

DATA browser 04  
CREATING INSECURITY

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Bureau of Inverse Technology

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glorious ninth

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Tiziana Terranova

McKenzie Wark

**CREATING INSECURITY:**  
**ART AND CULTURE IN THE AGE OF SECURITY**



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DATA browser 04

CREATING INSECURITY: ART AND CULTURE IN THE AGE OF SECURITY

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## CREATING INSECURITY: ART AND CULTURE IN THE AGE OF SECURITY

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## CREATING INSECURITY – INTRODUCTION

Wolfgang Sützl

- + 'What is the basis of security? What secures security? Its absence. Insecurity secures the necessity for security. The threat to security is [...] security itself. We have nothing to secure but security itself.' (Wark 2005)

These questions and statements might summarise what marks the point of departure for this book. If security secures itself, and if this is all that security does, than a book on security has to ask itself whether it is possible to make worthwhile and meaningful statements about security at all. If all security does is securing, is it possible to say anything about it that is not circular? Does security not demand wordless submission, and is the only alternative to this the indiscriminate terrorist act? If both the affirmation and the negation of security secure security, what is the point of publishing a book on it?

One way of answering this question is to view security as a specific manifestation of violence. The violence of security may be obvious, but merits explanation because it is still unusual. After all, more often than not security is so closely linked to 'peace' that they seem to be the same thing. Often security is implicitly or explicitly understood as a precondition for peace. Without security, no peace. However, security's business of securing itself is never complete. As a concept without an outer boundary, it never encounters a place where it has completed its mission. It shares this with the state of emergency, but does not have the latter's temporary character. Security never ends, it is an expanding loop; and

with security never fully securing itself, there cannot be peace.

On the other hand, is the purpose of security not to prevent war and violence? Is this not the promise of security that has led to its acceptance ever since the emergence of the modern European state? Indeed. It is crucial to see, however, that security does not represent a neutral intersection between peace on the one hand and war/violence on the other. The concept of security works well without peace, but security must secure access to violence – specifically, to a type of violence *not* endorsed by the legal system – in order to perform its securing function. A meaningful critique of security must therefore start by taking to heart the history and the difficulties of a critique of violence in general.

Security can be meaningfully examined – rather than just submitted to or challenged violently – when its specific manifestations are considered in relation to different levels of violence. Following the three-level model of violence of Johan Galtung (1990), one can identify the violence of security on the levels of direct, structural and cultural violence. The level of direct violence is the level of the gun, of war, the police, and any direct action targeted at diminishing life. Every security system, no matter how user-friendly, can be traced back to a gun at some point, to a pair of handcuffs, a baton, a prison, a murder, a threat. But direct violence has its ‘weakness’: it can be seen, identified, questioned, constrained. This happens, for example, in international law, where resort to violence is tied to specific conditions. It happens in ethics, where violence can be subjected to a normative argument.

However, violence that is actual violence goes beyond these constraints. Precisely because it does not tolerate outer limitations, is violence really violent, since it always enters a realm where there is no foundation but only what Carl Schmitt called a ‘pure’ decision? Is violence really violent, because violence always also enters a terrain where it has no purpose outside of itself? Jacques Derrida (1990) refers to this as the ‘mystical foundation of authority’ in his discussion of Walter Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’ and Carl Schmitt’s decisionist legal theory.

The question here is whether a critique of violence, a norm that constrains, can actually be *before* violence; in other words, whether violence can (always) be bound by norms? International law has tried to affirm this question by banishing, or rather, constraining the legitimacy of the use of violence in politics, limiting it to two purposes (self-defence, and UN Security Council resolutions). As different as the ideological orientations of Benjamin and Schmitt were, they agree that such a thing is not possible, which is why Benjamin is all the more interested in whether the exercise of violence itself can be understood in normative criteria. We know today that the constraining effort of international law, in those areas where it is followed and not ignored in a Schmittian fashion, leads to a new form of violence, a new problematic: evident in phenomena such as *peace troops*, *peace enforcement*, or *humanitarian violence*.

Still, direct violence can be identified, named, discussed in terms of responsibility; we can make statements about it and try to continue its normative hedging. Even if we are not pacifists, we can get in the way of violence. Therefore, in order for direct violence to be real and actual, and *effective*, something else is required: other layers that shield direct violence from critique or constraints. In Galtung’s thinking, there are two such layers.

The first of these is identified as ‘structural violence’. This is violence on the level of architecture and systems; it is the structural support system for direct violence. It goes beyond the purpose-oriented, singular nature of direct violence by adding the dimension of permanence and creating an automated process by building and maintaining institutions and industries, enacting laws, establishing standards, spawning bureaucracies, etc. In Deleuzian terms we could speak of ‘machinery’ when we refer to structural violence. Dispositives such as anti-terror legislation, IP regimes, restrictive communication structures, perhaps capitalism itself would be found on this level of violence. It is also the level of the ‘technical constraint’, for which the German language has the sinister word *Sachzwang* (‘coercion by the object’). It is the level of the TINA (‘there is no alternative’) principle, where things are the way they are because that is the only way they

could possibly be. On this structural level, violence becomes objectified: the idea of personal or institutional responsibility seeps away before the smooth working of machinery. There is organised irresponsibility – systems and networks in which no one can be held accountable for outcomes. But like direct violence, structural violence has its own weak spot. It is still possible to see it for what it is, to see it as something wrong that should be overcome; it is still possible to think that ‘another world is possible’. This is where a third level of violence comes into play; Galtung calls it ‘cultural violence’ (1990).

What cultural violence does is operate on the symbolic level to make structural and direct violence look normal or even desirable, i.e. to take away the symbolic foundations of a critique. Galtung speaks of cultural violence as ‘those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) – that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence’ (1990: 291).

While security is present on both the direct and structural levels of violence, the particular forms of security appear most prominently, and with far-reaching consequences, on the cultural level. Security as a cynical subject, identifying anything that is not affirmative as a security risk that cannot but secure security, may be the most poignant and consequential manifestation of our rich heritage in cultural violence, affecting any kind of otherness. Here, security secures itself by eroding the possibility of a meaningful critique. It does so by performing calculations and deploying technologies that reduce the number of possible outcomes to a number that no longer constitutes a risk; ideally, that number is one. Security eliminates potential surprises and ensures that nothing really new will happen. This can be observed on all three layers of violence: artists and critics are arrested (cf. Tiziana Terranova’s contribution in this book), their work structurally suppressed (e.g. by funding and institutional constraints), or rendered politically meaningless (e.g. by erosion of public space and generalised entertainment pressures).

But nowhere is security more present than on the cultural level: the emergence of a security aesthetic, the control of information and knowledge, the flattening of symbolic landscapes; in short, thwarting all potential tools of a critique is what security needs to achieve in this realm in order to fulfil its mission of securing itself. Yet the conflict between security on the one hand and art and culture on the other could hardly be more extreme: while the former needs to calculate and reduce the number of variables, the latter constantly increases that number by stating new things, creating symbols, affirming difference, signalling otherness, introducing surprises. This provides an obvious reason why art and culture have a hard time under security as the ‘basic principle’ of politics (Agamben 2001; and republished herein with a new translation). It explains why art and culture are particularly at risk and subject to the streamlining performed under security. Nevertheless, it is also the reason why art and culture are protected under many democratic constitutions, for it is the creation of difference and otherness that makes it possible to create those uncontrolled spaces from which political power might be held accountable. Those who wrote these constitutions knew that a democracy will cease to be a democracy unless it protects the possibility of expressing dissent against the powers thus criticised by protecting the freedom of art, science, the media, information, etc.

It is this particular potential of art and culture of providing the symbols, the grammar of a critique that can only be identified as a risk and targeted by the security apparatus. However, it is also this potential that the security apparatus can never completely eliminate unless it wants to eliminate its own *raison d’être*, insecurity. Just as it constantly re-invents the terrorist and becomes itself terrorist (Agamben 2001), the security-driven state must constantly re-invent the artist and is tempted to become itself artistic, developing an aesthetic of security.

If security is itself manifest as violence, who will protect us from security? This is the question that concerns Geoff Cox and Martin Knahl in their contribution to this book. Drawing on Benjamin’s 1921 essay ‘Critique of Violence’, they

consider how the contradictory reality of security is expressed in the realm of software, understood not as a mere instrument, but as ‘manifestation of ideology’ creating its own exclusions. Software running over networks is fraught with insecurity, and a security industry has developed that promises to secure information systems against a long taxonomy of potential threats. In parallel to how Benjamin develops his critique of violence as a critique of the means of violence rather than its ends (and therefore directed against the mythical powers of extra-legal violence rather than immanent violence), the authors discuss software as ‘pure means’: here, a critique of violence becomes possible as ‘pure software – as resistance to the mythic powers that regulate our systems’.

Software is also the focus of Florian Cramer’s contribution, ‘Buffer Overflows’. His point of departure is the confluence of ‘poem, prayer and computational algorithm’ in a 17th century anonymous piece of German poetry, and in Steve Reich’s composition *It’s gonna rain* (1965). Both are described as examples of performances ‘flooding’ a (metaphysical) communication channel: they create a ‘poetic virus spreading not a love, but a peace message, in the hope that through its multiplications and viral mutations, the prayer may be heard both by God and spread as a peace spell among mankind’. Parallels can be found in today’s digital networks, where buffer overflows are the most frequent security hole. Additionally, just like the cited 17th century poem, various 20th century art movements can be read as attempts to ‘stretch the limits of poetry in its original sense of “poesis”, creation’. Computer art creating insecurity creates symbolic performances: jodi’s work *OSS* (1998) is cited as a case in point. *OSS* floods the web ‘with myriads of small moving windows. However, the site does no real harm to a computer and creates the impression of an Internet virus only in the imagination of the spectator’ – it creates insecurity by peaceful means. Also by peaceful means, carlos katastrosfsky’s forthcoming *vir.us.exe* project (2009) is a windows program that once downloaded by the user and executed will simply delete itself. In a short introduction by Luís Silva, he explains that the virus is not threatening in itself, but is perceived to be all the same. This is how the feelings of insecurity are perpetuated.

The work of the ‘Global Security Alliance’, presented by Konrad Becker in this book, exaggerates the mythical power referred to by Benjamin in order to expose the very heart of the security industry. The GSA’s catalogue of services includes ‘cultural peacekeeping’, a term that may be an appropriate description of the mission of security in the field of culture: *pacifying* the cultural landscape, ensuring nothing surprising can ever happen. This is done by creating an aesthetic that is a mix of protection and comfort on the one hand, and strength and power on the other hand, through a strong presence on the symbolic level. One significant component of this symbolic level is information; here, security agencies are engaged in ‘strategic communication’, aligning the ‘content’ of communication to the desired result, eliminating the spaces where difference could occur. Information peacekeeping produces its own prose, of which the GSA contribution in this book is a fine example. Indeed, security rhetoric marks a decisive dividing line between two languages (or rather, non-languages) generated by security: this is the dividing line between the silence of effective, secret operations, and the noise of a meaningless, de-politicised language in the public realm – or perhaps what once might have been the public realm, for without symbols and a language that are capable of stating difference, there is no public realm.

The political poetics of security/insecurity is at the centre of Wolfgang Sützl’s contribution. Starting with a critical appreciation of Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben, and their theories of the ‘state of exception’, he develops a critique of language under security by drawing on Martin Heidegger’s philosophies of technology and language, guided by their interpretation by Gianni Vattimo. Security is understood as what Schmitt in his ‘Political Theology’ calls a *Grenzbegriff*, a concept of the ‘outermost sphere’ (1990: 11), that stands both within and without the legal order, ultimately based on the exception, not the norm, and therefore difficult to question from a normative – legal or ethical – point of view. Security is, in the last instance, something that can never be fully accounted for, based on what in German is called an *Abgrund* (abyss) rather than a *Grund* (foundation). Yet the applicability of Schmitt’s decisionist model

reaches its limitations for security as soon as technology comes into play. The *Abgrund* of security is no longer the single, sovereign decision for the state of exception, but the continual technological automatism that governs security systems. Security technology gives permanence to the exception. One way to understand this, Sützl suggests, is to take up Heidegger's theory of technology as the culmination of metaphysics. The problem of overcoming metaphysics – the required point 'outside' or 'beyond' metaphysics – reappears when we think we can solve the problem of technology by more, more powerful, more autonomous technology, by a constant updating of what remains essentially unchanged. One way out of this predicament is to look at what technology does to language. In the 1950s Heidegger observed the rise of a technical language, a language reduced to information, leaving traditional (or common) language desolate. This language divide anticipates the linguistic divide of security into a (telling) silence at the core of politics, and meaningless noise at its periphery. According to Sützl, creating 'insecurity', opening spaces of difference and otherness, is therefore an effort of a political poetics.

Attesting to the informational language of security, glorious ninth (Kate Southworth and Patrick Simons) present a series of 'incalculable' events, actions and encounters in the form of six short 'lists'. All calculable elements of the artwork are suspended, and the instructions provide a material form to comment on the relationship between security and art – through a range of protocols associated with state control and its impossibilities.

The question of 'boundaries' of the security system also marks the point of departure of Brian Holmes' article, 'Security Aesthetic = Systems Panic'. What happens when the boundary between inside and outside no longer exists, when threats can arise from within a system? 'Deep paranoia':

'The problem of the system's edges suddenly multiplies: the boundary to be secured is now the entire volume of the system, its width, its breadth, its depth, and most damnedly of all, its human potential for change in the future. The

resulting proliferation of eyes, ears, cameras, snooping devices, data banks, cross-checks and spiralling analytical anxiety in the face of every conceivable contingency is what defines the present security panic.'

Holmes draws on art critic Jack Burnham's thesis of 1968 describing the demise of the traditional art object, and the rise of an 'aesthetic system' in its place, where *Homo faber* turns into *Homo arbiter formae* – man the decider of forms – in order to ask what a democratic aesthetic would look like under security. He concludes that the aesthetic system must be constituted as a 'fully operational reality' capable of determining the systemic boundary of security by determining another. A democratic aesthetic system against security panic will require an art of 'elaborate fakes, doppelgängers, double agents, fictional entities that strive to produce outbreaks of truth at their points of contact with the hidden system'.

The hidden system in security, its secrecy and silence, is not its only reality; security is also spectacular and noisy. The border fortifications securing Europe and North America against immigrants are a case in point, and they are locations of extreme violence. Security as *Grenzbegriff* ('borderline' or 'limit' concept) takes on a literal meaning here: it marks a line that must not be crossed unless one wants to risk one's life. But the ambivalence of security remains irresolvable: it also marks a line that one *must cross* unless one wants to risk one's life. This utmost form of violence is experienced by the many who are 'others', and who wish to cross the borders of Europe or other wealthy, secured places. Daniela Ingruber's contribution follows P., a boy from Somalia, on his way to Europe. That way leads into a camp for minor refugees in Ceuta, where P.'s identity, his story, his body, are identified as 'other' and therefore barred, excluded. Security, Ingruber argues, excludes; negating the other's identity, 'security assassinates without looking at its victims'. According to Ingruber, art is the only possible response to the mania of security, with camera playing a special role: it can be used for surveillance as much as for film, it marks a juncture as well as a disjuncture. With reference to Nina Kusturica's documentary *Little Alien* (2009), the contrasting uses of the camera for surveillance and for telling

a refugee's story are discussed. The technical images of security fences and night vision technologies are contrasted with the camera accompanying a refugee on his journey, narrating his story. While the security camera is voyeuristic, the narrative camera 'returns something to [the protagonists] that security has taken away: the being itself, humanity'. By bringing back imagination in the bleak landscape of security, Ingruber concludes, film actually has a healing power.

