Poetic Disruption in a Time of Surveillance

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Abstract
This paper explores artistic practices that reappropriate released and “leaked” United States governmental documents. The steady trickle of documents from Edward Snowden’s cache, alongside the massive disclosures from Wikileaks, are only a small part of the regular release of documents via the Freedom of Information Act. This trove of material provides much fodder for artistic investigations into open culture, surveillance, counter-surveillance, drone warfare, and torture, among other topics. Nevertheless, the historical and contemporary artistic approaches discussed will focus more on poetic responses that upset a purely instrumental, objective analysis of the material. \textit{Art for Spooks} and the Crowdsourced Intelligence Agency (CSIA) will serve as the main catalysts for exploring the efficacy of the poetic in a time of objectification and quantification.

Keywords
Poetic, disruption, surveillance, counter-surveillance, art, appropriation, federal, documents, visualization, augmented reality.

Introduction
The focus of this paper is the concept of poetic disruption, proposed among others by the poet Hakim Bey \cite{Bey}, and prior to him, Salvador Dalí (paranoiac criticism) \cite{Dalí}. A host of countercultural figures and artists have used this term in reference to the interruption of strictly rationalist perspectives through poetic strategies. Our context for the term comes from the panelists’ engagement with governmental documents, either leaked by people such as Edward Snowden or Chelsea Manning, or released through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. These projects disrupt the conventional rationalist approach taken towards the analysis of such documents by mainstream and alternative media alike. Rather than using the documents as simply evidence of governmental misconduct, the panelists will discuss works, both their own as well as those of others, that poetically disrupt the understanding and discourse surrounding the documents.

The rhetoric of “transparency” through so-called “open” access to governmental data has implied that citizens can now “watch the watchers”, and thus engage in a form of counter-surveillance. However, to do so is to accept the logic of the “watchers”, and thus to potentially fall into a trap that admits no position of resistance. Instead, the works under discussion in this paper will suggest poetic disruption as one means of response that rejects the objectivist logic of transparency.

\textbf{Art for Spooks}
\textit{Art for Spooks} \cite{Spooks} (2014-ongoing) is an augmented book that takes a poetic angle to electronic surveillance. It combines texts and images from “leaked” NSA documents. Texts in the book draw on posts in “Ask Zelda”, the NSA’s internal advice column, and analogous to the popular “Dear Abby” column in the United States. Images are compiled from various PowerPoint presentations that appear to concern psychological operations. Altogether these documents evince mundane concerns of NSA employees with grooming etiquette, gossip and surveillance at the workplace; the development of encryption and psychological profiling tools modeled on alleged historical links between magicians and the military; and a delirious imaginary steeped in the world of modern folklore, populated as is with UFOs, popular media archetypes of evil and good, as well as (apparently) a taste for buffalo meat, high art, and Orientalist and gendered themes (Figure 1).

These materials are juxtaposed with graphics read through a tablet interface. The act of reading generates randomized data in the forms of new images and texts which are concurrently uploaded to various social media platforms, including Twitter and Flickr. The traces of these data are refracted through algorithmic manipulation. As visitors to \textit{Art for Spooks} share images of their augmentations, other information—texts about surveillance, alternative GPS coordinates, and text generated from NSA/GCHQ materials—can be found in the metadata of these images. (Metadata is different from content; it is “data about data”. In the case of images, it is mostly embedded in the photo’s EXIF information, which includes “hidden” information about camera shutter setting details, the camera’s model, as well as location, date and time of capture, etc. For another project that utilizes this kind of metadata, see \textit{I Know Where Your Cat Lives} \cite{CatLives}.) So for instance, on close inspection, it becomes apparent that the GPS coordinates specifying the upload location of the images are systematically changed to documented locations of United States drone strikes, such as in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan (Figure 2).\footnote{Data on locations of drone strikes is collected by...} One can click on...
these locations to see more images on Flickr from these defined locations. Because of this aggregation, the images from Art for Spooks appear alongside photos uploaded by people in the area. As a result, the viewer is treated to a shifting tapestry of NSA appropriated images alongside local photos including those of babies, school children, teenagers, and local people looking into the camera, as well as landscapes, animals, jewelry, mosques, everyday life scenes, market shots, improvised memorials, and documentation of rituals, and even a postcard with a quote from the president of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, addressed to a Taliban leader stating that the “killing of innocent children is contrary to Islam” (Figure 3).2

