventions that seek to collaborate and consult with artist-scholars demonstrate a need and urgency for more interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research that includes creative methodologies. Instituting awards and publications that invite artist-scholars to exhibit their findings in these forums is exciting because it establishes research-creation as a current and generative method for knowledge production. Projects such as hunting for prey hybridize theory, creative practice, and research to produce knowledges through resisting disciplinary norms and traditions. I think the field of surveillance studies can draw inspiration from methods employed through creative practices, such as creative function creep and community-based collaborations, to further enrich critical discussions of contemporary surveillance culture and society. Similarly, artist-scholars will benefit from engaging with surveillance studies scholars to further understand and articulate current trends, dialogues, and surveillance processes.

As a surveillance artist-scholar, I am advocating for more opportunities to share my work with surveillance scholars who are interested in exploring and unpacking surveillance and its ubiquity. To do this, I suggest we continue to promote research-creation in publications, conferences, and on organizing committees, not only to optimize artist participation, but also to demonstrate the scholarly rigour and research that is possible.
by using creative research methodologies. I encourage the Surveillance Studies Network to consider new ways of exhibiting these projects, through online exhibition platforms, gallery exhibitions, or by promoting online surveillance art archives in their publications and programming. Further, I suggest we consider inviting curators and art historians to participate in these discussions by contributing their insight on how surveillance art functions politically in different spaces.

Art and creative research can enrich surveillance studies by drawing connections between methodology, practice, technology, and surveillance theory. Creative interventions are best served when given opportunities and forums for their discussion and analysis, but also by inviting the artists to be the advocates for their creative research. Research-creation is a practice of care, therefore artist-scholars encourage care in their applications and exhibitions. Indeed, the artist-scholar is the producer of the creative objects, and the objects are the interlocutors of knowledge and research. As interlocutors, the creative objects can be shared with the surveillance studies community for interaction, engagement, and advancement of knowledge in the field.

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References