*Faceless*, a film by Manu Luksch (2007), attempts something similar, placing emphasis on how security, and CCTV surveillance in particular, affects people's life potentials by manipulating time. Made entirely from surveillance camera footage, the film narrates the story of a subject that exists in the film only as captured by CCTV systems. Mukul Patel's contribution is based on this film, and highlights the concept of time inherent in security: 'real time'. In real time 'the dominion of the present is guaranteed by the annihilation of the past and the future'. Surveillance cameras reduce people to data without a past or a future. *Faceless* tries to tell a story where no stories are told: by sending its subject on a journey to the precarious territory on the edge of the permanent present.

Security not only creates its own non-time, it creates non-places, so-called 'black sites'. These are locations where suspected terrorists are interrogated and/or tortured as part of the CIA's Extraordinary Rendition programme 'outside of the eye of international human rights law'. The Institute for Applied Autonomy's *Terminal Air* (2007) project creates insecurity by proving a map of the real-time movement of aircraft connecting these locations that officially do not exist. The project also brands the anonymous companies through which the programme is run, taking away their anonymity. Anonymity is a characteristic of 'clandestine operations'. The Extraordinary Rendition programme, though, reflects a recent transformation of US military doctrine, now 'less concerned with national security or global balances of power than with legal culpability and public relations'. The result is the 'political theatre' of the Bush administration around this programme, a show of secrecy, a winking of a politician's eye, the ambivalence of the 'black site'.

Norbert Koppensteiner also addresses the question of space under security in his contribution, and not just as a geometrical or geographical concept. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's philosophy of nomadism, and their concept of the state 'striating smooth space', he refers to the nomad as 'chiffre, as exemplary form which encompasses both the notions of resistance against homogenisation and the affirmative plurality of becomings'. Rosi Braidotti's concept of 'transpositions' implies both movement and difference, and is used as methodology in Koppensteiner's essay:

'Transpositions carry out a perpetual form of movement in which, as Braidotti (2006: 5) puts it, the 'positivity of difference' becomes a specific theme of its own. Deployed as a method in academic writing, trans-positions imply a perpetual, nomadic movement through concepts. In a series of differentiations and approximations, local points of reference (trans-positions) can be established while the guiding question is kept open as impetus. The movement so continues without ever finally settling on any one of those reference points (trans-positions).'

Nomadic politics, Koppensteiner argues, creates insecurity by working against the politics of the engineering of predictable, sedentary, and stable subjects under security. The incalculable nature of the nomad in transposition generates difference as space, gender, or expression, a difference impossible to pin down. Nomadic movements, therefore, have no map – which is precisely why it is difficult for them to be identified by security – but also impossible to base a global resistance project on them.

A case in point of the clash of smooth and striated space might be the use of mobile phones – a technology that has invited artistic and politically subversive uses as much as aroused surveillance desires. Naeem Mohaiemen's cellphone images of security scenes in Asia, and Bureau of Inverse Technology's *Antiterror Line* (a work by Natalie Jeremijenko and Kate Rich, from 2002) both 'invert' this technology, creating niches of empowerment within a politico-technological

landscape increasingly normalised by security. The BIT accompanying statement advises members of the public to report individuals or activity that may be directly or indirectly associated with anti-terrorist activity, to raise the question: ‘If the idea takes root that civil liberties should not be permitted to stand in the way of terrorism, at what point do security measures start to corrode the very society they are designed to protect?’ In a similar way, Mohaiemen’s ‘accidental’ images are presented in contrast to those of the mainstream press in an image war. He maintains that we need a ‘space for mistakes, rudeness, bacteria, and things that just don’t fit’.

The conflicting requirements of visibility and secrecy faced by the security apparatus lead to interesting contortions, as McKenzie Wark shows in his essay ‘The Occulted State’. In it, he explores the heritage of the Situationists in developing a current critique of the violence of security. Guy Debord’s theory of the spectacle and Gianfranco Sanguinetti’s writing on terrorism serve as a guiding thread for an analysis of the current spectacle of security. Rather than the diffuse spectacle of the 20th century, Wark argues, the 21st century security spectacle is a ‘disintegrated spectacle’: ‘The state of the disintegrating spectacle reveals itself as concerned mostly with its own sovereignty and the defence of property. It no longer makes any promises.’

In ‘Failure to comply: bioart, security and the market’, Tiziana Terranova follows Michel Foucault in demonstrating the interconnections between security and the market, highlighting the new position of critical artistic work under biopolitics. Security is described as ‘that operation by which the problem of order... is subjected to a strictly economic calculus’. Under neoliberalism, it operates with economic means, developing ‘more or less probable effects described according to the overall logic of cost. [Security] does not think that it can eradicate the activities in question completely, but it can set up such measures as to make them expensive and hence keep them within limits’.

The neoliberal market and security serve each other, while what is at stake is

life, and politics becomes biopolitics in a post-democratic scenario. Drawing on Anna Munster’s writing on the legal proceedings against Steve Kurtz (Critical Art Ensemble), Terranova applies Foucault’s theory of biopolitics to the limits and potentials of bioart. The CAE, she argues, refused to create bioart that fosters social cohesion and provide an antidote to the disintegrating effects of competition. Instead, ‘CAE bioart failed to comply to the rules of good conduct and thus attracted a surplus of punishment from the judiciary apparatus’.

Failing to comply to the demands of the politics of security may be the common denominator of the positions brought together in this book. Failing to comply means stating something meaningful about security. Given the nature of security as a concept without an outer border, anything meaningful that can be stated about security will be inevitably be critical. It will create, on the level of culture, that which security can only identify as insecurity. It will create potentials for different outcomes, i.e. democracy.

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## ON SECURITY AND TERROR

Giorgio Agamben

- + Security as the basic principle of state politics dates back to the birth of the modern state. Hobbes already mentions it as the opposite of fear, which compels human beings to join together in the formation of a society. But the thought of security does not fully develop until the 18th century. In a still-unpublished lecture at the Collège de France in 1978, Michel Foucault has shown how the political and economic practice of the Physiocrats opposes security to discipline and the law as instruments of governance.

Turgot and Quesnay as well as Physiocratic officials were not primarily concerned with the prevention of famine or the regulation of production, but wanted to allow for their development to then govern and 'secure' their consequences. Whereas disciplinary power isolates and closes off territories, measures of security lead to an opening and to globalisation; whereas the law wants to prevent and prescribe, security wants to intervene in ongoing processes to direct them. In short, discipline wants to produce order, security wants to govern disorder. Since measures of security can only function within a context of freedom of traffic, trade, and individual initiative, Foucault can show that the development of security and the development of liberalism coincide.

Today we are facing extreme and most dangerous developments in the thought of security. In the course of a gradual neutralisation of politics and the progressive surrender of traditional tasks of the state, security imposes itself as

the basic principle of state activity. What used to be one among several decisive measures of public administration until the first half of the twentieth century, now becomes the sole criterion of political legitimation. The thought of security entails an essential risk. A state which has security as its sole task and source of legitimacy is a fragile organism; it can always be provoked by terrorism to become itself terrorist.

We should not forget that the first major terror organisation after the war, the Organisation de l'Armée Secrète (OAS), was established by a French general, who considered himself a patriot and was convinced that terrorism was the only answer to the guerrilla phenomenon in Algeria and Indochina. When politics, the way it was understood by theorists of the 'police science' (Polizeiwissenschaft) in the eighteenth century, reduces itself to police, the difference between state and terrorism threatens to disappear. In the end security and terrorism may form a single deadly system, in which they justify and legitimate each others' actions.

The risk is not merely the development of a clandestine complicity of opponents, but that the search for security leads to a world civil war which renders all civil coexistence impossible. In the new situation created by the end of the classical form of war between sovereign states it becomes clear that security finds its end in globalisation: it implies the idea of a new planetary order which is in truth the worst of all disorders. But there is another danger. Because they require constant reference to a state of exception, measures of security work towards a growing depoliticisation of society. In the long run, they are irreconcilable with democracy.

Nothing is more important than a revision of the concept of security as basic principle of state politics. European and American politicians finally have to consider the catastrophic consequences of uncritical general use of this figure of thought. It is not that democracies should cease to defend themselves: but maybe the time has come to work towards the prevention of disorder and catastrophe, not merely towards their control. Plans exist today for all kinds of emergencies

(ecological, medical, military), but there is no politics to prevent them. On the contrary, we can say that politics secretly works towards the production of emergencies. It is the task of democratic politics to prevent the development of conditions which lead to hatred, terror, and destruction and not to limit itself to attempts to control them once they occur.

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Source: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20.09.2001, Nr. 219 / Seite 45.  
Translation: Soenke Zehle (2009).

# CRITIQUE OF SOFTWARE SECURITY

Geoff Cox & Martin Knahl

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<b>Government Action Taken</b>	[positive] ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ [negative]
<b>Result of Government Action</b>	[positive] ● ● ● ● ● [negative]
<b>Threat Level of Government Action</b>	[low] ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ [high]

Rate Feed

Screenshot: Jonah Brucker-Cohen, Michael Bennett, Homeland Insecurity Advisory System (2004)

Security is predicated on protection from perceived violence or terrorism, but who will protect us from security? Behind this statement is the fact that those in power regularly commit acts of real and symbolic violence and this goes unpunished – indeed it is legitimated so effectively that we think we are protected by these acts of violence against us in the form of security. This essay asks how the inherent violence encoded into software might be understood in this way. The argument is that – rather than simply assuming that it protects the user from insecurity - security software itself constitutes violence. These are some of the conditions that produce states of emergency and that in turn create insecurities.

### Critique of Violence

The background to this line of thinking draws upon Walter Benjamin's 1921 essay 'Critique of Violence'.<sup>1</sup> For Benjamin, the issue is not whether violence is a means to a just or unjust end (a critique of 'just ends') but whether violence can be a moral means in itself. As he puts it, 'a more exact criterion is needed, which would discriminate within the sphere of means themselves, without regard for the ends they serve' (1996: 236).<sup>2</sup> Rather than simply reconciling just ends by a justification of the means, or vice versa, the 'Critique of Violence' essay focuses on the realm of means, or more precisely: 'the question of the justification of certain means that constitute violence' as Benjamin puts it (1996: 237).

As far as the State is concerned, violence exercised by individuals, or its legal subjects, is a threat to the legal system that serves to justify its own use of violence. Legal ends appear to be only achievable by legal power. The law uses violence for legal ends that the law itself has decided. For instance, and as an agent of State authority, police violence is legitimated as both law-making and law-preserving – and indeed *all* violence is a means of law-making and law-preserving according to Benjamin. This indicates the law's 'monopoly on violence' as he puts it, in not simply preserving legal ends but more importantly in preserving the law itself. It also affirms the threat of actions that are outside of the law, to the law itself, and why they must be contained.

An exception to this is the right to strike, conceded by the State in recognition of the inevitability of antagonism in human societies. Yet to strike is an active refusal to work, the withdrawal of actions, a non-action, and is not necessarily violent. Where violence is more easily discernible is that the motivation to strike in the first place is to escape from the violence imposed on the worker by the employer. This position is in keeping with Trotsky, in his essay 'Terrorism' of 1911, who considers arguments against the use of violence to be a hypocrisy in that the entire state apparatus and its laws, police, and army are nothing but an apparatus for capitalist terror:

'Our class enemies are in the habit of complaining about our terrorism. What they mean by this is rather unclear. They would like to label all the activities of the proletariat directed against the class enemy's interests as terrorism. The strike, in their eyes, is the principal method of terrorism. The threat of a strike, the organisation of strike pickets, an economic boycott of a slave driving boss, a moral boycott of a traitor from our ranks - all this and much more they call terrorism. If terrorism is understood in this way as any action inspiring fear in, or doing harm to, the enemy - then of course the entire class struggle is nothing but terrorism.' (1987)

The right to strike translates as the right to use a form of violence to attain certain ends, and the State reserves the right to counter this with violence.<sup>3</sup> Trotsky points to the glaring paradox of a value system that argues for the 'absolute value of human life' and at the same time sacrifices millions of people in wars. On the one hand violence is seen to be inadmissible, and yet on the other, in *exceptional circumstances* it is seen to be necessary – in a 'shift from the moral high ground to raw self-interest' (Buck-Morss 2003: 33).<sup>4</sup>

Much the same paradox applies in the contemporary 'war on terror', as the *state of emergency* becomes the justification for the erosion of citizen's rights and freedoms that were hard won. The duplicity is evident in the way those deemed a danger to national security can be taken into custody and detained in ways

**Symantec ThreatCon**



**ThreatCon Level 1**

Low : Basic network posture  
 This condition applies when there is no discernible network incident activity and no malicious code activity with a moderate or severe risk rating. Under these conditions, only a routine security posture, designed to defeat normal network threats, is warranted. Automated systems and alerting mechanisms should be used.

**Symantec ThreatCon**



**ThreatCon Level 2**

Medium : Increased alertness  
 This condition applies when knowledge or the expectation of attack activity is present, without specific events occurring or when malicious code reaches a moderate risk rating. Under this condition, a careful examination of vulnerable and exposed systems is appropriate, security applications should be updated with new signatures and/or rules as soon as they become available and careful monitoring of logs is recommended. Changes to the security infrastructure are not required.

**Symantec ThreatCon**



**ThreatCon Level 3**

High : Known threat  
 This condition applies when an isolated threat to the computing infrastructure is currently underway or when malicious code reaches a severe risk rating. Under this condition, increased monitoring is necessary, security applications should be updated with new signatures and/or rules as soon as they become available and redeployment and reconfiguration of security systems is recommended. People should be able to maintain this posture for a few weeks at a time, as threats come and go.

**Symantec ThreatCon**



**ThreatCon Level 4**

Extreme : Full alert  
 This condition applies when extreme global network incident activity is in progress. Implementation of measures in this Threat Condition for more than a short period probably will create hardship and affect the normal operations of network infrastructure.

that erase individual human rights, turning them into a ‘noncitizen’ such that ‘bare life reaches its maximum indeterminacy’ (Agamben 2005: 4). The way the State suspends and withdraws its guarantee of protection and legal entitlement is a condition of contemporary power, and this is discussed in depth in Giorgio Agamben’s *State of Exception* (2005). Extending Carl Schmitt’s *Politische Theologie* of 1922 that established the contiguity between sovereignty and the state of exception, Agamben argues that the state of exception, although described as a provisional measure in *exceptional circumstances*, has become the working paradigm of modern government.<sup>5</sup> Under this logic, State power uses violence against an identifiable enemy so that its use of power appears legitimate despite the active contradiction with its own legal and natural laws. When the required ends cannot be guaranteed by the legal system alone, the repressive state apparatus further intervenes ‘for security reasons’ (Benjamin 1996: 243). Security marks the exception, in other words.

**Software Violence**

Software running over networks is a manifestation of ideology, and connectivity remains a security threat beyond its purely technical functionality. This is what Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, in *The Exploit*, describe as the new ‘network-network symmetry’ of power, in which control is distributed relatively autonomously in horizontal organisational locales and at the same time into rigid vertical hierarchies or directed commands (2007). This description is a socio-technical truism of course, and one that supports their claim that networks and sovereignty are not incompatible. Indeed together they are *exceptional* and are always related as ‘sovereignty-in-networks’. Correspondingly, the recommendation to those developing oppositional tactics is to take advantage of the vulnerabilities in networks by exploiting power differentials that exist in the system. This is precisely what software developers and malware (malicious software) authors have discovered, as they exploit vulnerable operating systems, internet service and security software.