As visual condensations of the battlefield, these composite images foreground the asymmetry between the cryptic abstractions of systems of espionage, political assassinations, surveillance, infiltration, and destabilization, and their targets’ perceptions and documentation of life on the ground, which are all routinely invisible in Western media. The eerie tone of these images is amplified as one considers the stakes of metadata in current surveillance at home and abroad and its implication in drone wars overseas. Metadata is not only central to domestic wiretapping and other surveillance activities, but according to the former NSA-chief General Michael Hayden, “We kill people based on metadata”3. Art for Spooks demonstrates that the manipulation of this data is a relatively trivial undertaking, thereby questioning the legitimacy of metadata as a component of surveillance targeting.

With this in mind, our project departs from heuristic models of addressing current forms of electronic surveillance. An example is the project by American photographer Trevor Paglen, I Could Tell You But Then You Would Have To Be Destroyed By Me (2010). The work, in the form of a book, collects patches allegedly worn by military personnel involved in covert surveillance operations. Each patch testifies to a similar bizarre fascination with images and themes as documented in Art for Spooks, ranging from a plethora of cryptic symbols (lightning bolts, Greek letters, and star and trident shapes) to images of a spy holding the planet on his fingertip.

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1See http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2014/may/10/we-kill-people-based-metadata/.

2This postcard, posted by Flickr user fstop186, is in reference to the Peshawar school massacre on 16 December, 2014, where 145 people, including 132 school children, were killed by fighters linked to the Tehrik-i-Taliban, a Pakistan-based group that is philosophically and operationally distinct from the better-known Afghan Taliban. For more information, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_Peshawar_school_massacre.

and an alien in chains with a Klingon inscription underneath reading: “Dont Ask”. In the book, Paglen attempts to get to the meaning of these images by way of visual analysis. In contrast, because monitoring and killing based on metadata constitutes a system of surveillance that bypasses evidentiary methods, we suggest that the intense categorization and cataloging of facts, phenomena, and life under current modes of surveillance demands the invention of new methods that resist the stultifying effects of this kind of instrumentalization.

With *Art for Spooks*, we propose that electronic surveillance can be best understood along the lines of the critical paranoiac method as outlined by the surrealist painter Salvador Dalí in the 1930s [7]. An extension of the Surrealists’ overall interest in the unconscious, this method melds Dalí’s interests in psychology and art by way of exploring associative process typical of paranoia. Schizophrenia is clinically described as a cognitive disease that develops from a mental state of superposition that psychologists call “ambivalence” [3]. Works created by Dalí following this method, including paintings, sculptures, and installations, closely resemble said definition. Dalí’s signature style of life-like compositions created by juxtaposing anthropomorphized objects, objectified bodies and body parts, optical illusions, and even biological and innate elements, mimic the paranoiac’s ability to combine disparate and otherwise unrelated materials through an illogical (that is, non-rational or Cartesian) associative process based on resemblance. Similarly, in his discussion of schizophrenia, the psychologist Mark Garrison argues that when treating schizophrenics, psychologists should keep in mind the many points of correlation between the thought processes employed in this pathology and those that function in poetically inflected language and art [14].

Contrary to Garrison’s pathologizing of schizophrenia as a mental disorder arising from the schizophrenic’s inability to resolve ambiguity of interpretation (which he opposes to “normal” people’s ability to do so), Dalí celebrated it as a catalyst to challenge the valorization of rationality and rational methods. According to Dalí, exposure to paranoiac-critical images and works would induce this same state in viewers, much like representations of the self and the world. By extension, he inverted the idea that normative rationalist (empirical) conceptions of reality are “normal”, arguing that consensus reality is a paranoiac delusion of the worst kind, given its ubiquitous stultifying effects [8, pg. 90]. In *Art for Spooks*, we contend that the belief underlying NSA’s electronic surveillance and drone strikes, namely that metadata corresponds to “reality”, is an extension of the rationalist/empiricist mode of viewing the world, which Paul N. Edwards describes as a “closed world discourse” [10].

