Article | Covert: The artist as voyeur

Carolyn McKay

University of Sydney, Australia. carolyn.mckay@sydney.edu.au

Abstract

An engagement with the aesthetics, rhetorics and methodologies of surveillance presents a canvas on which visual artists can critique, subvert or just play with emergent technologies. This paper probes artistic methodologies that implicate surveillance and the ethical tensions of appropriating the surveilled lives of strangers for creative pursuits. The ethically challenging practices of several contemporary artists are discussed, including Sophie Calle, and the author reflects upon her own body of work, *Covert*. The role of the artist, the nature of the gaze, privacy versus artistic expression, surveillance as an art platform and the eternal tensions between objectivity and subjectivity of using a mechanical device/prosthetic eye are explored.

Introduction

It is a short leap from looking (fixing one's gaze upon another) to voyeurism (taking delight in extended gazing) to spying (surreptitiously studying the actions of another). Surveillance, a type of spying, has interested artists and fascists alike since the birth of video technology.

(Rush 2004: 113)

In January 2011, I travelled to Japan, brand new HD video camera in hand, no particular project in mind. By the end of the trip I realised I had hours of footage filmed covertly from behind glass. Windows of trains and hotels afforded me the chance to be a watchful eye observing the unsuspecting, revealing unconnected episodes of strangers' lives. Reflecting upon the footage, it captured my own ambiguous connection with Japan; a country where I had once lived, but a place where I had been forever a fingerprinted 'alien', a resident yet officially 'the other' who observed the culture but was never embedded within it. The frame of reference for the resulting suite of digital videos is of an outsider, viewing the lives of others from a clandestine distance. Upon returning to Australia I found these secret violations contained mesmerising and poetic sequences that suggested a new body of work. A long process of editing and manipulating the footage ensued to create a body of work I called *Covert*. The suite of works exhibited at *galleryeight* in The Rocks district of Sydney, 2012 included:

Four High Definition looped videos, with audio:

The walking man, 02:45 minutes—sunrise near Naruto whirlpools, and a man's morning ritual is witnessed

Man reading, 02:00 minutes—a masked man, engrossed in reading, unknowingly becomes trapped at a train station

High rise, 01:36 minutes—life in Japan is a vertical multiplicity

Woman on a train, 02:42 minutes—the evening city lights of Osaka suffuse a masked woman, lost in her own thoughts

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The walking man, flipbook

The works have raised a number of issues for my individual art practice, not least being the ethical tensions of appropriating the lives of others for creative pursuits. As I reflect upon my own habits as a visual artist and constant observer of others, I wonder if I am some kind of voyeur? How does the secret use of a video camera impact upon the gaze? What are the ethics of filming in public? Has the copyright to others' lives been breached by these works? What is so appealing about the surreptitious process and the resulting moving images? *Covert* presents a departure point to reflect upon firstly, my own unease in making and exhibiting such a body of work, secondly, notions of observation, surveillance and voyeurism, and finally, artistic methodologies that engage with surveillance cultures. Many questions are posited and complexities raised; given the ever-changing nature of technologies, artistic practices and the visual culture environment, the answers remain slippery.

Carolyn McKay, *The walking man* 2012. HD video 02:45 minutes looped with audio

The artist's gaze

The gaze comes in several forms: Michel Foucault discusses the medical gaze of psychiatry and the panoptic gaze of disciplinary institutions, many theorists have considered and critiqued the hegemony of the voyeuristic and disempowering male gaze, and then there is scopophilia or pleasure in looking at others (Manlove 2007; Betterton 1985). Martin Jay, referencing Roland Barthes, suggests that the gaze informs, the gaze relates through exchange, the gaze possesses and it seeks something or someone (Jay 1993: 441). According to John Berger: 'To look is an act of choice' (Berger 1972: 8). It is a wilful practice (Sweeny 2006: 10), usually involving a reciprocity of gaze, except in the case of surveillant methods and technologies. Whether the gaze is socially acceptable or transgressive appears to be a function of the viewing relationship, intention and power plays.

In this paper, the gaze of the artist is explored, as well as the creative mediation of that gaze by secret lenses and recording devices. The scope of this paper is restricted to visual surveillance and ignores practices of eavesdropping, so often appropriated as a creative device by authors, actors, playwrights and poets.

The artist's gaze, followed by creative interpretation and translation, has traditionally involved a direct and corporeal relationship between the object, the eyes and a hand wielding a stick of willow charcoal, paint brush or sculpting tool. Surveillance, a form of gaze mediated by technology, offers a new way of seeing and being seen. As such, surveillance presents as an appealing tool and platform for visual artists—new modes of perception and observation create new modes of representation and exhibition.

For centuries, artists have embraced new technologies (and ingestible substances) to alter or heighten their perception—prisms, optical devices such as the camera obscura, mathematical grids and mirrors (Virilio 1994: 4, 15; Crary 1992: 25). Emergent digital technologies are the new visual prostheses 'relocating vision to a plane severed from a human observer', according to Jonathan Crary (1992: 1). Paul Virilio suggests that we now perceive the world through artificial or synthetic vision; the human eye 'no longer organises the search for truth' (Virilio 1994: 43, 59). Whether or not human vision is so diminished, the author would argue that her eyesight (albeit augmented for much of her life by visual prostheses: contact lenses or glasses) remains fundamental in the subjective search for subject matter, the process of composition, aesthetic choices of digital editing and constructed soundscape, and in the final presentation of the work. The lens is a servant, not the master, of the creative process.

Stalking strangers

Critical to a discussion of the intersections of art making with the surveillance of strangers is the extensive practice of Sophie Calle. Her various works explore 'the artist as subject; the voyeur as artist; the viewer as witness to the unreliability of images' (Rush 2004: 114). Calle, renowned for her ethically challenging works, explores arbitrary observation, the voyeuristic nature of the artist, dramatic games of pursuit as well as a role reversal from stalker to surveillance subject. She has made several works exploring the voyeuristic nature of the artist, following strangers and orchestrating surveillance of herself. Her practice involves surveillant photographic images sometimes staged, other times purporting to be documentary.

Calle has undertaken arbitrary acts of surveillance to generate dramatic narratives filled with guilty voyeuristic anxiety through her emotive and detached documentation (Hand 2005: 475). She writes:

For months in 1979 I followed strangers on the street—for the pleasure of following them, not because they particularly interested me. I photographed them without their knowledge, took note of their movements, then finally lost sight of them and forgot them.

(Calle and Auster 1999: 68)

She goes on to write:

At the end of January 1981, on the streets of Paris, I followed a man whom I lost sight of a few minutes later in the crowd. That very evening, quite by chance, he was introduced to me at an opening. During the course of our conversation, he told me he was planning an imminent trip to Venice. I decided to follow him.