To add detail here: Internet violence is propagated through various means such

The screenshot shows the Norton Threat Explorer website. The main heading is "Threat Explorer". Below it, a description states: "The Threat Explorer is a comprehensive resource consumers can turn to for daily, accurate, up-to-date information on the latest threats, risks and vulnerabilities." There are two main sections: "Latest Threats & Risks" and "Vulnerabilities".

Severity	Name	Type	Protected*
	W32.Imaut.E	Worm	
	W32.Waledac	Worm	
	Trojan.Gimfan.A	Trojan	12/22/2008
	JS.Downloader.B	Trojan, Virus, Worm	12/18/2008
	Bloodhound.Exploit.218	Trojan, Virus, Worm	12/18/2008
	Bloodhound.Exploit.216	Trojan, Virus, Worm	12/18/2008
	Bloodhound.PDF.3	Trojan, Virus, Worm	12/18/2008
	Suspicious.MH90	Trojan, Virus, Worm	12/18/2008
	Bloodhound.Exploit.215	Trojan, Virus, Worm	12/18/2008

Name	Discovered
Microsoft Internet Explorer XML Handling Remote Code Execution Vulnerability	December 11, 2008
Microsoft Windows GDI WMF Integer Overflow Vulnerability	December 9, 2008
Microsoft Internet Explorer HTML Objects Remote Code Execution Vulnerability	December 9, 2008
Microsoft Word RTF Malformed Control Word Remote Code Execution Vulnerability	December 9, 2008
Microsoft XML Core Services Transfer Encoding Cross Domain Information Disclo...	November 11, 2008
Adobe Reader /util.printf() JavaScript Function Stack Buffer Overflow Vulner...	November 4, 2008
Microsoft Windows Server Service RPC Handling Remote Code Execution Vulnerabi...	October 23, 2008
Microsoft Excel BIFF File Format Parsing Remote Code Execution Vulnerability	October 14, 2008
Microsoft Host Integration Server RPC Remote Code Execution Vulnerability	October 14, 2008

\*For continued protection, make sure that your Symantec subscription and/or license are up to date.

images: Symantec <<http://www.symantec.com/>>

as the use of viruses, spam, click fraud, phishing, and 'botnets' (collections of software robots, or bots, that run autonomously).<sup>6</sup> A vast amount of terms such as these has evolved in the area of software security,<sup>7</sup> and more or less structured collections exist either in the form of security-industry recommendations (see Symantec images) or as standards for research. An understanding of the characteristics and nature of known vulnerabilities has also been organised into taxonomies, providing a framework for the examination of known and potential

future vulnerabilities (Igre & Williams 2008).<sup>8</sup> Malware is usually installed via worms, trojan horses or backdoors under a common command and control infrastructure. A program installed by a botnet can violate a system's hard disc and monitor its user's keystrokes to gather private data (such as sensitive financial information, including credit card numbers and passwords for bank or Paypal accounts) and then distribute the retrieved data over the internet to its 'master'. For example, the function names and keywords below are taken from a popular bot with packet sniffing capabilities to capture online credentials and other information (from Ianelli & Hackworth 2005):

`bool IsSuspiciousBot(const char *szBuf)` – looks for keywords related to bot activity. Some examples include:

- "JOIN #"
- "302 "
- "366 "
- "!.login"
- "!.login"
- "!.Login"
- "!.ident"
- "!.ident"
- "!.hashin"
- "!.hashin"
- "!.secure"
- "!.secure"

`bool IsSuspiciousIRC(const char *szBuf)` – looks for keywords related to interesting IRC activity. Examples include:

- "OPER "
- "NICK "
- "oper "
- "You are now an IRC Operator"

`bool IsSuspiciousFTP(const char *szBuf)` – looks for FTP authentication credentials triggered by keywords such as USER and PASS.

`bool IsSuspiciousHTTP(const char *szBuf)` – may attempt to gather HTTP based authentication credentials and other valuable data. In this sample bot, the keywords appear to target paypal cookies.

- "paypal"
- "PAYPAL"
- "PAYPAL.COM"
- "paypal.com"
- "Set-Cookie:"

`bool IsSuspiciousVULN(const char *szBuf)` – looks for keywords that indicate vulnerable server versions. Examples include:

- "OpenSSL/0.9.6"
- "Serv-U FTP Server"
- "OpenSSH\_2"

There are countless other cases that illustrate insecurity issues surrounding botnets and the ways in which vulnerability in the system is exploited. With the popularity of filesharing and the high volumes of computers connected to peer to peer (P2P) networks, they have also become increasingly open to attack. The Trojan.Peacomm is an example of a trojan horse that provides the basis for building a P2P botnet (Grizzard 2007). The threat typically arrives in an email with a subject (e.g. ‘U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has kicked German Chancellor Angela Merkel’), and attachments (e.g. ‘Full Story.exe’) and an empty body. The executable is a trojan horse which modifies a system’s services .exe process and adds hidden threads. The ‘infected’ system subsequently attempts to establish P2P communication via UDP using a set of given IP addresses to obtain additional malicious files. Using a firewall with egress filtering, it can be detected that the services.exe process attempts to connect to a remote address via a UDP port. Subsequently the system will receive additional IP addresses, in essence building up a distributed network. To facilitate the process, the trojan further maintains a list of unsuitable peers. The strategy of using P2P communication spreads the load and further improves the robustness of the botnet, particularly when compared to the traditional approach of using centralised command and control servers.<sup>9</sup>

Botnets can also cause severe disruption on targeted sites. A botnet can control a set of ‘hijacked’ systems to target systems (e.g. a commercial or government website) with information requests in a distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack. In the extreme, a system that is unable to handle excessive crashes, sometimes brings down an entire data centre with it. In May 2006, the American blog-publishing firm Six Apart found itself the victim of a DDoS assault by an especially aggressive botnet. Within minutes, the company’s servers had crashed, causing the blogs of 10 million customers to disappear. Six Apart eventually discovered that the attack was not aimed at itself but rather at one of its customers, an Israeli firm named Blue Security, which had caused ignominy by offering a spam-counter attack service (Berinato 2006).<sup>10</sup> However the botnet assault continued for weeks, damaging many other companies and sites.

Eventually Blue Security surrendered and went out of business, expressing their reluctance (unlike the Israeli State) to take part in an ever-escalating ‘soft war’ of violence and counter-violence. The point is that security software operates double standards.

It would seem that the issue of security is reducible to the challenge of managing the inherent insecurities of networked relations. In other words, the network needs to distinguish whether you are a friend or not, evoking Carl Schmitt’s notion of enmity (in *The Concept of the Political*, of 1927).<sup>11</sup> Under contemporary neo-liberal conditions – inextricably linked to security – it is clear that liberal democracies exert a form of violence through their insistence on friendliness and participation in networks. This is the organised violence of democracy or ‘violence of participation’, as Markus Meissen puts it (2007: 26).<sup>12</sup> In other words, liberal democracy exerts a form of friendly violence that doesn’t appear violent at all – such as encouraging the use of certain kinds of software. All the time the violence is exerted nonviolently under the guise of protection from violence: security.

### Software Nonviolence

When no other choice is possible, software violence might be the answer – replacing the strike in the form of software that Deleuze anticipated when he claimed: ‘Computer piracy and viruses, for example, will replace strikes and what the nineteenth century called “sabotage” (“clogging” the machinery).’ (1990) There are many examples of artists and activists working in this way through direct action and hacking. Hackers, crackers,<sup>13</sup> or system intruders are generally understood as those who attempt to penetrate security systems on remote computers, but this is a pejorative use of the term. In general it simply refers to a person who was capable of creating hacks, or demonstrating technical virtuosity (Levy 1984). The ethical principles of hacking reflect these concerns:

\* Access to computers – and anything that might teach you something about the way the world really works – should be unlimited and total.

Always yield to the Hands-On Imperative!

- \* All information should be free.
- \* Mistrust authority – promote decentralization.
- \* Hackers should be judged by their acting, not bogus criteria such as degrees, age, race, or position.
- \* You can create art and beauty on a computer.
- \* Computers can change your life for the better.
- \* Don't litter other people's data.
- \* Make public data available, protect private data.<sup>14</sup>

In keeping with these principles, it should be stated that most hackers condemn attacks against communication systems. In 1999, the Chaos Computer Club joined an international coalition of hacker groups (including the Cult of the Dead Cow)<sup>15</sup> to condemn the use of networks as battlegrounds in their declaration for 'info peace': 'DO NOT support any acts of "Cyberwar". Keep the networks of communication alive. They are the nervous system for human progress.'<sup>16</sup>

An excellent example of non-violent direct action is the FloodNet tactical software developed in 1998 by the Electronic Disturbance Theater.<sup>17</sup> The FloodNet implementation is based on Java applets that assists in the execution of virtual sit-ins or online civil acts of disobedience, and offered as a tool to enable protestors to effectively shut down web servers of target institutions, by flooding them with requests. The requests are automatically reloaded at high frequencies to cause an excessive amount of traffic on the server so that other users are not able to access the website. It further enables users to post statements to a targeted site by transmitting them to the server's log files:

'By the selection of phases for use in building the "bad" urls , for example using "human\_rights" to form the url "http://www.xxx.gb.mx/human\_rights", the FloodNet is able to upload messages to server error logs by intentionally asking for a non-existent url. This causes the server to return messages like "human\_rights not found on this server." This works because of the way many http servers

process requests for web pages that do not exist. FloodNet's Java applet asks the targeted server for a directory called, in this example, "human\_rights", but since that directory doesn't exist, the server returns the familiar "File not Found" or "Error 404" message, recording the bad request. This is a unique way to leave a message on that server.' (Stalbaum)<sup>18</sup>

The tactic follows the hacker sensibility in opening up existing security vulnerabilities in the system. As ever, power continues to produce its own vulnerability but the question of violence is more unsettling and paradoxical. For some hackers, the ethical practices of free software represent a move away from the use of violence.<sup>19</sup> However what this essay has tried to establish is how violence is simply unavoidable and is inherent to the socio-technical structures of networks. In addition, insecurity is promoted by a burgeoning security industry that creates both awareness and fear regarding perceived insecurity,<sup>20</sup> intensifying the dependency of users on its software and at the same time engendering a growing ambivalence even amongst security professionals who recognise that 'security causes its own type of harm'.<sup>21</sup>

The actions of software dissidents can be seen to extend network forms of antagonism and the justification of certain means that constitute violence – further evoking Benjamin's essay. Moreover, software is necessarily violent even when it appears nonviolent.

### Pure Software Violence

In addition to 'systemic violence', there is symbolic violence embodied in language itself - not simply as an incitement to a violent action or in the ways that language reflects social domination (e.g. 'man-made' language) or heavy critique in general – but in the way that it produces meaning more fundamentally. For instance, in saying that 'a fundamental violence exists in this "essencing" ability of language' (2008: 58), Slavoj Žižek is making reference to Hegel's observation that there is something inherently violent in the capacity of language to represent a thing – an act equivalent to its symbolic death. In the realm of software,

programming languages are even more overtly violent – not simply representing a thing but enacting it. In other words, if source code says something and does something at the same time, it symbolises *and enacts* violence on the thing. It literally *executes it*.

In writing these words on a computer, violence and counter-violence is demonstrated in the choice of software and operating systems. Software development is limited through force. Violence is exerted against information that wants to be free. In what Angela Mitropoulos refers to as the ‘softwar’ (2007) proprietary software commits violence against users, all the time forcing users to pay and upgrade regularly when there are viable free alternatives. Mitropoulos is more specifically referring to the issue of intellectual property and related conflicts over sharing digital content, such as those over P2P file sharing. The perpetrator in this case breaks a number of basic principles inherent to digital media processes where files can be freely copied and shared, and furthermore legislates to normalise this contrary way of working. The moral ambiguities of software licenses and duplicities of the law are clear, and at the heart of all contractual agreements. To break a contract is to activate the threat of violence enforced by the law, whereas the greater violence has already been committed and gone unpunished. This is the basis for the piracy ethic, in stealing back what was already stolen in the first place.

On the relation between violence and social transformation, Benjamin refers to Georges Sorel’s essay ‘Reflections on Violence’ (1915) to expose the distinction between violence and force (1996: 245-6).<sup>22</sup> Sorel points to the failure of parliamentary democracy to deliver its promises and to the principle of counter-violence, not only through strikes but through revolution. The point is that under certain conditions violence becomes force, as ‘pure means’.<sup>23</sup> The consequences of the disruption of means and ends are political, as Agamben confirms: ‘Politics is the sphere neither of an end in itself nor of means subordinated to an end; rather, it is the sphere of a pure mediality without end intended as the field of

human action and of human thought.’ (2000: 116)

In Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’, the concept of pure means invokes the potential for ‘pure immediate violence’ – human action that neither makes nor preserves law, but is outside of the law. The idea of ‘pure violence’ does not apply to any violent action in itself, but in its relation to external conditions. The present is seized from the impure violence of history in what Benjamin describes as the ‘real state of emergency’ (Wohlfarth 2009: 14).<sup>24</sup> The paradox of Benjamin’s position is in drawing together proletarian violence (informed by Marxism) with the theology of divine violence represented by Judaic Messianism – where redemption is provided by ‘pure divine violence’. So rather than promote terrorist violence, or as necessary means justified by ends, he calls for: ‘collective political action that is lethal not to human beings, but to the humanly created mythic powers that reign over them’ (Buck-Morss 2003: 33). The concept of pure, divine violence is a violence that appears to come from nowhere – from beyond the law – in which ‘killing is neither a crime nor a sacrifice’ according to Žižek, because law applies only to the living. Žižek continues: ‘Divine violence is an expression of pure drive, of the undeadness, the excess of life, which strikes the “bare life” regulated by law.’ (2008: 168). For Benjamin, revolution requires this sense of excess; or in Agamben’s words, it is a means without end.

With software, pure means opens up vulnerabilities in the system as a practice of creating insecurity. If no one will protect us from the violence of security, there is no option but to release ‘pure softwar’ – as resistance to the mythic powers that regulate our systems.