As a holdover of the Cold War, when computers and informational concepts (cybernetics, cognitive psychology, and artificial intelligence) became central to military operations, the “closed world discourse” is synonymous with global surveillance and control through high-technology military power. Indeed, one of the most startling comments to come out of the Snowden documents is evidence of the NSA’s desire to “collect it all” 4. Edwards typifies the reductionist logic of this system in relation to the computer’s use as a metaphor and ideological construct, used to make war appear to be both controllable and rational, “a radically bounded scene of conflict, an inescapably self-referential space where every thought, word, and action is ultimately directed back towards a central struggle. It is a world radically divided against itself. Turned inexorably inward, without frontiers or escape, a closed world threatens to annihilate itself, to implode” [10, pg. 12]. As he shows through several examples, including Operation Igloo White, conducted from 1967 to 1972 in Vietnam, this “closed system” with its internal logic, is itself impenetrable from the outside, a realm of quantification (body counts) and simulation that serves only as a construct, as an illusion of control on the battlefield. Operation Igloo White is prototypical of present surveillance and wars at remote. Designed to create an impenetrable barrier between North and South Vietnam, the operation was directed from Washington DC using data provided in “real-time” by computers. Electronic sensors on the ground registered the presence of any North Vietnamese troops or vehicles that attempted to cross, and this data would then be represented on computer screens, which would in turn control the release of bombs from patrolling aircraft. The system proved ineffective, as the sensors were easily fooled. Paradoxically, however, the system was hailed as a success, because the criteria for success or failure was dictated by the computer itself: a convoy was registered as destroyed, not because this was verified on the ground in Vietnam, but because the computer would no longer detect it.

As descendants of these systems, contemporary forms of surveillance and warfare operating on metadata engage a similar logic. Consider for instance, a kindred project, Bangladeshi-American artist Hassan Elahi’s *Tracking Transience* (2006-ongoing) 5. Profiled by Wired as a “perfect alibi” or “an audacious art project”, *Tracking Transience* is a website created and maintained by the artist since 2006, when Elahi began documenting his everyday activities and whereabouts daily. To date, the site, a database, contains a growing amount of data including posts of the artists copies of debit card transitions, photographs of meals consumed and toilets visited, airport terminals, food courts, and his real-time physical location on google maps. The impetus of the project dates to 2002, when Elahi, who travels by plane extensively for international art exhibitions and conferences, was detained at the Detroit airport returning to the United States on a flight from the Netherlands. According to Elahi, FBI agents later told him they that they had been hoarded-
ing explosives in a Florida storage unit. To prove his whereabouts (coordinates), the artist showed them his Palm PDA, a device containing enough information—calendar notes of appointments and classes he teaches—to convince his interrogators of his innocence. Elahi passed subsequent lie detector tests and interviews, but his paranoia grew as given his frequent traveling he thought it only a matter of time for another such episode to occur.

As the artist jokingly observes, Tracking Transience is designed to allow for his permanent tracking by surveillance agencies. As an alibi, the project has thus far worked, as according to Elahi, his invitation to surveillance was taken up by federal agencies, which he was able to identify as visitors to his site based on the records of IP addresses. As an art project, Tracking Transience is a sardonic satire of federal Intelligence gathering. Along the lines of an artistic tradition concerned with the ambiguity of representation initiated by the Surrealists, among them Dalí, on the site and in exhibitions of the project, Elahi persistently addresses the questionable authenticity of images. As a manipulated archive, (for instance, the artist arranges photographs in mosaics according to parameters such as color and shape rather than based on particular chains of events or itinerary; few of the images here are presented with time or date tags or any identifying information and even those that have such as the videoscreen flashing one satellite image per day of the whereabouts of the artist invite doubts), Tracking Transience mocks the surveillers’ belief in the authenticity of images. How are we to know that Elahi is where he is shown to be? Is it indeed his phone that registers those coordinates? In his interview on the satirical television program The Colbert Report, (May 7, 2008) Elahi said that his website uses market forces to render information worthless. By flooding (and manipulating) the world with information, personal information becomes worthless to investigators.