(ibid: 76-7)

At that moment, Calle's arbitrary surveillance of strangers transformed into a singular pursuit (Hand 2005: 474). She covertly followed his journey, wearing a blond wig and armed with a camera, giving rise to one of her most famous works. *Suite vénitienne* (1979) involves Calle pursuing, like a shadow, and

photographing a man referred to as Henri B. for 2 weeks from Paris to Venice. The photographic work, inseparable from the text of Calle's diary entries, amplifies the breaches of normal social and spatial etiquette—the 'correct distancing in ordering social interaction' (Hand 2005: 475). Jean Baudrillard considers Calle's stalking to be a type of game of seduction where she follows but does not approach and remains detached, although she is ultimately caught in the act (Thorn 2010: 8-12). Further, Baudrillard considers *Suite vénitienne* to be a manifestation of photography as the art of disappearance—the *object* disappears and reappears as an *image*: 'photography is itself an act of disappearance, which captures the other vanished in front of the lens, which preserves him vanished on film, which, unlike a gaze, saves nothing of the other but his vanished presence' (Baudrillard 1988: 86 in Durden 2013: 33). This notion of capturing a vanished presence is explored in a later section of this paper. In his novel *Leviathan*, Paul Auster's fictional character 'Maria' is based upon Calle, and he writes that the project was a 'complex and disturbing experience' for the artist leaving her feeling as if 'she had been taking pictures of things that weren't there. The camera was no longer an instrument that recorded presences, it was a way of making the world disappear, a technique for encountering the invisible' (Auster 1992: 64). Interestingly, Calle seems preoccupied only with her own artistic journey and remains detached from issues of ethics and power relations.

The role of the artist

If it is accepted that the normative gaze of social convention is one that can be returned, it is no wonder that the hidden surveillant gaze of an artist such as Calle seems such a violation. Surveillance produces a dissociation of the see/being seen dyad. But is it not implicit in artistic and creative practice that there be a pushing of boundaries and challenging of conventions? The role of the arts practitioner, defined to include performance, music and literature (Gaztambide-Fernández 2008: 258 n.1), can be many things including the questioning, subversion or resistance of expectations, assumptions, social order or meta-narratives to create experiential response, awareness or transformation. Such an artist is one who engages critically with hegemonic discourses, often in the public sphere, to identify and challenge normative parameters.

An engagement with surveillance methodologies and aesthetics presents a particularly enticing canvas on which artists such as Calle can play. Artists may be seen as scribes who overtly respond to cultural, political and societal forces to create inscriptions or text that confront meaning, representation and stereotypes (ibid: 244-9). Through disruptive forces, artists aim to provoke and generate a dialogue with an audience using a variety of aesthetic platforms for interaction or intervention. Of course, within the confines of a totalitarian state, artists must carefully negotiate the boundaries between servile compliance and law-breaker status (Glazova 1988). Recent examples of the dangerous tensions between State, political activism and creative practice include the treatment of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei (McMillan-Scott 2011) and Russian punk musicians Pussy Riot (Hermant 2012).

Even within a democracy such as Australia, tensions exist between creativity, aesthetics and ethics *especially* when a camera lens is implicated. In 2008, the internationally renowned artist Bill Henson was the subject of moral panic regarding photographs he had taken of adolescents. With media claims of child pornography, the works affronted the public and even (then) Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd who decried the images as 'revolting'. Helen McDonald writes that the art gallery had released an image of an adolescent girl, in that liminal state between childhood and womanhood, into the 'amoral space of the internet where the distinction between art and pornography might seem to dissolve' and Henson had broken powerful taboos by showing images of budding breasts (McDonald 2011: 26). While she writes that 'Surveillance through the artist's camera compared with that of unmanned surveillance cameras is based on a more intimate relationship between the watcher and the watched' (ibid: 25), McDonald suggests that Henson demonstrates a clear understanding of the fine line between empathy and exploitation of photographic subjects, and the moral negotiation of relationships of power. Henson has insisted that his art practice is ethical and non-exploitative given the parental informed consent. Most

artists and arts writers/critics would consider the image of a naked adolescent girl that provoked the controversy, *Untitled 2008*, is dignified, the product of skill and artistic merit, and not sexualised nor pornographic, unlike much contemporary advertising. The images, while potentially uncomfortable and confronting to individual moral boundaries, are aesthetically pleasing and hauntingly beautiful. But perhaps only to the art-educated (elite?) eye. Susan Paterson writes that Henson's work is inspired by the rich painterly techniques and chiaroscuro effects of Caravaggio, and his images are metaphors for the vulnerability and fragility of humanity that must be considered within the discourse of art, the artist's intention and the context of the works. According to Paterson, Henson's work is confronting to viewers uninitiated to 'the aesthetic canons of "high art"' (Paterson 2010: 217). She writes: 'There is no doubt that those uneducated in reading art from an aesthetic viewpoint will take a photograph of a naked adolescent as a sign of something "evil", rather than a metaphorical symbol which may simply be an instrument for thought' (ibid: 220). Melinda Hinkson describes Henson's aesthetic as an intersection of baroque with the hyperreal, the richness of cinematic stills and gritty imagery filled with decay, death and sex: 'they convey fragments of experience on the edge of euphoria or social abyss—a contradictory state depicted in a distinctive deep black background for which Henson is renowned' (Hinkson 2009: 203).

High art and aesthetic considerations aside, there are undoubtedly shifting community standards and particular sensitivities towards images of children. The possible misappropriation of nude photographs of children 'makes us nervous and we seek to protect the rights of the child' writes Anne Marsh (2000). Interestingly, and just to add to the complexities and contradictions of this situation, Marsh writes of Henson's work at a time before the 2008 incident: 'As with many of Henson's photographs of youth set against nighttime land/city scapes the position of the photographer as voyeur is underlined. He is a kind of stalker who transforms his subjects into angelic, mystical, sometimes fetishist or archetypal images...' (ibid). 'Voyeur' and 'stalker' would probably not be labels that Henson would now relish.¹

Hinkson suggests that Henson's work cannot be defended merely on the basis that he has been making this kind of work for decades; she argues that 'something important has shifted in our visual culture environment that reconfigures relations between images and bodies which needs to be taken into account' (2009: 211). This comment rings true not only in relation to images of children but also generally to shifting visual culture in an environment of diminishing privacy and increasing surveillance. Surveillance technologies do not just regulate and discipline society's behaviour; our interface with these technologies have changed the way we see the everyday world and ourselves—our visual culture is impacted (Schirato and Webb 2004: 56). Visual culture encompasses visual information, representation and communication through images in society (Sweeny 2006: 294), and because artists generate forms of visuality, their practices are entwined with visual culture. Undoubtedly, the author's individual visual response has shifted as her art practice and forms of communication have become increasingly digitised. The tensions and anxieties between artistic freedom and the morality of the majority will continue to be tested and examined as new technologies and artistic practices evolve.

