

SIMULATION AS A TACTIC FOR RESISTANCE AGAINST MODERN

SURVEILLANCE TRENDS

In the move from traditional disciplinary societies to newer control societies there has been an interesting relationship struck amongst previously unrelated fields. Foucault's panopticon with its all seeing eye and the medical gaze of the clinic have merged into each other and created a new beast of surveillance. This beast incorporates information technology and advances in genetics and medicine with the traditional institutional demand for surveillance as a method of maintaining control. The implications of this new cooperation are great as databases are created which can monitor the individual before birth. I propose that there is an imperative of resistance and critical examination of this breed of surveillance. And as a tool of resistance, there are few less suited to the task than simulation with its ability to distort information, confuse institutions, enable citizens to elude detection, and to assist individuals, and particularly artist, to jam these new surveillance databases.

SURVEILLANCE AND THE DATABASE

While the panopticon, characterized, for example, in modern society by the proliferation of surveillance cameras still exists and expands it has now been relegated to "step two." It focuses on those already under suspicion or serves to "catch" those committing a deviant act. More efficient, however, is pre-emptive surveillance that moves beyond the optic gaze and utilizes developments in the fields of information technology, genetics and medicine.

A government maintaining massive databases of information on citizens is a practice that has existed for a long time. However, until advances in computer technology it was bulky and inefficient (for example, the Stasi building in Leipzig, Germany which contained all surveillance data collected). As well, this data collection was still directed at suspicious persons and as a means of catching someone after the devious act was committed. It also served the traditional disciplinary function, the Stasi building stood ominously in the city centre to remind the populace that the government was watching.

This data collection has moved from a disciplinary to a pre-emptive function. Computers have enabled governments and institutions to maintain massive databases larger than any earlier totalitarian regime could have imagined. Beyond making these large databases manageable, computers have also drawn the populace into the process. In the past the populace played a role by

spying and reporting on the activities of others. Now the populace reports on their own activities. Individuals do this willingly in return for promises of benefits (financial, social, medical, etc.). For example, businesses maintain databases of spending habits on customers in return for giving discounts when their "club card" is used.

GENETIC CODE AND CONTROL

It is the merging of the fields of information technology, genetics, and medicine that moves this data collection to a pre-emptive function. A perfect example of this is a plan in Iceland to create a genetic database of every citizen. (Druckrey, 2002) The plan was sold to the public with promises of medical benefits. The project was given to a genetics company to create a database of all medical information on every individual. This company then arranged a contract with a pharmaceutical company to give them access to this data to use for research purposes. So, a database of personal medical information on every citizen is available to the government, a genetics company, and a pharmaceutical firm. While medical advances could be made through this project, it is also possible that this data could be used for marketing purposes by the drug companies and to discriminate against those with potential health concerns in regards to employment and health insurance.

The implications of such projects are enormous. Institutions in possession of an expansive database of medical and genetic information can use this for profiling purposes. Governments could target individuals with a genetic predisposition to crime or those with a mental health condition that could lead to criminal acts (like schizophrenia). This information could be used as evidence in court cases or as a justification to place such individuals under direct surveillance. In the workplace, individuals could be denied employment if they are predisposed to any diseases or to an intolerance for hazardous work environments. Imaginably, this could apply to a wide spectrum of issues including potentially serious illnesses to discrimination based on conditions as mild as ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder). Health insurance companies could refuse coverage or treatment to individuals with predispositions to particular conditions or illnesses. With the entangled relationship between governments, employers, and health insurance companies there would likely be an exchange of information between all institutions. Despite claims otherwise, it is difficult to see how this communication would benefit the individual.