↻

**NOTES:**

1. In addition to Benjamin, it should be said that the question of violence is addressed by many others, such as those mentioned in the text, but also: Hannah Arendt's 'On Violence' (1969), Pierre Clastres's 'Archaeology of Violence' (1979), and Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (published in French as *Les damnés de la terre*, 1961) in which violence opposes the violence of colonialism. In attempting to actualise the 'Critique of Violence', the excesses of the Red Army Faction operating in Germany during the 1970s are often cited. Irving Wohlfarth's 'Critique of Violence' (2009) charts the connections/disconnections between Benjamin's 'Critique' and the RAF's violent interpretation.
2. This is important to Benjamin's argument as otherwise violence operates as if by 'natural law', in a Darwinian fashion as 'the only original means, besides natural selection, appropriate to all the vital ends of nature' (1996: 237). In contrast to natural law that takes violence to be a product of nature, 'positive law' takes violence as a product of history. The problem is that 'positive law is blind to the absoluteness of ends, natural law is equally so to the contingency of means' (1996: 237). Whereas natural law seeks to justify means, positive law tries to guarantee ends.
3. What is distinguished in Trotsky's formulation is not individual terrorist acts, but collective acts against the system. He says: 'In our eyes, individual terror is inadmissible precisely because it *belittles the role of the masses in their own consciousness*, reconciles them to their powerlessness...' (1987). Moreover, Capitalist society allows strikes on the basis that it requires an active, mobile, cognitive, communicative and socialised labour force, but it is the self-recognition of this, that is necessary in Trotsky's view to consolidate self-organisation that leads to the strategic 'alignment of class forces, the proletariat's social weight'.
4. Susan Buck-Morss points to the flagrant opportunism of the US in this respect, and the West in general, in how it approaches 'democracy' with double standards. She quotes Samuel Huntington: 'Democracy is promoted but not if it brings Islamic fundamentalism to power; nonproliferation is preached for Iran and Iraq but not for Israel... human rights are an issue with China but not with Saudi Arabia' (2003: 32). The present terrorism of Israeli actions in Gaza confirms the point all too clearly (January 2009). Furthermore, IAA's *Terminal Air* project (herein) is another example of double standards or what they call 'implausible deniability'.
5. That security is the leading principle of state politics is also emphasised in Agamben's 'On Security and Terror' (herein), such that the State 'can always be provoked by terrorism to become itself terrorist' (2001).
6. The term botnet refers to a network of computers using distributed computing software but is typically associated with compromised computers (sometimes also referred to as Zombie computers) running malicious software. For more on botnets, and links to other technical terminology, see the wikipedia entry <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Botnet>>. Some computer security experts believe that at least 10% of home PCs have been recruited into botnets (Carr 2007). The majority of these computers are running Microsoft Windows operating systems, but other operating systems can be affected.
7. Examples include: 'the most trusted source for computer security training, certification and research' <<http://www.sans.org/resources/glossary.php>>, '... 10 biggest network threats' <<http://www.itsecurity.com/features/networksecurity-threats-011707/>>, Internet Engineering Task Force IETF RFC4949 <<http://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc4949.txt>> and RFC2828 that provide extensive Internet Security Glossaries (e.g. RFC4949 totals 365 pages).
8. Vinay M. Igrue and Ronald D. Williams (2008) suggest the following properties for an efficient taxonomy of attacks and vulnerabilities in Computer Systems: Application — or system-specific taxonomy; Taxonomy must be layered or hierarchical; First level of classification — attack

impact; Second level of classification — system-specific attack; Third level of classification — system components (attack targets); Fourth level of classification — system features (source of vulnerability); Classes need not be mutually exclusive.

9. A useful project in relation to this rise in the abuse of P2P networks is 'Six/Four', 'a flexible framework consisting of a formally specified P2P protocol. This protocol is best described as a trust-enhanced anonymous tunneling protocol, and meant to provide people with anonymous, secure access to public data.' <<http://www.hacktivismo.com/projects/index.php>> Download from <<http://sourceforge.net/projects/sixfour/>>.
10. Blue Security's URL <<http://bluesecurity.com/>> is now a dead link. For a description of the anti-spanning tool and subsequent backlash, see <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue\\_Frog](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Frog)>.
11. Schmitt's critique of liberalism lies in its inability to recognise antagonism as inevitable in human societies, and the political differentiation of friend or enemy lies at the centre of this. But, as liberal democracies are seen to be inadequate, the consequence of this for Schmitt is a legitimisation of authoritarian regimes.
12. Social networking platforms arguably demonstrate the 'violence of participation'. For more on this, see *Antisocial Applications* <<http://project.arnolfini.org.uk/projects/2008/antisocial/notes.php>>.
13. To clarify the distinction: a hacker is thus someone with proficiency and practical understanding of the structure and operations of computer networks and systems. Those with more malign intentions are sometimes known as crackers (aka terrorists).
14. From 'Hacker Ethics' <<http://www.ccc.de/hackerethics?language=en>>. Also see Steven Mizrach's 'Is there a Hacker Ethic for 90s Hackers?', <<http://www.fiu.edu/~mizrachs/hackethic.html>>
15. The Cult of the Dead Cow (cDc) is an extremely influential hackers group, established in 1984, and opposing anyone or any government that aspires to limit free speech <<http://www.cultdeadcow.com>>. For instance, its global campaign against Google was launched in 2006, and Goolag Scanner was released in 2008 <<http://www.goolag.org/>>.
16. The 1999 declaration of 'info peace' <<http://www.ccc.de/CRD/CRD19990107.html>> (although this a broken link on the CCC web site). In the wake of 9/11, a Chaos Computer Club press release (of 09/13/2001) further emphasised the point that more international understanding was required not conflict <<http://www.ccc.de/press/releases/2001/CCC20010913.en.html>>.
17. The Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT) is a small group of cyber activists and artists engaged in developing the theory and practice of Electronic Civil Disobedience (ECD). The group initially executed FloodNet in April and December 1998 on Mexican and American government sites respectively. The ECD web site <<http://www.thing.net/~rdm/ecd/ecd.html>> contains a log of current and past actions. FloodNet can also be downloaded from the site <<http://www.thing.net/~rdm/ecd/floodnet.html>>.
18. The quote continues: 'Past versions of the FloodNet have tuned this idea to current events, such as during the June 10 protest when the names of the Zapatista farmers killed by the Mexican Army in military attacks on the autonomous village of El Bosque, were used in the construction of the "bad" urls. In an artistic sense, this is a way of remembering and honoring those who gave their lives in defense of their freedom. In a conceptual sense, the FloodNet performance was able to facilitate a symbolic return of the dead to the servers of those responsible for their murders.' (op cit.) For more on the Zapatistas, see their official site <<http://www.ezln.org.mx/index.html>> and

wikipedia entry that includes a section on the use of tactical media <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zapatista\\_Army\\_of\\_National\\_Liberation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zapatista_Army_of_National_Liberation)>.

19. Thanks to Jaromil for clarification of this point (from an email exchange in December 2008), and for pointing to the 'info-peace' declaration (see note 16).

20. According to different market surveys the size of the security software market is experiencing rapid growth, fuelled by 'compliance, data leakage and privacy issues, along with the need to tackle the fast evolving and sophisticated threat environment' (Thomson 2008). According to latest figures from Gartner, sales of enterprise security products rose by nearly 20 per cent in 2007 and were worth \$10.4bn. Symantec dominates the enterprise security market with over 26 per cent market share, followed by McAfee with over 11 per cent (Thomson 2008).

21. Gerald V Post and Albert Kagan raise the question whether IT controls are a burden or benefit. According to the results of their study: '34% of the respondents perceived interference or delays caused by the security systems as a consequence of their business environment... general employees perceive that increases (more onerous measures) in security policies and practices result in greater interference(s) with their job responsibilities'. Post and Kagan further suggest that users should be part of creating a security policy and suggest the testing of security restrictions on users to minimise task interference.

22. Note the German word 'Gewalt' means both violence and force.

23. The use of the phrase 'pure means' is interesting in this connection as it evokes interlinking ideas expressed in Hannah Arendt's essay 'Labor, Work, Action' (2000) and Giorgio Agamben's short collection of essays *Means Without End* (2000); both making reference to Aristotle's claim that action is an end in itself.

24. An extensive discussion of Benjamin's essay and its reception in relation to a rejection of the law for 'messianic anarchy' appears in Wohlfarth's 'Critique of Violence' (2009). Wohlfarth maintains that the emphasis of politics over history is crucial to a reading of Benjamin's 'Critique', in 'seizing the present'; what Benjamin describes elsewhere as exploding the historical continuum.

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# BUFFER OVERFLOWS: CODES, SYSTEMS AND SUBVERSION IN COMPUTATIONAL POETICS

Florian Cramer

## + **Buffer Overflow, 1627**

In 1627, the ninth year of the Thirty Years' War that destroyed much of Middle Europe, an anonymous German wrote a poem consisting of 24,480 permutations – 24,480 lines containing the same yet shuffled words – of the phrase 'Sit Pax da pacis tu rex peto tempore nostro' ['Let there be peace, give us peace in this time, I beg you, my lord'] (Wagenknecht 1971: 2). The text contains embedded time stamp with its capitalised letters forming 'MDCXXVII', the Latin number 1627, as what in Renaissance poetics was called a chronostych. While nine words, or elements, can be shuffled  $9! = 362,880$  times according to the laws of mathematical combinatorics, the 24,480 permutations exhaust the actual maximum of permutations if the meter of the initial line is kept (Wagenknecht 1971: 3).

The text thus is at once a poem, a prayer and a computational algorithm prototyping a modern computer program. The combination of poetry and combinatorial algorithmics was neither new nor original by itself, since word-permutational poems are known in the Greek and Latin antiquity and Middle Ages until Julius Caesar Scaliger formalised them as 'Proteic verse' in his poetics from 1561, the work that served as the canonical textbook for poets throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century (1964: 73). What is remarkable about this poem, however, is its combination of algorithmic writing and peace prayer. Following J.L. Austin, a prayer is a model example of a performative utterance (1975).

# PROTEUS POETICUS.

SIT PAX DA PAUS TV REX PETO TEMPORE NOSTRO  
 Sit pax da paus tu tempore rex peto nostro  
 Sit pax da paus Rex tu peto tempore n. tro  
 Sit pax da paus Rex tempore tu peto nostro  
 Sit pax da paus nostro peto tempore tu rex  
 Sit pax da paus nostro peto tempore rex tu.  
 Sit pax da paus peto tu rex tempore nostro  
 Sit pax da paus peto Rex tu tempore nostro  
 Sit pax da paus peto nostro tempore tu rex  
 10 Sit pax da paus peto nostro tempore rex tu.  
 Sit pax da nostro tu rex peto tempore paus.  
 Sit pax da nostro tu tempore rex peto paus.  
 Sit pax da nostro rex tu peto tempore paus.  
 Sit pax da nostro rex tempore tu peto paus

Its computationally looped execution reinforces the performative intensity, a compositional and poetic means also found, 350 years later, in Steve Reich's audio tape composition *It's gonna rain* (1965), with its own appropriation of a prayer as its (sound) material and constant repetitive variation as a means of intensifying the speech act.

Both works, the 17th century poem and the 20th century experimental music piece, emphasise the physical performance of language. In the former, the performance lies in the act of writing rather than in the speaking voice: all the 24,480 lines have been handwritten by the anonymous poet. They resemble, by contemporary standards, the 'flooding' of a communication channel. But while a modern 'denial-of-service-attack' is meant to clutter a remote system with requests and thus make it unresponsive for others, the poem on the contrary

tries to capture attention of a supreme metaphysical instance in order to yield a physical, real-life effect. Its code could be called viral because it relies on self-multiplication, -mutation and -reproduction. And with a curious historical parallel between the Thirty Years' War and the end of the Cold War, one of the earliest algorithmic viruses to target personal computers, the MacMag virus from 1988, most prominently consisted of a pop-up message that the virus authors would like to 'convey their UNIVERSAL MESSAGE OF PEACE to all Macintosh users around the world'.<sup>1</sup>

## Network Buffer Overflows

Like a modern networked computer virus, the 17<sup>th</sup> century poem has four basic components that are intrinsically tied to each other in order for the code to propagate:

1. the algorithmic instruction code, explicit in computer programs, implicit in the poem as its permutation formula;
2. the physical execution of the instruction, i.e. the expansion of the formula into 24,480 output instances;
3. a communication and propagation channel: the prayer as communication between a human and god, the former likely including a congregation of praying believers in a church.
4. a target; human communication and politics, via the metaphysical instance of god. The poem ultimately serves as a metaphysical counterstrike to physical attack.

The relation between word and instruction is delicate. If one defines communication channels and networks as entities over which information is transmitted by the virtue of a framework of codes governing their functioning, then the instruction could consist of legal agreements and regulations – as in the postal network –, or it could be machine instructions, like in the Internet with its software protocols and forwarding agents. Despite their difference, both types of code boil down to social agency and decision-making translated into policies, even if automatic technological execution obscures the human

decision-making, and even if both kinds of frameworks are based on managerial cybernetic fictions of control. For this system to function, it is important that its instruction framework remains strictly isolated from the information it transmits. Otherwise, the transmitted piece of information could leak into the framework and, if it were phrased as a policy instruction, reprogram it. In other words, if the written policy (p) of the communication framework is ‘transmit the message’, and the message (m) consists of the word ‘not’, this does not cause a problem as long as (m) does not interfere with (p), but exists as a separate layer. Yet if the policy has been insecurely phrased as ‘transmit the message in this sentence’, then a message consisting of the word ‘not’ reverses the policy and halts the system.

This is, in a nutshell, how most logical viruses work: By the virtue of a security leak in the system, a message turns into an instruction, or data turns into programs in order to reprogram the system. The message of an E-Mail virus, for example, is not just simply a message, but an executable piece of software. In computer programming, a comparable yet more general phenomenon of such a mutation is called a buffer or stack overflow. Today, buffer overflows and ‘arbitrary code execution’ vulnerabilities are the most frequent reason for software security holes in all common operating systems, no matter whether Windows, Mac OS or GNU/Linux, and are rooted in the fact that computer programs store their temporary data in stacks. In performance-efficient programming languages like C and C++, programmers must predefine size of every stack in advance, comparable to how an engineer of a hydraulic mechanism would put fixed-size tanks into the machine in order to temporarily collect water flowing through its pipes.<sup>2</sup> If, during the execution, the program or its users puts more data into a stack than the programmer anticipated – just as if more water would flow through a pipe than anticipated – the stacks (respectively tank) flows over, and the data spills into memory (=tanks) used by other running programs (=pipes), resulting in a non-anticipated behaviour of the system.

An outside attacker knowing this vulnerability could tactically overflow the

systems with too much data (figuratively: spill excessive water into its pipes) in order to reprogram it. For example, if an address database program was designed to hold up to 32 characters for name entry and the programmer did not take precautions to verify and, if necessary, shorten the user input, a user of the database could overflow the buffer by entering more than 32 characters which would end up somewhere in the running system and, if containing the proper instruction symbols, be processed as administrative commands.

The poem anticipates this physical operation as a metaphysical operation. With god as its receiver, the 24,480 lines of the permutational poem are written as a demiurgic buffer overflow in a metaphysical communication network within which the mere human utterance mutates, by virtue of god as the executive instance, into a program; the word ‘peace’ into the fact of peace. The poem thus takes ‘poesis’, creation, literally.<sup>3</sup> Unlike romanticism, it presupposes – or at least prays for – undamaged transcendence of metaphysics and physics. It thus conceives of its programming as neither merely aesthetic nor just metaphorical.

### Buffer Overflows and Digital Art

It is the classical notion of performative arts that they act against the communication systems within which they operate, and try to rewrite the framework through finding cracks in its cultural code; a concept applying to all radical avant-garde movements from Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, Fluxus to actionism, body and performance art. Even the 17<sup>th</sup> century prayer poem, with its physical exercise of handwriting, fits the picture. A contemporary example of such a physical exhaustion of symbols is *OSS* by jodi (1998, <http://oss.jodi.org>). It uses the Javascript programming language to flood the web browser with myriads of small moving windows. While the site does no real harm to a computer, it creates the impression of an Internet virus only in the imagination of spectators by forcing them into physical interaction with the visually flooded computer screen. The illusion was compelling enough for jodi’s Internet provider to shut down the site in the belief that it was spreading computer malware. After jodi, a whole genre of Internet art and Internet poetry, often referred to as ‘codework’,

played with this illusion and the slippery, user-frightening boundaries of data and program code in computational communication networks.