Similarly, Art for Spooks uses social media sites, regularly monitored by surveillance agents and market forces alike (in our case Twitter and Flickr), to intervene is this conjunction of surveillance and consumerism. In this regard, we should note that Elahi’s and our project converge in that both are directed at a very defined audience. Alongside disrupting the use of personal information by marketers, Art for Spooks is designed to augment the paranoia of NSA employers and those that, because of their involvement with surveillance-related activities, are legally barred from accessing and reading leaked NSA documents. To date, we know about such an instance, when a visitor to an exhibition showcasing Art for Spooks messaged her friend with a link to the projects website, upon which the recipient, who works on developing drone technology, sent a message back admonishing her that “now” he “had to clear his cache” and not to send any information about the project to his phone. The perplexed visitor approached one of us as to inquire why her friend would be so concerned, stating that given his line of work, she thought he would “be very interested in Art for Spooks”. Nevertheless, if one has taken an oath to protect classified information, one is still prohibited from accessing publicly available information that is still not formally declassified—exactly the situation with the Snowden and Wikileaks releases. Thus this friend’s response is understandable. This incident reflects the underlying aim of the project, which both conceived as an invitation and a provocation, seeks to employ poetics—the ambiguous processes of the paranoiac-critical method—to create conflicts of interpretation ideally leading to seeing the world in a different light. These characteristics of Art for Spooks could additionally be understood as a form of parrhesia. Most prominently explored by Michel Foucault, parrhesia is a form of “free” or “fearless” speech. Coming out of his studies of ancient Greek and Roman texts, parrhesia is a form of speech that: 1) is directed at someone with more power or authority than you; 2) could place you in some form of danger; and 3) is a moral truth not necessarily based on Cartesian or rational forms of evidence [12]. While Foucault mostly based his comments on an analysis of ancient texts, he later extended the idea of parrhesia into the present by suggesting that the “modern” artist could enact a form of parrhesia today [13]. Indeed, parrhesia is key to the work of an artist such as Krzysztof Wodiczko, who draws on Foucault’s understanding of fearless speech in his projects and prostheses that enable immigrants, marginalized women workers, and victims of violence to express themselves in public space [18]. While Snowden himself could certainly be understood as engaging in parrhesia, especially given the risk he has faced and continues to face, we should not presume that everyone has the capability to act in such a manner. Instead, artists and activists can engage in parrhesia with the surveillance state in a variety of ways, from the activists who barricade access to military bases such as the Upstate New York Coalition to Ground the Drones and End the Wars ⁶ to our own practices in Art for Spooks. Each is a form of parrhesia tailored to each individual or group’s tolerance for reprisal, and using the means congruent with their philosophical outlook. As artists, we understand parrhesia in a poetic sense, a means by which to “speak” with the surveillance state using their language in order to interfere with their own paranoia.

The Crowd-Sourced Intelligence Agency

The Crowd-Sourced Intelligence Agency (CSIA) (Figures 4, 5, and 6) is an interactive artwork and research project that allows users to perform the role of an intelligence analyst through an online interface. Anyone can use their Twitter account to login and evaluate Twitter posts, or comment on other agents’ evaluations. The second phase of CSIA, Agent Bayes, allows participants to review fully automated algorithmic evaluations of Twitter posts. Agent Bayes is named after the Bayes theorem, the most common formula used by intelligence agencies for establishing the probability of an event. The machine-learning algorithm evaluates Twitter posts and labels them as either suspicious or not suspicious in regards to national security threats. CSIA agents can compare the algorithm’s decision to the original tweet and it’s associated metadata, and can agree or disagree with the algorithm’s decision. Eventually, this feedback will be integrated into the algorithm to improve its accuracy. Both phases of the project are built to replicate secretive social media surveillance techniques used

⁶See http://upstatedroneaction.org/.
by various intelligence agencies as revealed in FOIA files, leaked documents, ethnographic and technical reports. In the CSIA, however, analysis takes place in the open. CSIA agents get first-hand experience with the decision-making processes faced by intelligence analysts who monitor social media.

The Poetics of Surveillance

The provocations for making the CSIA were stories of spectacular misjudgments by intelligence agencies in identifying threats to national security. Notably, two British students were detained by the US Department of Homeland Security and denied entry to the United States in 2012 for posts they made on Twitter. And during the trial of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev for the 2013 bombing of the Boston Marathon, the social media evidence presented by the FBI was exceptionally flawed. A photograph of a mosque in Grozny used for the background of Tsarnaev’s Twitter page was incorrectly identified as Mecca, and jokes from television shows and song lyrics were incorrectly marked as evidence of terrorist activity. Tsarnaev was convicted due to ample physical evidence linking him to the crime, drawing a stark contrast between traditional evidence gathering techniques and more recent methods for gathering digital evidence.