With continued medical/genetic advances and as a response to genetic profiling mentioned above there will likely be a push towards genetic tampering. This will take the form of "identifying and

correcting coding errors at the microscopic chemical level, repairing defects in genetic structure, designing new structures and replicating them, etc.” (Bogard, 1996: 142) By doing so, corrections to one’s genetic code will occur before birth in a way to pre-emptively deal with genetic profiling and discrimination later in life (as well as treating potential medical illnesses). Everyone will be able to strive for an ideal genetic makeup for his or her unborn children. However, aside from targeting and eliminating serious physical illnesses, striving for this ideal will have great and grave implications as “normalization” will become an imperative. Diversity will be decreased and society will be divided between those who can afford such genetic corrections and those who cannot. Taken further, it’s possible that employment decisions could be made before birth as one’s genetic alterations would tailor individuals to a particular career. Additionally, these treatments could lead to possible mutations and negative side effects that have not yet been imagined. Inherent in this discussion of genetic coding and tampering is an issue of consent. Institutions, governments, and parents will carry out these actions upon unborn children who will be unable to consent on decisions that will dictate their entire lives. While individuals are able to attempt resist such interference and surveillance, such resistance is impossible for the unborn child.

It appears that the database and the surveillance that accompanies it precede the living organism. Genetic makeup can be catalogued before the fertilized egg is inserted into the womb (the egg will increasingly be fertilized in vitro). If I exist in the database before I exist in a traditionally understood physical way this limits the possibilities for self-determination and resistance to such invasions of my privacy. My identity is reduced to this genetic code. As Gilles Deleuze explained, “We’re no longer dealing with a duality of mass and individual. Individuals become ‘dividuals’, and masses become samples, data, markets, or ‘banks’.” (Deleuze, 2002: 319) Beyond this philosophical concern, there are questions raised over privacy, control, and access to these databases. Who will have access to the database, how will it be used, will individuals have access to the database upon which they can compare their genetic makeup to the rest of the population? All of these questions, in my opinion, need to be addressed and critically put forth in public discourse. Unfortunately, the voices of the institutions who proclaim the medical benefits of projects such as the Human Genome Project are louder than those voicing concern over this evolution of surveillance and government influence on individual lives.

IMPERATIVE FOR ARTISTIC RESISTANCE

“It is not a case of worrying or hoping for the best, but of finding a new weapon.” (Deleuze, 2002: 318) Art, I would like to propose, can be this new weapon to address and resist this evolution of surveillance that focuses on genetic mapping and genetic databases for use for profiling, profit and control. Art can be used in a variety of ways to draw attention and publicize the implications of these developments within surveillance and genetics.

First, artists can create works that fictionalize and exaggerate the current situation but imply what the future may bring. This forces a reaction from the public and pushes them to analyze the situation. They are at the same time calmed that the work that simulates the future isn't "real" but yet forced to question its probability in the future. There is a long history of artists depicting what's possible and of science making it so. These works also function to raise the level of public discourse by informing and drawing attention to pertinent developments and their implications. Carl Djerassi uses fiction and drama "as novel ways to raise the intellectual level of public discourse of sex and reproduction." (Djerassi, 2000) Steve Mann employs his idea of "Reflectionism" (borrowed from the Situationists) to address surveillance by wearing self-made cameras (or implying that he has a camera) into places with surveillance cameras in order to illicit a response. (Mann, 2002) While institutions proclaim that individuals shouldn't worry over surveillance cameras if they are not guilty of any offense, Mann found that their opinion changed when the camera was pointed towards them. In both cases, surveillance is simulated and addressed critically within their work.

Beyond stimulating public debate and raising the level of public discourse, artists should critically address the expanding surveillance and genetic mapping as a way to create a debate within art. There are many artists embracing medical and technical advances and promoting a utopian vision of their implications. Artists need to create works to counter this opinion. Encouraged by works like Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" artists such as Orlan (<http://www.orlan.net>) and Stahl Stenslie (<http://www.stenslie.net/stahl>) embrace these developments. Orlan subjects her body to extensive surgery and Stenslie embraces the potentialities in merging technology and the body. Artists need to stimulate debate within art that would then spill into the public discourse. Works dealing with the emancipatory potentials of these advancements need to be contrasted with works addressing the more Orwellian concerns about privacy, control, and surveillance.