Staring at nudes

The fixing of an artist's gaze upon the naked human form has been fundamental to art practice, and subject matter, for a very long time. Surveillance and voyeurism are manifest in *Diana and her nymphs spied upon by satyrs*, Sir Peter Paul Rubens and Frans Snyder c.1616; *Susanna and the Elders*, Guercino 1617; and *Nymph spied upon by Satyrs*, Nicolas Poussin c.1626. Edgar Degas voyeuristically sought to

¹ The 2008 Henson controversy was resolved when the NSW Director of Public Prosecutions recommended that no charges of child pornography be laid against the artist, and the images were rated with the mild label 'Parental Guidance' by the Australian Classification Board. 'Bill Henson's Photographic Work Seized From Gallery by Police' <http://www.abc.net.au/archives/80days/stories/2012/01/19/3415368.htm> accessed 12 May 2013.

portray his series of nudes at their toilet ‘as if you looked through a keyhole’ (Betterton 1985: 16; Virilio 1994: 30).²

I started my art training by engaging with very traditional studio practices at Sydney’s Julian Ashton Art School, (and later at the Tom Bass Sculpture Studio) where my first year was spent drawing the skeleton in various poses, then studying anatomy books to understand the structure and functions of muscles and ligaments in the human body. This was all preparatory study before promotion in my second year to the life room where I spent the following two years drawing and painting the nude. During this training, I was taught to look, to gaze, to stare. In the words of American photographer Walker Evans (1903-1975) who in the 1930s covertly photographed New York subway passengers with his 35mm camera hidden under his coat: ‘*Stare. It is the way to educate your eye, and more. Stare, pry, listen, eavesdrop. Die knowing something. You are not here long*’ (Garland-Thomson 2009: 118).

I was taught to stare ardently and forensically, to undertake a mindful engagement with the gaze upon the body of the model, to gain knowledge of that particular anatomy—the relationships and rhythms that define the individual—with the goal being to render an essence, representation and understanding of the body, a translation of perception from the eyes through hand and charcoal to paper—an experience entwining a desire for knowledge, an aesthetic appreciation and enjoyment of gazing upon the human form. Perhaps the life drawing class was also an inquisitive opportunity involving a level of objectification of the model. A power imbalance between artist, model or muse seems inevitable, perhaps dependent upon their relationship and questions of gender or sexuality of the participants. While life drawing is not necessarily a voyeuristic experience, if voyeurism is defined as gaining sexual pleasure from watching others, there is undoubtedly a difference between gazing at a nude model versus a pile of fruit. Can artists necessarily hide behind ‘the guise of disinterested aesthetic contemplation’ (Betterton 1985: 5-6)?

The author’s art practice segued from paint to digital video and photomedia during postgraduate research at Sydney College of the Arts where the painting studio is filled with painters wielding handheld cameras instead of brushes. The digital media was appropriate for my research project that explored the nature of eyewitness testimony in murder trials. My digital practice therefore evolved from a painterly perspective with an interest in experimenting with the moving image within a visual arts discourse, rather than film studies, and this underpins the approach in this paper. Rush discusses the origins of video art; while accepting that much of the language of video art is borrowed from film studies, he writes: ‘Video, in the hands of some of its early practitioners like Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci, William Anastasi, and others was merely another material put to use in the service of an idea: not an identifying material or medium that defined the artist’ (Rush 2007: 8). Similarly, the medium of video was merely at my disposal providing a different conceptual toolbox for experimentation, to broaden my arts practice into the hybrid arena, and to produce works meant for a gallery context, not cinema. At the same time and in the same vein, I began exploring performance art, more concerned with implicating my own body in the process than any considerations of theatre or acting. New video tools provide me with new forms of seeing and representation, and form part of the continuum of my ever-evolving art practice.

Power relations and ethics

Flowing from my traditional art training and years of drawing and sculpting the nude, it is interesting to reflect upon the difference between having been granted access to the spectacle of a paid model’s body versus watching/filming people unawares—perhaps all figurative art-making encompasses elements of transgression. What exactly is the difference between the use of someone’s image with their express

² As an aside, sovereign power as the centre of a network of surveillance is visually manifested in motifs of all-hearing ears and omniscient eyes gloriously depicted on the queen’s cloak in *Elizabeth I The Rainbow Portrait*, attributed to Isaac Oliver c. 1600.

consent, as against without their knowledge, and how does the mediation and recording of the image by a video camera further transform the power relations? If art needs to challenge social and aesthetic conventions, what are the ethical ambiguities and complexities? The use of technologies to extend the range of the human eye and the ensuing lack of mutuality of the gaze are complex issues to explore within the 21st century's inescapable surveillance. As discussed above, the practices of Henson, Calle and probably the author's, call into question the moral negotiation of relationships of power and the imbalance between the operator/photographer/artist and the subject. For Susan Sontag, the camera is a weapon, for Foucault it is the eye of the overseer or prison guard (Marsh 2000).

Daniel Palmer, in confronting candid photography, states that power relations are always implicated within the photographic act (Palmer 2011: 111). Troubling, perhaps, is that Calle's photographic practice seemingly does not consider the 'moral negotiation of relationships of power' at all. 'Artists and media-makers collect, observe, reflect and reinterpret that which is around them. We give them licence and they take the liberty. It is not a right, it just happens that way' according to Mike Stubbs (Stubbs 2004: 17). In Calle's *Suite vénitienne* discussed above, it could be argued that liberties are more than taken, there appears to be a complete disregard of any moral obligations. Perhaps that is the overwhelmingly seductive appeal of Calle's work—we as viewers are dared to vicariously enjoy the wicked thrill of the chase and the overstepping of normative social boundaries. Auster reflects upon the fictitious artist 'Maria' in *Leviathan*, suggesting that these works were driven by a passion for investigation and risk-taking: 'Her subject was the eye, the drama of watching and being watched' (Auster 1992: 63), so as viewers, we must just overlook any ethical considerations.

'To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed', Susan Sontag (2008: 4) wrote about the feeling of knowledge and power that comes from still photography, and this notion may be extrapolated into moving image technologies such as video. She continues: 'To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed' (ibid: 14). That comment resonates with me; the people I filmed in *Covert* have been morphed into an art form that I control and own; they are even my copyrighted images. In *Covert*, power is exercised over the subject matter; for example, the surveilled subject in 'Man reading' starts to leave the frame as his train pulls out from the station. Through editing and temporal manipulation, that moment is reversed forcing him to return to the station to replay his actions repeatedly, until I finally allow his train to depart, with the camera capturing the blurred background as the scene fades to black.