Considering the plethora of stories and leaked documents about the aforementioned “collect it all” strategy now used by the NSA and intelligence agencies around the world, there must be hundreds of less spectacular incidents of misidentifications. This raises the question: what are the decision-making criteria for intelligence agencies when evaluating data collected from social media? Despite occasional news stories or ethnographic reports discussing the erroneous judgments of federal agents, leaked schematics illustrating the process of data collection, and photographic documentation of vast data collection centers, little is known about how the data is processed once it has been collected.

During the planning stages for the CSIA, we needed a word to describe the type of aesthetic experience that comes from this kind of judgment making process. The term we began using is “qualculative poetics”. Qualculation is the system for making qualitative rational judgments; it is the material process and set of practices that allow people to make those judgments. Qualculation includes the spatiotemporal arrangements and metrics needed for making value based decisions. The term was coined by Franck Cochoy when he was researching how shopping carts in supermarkets alter the decision-making process by transforming shopping decisions into a question of volume [5]. Later, Michelle Callon and John Law linked qualculation with agency, realizing that there is a social and material basis for any system of judgment, whether it is a legal system or scientific process. Qualculation is related to discourses surrounding accountability, while the antithesis of qualculation, nonqualculation, is related to postmodernism, or certain religious traditions that
withhold making judgments [4].

A “qualulative poetics” is the creative rearrangement of these elements for aesthetic ends, often resulting in the questioning, or disruption, of a dominant, rationalist logic. In the CSIA, the qualulative poetics would be the experience that emanates from the display and arrangement of information on the screen and the sequence in which it is presented. Because a CSIA account is obtained through Twitter’s API, every CSIA agent is familiar with tweets in their original context—Twitter’s interface. In presenting tweets in the format seen by intelligence agents, the CSIA interface detaches the tweet from its original context and transforms into something to be judged based on how threatening it is to national security. The microblog post is no longer part of a larger system for communication; it is an individual piece of data presented along with its associated metadata. For example, if the author of the tweet has supplied Twitter with a description of themselves or their location, this information will be displayed and may affect the agents decision. The individual users of the app (the CSIA agents) must also contend with the human element of the decision-making process, and depending on their individual socialization, biases, and education this may vary widely.

Whenever possible, our design decisions for the application were based on known techniques used by intelligence agencies for monitoring social media. Through the design process, we became aware of how choices made about what information to present and how it is presented will directly affect the decision making process of the agents, and the agency they have in making those choices. Within several minutes of use, every user of the CSIA will be encountered with a tweet that will be difficult to evaluate based on the information presented. Yet, by all available accounts, this is the same information presented to real intelligence analysts. This difficulty is the aesthetic experience of the CSIA, its qualulative poetics. Bruce Nauman once said that where language ceases to be a useful tool for communication is the edge where poetry or art happen [21, pg. 44]. We are looking for that same edge in social media surveillance systems.

**Socio-technical Assumptions**

As an artistic research project, the CSIA aims to analyze intelligence agencies’ socio-technical assumptions. From our direct engagement with the technical apparatuses known to be used by intelligence agencies interested in total information awareness, we are testing some of the theories that have been developed about intelligence gathering. We will briefly discuss five socio-technical assumptions that media theorists, philosophers, and ethnographers have explored and compare them with our tentative findings to date.

In “Signal-to-Noise Ratio”, media theorist Friedrich Kittler writes, “Ever since noise, through the interception of enemy signals, has not been evaluated by interpreting articulated discourses or sounds… An unoccupied space has emerged, where one might substitute the practice of interception for the theory of reception, and polemics for hermeneutics” [16, pg. 177]. Kittler’s passage indicates that the analyst’s subjective interpretation of any given message is less essential to understanding the production of intelligence than the overall orientation of an agency or program the basic assumptions underpinning the technological and social apparatus. We can also derive from it one of the basic assumptions behind signals intelligence: that an analyst is there to intercept and decode enemy signals from noise.