THE MEDIA AS A TOOL AND A WEAPON

Governments and corporations, to ease the public's fears regarding expanding surveillance and medical advances, use the media to promote their agenda. It functions as a propaganda tool to desensitize the public to the scope of modern surveillance and to glorify the positive potential of genetic and medical breakthroughs. It saturates the media in order to drown out dissenting, questioning voices. However, the media cannot be used as a blunt propaganda tool as it has been used historically in totalitarian regimes. Rather, it serves to gradually garner public support for these policies and institutions.

First, it promotes a society of surveillance. This is the effect of the proliferation of reality shows such as "the Real World" and "Big Brother". This saturation of reality programming leads to what Paul Virilio referred to as "the banalization or popularization of global surveillance" (Virilio, 2002: 109) This "Enjoying Surveillance" means "enjoying the advancing militarization of perception and the progressing armament of society" and it functions to decrease the risk of public resistance or revolt to this surveillance. (Weibel, 2002: 219) The public become engrossed in the spectacle of these shows and strive to take part, putting themselves under surveillance as a contestant or by putting themselves on display on the Internet. Narcissism wins out over privacy and leads to an embrace of this surveillance culture. As Ursula Frohne explains, "the narcissistic desire for representation has released surveillance from the stigma of manipulation and the theft of freedom and made it socially acceptable as an additional gain in security." (Frohne, 2002: 268)

The second way which government and corporate institutions use the media as a propaganda tool is to promote their interpretations of these medical developments. Genetic testing is promoted as "preventative, deterrent medicine" and "their potential to keep insurance costs down by better identification of risks" is stressed. (Bogard, 1996: 147) However, what isn't mentioned is that these costs would be kept down by refusing coverage to anyone genetically predisposed to any medical illness. Dissenting opinions are not given equal airtime as tremendous amounts of government and corporate money are poured into promoting projects like the Human Genome Project. Through the proliferation of reality/surveillance programming and the saturation of the media with the positive view of genetic and biological research into mapping and databasing genetic information, governments and relevant institutions use the media to create a culture positive and uncritical to their goals.

However, this reality programming is not real and the medical information is only half (at most) accurate. These institutions create a simulation of surveillance with these programs where the participants know that they are being watched and thus “perform” despite claims of authenticity. The medical information publicized is a “smokescreen” presented to the public – a mask of the true implications of such research. Artists, and new media artists in particular, should use the media as a medium for their expression as a way of “taking it back” and democratizing its use. As well, artists should appropriate the tactics of governments and institutions as a method of resistance and critical examination of this evolution of surveillance.

SIMULATION AS A TACTIC IN ART

Simulation can and should be used as a tactical response to expanding, ubiquitous surveillance. Computers and much of the technological breakthroughs of the twentieth century emerged from the military. Artists using these technologies should have no problem borrowing military strategies and implementing them in their works as well. These strategies should be incorporated into works as a form of resistance to expanding surveillance, privacy loss as a result of genetic coding, and the popularization of surveillance in the mass media in the form of reality programming. These works should use simulation as a way to confuse, distract, and jam surveillance.

Confusion creates uncertainty and those in power use it as a way of maintaining control. The Bush administration releasing confusing press releases after September 11th, insured that the government would dictate the discourse and maintain the attention of the public. Few could make sense of the color-coded risk system or of conflicting messages about imminent attacks. However, many paid even closer attention to the messages released by the government in a hope to eventually understand the situation. The confusion is a simulation of reality and it functions as a tactic of control by “keeping the relation between the artificial and the real indeterminate, in a state of continual suspense and uncertainty.” (Bogard, 1996: 73) Steve Mann’s “WearComp” project (mentioned above) employed this as well. Merely placing a plastic patch on his shirt and intimating that he was using a camera incited confused responses. Individuals were thrown off by the reversal of roles. The aim of the piece is that through the confusion the “witnesses” reanalyzed the implications of the surveillance systems Mann was challenging through his simulation. Interestingly, the responses to his direct action were not drastically different when he merely intimated having a camera versus actually “brandishing” one.