Certainly Foucault would suggest that to control the visibility of another, such as the 'Man reading', is to exert power over that person, and he explores the regimes of vision, technologies, power, control, knowledge and the body. The panopticon, and its more recent version, the electronic panopticon (Lianos and Douglas 2000: 105; Sweeny 2006: 296), is a powerful metaphoric device for understanding the impact of technological changes in the ordering techniques of society (Foucault 1995: 202). With surveillance technologies such as CCTV, the presence and absence of the viewer is unverifiable—the population is unaware of exactly who is observing and when, again subverting the social norm of reciprocity of gaze. Much of today's surveillance to which we wilfully submit ourselves is cellular and, unlike the panopticon that Foucault uses as a metaphor for State surveillance, is no longer dependent on lines of human sight (Manovich 2006: 224).

A provocative artistic work that interrogates ethics and trust is *The Married Man* project by Natasha Caruana. The work involved eighty dates with men seeking extra-marital affairs and during the dates, Caruana took clandestine photographs and made secret audio recordings of her encounters with these would-be adulterers. Caruana positions herself as an ethnographer, a participant-observer with a camera lens, yet has an awareness of the ethical complexities of the work. In an interview she says: 'The whole thing is ethically questionable—I'm taking pictures of a private moment, but then they're putting

themselves online [to find a mistress], and they're cheating on their domestic lives'. Who has the moral high ground in this scenario? It is unlikely that her surveilled subjects will complain. Caruana also reflects upon the ethical public presentation of the body of work, discussed later in this paper.³

Throughout the experience of making *Covert* I did feel slightly predatory, sensing that I was secretly thieving, violating and objectifying a portion of someone's daily life for my art. 'Surveillance confiscates the gaze for its own profit, appropriates it, and submits' the subject to it (Jay 1993: 382). The process of editing and manipulating the video footage was an exercise of power over the surveilled subject's image and representation. Nevertheless, I have to admit that there was a certain thrilling tension, perverse pleasure and almost titillation in filming 'under cover'.

Objectivity and truth

Issues of authenticity, truth and the camera's perceived objectivity arise in photographic and video works. Since the photographic camera appeared in the 19th century, it has been perceived as a nonhuman form of intervention, objective in its mechanical functioning and chemical process, and seen as an accurate recording device of reality.

I argue that my video artwork—its contents and presentation—are the product of both the tools of my trade and own subjectivity. A reductive view of the making of *Covert* could be that it simply involved flicking a switch to capture a scene and the resulting works could be dismissed as 'mechanical' or 'automatic' products (Bazin 1967: 13 in Durden 2013: 37-38). In both painting and photography, Bazin accepts that a person selects the subject matter but the painter, in applying paint, is the agent of mediation between the subject and the image, whereas the photographer utilises photochemical or digital process to create an image directly from the subject. Bazin therefore considers photographs to have a distinctive nature. In the making of *Covert*, there were mechanical processes, yet the long process of editing and translation through temporal, visual and chromatic manipulation has resulted in imagery where I, like a painter, am the agent of mediation. *Covert* is more concerned with subjective mediation to create a world, a painting in motion, and to make the images my own, rather than reveal life as it is. I did not just *take* footage, I *made* an audio visual work. Contrary to Bazin's goal of realism and objectivity, I have aimed to create artworks of surveilled subjects abstracted from their real world and translated into a more poetic fictional realm through processes of desaturation, mirroring, temporal modifications and eerie audioscapes. The intent behind the body of work was to create intriguing or meditative moving images with their own inner realities that could loop indefinitely within a gallery context. In 2012 I curated a video screening, *Anakhronismos*, at Sydney's Bondi Pavilion for Waverley Council. The exhibition drew together a number of well-known and emerging artists whose works related to the curatorial theme of backward + time.⁴ What I wrote in that catalogue also applies to the experimental intent behind *Covert*:

Time code is the defining language of digital video. Artists find expression in frames per second, with editing software allowing temporal relationships to be splintered, echoed, layered and suspended, expanding non-linear possibilities. Video, the 'art of time' according to video historian Michael Rush, has been used by artists to foreground the subjective experience of both duration and timelessness. Moments can be dramatically

³ Diane Smyth, *Natasha Caruana's Married Men* <http://www.bjp-online.com/british-journal-of-photography/project/1936264/natasha-caruanas-married>; see also http://natashacaruana.com/works/the_married_man accessed online 19 May 2013.

⁴ *Anakhronismos*, January 2012 included Anne Ferran, Yoram Gross, Matthew Hopkins, Brian Joyce and Trevor Ditcham, Carolyn McKay, Kate Richards and Ross Gibson, and Vanessa White. The exhibition was part of Waverley Council's *Illuminations* programme.

fast-forwarded or extended, slowed, repeated, revisited with re-editing and through looping repetition, a mesmerising endless episode may be created.

The surveilled *Covert* subjects, while treated with dignity and humanity, are, from the author's perhaps contradictory perspective, raw material, akin to the ubiquitous still life arrangement that I have taken the liberty of appropriating and exploiting for my artistic purposes. Both the subject matter and the medium of video were conveniently at my disposal for use in my hybrid arts practice. Artists, like bowerbirds, collect subject matter and tools to construct their practice and art.

Regardless of whether the video camera's recording is pre-programmed or conducted by a human operator, there is always a certain choice of perspective, delineation of space and framing of subject matter. Sturken and Cartwright contend that 'the aura of machine *objectivity* clings to mechanical and electronic images' even when aesthetic and subjective choices have been clearly made. They conclude that: 'This combination of the subjective and the objective is a central tension in camera-generated images' (Sturken and Cartwright 2001:16) and on-going issue when artworks involve the use of a mechanical prosthetic eye. It is worth underlining that behind the prosthetic eye/lens is a human selecting the scene.

Catching strangers unawares

What I found particularly appealing in the *Covert* images were people revealed unawares, unposed, introspective and natural. In a public space, they were immersed in self-absorption and alone with their thoughts. I captured *Woman on a train* by pointing my video camera in the opposite direction of my target, the camera finding her reflected image on my window as well the reflected nightscape, overlaid on the actual view from my window, fractured by the blur of a passing train. The several layers created an ambiguity of the line of sight, and at the *Covert* exhibition opening, gallery visitors were confused as to where I was in relation to the woman. The video work involved digital manipulation in terms of colour saturation, temporal changes and added strange audioscape, but the line of sight remained authentically mine. The masked woman sits on the evening Osaka train with bags of shopping, looking up, gazing inwardly, and never at me.