Seeing the surveilled as the enemy is tied to the tacit assumption of guilt within automated intelligence agency surveillance strategies. Media theorist Timothy Jordan argues in Information Politics that algorithmic profiling treats everyone whose data is collected as guilty, and people are only determined to be innocent after their records have been analyzed and found not to resemble the criminal profile. This technique, which is used in commercial profiling and other big data analytics, has been called “topic-agnostic”, to characterize the function creep wherein data collected for one purpose can be used for another using the same procedures [15, pg. 115]. But the presumption of guilt is unique to security agencies, who use technologies developed in marketing and used in finance for very different purposes.

Philosopher Colin Koopman traces the intertwined histories of personality psychology and information theory, arguing that “informational persons” have developed since the late 1800s in personality psychology, privacy law, bureaucratic paperwork, communications theories, and elsewhere. From the Tabulating Machine of the census of 1890 to the notion that privacy is based on the “right to an invariable personality” modern and contemporary forms of surveillance assume that your data at least partially constitutes you and therefore surveilling your data is surveilling you [17]. The belief that captured data is an accurate and indexical trace of a person and their actions is equivalent to the belief that a photograph is an indexical trace of reality with an empirical claim to truth—yet this has been called into question since the birth of photographic technology. The first daguerreotype of a street scene, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre’s Boulevard du Temple from 1838, did not register any of the moving figures, and therefore failed to accurately represent the bustling streets of Paris. Like the wandering figures that evaded detection in early photographs, language used on social media is constantly shifting, and there is no reason to conclude that what is captured transparently represents the world. To believe otherwise is to neglect the significance of interpretation.

An ethnographic account of a Swedish intelligence agency, *The Raw is Cooked: Data in Intelligence Practice*, by Minna Räsänen and James Nyce, that corroborates with ethnographic accounts of US intelligence agencies, reveals that the notion of “raw data” is used regularly by intelligence agents to mean data received from sensors, signals and individuals. Agents assume that intelligence work begins with raw data, and that it is “through their own interpretive labor” that data is cooked, if you will. But, Räsänen and Nyce argue that this data has already been “processed by the work practices”, such as the forms that agents have to enter data into, as well as “political, practical and other decisions even before data collection occurs” [23, pg. 655]. Räsänen and Nyce argue that the interpretive labor of an intelligence agency begins before an analyst ever sifts through the information. Furthermore, from an analysis of the FBI’s own model of the “intelligence cycle”, which is defined as the “process of developing refined data into polished intelligence” it is clear that there is
no distinction between, or clear definition of, the terms data and information: in fact, they are used interchangeably, and both are described as, and understood to be, “raw” [11].

In *Infoglut*, Mark Andrejевич writes that the belief that processing a database could predict (or prevent) crime assumes that the only limit on our ability to predict is the “ability to effectively organize all of the information” [1]. Leaked documents and ethnographic reports show that intelligence agents are afraid that they may not be sharing enough information with one another, and yet they simultaneously feel that they are drowning in too much information, and struggling to make meaning out of noise [22, 6]. In a leaked intranet column called the SIGINT Philosopher, an NSA agent stated, “We are drowning in information. And yet we know nothing. For sure.” [20] This “collect it all” and “share it all” approach has resulted in the accumulation of more information than can be processed by human agents creating a need for automated processing, or “next generation information access” (NGIA) systems, to algorithmically process the massive troves of data they have collected, with the belief that software will find patterns that human analysts cannot perceive.

Through the development of the first two phases of the CSIA, we have found that dataveillance techniques, as currently practiced by intelligence agencies, do seem to operate on the premise that they produce transparent representations of “the enemy’s” behavior as unprocessed data that can be processed into intelligence. Additionally, the intelligence community seems to be taken in by some of the promises of Big Data, such as the assumption that processing more information will allow for more accurate prediction and prevention. This is the role of their NGIA systems, which algorithmically analyze and classify hundreds of data streams from diverse sources, both open source and private. The belief that processing more information will allow for more accurate prediction contradicts the fact that they still find themselves struggling to make meaning out of a sea of random noise.