From a cybernetic point of view, the buffer overflow thus seems the perfect model for the breach of systems, whether they follow formal logic rules or are based on social agreement and subjective perception. But exactly this perfect isomorphy of technological metaphor is what makes it suspicious, because it implicitly reduced social processes to deterministic machine programs. The belief that culture, society, politics, economy are simply machines, and can be reprogrammed just by inserting unprecedented logic, rests itself on the cybernetic phantasmagoria of 'system' as more than just a heuristic notion or a pragmatic descriptor of organised constructions – and thus, necessarily: abstractions – but as autonomous agents. System, in this sense, substitutes the supreme metaphysical instance. Just as religion, it is a proxy for negating human agency and individual responsibility. The hacker serves as a romantic simulacrum for agency in the supposed age of autonomous systems, just as the priest and guru did for the previous metaphysics. The permutational prayer poem is thus not simply a primitive metaphorical precursor of a buffer overflow in a modern communication system, but rather extrapolates the belief structures and metaphysics still present in the notion, and imagination, of 'system'.

∪

This essay was first written in 2004.

#### NOTES:

1. According to Robert M. Slade's 'History of Computer Viruses' (1992).
2. Programming languages with higher hardware abstraction no longer require predefined stack sizes, but can be affected as well if their interpreters and compilers are themselves written in a lower-level language like C or C++.
3. And thus follows, as Christian Kabbalah, the model of world creation through permutational language in the early Kabbalistic *Sefer Yetzirah* [Book of Creation].

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## VIR.US.EXE

project by carlos katastrosky  
text by Luís Silva

- + Computer viruses have long been considered our machines' most fearsome foes. Able to replicate themselves and spread uncontrollably through communication networks, they constitute a direct threat to all the information we keep in our disks and hold so dear. But computer viruses, like their organic counterparts, function, even if we tend to perceive it as one single effect, on two different levels. First of all, they *infect*, their rogue activity has consequences, damaging the hosting systems and spreading their reach; and secondly, they also *threat*, causing a generalised feeling of insecurity and fear, originated by the perception of the eventual infection's outcomes.

carlos katastrosky's project *vir.us.exe* (2009), co-commissioned by KURATOR and LX 2.0 for the *Anti-Bodies* programme, departs from and investigates this dual nature that defines viral activity. *vir.us.exe* is a windows program that once downloaded by the user and executed in her machine, will simply delete itself. Despite such a harmless and even self-destructive behaviour (on the antipodes of a common viral infection), the program is defined and promoted as an actual virus, that one, if brave or careless enough, can install, risking her computer and in the process compromising her own security.

Reminiscent of *Russian Roulette* (2006), a p2p-related piece in which a call was launched inviting users to upload files of their choice that could later be randomly downloaded by other users who had no knowledge whatsoever of the content of

those files, possibly threatening the integrity of their machines, *vir.us.exe* is, like many other katastrofsky projects, a silent project. One of two things can happen: either the user perceives *vir.us.exe* as an actual threat and doesn't engage with the application, maintaining her system safe; or she will download and run the application, leading to its self deletion, and as in the previous situation nothing much will happen. Or will it? The core of the project doesn't lie in running or not running a piece of software in order to obtain a certain outcome. The application is simply an excuse, a set-up that is carefully created by the artist to trigger a response in the user, to confront her and investigate how the psychology of fear works (similar to the strategies and methodologies of early social psychology experiments) and causes one to react. *vir.us.exe* isn't a virus because it infects a computer, it is a virus because it triggers the exact same responses every virus triggers, regardless of causing an actual infection. In that sense we can say it becomes a meta-virus, not threatening in itself, but being perceived as a threat.

↻

KURATOR <<http://www.kurator.org/>> is collaborating with LX 2.0 <<http://www.lisboa20.pt/lx20/>> to develop a programme of new work to infect the 2012 Olympics. The overall *Anti-Bodies* programme is curated and co-ordinated by Relational <<http://relational.org.uk/>>, with support from Arts Council England.

```
#include <windows.h>
#include <shellapi.h>
#include <iostream>

void Selfdestruct();
static const char tempbatname[] = "_uinsep.bat" ;

void main(void)
{
    Selfdestruct();
}

void Selfdestruct()
{
    // temporary .bat file

    static char templ[] =
        ":Repeat\r\n"
        "del \"%s\" \r\n"
        "if exist \"%s\" goto Repeat\r\n"
        "del \"%s\" " ;

    char modulename[_MAX_PATH] ;    // absolute path of calling .exe file
    char temppath[_MAX_PATH] ;    // absolute path of temporary .bat file
    char folder[_MAX_PATH] ;

    GetTempPath(_MAX_PATH, temppath) ;
    strcat(temppath, tempbatname) ;

    GetModuleFileName(NULL, modulename, _MAX_PATH) ;
    strcpy(folder, modulename) ;
    char *pb = strrchr(folder, '\\');
    if (pb != NULL)
        *pb = 0 ;

    HANDLE hf ;

    hf = CreateFile(temppath, GENERIC_WRITE, 0, NULL,
        CREATE_ALWAYS, FILE_ATTRIBUTE_NORMAL, NULL) ;

    if (hf != INVALID_HANDLE_VALUE)
    {
        DWORD len ;
        char *bat ;

        bat = (char*)malloc(strlen(templ) +
            strlen(modulename) * 2 + strlen(temppath) + strlen(folder)
            + 20) ;

        wsprintf(bat, templ, modulename, modulename, folder, temppath) ;

        WriteFile(hf, bat, strlen(bat), &len, NULL) ;
        CloseHandle(hf) ;

        ShellExecute(NULL, "open", temppath, NULL, NULL, SW_HIDE);
    }
}
```

## GLOBAL SECURITY ALLIANCE

Konrad Becker

### + **Transnational Peace and the Power to Influence Results**

Never before in the history of the world, has there been such a need to respond effectively to critical events. In today's complex world where solutions to your security concerns are no longer straightforward, it is more difficult than ever to successfully protect interests against diverse and intricate dangers. Threats are constantly changing and require evolving solutions to meet the needs of various unique and culturally sensitive security situations. Crisis consulting practice provides insurance against the latest threats targeting the lifeblood of nations, their culture and economy and new international business risks.

### **Reliable Partner for Constantly Changing Security Requirements**

On the Network the fast become faster and the strong become stronger. Pressure on local commerce and the discharge of expendable segments of the workforce population in global business regimes, produces accelerating social gaps and tensions. Given world population trends and likely future developments, the focus of potential sources of unrest and targets of stability operations is on urban areas. General services administration contracts for approved operations need to go beyond simple procedures to scare the hell out of target populations, since they become useless in an environment where levels of terror threats remain constantly high.



### **Risk Management for the Full Threat Spectrum**

Technical systems and their accompanying legislative framework provide effective support to the internalisation of control in the transformation of a welfare state into a security economy. The difference between war and peace is long past and transforms into permanent information peacekeeping enterprises. International spheres of influence enable a global footprint where territorial administration structures of the state serve as executive committees, securing interests for a good investor business climate.

### **Delivers Results through Analytical Products and Operational Expertise**

Security culture services allow the implementation of realities in an increasingly culturally constituted security environment. The future of dual use media technologies is now; the convergence of high-tech armaments and security services with entertainment and public relations renders the distinction between war and entertainment obsolete. Cultural peacekeeping, the answer to the chaos of individual interests and social dissolution in consumer societies, requires projecting threats of enemies within or without. As much as diversity is good for business, deviance undermines the base of psychological security and requires swift neutralisation, if necessary by force.



### **Comprehensive Solutions for the Control over Ideas and Information Flows**

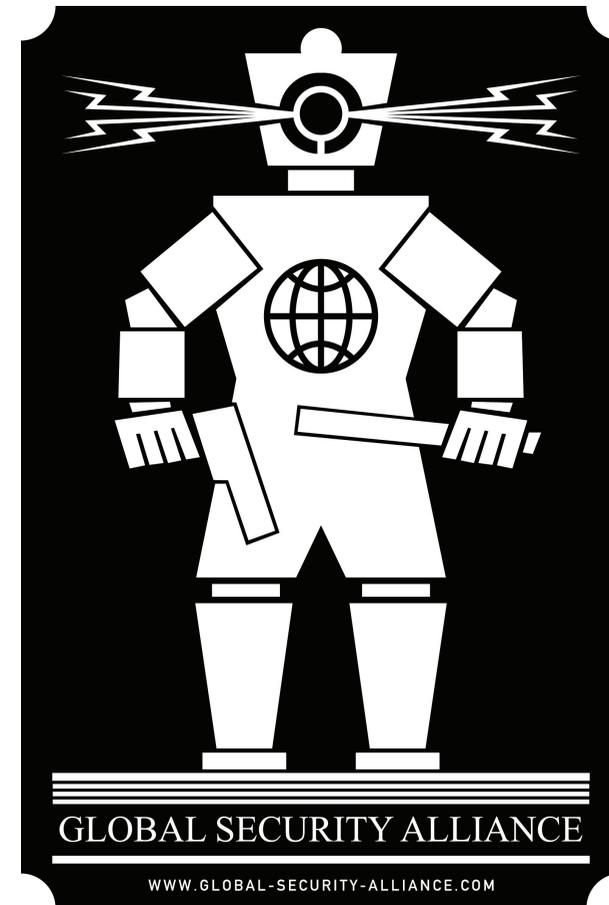
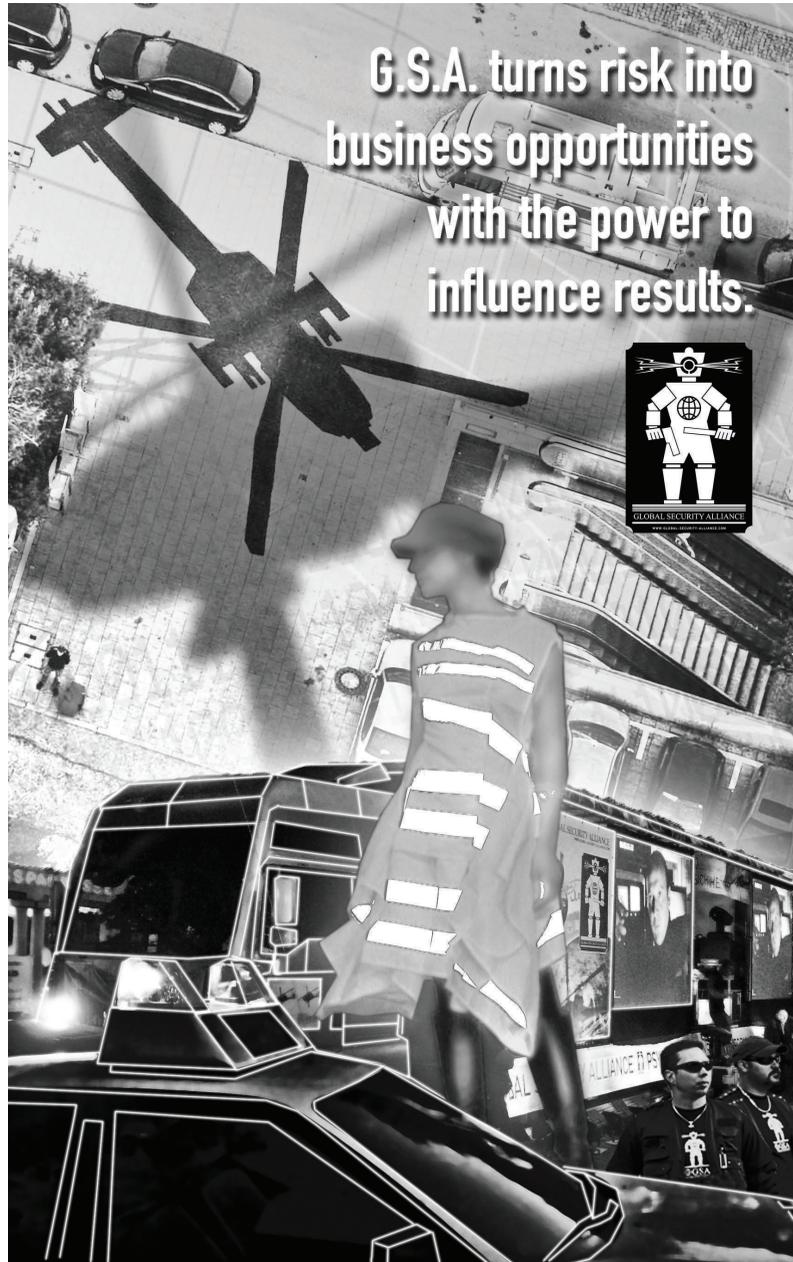
Mapping incidents and social data with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) allows analysts to visualise socio-graphic hot spots, trends and cultural patterns. Black helicopter shadows signify areas of ambivalent psychological energies. Like mysterious crop circles, connected with the idea of alien footprints, or fairy circles burned by dancing elves. Similar to extraordinary rendition program flights, extrajudicial transfer into subterranean black sites, if one returns from the encounter with phantoms, the world has moved on. Popular traditions warn against such dangers, but security discourses exclude the public for security reasons.

### **Experienced Executives and the Most Reputable People That Money Can Buy**

Strategic communications and the art of media truth projection are a secure investment into reality, where creating info-spheres is a product for those who pay. Peace and stability growth industries are committed to the needs of civilian or military forces for protection any time and any place. Special Operations professionals serve and support a philosophy dedicated to promote strength locally, regionally, and worldwide - to foster an environment for business to flourish.

5





## LANGUAGES OF SURPRISE: TOWARD A POLITICAL POETICS OF INSECURITY

Wolfgang Sützl

- + As Giorgio Agamben wrote in 2001, security has been the *Leitbegriff*, guiding concept, of state politics since the birth of the modern state.<sup>1</sup> Today, though, we are facing ‘extreme and most dangerous developments in the thought of security’. Referring to Foucault, Agamben argues that unlike disciplinary power, security creates open spaces and is therefore related to ideas of liberalism and globalisation, managing disorder rather than preventing it. It can constantly be provoked by terrorism to become itself terroristic, there are no clear boundaries between security and terror, and security leads to a gradual neutralisation of politics. Nevertheless, security ‘now becomes the sole criterion of political legitimation’. Measures of security require ‘constant reference to a state of exception’ and are therefore irreconcilable with democracy, leading to the danger of a ‘a world civil war which renders all civil coexistence impossible’, which is why ‘nothing is more important than a revision of the concept of security’ (Agamben 2001).

While eight years later we see the fallout of security as the guiding concept of politics all over the globe, we are far away from a better understanding of security.<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I want to address some of the reasons for this that I consider important, and, in doing so, make an attempt to contribute to this revision. I will try to accomplish this as follows: First, I will take up Agamben’s point about the relationship between security measures and the state of exception. I will follow him in his interpretation of Carl Schmitt in order to show the deeper strata of

violence in the concept. I do so not because I think of Schmitt as a peacenik, but because I agree with Chantal Mouffe's point that Schmitt's thinking renders significant deficiencies in liberal thinking visible (1999: 2) and I believe that this will help precisely in this effort. I will illustrate how the *Grenzbegriff*, or limit concept, of security impacts on potentials of life and of democracy.

Next, I will discuss the violence resulting from the missing boundaries of the concept of security. I will discuss security from a perspective that describes it as 'metaphysical' – as something beyond which it is impossible to go, as something impossible to describe, a source of authority that cannot be questioned but either surrendered to or fought against, both strengthening the concept. The 'overcoming of metaphysics' was a theme in Heidegger's second period and given a leftist twist by Gianni Vattimo, whose interpretation I follow in reading Heidegger (1971, 1993). Vattimo is known for his *pensiero debole*, or weak thought, which advocates a type of overcoming that does not look for a position of strength from which to control, negate, or destroy that which it wants to overcome (2006).