Slavoj Žižek asserts that the camera's eye is uncanny and weird and he explores this through Marcel Proust's *The Guermantes Way*.⁵ Proust writes of walking into a room where his grandmother is unaware of his presence: 'I was in the room, or rather I was not yet in the room since she was not aware of my presence...she had abandoned herself to a train of thoughts which she had never allowed to be visible by me' (Žižek in Bond 2009: xii). Žižek writes that the camera allows us to see people 'in themselves' or the spectator becomes, quoting Proust, 'a spectator, so to speak, of one's own absence'. According to Žižek, the observer 'is reduced to a gaze observing how things look in his own absence' (ibid: xiii). *Covert* provided a sense of this notion for me; I was absent to my surveilled subjects and so allowed to see their private expressions. Žižek also discusses the eye of the camera as an 'autonomous organ' which wanders around to reveal life unawares, a cinema of fact and poetic documentary in Dziga Vertov's *Kino-Eye* 1924: 'I am kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it' (Vertov 1984: 4). *Covert*, I argue, is still me, not a machine view; it is the work of a human with a prosthetic eye/lens who seeks to gather reference material for making art.

⁵ Available: <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/p/proust/marcel/p96g/chapter1.html>

Carolyn McKay, *Woman on a train* 2012. HD video 02:42 minutes looped with audio

Calle is both voyeur and detective but also willing to reverse roles. In *The shadow* (1981) she requested her mother hire a detective to follow her, to report on her daily activities and provide photographic evidence of her existence (Somaini 2010: 149). Calle the observer becomes the observed, albeit the knowing choreographer of the surveillance. Auster in *Leviathan* refers to this entirely artificial exercise of surveillance as providing amplified meaning to the minutiae and banality of daily existence: 'Microscopic actions became fraught with new meaning, the driest routines were charged with uncommon emotion' (Auster 1992: 63). It also gave Calle the opportunity to see herself as a surveillance subject caught unawares through the eyes of the detective. Perhaps to be perceived by others, is to exist? Auster writes that 'Maria' 'felt as if she had become a stranger, as if she had been turned into an imaginary being' (ibid) after studying the photographs and reports of her movements. Following Žižek's thoughts, it could be that Calle was confronted by being a spectator of her own absence. The opportunity to see ourselves 'from outside' and 'reduced to an external object for the gaze' (Žižek in Bond 2009: xiv) as others see us is rarely offered, and must be akin to a dream state, out-of-body experience.

While making *Covert*, I wondered how I would feel if I had been caught unawares by another's camera. I *think* I would be happy, provided the resulting images had aesthetic value and depending on the context of any public presentation.

A 2010 exhibition, 'Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance & the Camera' at the Tate Modern, London presented 250 works that considered the use of the camera to surreptitiously make images.⁶ The first section of the exhibition, 'The Unseen Photographer' considered how the covert photographic image reveals the world caught unawares, natural and unposed, and this encapsulates what I found particularly appealing about this form of spectatorship. People certainly act differently when they do not know that they are under the gaze of the recording eye of a camera. As Sontag wrote: 'There is something on people's faces when they don't know they are being observed that never appears when they do... their expressions are private ones, not those they would offer to the camera' (Sontag 2008: 37). There are the

⁶ <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/exposed> accessed online 21 November 2012.

unconscious gestures and facial expressions when people think they are alone with themselves, captured in zoomed lens glory in *Covert*.

Palmer challenges the alleged violations and exploitative relations of the unseen watcher over the watched. Of Walker Evans' clandestine subway portraits that have been previously referenced, he writes that the photographer sought 'an authentic and unsentimental record of humanity', anonymous portraits 'in naked repose' (Palmer 2011: 113-4). There is an intimacy in their private expression and inward contemplation that hints at a truth of their experience at that point in time, mere clues, but not necessarily any truth of the individual soul. As Palmer concludes, the practice of photographing people unawares 'carries with it the promise of revelation but also the threat of nothingness' (ibid: 123). Perhaps secret images can only be defended when done well and when they reveal a universal moment of humanity.

The predatory eye/lens

With an awareness that my video recording was perhaps predatory and parasitic, I sensed I had secretly purloined a portion of someone's personal intellectual property for my own artistic purposes. The closely zoomed images, for example of *Man reading*, suggest proximity, even uncomfortable overproximity, and imply a level of intimacy with a stranger in a copresent space, when in fact, I was on another train some distance away. The subtleties of his actions are heightened as the speed of the original footage has been slowed through digital editing. The camera zoom even captures and tracks the movement of his eyes as he reads a book, obviously typeset according to traditional Japanese conventions—from top to bottom, and right to left. The process involved a nearness only possible with a zoom lens, and the simultaneous, paradoxical distance of anonymity. The zoom lens of surveillance devices, and my own HD camera, is more than a visual prosthesis; it extends perceptions to that which would be normally imperceptible: 'it also becomes a conceptual toolbox with which the visual process of the imaginary can produce new forms' (Durden 2013: 47), that is, new forms of image making, representation and experimentation.

Carolyn McKay, *Man reading* 2012. HD video 02:00 minutes looped with audio

Fixing the ephemeral

I had always wanted to see the Naruto whirlpools in Kagawa Prefecture, made famous by ukiyoe artist Hiroshige Utagawa (1797-1858), and a long journey from Koya-san to Naoshima took me in that direction. Early one morning from the hotel window I noticed a man on the beach below performing an idiosyncratic tai chi session. I quickly grabbed my camera to capture this ephemeral piece of choreography as he made his way up the beach and out of sight.

Back in Australia, I transformed the raw footage using Final Cut Pro so that the anonymous Japanese man seems to emerge like a blastula from the lapping waves. The amorphous form then splits into two mirrored men who perform the strange dawn dance conjoined by the long shadow from the rising sun, set to my software created soundscape.

Carolyn McKay, *The walking man* flipbook 2012

The walking man video was also the basis for a flipbook that I created from 110 selected frames from the video footage, another act of translating the transient moment into a sequence of still images and physical stop animation. Films and videos are based upon the photographic image (Cavell 1971: 17), and *The walking man* flipbook embraces this notion by fracturing the digital video into its component parts and individual still frames to create a stop animation in (more) enduring material form. The materialisation of contemporary video seems particularly pertinent given the nebulous nature of its digital structure stored on a hard drive.