Another way that simulation can be used in art in a critical way is through distraction. “One can distract power to escape it. To distract power is to elude its grasp and, potentially, to overpower it by blocking its sense. Unable to sense its object or to make sense of it, i.e., to signify it, distracted power is rendered powerless.” (Bogard, 2000) This distraction can be seen in Sanja Ivekovic’s “Triangle” (<http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/triangle>) where, suspecting that she is under watch of a surveillance camera, she simulates masturbating on her balcony while Tito’s car drives by on the street below. Within minutes an officer is at her door demanding that she leave her balcony. Through this simulation she has distracted the police who have her under surveillance and thus challenged their power over her and, as well, the power of the totalitarian regime that she lived under.

Jamming radars is a traditional military tactic for evading detection. Upon realizing that a plane, for instance, can’t avoid being detected by a radar the response is then to send out excessive amounts of fake data as well in order to overwhelm the enemies system so that it can not distinguish the real from the fake, essentially jamming their radar system. The Internet is a fertile ground for artists to provide simulations of surveillance and fake information as a way of making it more difficult for institutions to decipher the real database or the real surveillance. The Cyborg Web Shop (<http://www.cyborg.com.hr/>) is an effective implementation of this where users seem to be able to purchase products to improve themselves and essentially to be converted into “cyborgs”. The website is professional looking and effectively deceptive. It presents an excess of “data” in the form of profiles on its customers and provides a playful look at the idea of cyborgs and genetic code databases. The Internet is enormous and the greater it expands with “fake” data the more difficult it will be for institutions to sort through it all and extract the “real” data that they are looking for in their attempts to use the Internet and information technologies as modern surveillance tools.

A last tactic of simulation to be used against surveillance by artists is expressed by the French term, *la perruque*, which was explored by Michel De Certeau. It refers “to the all those ingenious ways workers have devised to trick their employers or supervisors into thinking they are working, or that make their work less burdensome.” (De Certeau quoted in Bogard, 1996: 110) While this practice is very old it is well suited for contemporary occupations in which employees can easily feign to “look busy” while actually doing something else. It’s common practice in computer related jobs to have one window of work and one window of non-work and to switch inbetween the two depending on if someone is watching. Many offices combat this by installing software that tracks the

activities of workers on their computers. It is a wonderful example of the power struggle between employers and employees as the one strives to maintain control through surveillance and the other strives to get out from under its watch. Art created while on someone else's time exemplifies this struggle.

In conclusion, while many artists employ simulation as a way to critically address simulation, most of these address the more traditional forms of surveillance. These include works such as Harco Haagsma who attempts to "make fun of surveillance" (Haagsma, 2002: 305), Cornelia Schleime who draws on personal experiences of surveillance ("Here's to further fruitful co-operation No. 7284/85" in Hoffman, 2002), and John Lennon and Yoko Ono who address the role of the media in surveillance ("Film No 6. Rape (Clip), Hoberman, 2002). Unfortunately it is much more difficult to find impressive artwork which addresses this newer form of surveillance which merges information technology and advances in medicine and genetics. I wish to provide an example of this in my Internet website, "All About My Pregnancy..." (<http://www.pixelkraut.net/pregnancy/pregnant.swf>) The website aims to critically address the topic of surveillance and simulation as a fake website and video diary depicting my fake pregnancy. I hope to critically draw attention to this "banalization of surveillance" with the obsession to offer intimate details to strangers via the web and as well to tie it into concerns regarding databases of genetic information and the implications of genetic advances.

There is no doubt that in light of global politics and security fears the traditional forms of surveillance which Foucault wrote about years ago are still very much present and very much expanding. However, there is also a long tradition of individuals resisting and artists critically addressing these methods of surveillance. Troubling, in my mind, is the lack of a push for resistance and a lack of artists critically looking at newer trends in surveillance. The Internet and information technologies which are used by institutions to maintain enormous databases of information can also be used as sites of resistance. And in this resistance, simulation can be a powerful tool.

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*some of these references were used primarily for the paper, others for the website, and some for both.