**Artistic Research and Disruption**

Culturally, we are in the early phases of understanding contemporary forms of dataveillance and the appropriate tactics of resistance to them. We take the position that a critical, practice-based understanding of how contemporary dataveillance functions is the first step towards any kind of resistance. By crowd-sourcing the decision-making process used to create intelligence, the CSIA opens up a window into the technical practices that frame intelligence gathering, revealing the assumptions that lie in the technological and algorithmic designs that intelligence agencies deploy. By replicating known data processing techniques, CSIA allows for a practice-based awareness of dataveillance techniques, and exposes potential problems or oversights inherent in the process. But the CSIA does not only replicate what intelligence agencies do in order to study them. By opening up these processes for all to participate in and see, it also changes the relationship between intelligence agents and their targets. Intelligence agents are typically unaccountable to the people they judge, and people who are profiled cannot usually see the processes behind how they are categorized.

The CSIA contributes to a more informed debate on the problems associated with secret, automated, “collect it all” surveillance. It fosters the potential for disruption and resistance through a practice-based awareness of social media surveillance techniques: by giving users first-hand experience with how social media surveillance works, it provides them with the means to navigate the security apparatus, allowing users to choose if they want to evade algorithmic capture, jam the system with too much information, or find another mode of engagement. The CSIA not only opens a debate about the effectiveness of surveillance techniques, but it also enables users to reflect on how they want to engage with it.

**Conclusion**

At the core of both *Art for Spooks* and the CSIA is a desire to directly engage with the rationalist, objectivist logic that guides the contemporary surveillance state. In both projects, documents that were leaked or released through FOIA requests play an integral part in the creation of the work and are part of the aesthetic experience. This is not to say the material itself is aestheticized, but rather, an incorporation of the rationality revealed by those documents provides an opportunity for the viewer to playfully partake in that logic. One example is the use of metadata within each project in a manner that adds an element of horror to Michael Hayden’s admission that people are killed based on metadata. *Art for Spooks* demonstrates how easily and automatically this metadata can be manipulated. Likewise, the CSIA challenges viewers to make decisions based on the limited understandings that can be gleaned from metadata—the same decisions that have potentially life changing consequences when made by actual intelligence analysts. It could be said that these projects provide the viewer with a sandbox for a protected interaction with the logic of the system that allows them to viscerally experience the limitations and assumptions deeply-rooted within the rationalist perspectives outlined by the released documents. This sandbox is the space for both a playful engagement and poetic disruption.

**Author Biographies**

Derek Curry’s artistic practice engages questions of agency and knowledge production through a variety of mediums from video games and data analytics, to participatory performance and sculptural data visualizations, and his research focuses on algorithmic modes of control, particularly in the electronic stock exchanges. Jennifer Gradecki’s artistic practice and research focuses on the relationship between information and power, particularly in intelligence agencies, and aims to make specialized knowledge and technical information more accessible. Curry and Gradecki are both currently PhD candidates at SUNY Buffalo, in Media Study and Visual Studies, respectively. They earned their MFAs in New Genres from UCLAs Department of Art in 2010 and have participated in numerous international exhibitions and conferences, including the New Media Gallery in Zadar, the AC Institute in New York, the Science Gallery in Dublin, Critical Finance Studies in Amsterdam, the International Symposium on Electronic Art in Vancouver, and Radical Networks at NYU Polytechnic–Eyebeam.
Nicholas Knouf is an Assistant Professor of Cinema and Media Studies at Wellesley College in Wellesley, MA. His research explores the interstitial spaces between media studies, information science, critical theory, digital art, and science and technology studies. His work has been discussed in print and online media, including Vice (Motherboard), ID Magazine, the Boston Globe, CNN, Slashdot, and Afterimage. He has a PhD in Information Science from Cornell University.

Claudia Pederson’s research interests focus on the theories, histories and practices spanning art, technology, and social agency. Her writings on play, games, digital photography, and techno-ecological art are published in Afterimage, Intelligent Agent, Eludamos, Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas, as well as the ISEA, DAC, and CHI conference proceedings. Her most recent essays on contemporary Latin American artists working with robotics, interactive textiles and consumer electronics are forthcoming in an anthology on Latin American Modernism and Journal of Peer Production. Pederson holds a PhD from the History of Art and Visual Studies Department at Cornell University and is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Art, Design and Creative Industries at Wichita State University.

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