The final work, *High rise*, shows a scene shot within Kyoto Station as people walk to and fro through a high rise restaurant precinct. Through multiplying the one scene six times within the screen, I sought to reflect upon the verticality of existence in a highly populated country, as well as capture a sense of a passing parade of strangers and repetitive nature of the crowd's behaviour. The speed of the original visual footage and audio has been dramatically slowed to fracture the instant from the rushed reality and provide a mesmerising moment to reflect upon humanity.

Carolyn McKay, *High Rise* 2012. HD video 01:36 minutes looped with audio

These videos appropriate and fix private moments that would have remained ephemeral, compelling these strangers, through DVD looping, to repeat their experiences indefinitely. On the other hand, these stolen transient episodes have gained a poetic resonance that would have otherwise passed unnoticed. Perhaps the surveilled subjects in *Covert* attain a level of immortality in this digital afterlife, freed from the constraints of time. Immortality and preservation have long been the quests of art (Bazin 1967: 10 in Durden 2013: 37) while, as previously discussed, Baudrillard considers photography as the art of disappearance, where we are reminded that the subject has been preserved only as a vanished presence. From my perspective, the use of non-material tools and media in an attempt to possess the impermanence of the moment seems ambiguous and entirely appropriate.

Privacy in a surveilled society

Palmer discusses landmark litigation in the USA between the two competing concepts of artistic expression versus privacy. The case concerned Philip-Lorca diCorcia's body of work, *Heads* 2000, created by photographing people in public without consent. One surveilled subject commenced legal proceedings and, while he claimed the loss of his own image and invasion of privacy, artistic expression won the day.⁷ *Le droit à l'image* versus the image as 'common visual property' when in public are, according to Palmer, tensions existing in contemporary public spaces where people feel immersed in their own private universe through smartphones and audio devices (Palmer 2011: 116). In making *Covert*, I did question whether I had breached any copyright to my subjects' lives. The work selects, frames and draws attention to private anonymous moments acted out in public spaces. Is it even more sinister that I filmed some people from the hidden privacy of a hotel room? Unlike a camera in a public space declaring its panoptic presence, mine was shielded from view.

⁷ Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance and the Camera, exhibition guide, The Unseen Photographer <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/exposed/exposed-voyeurism-surveillance-and-camera-exhibition-guide-0> accessed online 13 November 2012.

As Foucault states: ‘Our society is not one of spectacle but of surveillance’ (Foucault 1995: 217). Video and surveillance technologies, ever proliferating, erode the line between public and private and allow visual capture on a grand and unregulated scale (Norris, McCahill and Wood 2002; Sutton and Wilson 2002; Apel 2008: 261). With CCTV networks ubiquitous and pervasive throughout major cities, we are all possibly protected yet all potential suspects. We may unwittingly be captured on Google Street View, biometric information is often gathered when travelling, our phones may be intercepted or hacked, human resources managers data mine our social network pages, and covert dataveillance occurs in our interactions with corporate entities and the internet to monitor our consumption patterns. Corporate and government surveillance are invisible forms of control, with the knowledge produced through surveillance creating parameters around human existence. Our smartphones and tablets are locative devices that track our physical moves, as well as monitor our virtual browsing patterns through cellspace (Manovich 2006: 221). With social media, we volunteer private information to the world, pose and preen on webcam, post ‘selfies’ on our pages and self-surveil our virtual representations via the Picture-in-Picture images of Skype and self-googling. According to Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg, privacy is no longer a social norm or expectation.⁸ The notion of ‘the public nature of the intimate’, the fragile boundaries between public and disappearing private space, and the intervention of media in exhibitionism, narcissism and voyeurism in the post-private world are compelling 21st century issues dealt with in a group exhibition *Privacy* at Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, November 2012—February 2013.

Steve Mann ponders ‘the right to fair use of one’s environs’, the ownership of space and issues of copyright infringement that come from implicating sur/sous-veillance technologies in a creative practice, finding that objects, such as paintings hanging on a wall of a gallery may have more rights over their intellectual property than humans (Mann 2004: 624). Reflecting upon *Covert*, it is perhaps perverse that the surveilled subjects are now embedded in an artwork over which I maintain copyright.

Spectatorship and uneasy images

While appreciating the aesthetic of the work and poetic images, at the opening night of *Covert* a few gallery visitors were challenged by the fact that the creative act involved secret surveillance. One person, who worked in public television broadcasting, suggested that release forms were required while another person suggested that the works should not be for sale. Someone else remarked that it was only acceptable as the subjects lived overseas. Like Caruana’s *The Married Men*, it is interesting for artist and audience alike to consider the moral boundaries once such work finds its way into public exhibition. To make the work may be eccentric, strange or creepy but I posit—is it the act of exhibiting the surveilled artwork that really affronts society? Caruana states: ‘...what happens when I put the images on a gallery wall or in a book? That’s when the audience starts to question the morality of the whole thing, and that’s where it becomes interesting’.⁹

What difference does it make if the subject matter is an anonymous Japanese person or, in the case of Sophie Calle, an unsuspecting hotel guest? Calle’s 1981 work, *L’Hôtel, (The hotel)* involved her being hired as a chambermaid in a Venetian hotel. She writes that, in ‘the course of my cleaning duties, I examined the personal belongings of the hotel guest and observed through details lives which remained unknown to me’ (Calle and Auster 1999: 140). She photographed and documented her intimate encounters with guests’ belongings, creating narratives with an air of forensic detachment, and at the same time, voyeuristic. For example:

⁸ Bobbie Johnson, *Privacy no longer a social norm, says Facebook founder* The Guardian, 11 January 2010 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2010/jan/11/facebook-privacy> accessed online 13 November 2012.

⁹ Diane Smyth, *Natasha Caruana’s Married Men* <http://www.bjp-online.com/british-journal-of-photography/project/1936264/natasha-caruanas-married> accessed online 19 May 2013.

Room 25

Tuesday 17, 9:30 A.M. Today I open the closet. Few clothes. But good-quality ones: tweeds, woollens...subdued colors: gray, navy, brown. A pair of large white underpants lines the bottom of the drawer. In the corner of the closet, a nearly empty toilet kit: it contains some night cream for pimples, needles, and thread inside a lipstick case—I see no razor—and a list of clothes he is traveling with.

(ibid: 144)

L'Hôtel contravenes tacit social etiquette, breaches correct proximity with strangers and affronts people's right to privacy. Calle implicates us, as viewers, in her transgression as we are seduced into reading her text and looking at her indiscreet photographs to fabricate our own narratives. Spectatorship seems passive yet it carries responsibility and choice. Dora Apel discusses looking at lynching photographs and discusses the immorality not only of the executioner and participants but also the photographer 'whose ostensibly neutral position is not neutral' as, through non-intervention, he sanctions the acts. 'We, as viewers, are invited to occupy the photographer's viewing position' and thus are complicit and implicated in the immorality as well (Apel 2003: 458). Like images of crime scenes, wars and car crashes, we should turn away, but we don't.