Finally, I will try to weaken security as a guiding concept of politics by following Heidegger's critique of technology as *metaphysical*, and his philosophy of language. I will go beyond Schmitt and Agamben and propose an understanding of security that views it as metaphysical *in so far* as it is technological. As Heidegger develops his philosophy of language as a consequence of his critique of technology, I will look at the languages that emerge around security: there is silence in the heart of politics, where nothing at all can be said and only violence is possible, and there is noise in its peripheral layers, where politics disappears in talk that has become empty because it no longer is capable of stating anything new in public. I will conclude with Uwe Pörksen's perspective on the language of the political, and suggest that weakening security is an effort of political poetics.

### Security as Grenzbegriff: Carl Schmitt

Carl Schmitt defines as the sovereign 'he who decides on the state of exception' (1990: 11).<sup>3</sup> He describes sovereignty as a *Grenzbegriff*, a 'limit concept'. A limit concept is defined by belonging to the 'outermost sphere'. The sovereign who decides on the state of exception does so from that place, which means that the decision regarding the state of exception can never be fully accounted for. While a decision on the state of exception impacts on the law and on people's rights, it can never be fully substantiated, or be challenged, questioned, or criticized from that place. To Schmitt, this means that the decision on the state of exception is a 'decision in the eminent sense' (1990: 11), something like a pure decision without a foundation that could be rationally discussed or ethically questioned. Such decisions in the eminent sense of the word fall in line with Schmitt's concept of the political, according to which it is the decision between enemy and friend that makes a decision actually political, and that such a decision can never be fully accounted for. All other systems – the economy, culture, society, etc. – have nothing to do with politics, and unless the state is designed in a way that recognises this, they contribute to its neutralisation, to the disappearance of politics, which in Schmitt's view is the fate of the liberal democracy. Real political sovereignty, therefore, is based on the *exception*, not on any norm. With no normative foundation that could form part of a rational democratic discourse, sovereignty is, in the last instance, never based on a *Grund* (foundation), but on an *Abgrund* (abyss).

Although Schmitt does yet not write about security per se, much of what Schmitt says about the state of exception applies to security, and its location in the outermost sphere of the political system. In order to be able to *secure*, security must have no outer boundary, it must have access to a place from which everyone else is barred. It must be able to draw from a source that is outside of the norm, outside of what can be the object of a rational political or ethical discourse.

Because the exception is the *Abgrund* of security, Agamben, interpreting Walter Benjamin, speaks of the state of exception as something permanent, as the

exception becoming the norm. As I have argued elsewhere, one consequence of this is that Schmitt's decisionism is questioned by security because it relies on a clear distinction between the norm and the exception. Security, and its reliance on the 'neutralising' factor of technology, becomes itself a state of exception within Schmitt's thinking and counteracts his decisionist view: when increasingly automated, complex technological systems are employed for purposes of security, technology gradually moves into the place Schmitt had reserved for the sovereign, except that it never takes *the* decision. Instead, what emerges is a diffuse techno-political zone where norms (e.g. civil rights) are silently suspended by technical constraints rather than by the single, unaccountable strike of a sovereign decision (Sütlz 2008). So security as guiding concept, as described by Agamben, both proves and disproves Schmitt's idea of sovereignty as a *Grenzbegriff*: it proves it because security must draw from the exception rather than the norm and cannot be fully controlled with the means available to a liberal democracy (it is irreconcilable with democracy); and it disproves it because the actual act of decision is lost in the permanent calculations of the technological system. Rather than a decision being taken for one or the other, security manages both and keeps them in a permanent waiting loop.

This ambivalence should not come as a surprise; rather, it is precisely what is to be expected from a *Grenzbegriff* which as such can never be fully resolved: in order to resolve a *Grenzbegriff*, one would need access to the *Abgrund*, to the (necessarily occult) exception that it draws on. Such an attempt can be made only at the price of extreme violence towards others and oneself. (This is what terrorists do).

Before I turn to discussing this problem as the problem of metaphysics, I want to cite a few specific areas that illustrate the particular form of violence inherent in security as a guiding concept of state politics.

Firstly, security requires anyone who could be *someone* to live as *anyone*. As a concept without an outer boundary, security applies everywhere and for

everyone, i.e. it is impossible to disagree with its consequences unless one wants to be identified as no one and have no place. It is something one cannot not want. This has a number of particular consequences. One, that security is for everyone means that unless you are like everyone, security is not for you. In other words, security turns people, who are always *someone*, into *anyone*. It places political subjectivity on the level of exchangeability. It does so by separating and appropriating a sheath of data from the individual that render all individuals commensurable. Security technologies such as surveillance and biometrics meet precisely this purpose. They are essentially architectures of sameness:<sup>4</sup> generating and appropriating personal data means that the political potential of individuals is appropriated by an authority that can always escape accountability for motives of security. It means that those specifics about an individual that make it possible for him/her to be *someone in particular*, to have a *particular* political existence capable of accessing and exercising rights, of having a *voice*, is separated from the existence of the individual.<sup>5</sup>

In practice this means that the choices available to an individual, the choices that would make that individual a *citizen*, are increasingly suspended in a waiting loop, i.e. while they formally continue to exist, they are rendered meaningless or impracticable. For the lives of many people this means that their choices increasingly become de-politicised, most notably by them becoming consumer choices, either through the imposing presence of architectures of consumption, or through the aesthetisation of politics, when governments and parties become indistinguishable from companies. The deafening noise of consumerism owes its growth exactly to the absence of politics in the choices that are available under security as a guiding concept. It is not a coincidence that locations of extreme consumption – shopping malls, airports, plazas – also tend to be heavily surveilled environments.

For others, the violence of having to be *anyone* under security has meant death. This was the case with Jean Charles de Menezes, shot dead by police on the London Underground in 2005. (Sütlz 2007) The Brazilian engineer had crossed

the line from being anyone to being someone, and not because he chose to, but because security performed a calculation that led to this result. And viewed from the logic of security as a concept without boundaries, such a someone *can be nothing else but a potential terrorist*. But perhaps the violence of having to be anyone rather than an individual with control over his/her identity, with a political voice, is nowhere more crude than in anti-immigration regimes, and nowhere experienced with greater violence than by the someones arriving with nothing but their existence at the borders of Europe or North America. The voice they bring is the most radical one, most capable of questioning. Fortress-building, camp-building and biometrical regimes are part of the armory of keeping these radical someones out, or making sure they become anyone.

Secondly, because security is a *Grenzbegriff* without an outer boundary, it works against those voices that wish to limit it and hold it accountable, in other words, to base it on a norm that can be made explicit and talked about, rather than an exception that is occult and wordless. This silencing of security is manifest in a number of different ways. It is manifest when no questions are allowed for 'security reasons'. It is manifest when judicial or parliamentary enquiries are suppressed because of 'national security interests', and it is manifest when the freedom of the media is curtailed – by direct censorship or by targeted manipulation of information – for the same motive. It is manifest when artists are treated as terrorists.

Thirdly, as stated before, a *Grenzbegriff* cannot be rationally established or disproven, but it is also not accessible to a normative critique. Security is beyond good and evil, which means it relates to a normative ethical critique as cynicism. This means it keeps the outer form in place while negating political content. Oscar Wilde describes the cynic as the 'man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing'. Cynicism is immune to a normative critique because it contains nothing that a normative critique could take issue with. It can accommodate and affirm any normative point without actually responding. It operates on a level of total commensurability and exchangeability. Cynicism

is the ethics of the *Grenzbegriff*, it is, in our present, the actual philosophy of security, it protects security from questions by performing a quick calculation, neutralising whatever point may be made.

### **Security as Metaphysics: Heidegger**

The problem of security as a *Grenzbegriff* has much in common with the problem of metaphysics in philosophy as interpreted by Gianni Vattimo in his reading of Heidegger. According to Vattimo, the problem of an 'overcoming' of metaphysics, which early 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy had attempted, lies in the fact that in order to overcome something, a third point that lies beyond that which is to be overcome is needed, an 'outside' from which metaphysics could be dealt with as a problem to be resolved. However, the definition of such an outside point would amount to a *new* metaphysics, it would amount to a relapse, or to a demonstration of the necessity of metaphysics. In his leftist reading of Heidegger, Vattimo describes this metaphysical quandary as violence, as it opens a space of non-accountable power. Therefore, unless one wishes to continue a constant renewal of cycles of violence, the only overcoming of metaphysics is its initial acceptance as an inherited condition or sickness that can be ameliorated but not dialectically overcome.

In politics, democracy is different from monarchy or dictatorship because it works against the existence of non-accountable spaces. With security, these non-accountable spaces are spreading in the entire political system. If we are interested in a critique of the violence of security that is not immediately neutralised by cynicism, we must transcend the rational and normative without becoming violent, i.e. we must become artists. At this point, we must move beyond the ideas of security as a *Grenzbegriff*, and we can do so by following Heidegger's own thinking. The problem of overcoming metaphysics leads Heidegger to his philosophies of technology and language.

The reason why understanding security as a *Grenzbegriff* in the terms of Schmitt and Agamben is necessary but not sufficient lies in technology: Schmitt tries to

identify a *pure* political sphere, and Agamben still refers to security and the state of exception as largely abstract terms. Both do not connect their political/legal theories with a media theory, i.e. by addressing the question by which means, with which technologies security actually operates.

This is where Heidegger's philosophy of technology becomes an essential tool in approaching the difficulty of a critique of security as a critique of violence. Heidegger views technology not merely as an instrument, in his view the 'current understanding' of technology, but as *the culmination of the metaphysical drive of western culture*. Like metaphysics, technology marks an area beyond which one cannot go, and where any attempt to do so will result in more of the same: in more, faster, more powerful, more autonomous technology, in a constant *updating* of something that remains *essentially* the same.

Technology, in its current, instrumental understanding, is metaphysics and resembles the *Grenzbegriff* of security. While the constraints it creates and cannot solve without creating other constraints are the post-modern heir of Schmitt's decisionism, the politics of security and technology form a continuum.

To weaken the cycle of dependence on technology, to establish a 'free relationship' to technology, Heidegger proposes a poetic effort. Technology shapes language in a particular way, it creates a 'technical' language different from 'traditional' language. I will work with this distinction to argue that it is through language, and *poiesis* in the wider sense, that the metaphysical violence of security might be weakened.

### **Telling Silence and Empty Talk**

I noted earlier that the politics of security creates two linguistic zones: a silent, occult inner in which nothing is said but where politics actually occurs, and an outer zone of noise divested of any political meaning. A secured situation can therefore be a silent situation, or deafening chatter, and is usually both at the same time. It can be wordless acquiescence and obedience to commands, be they

implicit constraints or explicit admonitions, and it can be a powerful stream of loud emptiness.

In order to better understand the nature of these two zones, Heidegger's philosophy of language provides a useful tool. For one, Heidegger defines the essence of language as *sagen*, or saying, which is different from mere speaking. It is possible, therefore, and part of everyday experience, to speak without saying anything, and to be silent but say something precisely by being silent. There can be *nichts-sagend* speech (a non-saying speech, or empty, meaningless talk) and *viel-sagend* silence (a 'telling silence') (Heidegger 1989: 23). For another, Heidegger distinguishes between 'traditional'<sup>6</sup> language on the one hand, and 'technical' language on the other. Let us look at both these distinctions as they relate to security.

The silence at the core of politics that is generated by security is an expression of the 'telling silence' Heidegger speaks of. Although nothing is said, this is where whatever remains of actual politics occurs. This is also the zone of quiet, frictionless, user-friendly management, of automated technological systems, of ambient computing, surveillance, etc. It is the zone in which human beings have lost their voice in so far as it is a voice capable of *saying* something. Politically speaking, this is the zone of curtailing of civil rights, of shutting up and of censoring, of structural suppression of voices. It is the zone where critical voices are persecuted or killed, where dissenting voices are nipped in the bud. It is, ultimately, the zone where life is life only in so far as it can be terminated at any moment, therefore the zone of state violence. Note the hostility of the military towards common language and its grammar, note the formalisation and reduction of language to acronyms and codes that occurs here, the restriction of communication both inside and outside; note finally how the ultimate form of a telling silence is the silence of the deserted battlefield.

This telling silence is the silence generated by technological language. Rather than from life, this language emerges out of technology and carries its metaphysical

marks. Like technology, it intends to be precise, fast, and as formalised as possible. Heidegger describes this language as 'information' (1989: 22). Reduced to signals, it allows universal exchange. It is the language of facts and of description, and it aims at the fact as its vanishing point: a fact is something that has been settled and allows no further questions; facts generate silence.

Most importantly, though, technical language is the place where language becomes *calculation*, and calculation is at the heart of security operations. Security calculates in order to reduce the number of possible outcomes to a manageable size, ideally, to predict. This also marks a conjunction between security and technology: in order to become more efficient in calculating, the machinery of calculation is constantly upgraded and developed, although it is precisely the development of ever more powerful and complex technologies that then increases the number of possible outcomes.

The calculations of security are intended to avoid surprises. Yet the very idea of democracy is the possibility of saying something new, of *surprising the government*, which is why elections are secret and why PR agencies and polling institutions are so keen to find out what people might think *before* they vote. By reducing variables, security takes the 'risk' out of democracy, and democracy remains as a cynical construct (formally intact, but non-political). Technological language has another key characteristic that should not be overlooked, that is, it is imperative in nature. Even though when not phrased as commands, factual statements are imperative in so far as they allow no objections, and like commands, they are not invitations for discussion.

On the other hand, there is speech as chatter, as *nichts-sagend*, empty talk; I have referred to this as 'noise'. This type of speech spreads where language explodes by losing any connection to meaning. The lack of meaning, that is, of potential for political change, means that there is no instance at all capable of directing or ending talk by tying it to a potential. As a result, the volume of this talk increases constantly and its sphere expands and its expansion accelerates.

There is no stopping, as is easy to observe in today's media and entertainment landscapes. This speech is secure because it will never be able to generate any political consequences, creating instead a vast continuum of a simulated political sphere, of politics neutralised by entertainment, commerce, etc. Noise is the result of the shredding of language that occurs through technology, and, invariably, through security. Noise is what *could have been* language, i.e. it is the *negated potential of a political language*.

By creating silence and noise and neutralising language, the politics of security does what is its essential task: it destroys the potential of an autonomous, political voice of citizens, for no reason that would be outside of security itself. The essential task of security is to *secure itself*, which marks the definitive entry of a metaphysical form into politics. This is, in my view, the deeper political meaning of what Heidegger calls *Verwüstung* (desertification, devastation) of language: it destroys not just the human, it destroys the very *potential* of humanness.

### Political Poetics

The effort of contributing to a real critique of the politics of security is therefore an effort of *political poetics*. It is an effort of creating and learning to use a language beyond silence and noise. I will conclude by following the German linguist Uwe Pörksen in tracing the contours of such a political poetics. In his work on the language of the political, Pörksen addresses the 'lacking autonomy of the political' (2002: 17), and the 'diminution of politics' (2004: 7), both of which he attributes to the rise of 'great powers' in society, these being 'science, technology, and economics' on the one hand, and 'media, opinion polls, political parties' on the other (2002: 19, 27).<sup>7</sup>

These two coalitions of powers mirror the divide between telling silence and empty talk. In both areas the autonomy of the political is lost: in the area of silence it is surrendered to calculation (which reigns in technology, science, economics); in the area of empty talk it becomes indistinct and vanishes in

generalised noise.