In reflecting upon the uncomfortable nature of *Covert*, I argue that the subjects were treated with humanity and respect, and probably only they themselves could ever recognise their image. As the unseen eye, I had selectively looked upon the world and responded, and the images produced have been detached from time and place, now with a unique life of their own, and their own inner reality. The final videos have been disconnected from the original footage through either desaturation or over-saturation of colour, mirroring techniques, manipulation of the timecode, multiplication of image, and use of evocative audioscapes I produced. Through the act of creation, a truth of an experience had been revealed—a truth at least of my experience of zooming my prosthetic eye/lens in someone's direction and perhaps some truth of their fleeting private expressions and actions. In this body of work the audience is invited to linger in the author's transgressive hidden stare and, to modify the words of Mark Rothko, 'to take a journey within the realm of the canvas' (Rothko 2004: 47), or screen in this case.

I was pleased to read a review the next day written by Carrie Miller in *The Art Life*:

Artists are by nature voyeurs but there's a long-standing interest in the history of art in the concept of the gaze. In *Covert at galleryeight*, Carolyn McKay demonstrates this ongoing fascination with the power of the camera lens to frame the subject of its gaze in a series of compelling video works that demonstrate that our ability to surveil others can transcend the oppressive forces of mere objectification.

The works were created from footage McKay shot travelling around Japan last year that she filmed covertly from behind glass, either through the window of a train or a hotel. These banal scenes of strangers going about their everyday lives—a generic looking commuter, a mask covering his face, reading a book on the way to work—are given poetic resonance through the process of translation afforded by post-production manipulation that distort time or create a mirror effect as in the case of *The Walking Man*. McKay's ability to reveal something in an ordinary, ephemeral moment and extend it to create something new and enduring is what sets her work apart from a lot of mediocre contemporary video work that claims the banal as its subject matter.¹⁰

¹⁰ Carrie Miller, 'Covert' <http://theartlife.com.au/2012/covert/> accessed online 23 November 2012.

It was a relief that the reviewer recognised that the works had artistic integrity and surpassed objectification, and through the act of translation, attained aesthetic autonomy. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise the complexities of the relationship between artist, subject and the eventual audience for the artwork. As previously discussed, visual culture is always shifting and there is no way of accurately anticipating audience reaction until the artwork is released into the public sphere; Bill Henson would be acutely aware of the unpredictability of societal response.

The artist as voyeur

Voyeurism may be defined as the pleasure, perhaps an erotic one, in looking while not being seen and the term may carry sinister even sadistic overtones (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 76, 370). Voyeuristic images place the viewer in the position of ‘peeping tom’ and raise questions about the morality in looking and colluding with the maker of the image.¹¹ Scopophilia, the compulsion to look and pleasure in looking, refers to active voyeurism and passive exhibitionism (ibid: 365), possibly leading to fetishism and perversion (Manlove 2007: 88).

During the making of *Covert*, I wondered if I would be considered some kind of voyeur. I think not, but some artists certainly are. As an example, Kohei Yoshiyuki’s series of photographs, *The Park*, 1979 captures images of voyeurs in a Tokyo park at night spying upon amorous couples in intimate embrace. Yoshiyuki became a participant in order to be accepted as one of the voyeur contingent and to document the nocturnal voyeurism. While he recognised that he had similar interests as the voyeurs, he was armed with a camera and his intent was to capture what was happening in the park: ‘... so I was not a real “voyeur” like them. But I think, in a way, the act of taking photographs itself is voyeuristic somehow. So I may be a voyeur, because I am a photographer’.¹²

Disregarding whether the material is salacious or not, Marsh suggests that photographing anyone without their knowledge is predatory and voyeuristic. Yet paradoxically it is this aspect—that the artist delivers what normally is unseen—that makes this form of art work so compelling: ‘They are photographs of what we shouldn’t really be looking at: they are invasions of privacy; these people have been caught on film without knowing it’ (Marsh 2011: 55). Marsh writes that we are drawn to these private moments of others as these are the images we desire for ourselves, to experience our appearance when we are unawares as perceived by others: ‘It is as if this mode of photography is capturing a truth that has been denied to us and it is this aspect that seduces us most’ (ibid: 56). Perhaps that is what inspired Calle’s work *The Shadow*, that opportunity to be seen and represented by another. Indeed our own face ‘in naked repose’ is a part of our physiology that we can never truly experience as others see us. We can only ever purposefully gaze at a reversed and reduced mirror image and never catch ourselves unawares.

Returning to the notion of voyeurism, in *L’Hôtel* Calle’s photographing hotel guests’ slept-in beds and intimate belongings, presents a transgressive example:

Room 47, March 2-6
Monday, March 2, 10 A.M.

¹¹ Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance and the Camera, exhibition guide, Voyeurism and Desire <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/exposed/exposed-voyeurism-surveillance-and-camera-exhibition-guide-2> accessed online 13 November 2012.

¹² Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance and the Camera, exhibition guide, Voyeurism and Desire <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/exposed/exposed-voyeurism-surveillance-and-camera-exhibition-guide-2> accessed online 13 November 12.

...In the bathroom, nothing in particular to catch one's eye: ordinary toiletries, some Microlax for constipation, some Calèche perfume, contraceptive pills, and various lotions for sensitive skin. There's only the wardrobe left to explore...

Room 30

Tuesday 24, 9:45 A.M.

In the bathroom, on the edge of the basin, there are two toilet bags, still full; one marked with the initials PM, and in the bath, a pair of dirty panties and a sanitary towel spotted with blood.

To view Calle's photographs of the guests' undignified hanging underwear and pillows still indented from sleeping heads, as well as reading her diary entries, seems an infringement upon these strangers' lives, making vicarious peeping toms of us all. Yet the work compels us to look and be complicit in the violation.

Surveillance as emerging aesthetic

As video historian Michael Rush's quote at the beginning of this article suggests, surveillance has been a source of fascination to a broad spectrum of artists and appropriated both as a methodology and text or canvas for creative research and practice. For several years I have been teaching 'Research Methodologies in Art Practice', a course that seeks to prepare postgraduate visual arts students for independent research and higher degrees. Fundamental to the course is an exploration of studio practice as providing new forms of knowledge drawn from intuition, intellect, reflexivity, imagination, handling materials and rigorous engagement with visual realisation as creating texts and artefacts. Practice-led research seeks to produce moments of revelation and transform human understanding, as well as open up sites for profound questioning of existing knowledge and theories (Sullivan 2005: 119, 244). Ross Gibson writes: 'Artist-researchers have the chance to woo two modes of knowing: the implicit and the explicit. They have the chance to entwine the insider's embodied know-how with the outsider's analytical precepts' (Gibson 2010: 11). On this basis, visual artists are well placed to implicate and comment upon surveillance technologies in their creative and critical endeavours and through this process, reveal fresh insights.