In Pörksen's view, the language of the political is a poetic language in so far as it is capable of 'saying something that is not yet existing', and to 'begin something new in public space'. But it is not a poem or fiction, as it has a factual, objective dimension, too. However, it is part of the quality of a good political speech that this objective dimension is not just the silence between words. A good political speech is one that 'chooses the right word on the level of language, while finding the appropriate word on the level of the object'. Such a political speech is beyond the secure neutralised languages of silence and noise, which is why making use of it is a 'step into uncertainty' (Pörksen 2002: 42).

I understand Pörksen as advocating a political poetics in whose art consists in finding a place for the new and the experimental on the level of the object, i.e. that a potential of something new can be created at precisely that place where under the conditions of security the silence of calculation rules. Conversely, such a political poetics would bring empowering technology into the noise environment, supporting meaningful messages so they can be heard amidst the noise. This is an effort that it is technological in so far as it is poetic, and poetic in so far as it is technological. The way the two languages change through this techno-poetic work is not one of harmonisation or reconciliation, or opposition, or synthesis. It is a relationship beyond calculation. I call this relationship one of *contamination*. It is the spontaneous, unpredictable, dynamics of contamination that makes the political poetics Pörksen outlines something insecure. Where something new can be said, *surprises* are possible, the very surprises that provide democratic politics with legitimacy. Political poetics under security as a guiding concept of politics must create languages of surprise.

If I am not mistaken, it is in thinking about and working on a political poetics of this kind where a potential for a critique of security lies. This would be a critique that refrains from direct negation as much as from a merely rational or normative discourse, and it would be a critique that is an effort of political

poetics capable of *weakening* security, rendering it useless as a guiding concept. This may not be a grand thing. But the nature of security as a metaphysical concept and *Grenzbegriff* should teach us that every grand scheme will probably only further deepen the divisions and strengthen the violence generated by the politics of security. If I am not mistaken again, it is the work of artists, poets and scholars to promote the contamination of languages and to contribute to this political poetics. '*A good speech stand above violence*', says Pörksen. 'This is not a historical truth, but it is probably true.' (Pörksen 2002: 187; his emphasis)

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**NOTES:**

1. The quotes from this source follow Soenke Zoehle's translation of the original article published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, but the German *Leitbegriff* is translated as 'guiding concept' here (not as 'basic principle', as in Zoehle's translation).
2. What 'better understanding' here means is providing a description or a rational critique, as the very essence of security will turn either into affirmations of the status quo. This will become clear in what follows. Instead, it refers to contributing to a body of knowledge capable of a critique of the particular form of violence inherent in security.
3. Translations of the quotes from the German by W.S.
4. I have argued elsewhere that Nietzsche's tragic thinking contains markers for a critique of security, in this particular case his 'eternal recurrence' (Sützl 2007).
5. This separation reflects the biopolitical distinction between *zoe* and *bios*, as described by Agamben. The *bios*, the particular form of life is separated from bare life. In the state of exception, politics is based on bare life.
6. 'Traditional' is a translation of the German *überliefert*, meaning 'handed-down' or 'transmitted'. It does not refer to a particular tradition or set of values, or conservative ideology, but can be understood as poetic or common language.
7. All Pörksen quotes translated from the German by W.S.

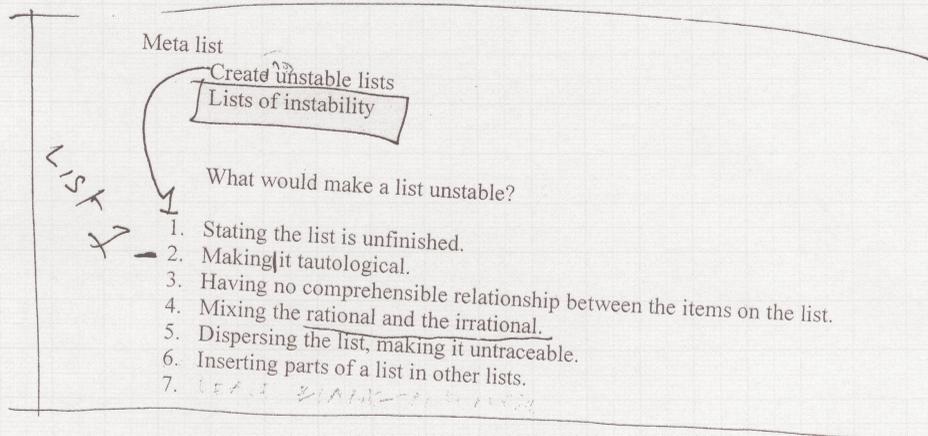
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Joseph Schillinger, a minor American Cubist who wrote over a twenty-five year period, an often extraordinary book called *The Mathematical Basis of the Arts*, divided the historical evolution of art into five "zones", which replace each other with increasing acceleration: 1. pre-esthetic, a biological stage of mimicry; 2. traditional-esthetic, a magic, ritual-religious art; 3. emotional-esthetic, artistic expression of emotions, self-expression, art for art's sake; 4. rational-esthetic, characterized by empiricism, experimental art, novel art; 5. scientific, post-esthetic, which will make possible the manufacture, distribution and consumption of a perfect art product and will be characterized by a fusion of the art forms and materials, and, finally, a "disintegration of art", the "abstraction and liberation of the idea".<sup>2</sup>

Given this framework, we could now be in a transitional period between the last two phases, though one can hardly conceive of them as literally the last phases the visual arts will go through. After the intuitive process of recreating esthetic realities through man's own body, the process of reproduction or imitation, mathematical logic enters into art. (The Bau-

Lippard, L. and J. Chandler,  
"The Dematerialisation of Art"  
Art International XII no. 2 (February 1968) p. 31.

#### List of tasks

Dwell on the question of how text-jugglers and braggarts cause harm and damage.

- 1) Critically reshape the stock of human forces and means left by the old school.
- 2) Realize that it is still more dangerous to start to imbibe only slogans.
- 3) Reflect on whether students should be compelled to imbibe a mass of useless, superfluous barren knowledge, which clogs the brain and transforms the younger generation into bureaucrats regimented according to one single pattern.
- 4) Examine the effect of integrating the ready made, memorized formulas, councils, recipes, prescriptions and programmes into everyday life.
- 5) Discuss how to encounter the other as a friend and not as an exploiter.
- 6) Consider the extent to which to give a hang for anybody else.

List influenced by V I Lenin's  
*The Tasks of the Youth League*  
(Speech delivered at the Third  
All-Russian Congress of the  
Russian Young Communist League,  
October 2, 1920)

List of  
incalculable places

Agnes Martin *The  
Ages* (1959-60)  
Bas Jan Ader *In  
Search of The  
Miraculous* (1975)  
Eva Hesse *Right  
After* (1969)  
Kasimir Malevich  
*Black Square* (1915)  
Nina Danino *Stabat  
Mater* (1990)  
Robert Barry *88mc  
Carrier Wave (FM)*  
(1968)  
Yves Klein *Le Vide*  
(1958)

List 1.  
10 ways to watch and monitor the state.  
Observe and log people entering and leaving  
a police station, Regularly alternate  
sources of news, t.v. internet, newspapers  
etc, Subscribe to monitoring organisations,  
amnesty, human rights watch etc., Make and  
maintain international links and contacts.

List 2.  
10 forms of self censorship.  
meeting criteria of arts council bids, cv  
presentation, academic standards, self  
presentation of self and work, fear of  
ridicule/not being taken seriously,  
filtering of sub/un conscious.

List 3.  
10 ways to resist increased alienation.  
Learn to: Cook.Read.Mend clothes.Use  
Technology.Grow some food.Develop collective  
resources.Speak another language.

List 4.  
Playlist of 10 sounds.  
car alarm; smoke alarm; machine outside  
shops; dispersal tone, structure of a day,  
Instructions, sound of unusual activity,  
sound of when it's time for action.

List 5.  
10 words listed under E.  
Ecology, Educated, Elite, Empirical,  
Equality, Ethnic, Evolution, Existential,  
Experience, Expert, Exploitation

List 6.  
10 things collected in data form  
National insurance, Driving license,  
Passport, Car number plate, NHS number, Tax  
reference, Bank account, IP address, Mobile  
number, Life assurance, Body Mass Index,  
Cholesterol ratio, Blood pressure,  
Attendance/absenteeism, Life expectancy,  
Genome, White blood cell count

List 7.  
10 unexpected encounters  
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

## SECURITY AESTHETIC = SYSTEMS PANIC

Brian Holmes

- + Where does security end, and insecurity begin? Systems analysts recognise this as a classic boundary question. Its answer determines the precise deployment of any security system. But as we shall see, this particular boundary question cannot be answered under present conditions, except through the definition of a second system, a specifically interrogatory one. Drawing on the work of an American art critic of the 1960s, I'll call this second kind of bounded entity an 'aesthetic system'.

First we should consider how security systems are installed in reality. Attention is focused on every point where an environment, conceived as 'secure', comes into contact with its outer edges. Typically, these edges are doors, windows, property lines, borders, coasts, air-space – every place of ingress or egress. At each of the edges, a catalogue of known and present dangers is established. An analysis is conducted to determine the most effective responses to these dangers; and then locks, barriers, fences, warning devices, surveillance personnel, armed guards, etc. are positioned at the system's boundaries to repel the threat. Further efforts are expended to look into the crystal ball of the future, predicting all those points where new threats could call for the definition of new boundaries. More material and personnel can now be deployed, or at least, readied for deployment. The security system expands dynamically, continually adjusting its relations to the outside world, continually redefining its own boundaries as a system.

One can easily imagine how a home, an airport or a harbour can be made 'secure'. An initial, safe or 'quiet' inside space must simply be preserved from outer harm. But what happens in a complex social system, one composed of many different actors, some with irreconcilably diverging interests? What happens when the space to be protected is as much linguistic and ideological as it is physical and architectural, so that a breach of legitimacy or a leak of information can be perceived as illicit ingress or egress? In short, what happens in a contested environment where threats can arise from within? The response is clear: what happens is vertiginous paranoia.

The problem of the system's edges suddenly multiplies: the boundary to be secured is now the entire volume of the system, its width, its breadth, its depth, its characteristics and qualities and most damnedly of all, its human potential for change. The resulting proliferation of eyes, ears, cameras, snooping devices, data banks, cross-checks and spiraling analytical anxiety in the face of every conceivable contingency is what defines the present security panic. Under these conditions, no form of precaution could appear superfluous. Statistical models of equilibrium are checked constantly against real-time deviations. Nascent trends are examined for potentially hostile extrapolations. Endlessly ramifying if-then scenarios are extended preemptively into the future. An aesthetics of closure striving toward mathematical certainty becomes the tacitly nourished ethos of the security system.

Yet there is one further complication that merits our attention, particularly in what is called a democracy, where surveillance of the state by the citizens is an historical norm. This is the fact that security measures, in the face of a proliferating internal enemy, come rapidly to be shrouded in a veil of secrecy. The veil is not only cast to preserve their immediate effectiveness, though that is obviously an issue. But there is more at stake. Secrecy, from the viewpoint of the security system, is required to keep the initial security measures from backfiring and producing greater insecurity.

For what if innocent but marginalised social groups knew the extent to which they are being spied on? Would they not then feel further alienation, and maybe even defect to the side of the enemy? And what if mainstream citizens themselves had to be surveilled, for fear that a violent anomaly might be lurking somewhere in an average profile? If they knew they were being watched, wouldn't these honest citizens become angered and demand an end to the proliferation of security measures? Doesn't opinion control then become necessary at all levels of the system? And how about educational and cultural censorship, morality brigades, conversation police? Where does security end, and insecurity begin?

### **Cybernetic Shadow-Boxing**

As you can see from the world around us, any security system is destined under stress to become an entity of uncertain contours, a veritable black hole in society, extending its cloak of invisibility to the exact extent that its internal paranoia deepens; and at the same time generating an external paranoia about its operations that can only provoke a redoubling of its initial drive to stealth and invisibility. Under these conditions, what becomes necessary for the maintenance of democracy is a specific kind of social system, whose probing and questioning can provide some renewed transparency. This is where art criticism used to have great ideas.

Writing in 1968, Jack Burnham predicted the coming demise of the traditional art object, and with it, of the figure of the artist as *Homo faber*, or man the maker. In their place would arise 'aesthetic systems' shaped by *Homo arbiter formae*, man the decider of forms. The essential reasons for this shift were technological and organisational: in an age of ever-more complex and powerful information machines, constructed by ever-more sophisticated and extensive organisations, an art that retained the simple posture of manufacture, or hand-making, would inevitably be condemned to lose all relevance in the world. Yet this declining relevance could be countered if the artist rose to the challenges of the contemporary process of production. The cybernetic design of expansive socio-technical systems could be reflected and evaluated by the deployment of

compact aesthetic systems. As Burnham wrote:

‘The systems approach goes beyond a concern with staged environments and happenings; it deals in a revolutionary fashion with the larger problem of boundary concepts... Conceptual focus rather than material limits define the system. Thus any situation, either in or outside the context of art, may be designed and judged as a system... In evaluating systems, the artist is a perspectivist considering goals, boundaries, structure, input, output, and related activity inside and outside the system. Where the object almost always has a fixed shape and boundaries, the consistency of a system may be altered in time and space, its behavior determined both by external conditions and its mechanisms of control.’ (1968)

Burnham’s insights were far ahead of his time. In the 1960s, what he mainly had before his eyes were sculptural environments, or what we now call installations: relatively simple systems of interaction with the public, which no longer appeared as art objects, but rather as heterogeneous assemblages of parts, some of which might break down and could then be replaced without in any way damaging the originality or authenticity of the system. Hans Haacke’s early sculptures were the classic examples – and that was already a revolution. What we have seen emerging in the art of our time, however, particularly since computerised communications technology became widely available in the 1990s, are subtly aestheticised versions of complex socio-technical systems: networks of actors, equipment, physical sites and virtual spaces allowing for the orchestration of highly diverse activities. In this context of spiraling interaction, the most important artistic decisions are the ones that shape the systemic boundary, lending the system its degrees of recognisability and irrerecognisability, and thus, its potential for symbolic agency. As Burnham remarks, the systems artist ‘operates as a quasi-political provocateur, though in no concrete sense is he an ideologist or a moralist’ (1968).

How then does a democratic systems aesthetic come into play, in the face of

security panic with its inherent tendencies toward invisibility, concealed intentions, censorship and even aggression? What we have is the paradoxical, yet also paradigmatic case where one systemic boundary can only be identified by determining another. What this means is that an aesthetic system must be constituted as a fully operational reality: a project, a team, an alliance or network that can probe the contours of the secret, dissimulating system, and at the same time, reveal those hidden outlines mimetically, through its own outer forms, its own vocabularies and images, its characteristic modes of appearance and communication. What you get then, in art, are elaborate fakes, doppelgängers, double agents, fictional entities that strive to produce outbreaks of truth at their points of contact with the hidden system. What you get, in other words, are counter-models, the virtual outlines of rival systems. This is the principle of some of the most advanced art of our day. Jack Burnham understood it in 1968. But there’s just one problem: later generations of critics did not read him.<sup>1</sup>

While security systems proliferate, and while strategic reality hackers devise complex and sardonic lures to ferret them out and render them visible, the majority of cultural commentators remain blind to the entire predicament and go on blithering about the tragedies of great painting or the modest pleasures of relational art. Yet there are other things under the sun, even if they are not so easy to see. An urgent task of cultural critique in the age of security panic is to help carve out space in democratic societies for the necessary fictions, feints, satires, double-identities and organisational shadow-boxing of aesthetic systems.