Cinema and television have engaged with the aesthetics and imagery of surveillance—Dietmar Kammerer suggests that this engagement with faux CCTV and surveilling techniques is creating a 'rhetorics of surveillance' (Kammerer 2002: 468). Without doubt, this aesthetic has been co-opted by 21st century crime series and mockumentaries. The use of jerky handheld cameras and surveillance footage adds a layer of gritty, documentary style realism and Adrian Martin suggests that contemporary cinema contorts itself to combine these elements (Martin 2011: 50). Robert W. Sweeny questions if the surveillance implicit in reality television anaesthetises viewers to the social impact of surveillance (Sweeny 2006: 295). Certainly, surveillance culture is being accepted and internalised by contemporary society, transforming visual culture. As such, it presents a perfect platform for artists to create works that may shift perspectives and awareness.

Within the visual arts, there is a wealth of artists who have used surveillance in their practice as a new mode of revealing (Eleftheriotis 1995) or to explore the aesthetic of being the unseen eye. Such works underline the eternal role of artists to critique, subvert and generally frolic with emerging technologies and social norms. In 1969, Vito Acconci recorded his experience of following a random stranger, Ian Breakwell's *The Walking Man Diary*, 1975-8 records images of an unknown man as he passed the artist's window, since 1996, the Surveillance Camera Players' *modus operandi* has involved interaction with CCTV cameras in public places, and Albrechtslund and Dubbeld discuss artists who use surveillance techniques for entertainment and games (Albrechtslund and Dubbeld 2002). Established CCTV

surveillance systems may be commandeered by artists and used as a platform for, as an example, a parkour performance in *The Duellists* 2007 by David Valentine.¹³

Jill Magid has been drawn to surveillance technology in her art practice as it offers a form of visibility of herself not otherwise available. As a platform for creativity, CCTV allows the placement of the self within the stage of a city and engagement with the politics of space and the controlling institutions (Lovink 2005). According to Jonathan Finn, Magid's creative engagement with CCTV offers insights into the intangible aspects and complexities of surveillance culture. He finds that Magid's *Evidence Locker* highlights 'the fragmented, partial and incomplete nature of the surveillance gaze; the ineffectiveness of visual surveillance; and the visual pleasure of surveillance'. The work represents a point of intersection between visual arts and Surveillance Studies and Finn entices viewers to reflect upon their place and role in resisting/critiquing/submitting to surveillance culture (Finn 2012: 136, 147-8).

While Dora Apel explores how artists draw upon surveillance technologies to produce works that radically critique war and terrorism, I had the good fortune of visiting dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel, Germany and came across Rabih Mroué's *The Pixelated Revolution*, 2012. The work references YouTube footage of shootings during the Syrian Revolution—footage that the protestors/victims themselves shot with their mobile phones. The work contemplates the phone camera as an extension of the eye: 'the eye that is the camera spots the sniper lurking behind a wall ... Abruptly, the sniper sees the eye, the man, the mobile phone watching him. Their eyes meet and then the sniper matter-of-factly lifts his gun and aims'. The eye/man/phone falls to the ground, one assumes, dead (Mroué, Nawfal, and Martin 2012: 20). *The Pixelated Revolution* involves pop-up, not panoptic, surveillance where many eyes are 'looking for and trying to capture other eyes'. Rather than shooting people who have guns with the intent to kill, the targets are people with phones who are surveilling the conflict and uploading their recordings for global spectatorship. The handheld, grainy aesthetic of the low-resolution images provide undeniable veracity of experience and compelling 'video letters' (ibid: 22-4). These are just a few examples of artists whose methodologies implicate surveillance culture in artistic process as political or social provocation, or to immerse viewers in a different form of perception.

Conclusion

Rush initially suggests that surveillance is the more sinister side of the photographic gaze, yet he concludes—as I will—that the proliferation and people's willing acceptance of surveillance technologies suggests that surveillance is perhaps not so sinister at all anymore (Rush 2004: 113). Surveillance, so prevalent in contemporary society, has changed our ways of seeing and being seen and is implicated in the shifting visual culture environment. In the era of inescapable surveillance, new forms of representation go hand-in-hand with new forms of regulation, serving to structure society and visual culture. Technologies change the way we perceive ourselves and the world through modified forms of framing, focus and perspective. Not surprisingly, artists (myself included) have been drawn to the aesthetics, conceptual possibilities and technologies of surveillance with the inherent opportunities to explore emerging forms of observation, perception, representation and exhibition. Sometimes artists who use these technologies as tools in their art practice may seem to taunt and flout normative parameters of social etiquette and space, yet such transgressions provide normally unseen images, as well as generate innovative perspectives. It may well be rude to stare, but that's what artists do, and audiences are invited to participate, be provoked and engage in dialogue.

While my body of work, *Covert*, may contravene social norms of reciprocity of gaze, my intent was one of creating visual pleasure and mesmerising aesthetic experience, rather than any guilty voyeuristic pleasures, humiliation or denigration of others. Writing this paper has been a catalyst for uncomfortable

¹³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwueQrsTxXM> accessed online 13 November 2012.

critical reflection upon the process of making and exhibiting *Covert*. The author has an increased awareness of the moral and power implications, and resulting frictions when the unseen predatory lens captures and controls the visibility and representation of strangers. Nevertheless, there remains a wicked sense of achievement that the resulting body of work, *Covert*, provided such a chance to see without being seen. I conclude that the most transgressive part of *Covert* was not my concealed video recording but rather the act of exhibiting the footage as art within a gallery. Whether the social breach is ultimately acceptable or controversial is a factor of the artist's intent, context and the aesthetic quality of the artwork.

In this paper, I have reflected upon, but not resolved, the eternal and recurrent dualities of asymmetry/reciprocity of gaze, objectivity/subjectivity of the lens, stranger/intimacy, empathy/exploitation, and ethics/artistic expression when artists incorporate surveilling techniques in their art practice. In a world of collapsing boundaries between public and private, artistic surveillance remains contentious; the tensions, complexities and contradictions will endure. All I know is that after almost twenty years of art practice I have developed a compulsion to look and, in the words of Chance the Gardner: 'I like to watch'.¹⁴

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¹⁴ Peter Sellers, 'Being There', 1979, directed by Hal Ashby. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0078841/quotes>

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