### Probing the Black World

A paradigmatic case is Marko Peljhan’s *Trust-System 15*, initiated in 1995, which is an attempt to build an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) for civilian counter-reconnaissance and independent media broadcasting. As noted in the concept text accompanying an installation at the Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana, Slovenia, projects of this kind ‘include methods and materials which interact directly with societal and capital systems, communicate with them, use them, and cooperate with them, as well as position themselves in direct confrontation

with them'. On the wall are images of the projected drone along with letters from various military corporations – Aydin Vector, Fibersense Technology, Interstate Electronics, etc. – expressing their willingness to supply Peljhan with all necessary information for the purchase of materials. A vitrine contains specialised engineering manuals and a few key components. Yet the work is not complete with the installation of this conceptual display. The aim is to realise the UAV, and to expose all the conditions under which such technologies are being deployed in present-day societies. As the artist explains in a lecture:

'The project has two objectives – tactical broadcasting of a radio programme over territory where broadcasting by the usual means is impossible because of military actions and civil repression, and collecting of intelligence for civilian purposes. The second objective is of course in collision with all the legislations in the world, but I and an entire culture are certainly interested in how to maintain a degree of civilian control over very aggressive and self-reproducing systems of social repression which use these same methods to keep us under their thumb.' (1999)

All of Peljhan's work deploys rigorously conceived socio-technical systems as vehicles to gather information about military and corporate technologies, even while initiating their conversion to civilian uses. Today, after multiple iterations of the tactical UAV concept under the shadow of increasing security panic, he has carried out the first test flights. Can anyone predict what kinds of knowledge – and what levels of controversy – will be generated by the confrontation between the *Trust-System* and the increasingly secretive military systems of our supposedly democratic societies?

To define the boundaries of an aesthetic system is to determine both a threshold of visibility and a potential for interaction. This has been the artistic principle of the Yes Men for over a decade, in interventions typically based on the creation of fake websites spuriously mirroring the claims of real corporations or bureaucracies. Email requests for interviews or conference presentations then

open up situations of apparently normal collaboration, morphing into bizarre and ambiguous confrontations when the group's satirical performances begin to take over the scene (often through the display of outlandish accoutrements such as the 'Employee Visualization Appendage' or the Halliburton Survivaball').<sup>2</sup> The aim is always to cut through commercial or bureaucratic rhetoric to reveal the unstated but imperious drive for profit at any cost, which dictates corporate and governmental behaviour under neoliberalism.

The more confrontational forms of tactical media all work out some variation on the systems aesthetic, in configurations that range from predominantly symbolic display to more pragmatic forms of political intervention. In a particularly impressive project, Trevor Paglen mobilised an existing network of amateur plane-spotters to gather information about the CIA's extraordinary rendition program, which he then published in book form with a professional journalist (Paglan & Thompson 2006). The Institute for Applied Autonomy subsequently produced a striking visualisation of Paglen's information, with the work *Terminal Air* (2007); but they have also made protest tools such as the *Graffiti Writer* (1999) or the eminently practical *TXTmob* application (2004), which helps demonstrators to share up-to-the-minute information about police deployments via mobile-phone messaging.<sup>3</sup> On the level of Internet activism, Übermorgen launches elaborate applications such as *GWEI – Google Will Eat Itself* (2005), which enlists web-users to probe the obscure operational routines of the tentacular search-engine portal.<sup>4</sup> And at street level, an anonymous group posing as the Chicago Housing Authority transformed the slogan 'This is Change' into 'This is Chaos', dressing up as municipal workers to install an astonishing poster series in the city's own display spaces (2005). The bright orange posters denounced the elimination of much of Chicago's low-cost housing by the authority charged with protecting it, deftly exposing the truth papered over by an expensive Leo Burnett advertising campaign.<sup>5</sup>

The list could go on and on, but in this context it clearly has to culminate with Critical Art Ensemble, whose projects have typically taken the form of

staged laboratories inviting the public to gain first-hand experience with the increasingly pervasive effects of biotech. Their research into the history and present development of biological weapons touched off a veritable security panic, plunging the artist Steve Kurtz and the university professor Robert Ferrell in a four-year 'bioterror' trial that galvanised widespread support for the freedom of both artistic expression and scientific research. In this case, an aesthetic system clashed directly with the US government, generating a wealth of penetrating insights into the control structures of authoritarian neoliberalism, but only at the price of a long and exhausting ordeal – which fortunately ended with the withdrawal of all charges.<sup>6</sup>

So what are the current prospects of the systems aesthetic in its most provocative and confrontational forms? The lessons of recent years are clear: the security obsessions of contemporary societies inevitably give rise to proliferating zones of secrecy, both at the heart of the increasingly militarised states and in the dispersed and labyrinthine worlds of the transnational corporations. Two imperious justifications – the pressures of economic competition and the demands of sovereign defence – lend a perverse legitimacy to what would otherwise be manifestly undemocratic practices. Artistic interventions are one way to probe these 'black worlds', in order to extract information and to offer tangible aesthetic images of what can no longer be seen. Public art institutions should support and distribute such projects as part of their civic mandate. But critical artists and activists will always have to work far in advance of the institutional mainstream, adopting the formats and guises that allow them to grapple with the invisible.

A great example is the Public Netbase of Vienna, an electronic arts centre that initially configured itself as an Internet service provider to explore both the potentials and the traps of the emerging information society. After twelve years of original and challenging projects, including work with most of the artists I've cited here, Netbase refused to neutralise itself and was finally forced out of operation in 2006 by pressure from the municipal authorities. Today parts

of the former team run the 'Global Security Alliance' – a satirical performance festival exploring the paradoxes of security panic and 'cultural peacekeeping'.<sup>7</sup> Another project involves the technopolitics of information-retrieval and data-mining.<sup>8</sup> And in collaboration with the group Kuda.org based in Novi Sad, they have just published an anthology of Netbase projects in the form of a jet-black monolith, recounting a decade of hands-on research into aesthetic systems. The name of the book says it all: *Non Stop Future*.<sup>9</sup>

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**NOTES:**

1. Of course there are historicist readings, like Luke Skrebowski's 'All Systems Go: Recovering Jack Burnham's "Systems Aesthetics"' (2006). Too bad they remain on the safe terrain of art history.
2. <<http://theyesmen.org>>.
3. <<http://www.appliedautonomy.com>>. See herein, 'Implausible Deniability'.
4. <<http://www.ubermorgen.com>>. *GWEI* was a collaboration between UBERMORGEN.COM, Alessandro Ludovico, and Paolo Cirio.
5. Documentation of this intervention can still be found at <<http://web.archive.org/web/20070405175219/http://www.chicagohousingauthority.net>>.
6. See the analyses of the case and its implications at <<http://www.caedefensefund.org/overview.html>>.
7. <<http://global-security-alliance.com>>.
8. <[http://world-information.org/wii/deep\\_search](http://world-information.org/wii/deep_search)>.
9. See (Curcic & Pantelic 2008).

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## SECURITY MANIA: FILM AS A TOOL OF HEALING

Daniela Ingruber

- + Safety is comfortable, a human need.  
But security tends to be inhuman.  
Security takes away freedom.  
And it's usually the freedom of others that is taken.  
Security is never related to all. It excludes.  
Its policies injure and kill.  
As soon as security policies are introduced to make some feel safer, others are ignored, will be less secure; and less free.

Security is an obsession.  
Fighting terrorism directly led to a certain security mania. All those who do not fit into the pattern of the young prosperous white-skinned success or those who were born on the wrong side of the capitalist geography, come under the label "not-wanted": those, who might be criminals, terrorists or simply are different. Being different means an error message: it disturbs the security mania. It is seen as a criminal act, a threat to democracy and a danger for capitalism.

Like P., who is considered such a threat.  
P. was eleven years old, when he found his father killed by soldiers or those who pretended to fight for the security of his country – Somalia. All his relatives had been banished or killed before. Nobody was left to help the boy bury his father. Therefore P. decided to sit next to the corpse.

He sat there for days.

After one week his neighbours told him to leave if he wanted to survive. By sitting next to his assassinated father he had become a security risk for the entire neighbourhood. P. asked them where to go. Their answer was simple and helpless: “Go to Europe”, they said.

That’s what he did. That’s what he tried, for seven years.

It turned out to be a journey of hunger, violence and death. He got beaten by policemen, the military and people smugglers. Various times they stole the money he had been working hard for. He was sent back several times and always started again. He lost the majority of the friends he made on his trip. Some starved to death, others were murdered and the last ones drowned in the sea, some meters in front of the European border, where a “new” life was supposed to start.

In spring 2008 he finally arrived in “Europe”, actually in Ceuta, one of two Spanish enclaves in Africa, close to Europe, very close; he can see Europe, when he looks over the sea. A ferry could bring him there within 45 minutes. But nobody would allow him to enter a ferry. Until today the promised future has not begun yet, because he is different: he has the wrong colour of skin, wrong sex and the wrong story, though it is his skin, his story.

Being black, male, without money and education, he is considered a security risk, a potential threat to European society and economy. His character is not involved in the judgement. Being categorised a security risk reduces him to the minimum of life: no room for individuality left.

P. does not give up, still. Why should he? There is nowhere and nobody else where he could go.

At the moment he stays in C.E.T.I., a camp for unaccompanied minor refugees. His chances of achieving refugee status are tiny; he looks older than a minor. Seven years on the run have turned him into a man. Nobody would ever guess he is minor and there is no passport to prove it. Perhaps he has never been farther from Europe than today.

What he needs most after all those years is security. But this only exists for rich or successful ones. Being called a risk, there is no opportunity for P.

But who decides about chances in the capitalist world system? Surely not an asylum seeker, but those who build the walls to defend their wealth.

Security destroys those who need security most.

### **Only a fence**

Throughout history walls have been effective and politically powerful in hindering uninvited strangers from trespassing. Walls were and are made for keeping strangers out. What the builders of walls never understood is: they rather imprison themselves within the walls, like in a fortress. The European Union even seems to be proud of that fact.

Thus, it is only a fence; a fence between two countries, two cultures and finally two continents; only a fence, like in Melilla, another Spanish enclave in Africa.

Just a fence and one can look through it.

Pictures of people who tried to climb over that fence show something else: six metres high, armed with tiny knives, razor sharp wires, surveillance cameras, alarm systems and pepper-showers.<sup>1</sup> This is European security. On the other side of the fence, another security-tool: Moroccan soldiers, who tend to shoot before shouting. They help Europe to defend its border. What is defined as a fence in truth resembles an instrument of torture. More than that: a killing tool, a murder weapon, killing indirectly as well, because refugees seek other ways to overcome the border to Europe; they swim and drown, they run and get shot, they climb trucks and fall off after hours, they use boats that sink. The so-called high number of refugees reaching Lampedusa or the Canary Islands in boats or swimming is a small part of all the people who try. Many have to give up. The majority die on their way. The security-fence and its policy kill by pure existence.

Security assassinates without looking at its victims.

Human beings do not seem to matter in the discussion of security issues. But who feels safe in the end, if being human does not play a role?

Security is selective.

Security is blind.

Obsessions tend to turn people violent; so does the obsession for security; once started, this mania discovers enemies where there are none, it looks for dangers until it finds something to call a peril.

Security leads to paranoia.

Ironically, it never reaches its goal, as security issues do not disappear because of security policy. They simply get hidden or suppressed. Their energy increases through suppression and turns into violence. But violence does not lead to safety, it rather causes more security policies.

### Escaping or fighting security

The only reply possible to today's security mania is the artificial – art. The obsession can be escaped by dismissing the real. Art irritates. Art consists of irregularities. Nothing is so far from security as art; and of all types of the artificial, film is the most peculiar when it comes to security issues: the same technology can be used for both: security and film. The camera brings them together and separates them irreconcilably.

Through surveillance, the camera loses its magic attitude – in film it awakens to passion. In its surveillance work, the camera shows what it is supposed to show: the illustration of anonymous moving. This means an abstract, not a connection between different time levels. Nothing is left over, no surplus is kept, because even if set together, the different images do not mean anything but a nothing, a vacuum of human existence. The camera catches our shadows but never the original.

Used for art movies, the camera connects to the past and the future, it tells stories or even creates them. The interpretation of the pictures is left to the audience, who fill them with their thought and bring them back to life.

In both cases it is a camera, a technical tool, similar to each other though the technical data might differ. What makes the pictures so different?

*Little Alien* (2009), Nina Kusturica's latest documentary, demonstrates the disparity: the cold of a surveillance camera and the warmth of a movie-camera. Imagine a scene at the border between the European Union and Ukraine: A

surveillance camera records the movements of migrants, trying to cross the border. While the migrants do not see in the dark and therefore walk cautiously and clumsily, the infrared camera watches everything in clear view. The pictures do not only portray all the movements but also show the migrants as awkward people, being blind in the dark. The camera does not know any compassion. The camera in *Little Alien* (cinematography: Christoph Hochenbichler) follows the computer images and the face of the soldier who smiles while explaining that the refugees do not have the slightest chance to escape.

Another scene of the movie *Little Alien* shows a young man, who plans to flee from Africa under a truck going to Spain. This time the camera accompanies the migrant. No surveillance, a movie, telling the story of the young boy and still keeping all the necessary distance to keep him private. He is 16 years old and talks about the policemen who beat him up several times. His eyes show that he tells the truth. The audience of the movie does not need to see the violence itself. Everything is obvious. The camera does not have to go into surveillance or too much closeness. Nina Kusturica avoids talking about security, its winning and losing. It is obvious that she tries to deconstruct the state's obsession with security issues by showing who the so-called security threats really are – and she succeeds.

The European border-fence is also shown in her movie – and manifests itself by being technologically clean and distant. José Palazón, spokesperson of PRODEIN (Asociación pro derechos de la infancia), a child-care NGO in Melilla, describes how the deadly fence works; no pictures of injured or killed persons need to be shown: the movie exhibits the nonsense of such a fence by merely sticking to technology-images.

But the real power of this movie lies in its ability to follow unaccompanied minor refugees from different parts of the world and letting them decide how they want to be portrayed in the movie. They talk about their life, when they want to, they go to parties, but they also get angry with the system that does not provide them with any kind of answer why they are considered a security risk for the state. Those young people cannot be understood as helpless victims

or crying teenagers, nor as individuals whose fate makes the audience cry. The audience might cry – not for those refugees but with them: security does not lead to safety.

Security policies presume there is something to fight against that can be fought and regard this as the task of any hierarchical order. But security policies lie, if they assume they could hold the promise. They cannot, because security takes more than it gives. For hindering some in their criminal actions security blocks the entire society.

Security imprisons.

And security is cowardly. Its policies call for weapons even if there are none on the other side. Development cooperation, any kind of international peace initiative and the fight against hunger and poverty contain embedded security measures, mostly including the military or police. Journalists seem to agree and so-called civil society is involved far too much to judge the necessity of security policies at any moment.

*Little Alien* identifies the ridiculous obsession and gives language back to the protagonists, the refugees. The movie returns them something that all security tools have taken away: being itself, humanity, instead of spreading voyeurism. It is irritating and passionate.

Film irritates.

And film needs dialogue, whereas security kills any sort of conversation and discussion. What is there to be said as long as security policies do not give answers and cannot be disputed? As long as any kind of resistance is called a confession of guilt?

Security judges and punishes.

Film judges, too, but the judgement is open to interpretation of the audience. If the audience comes to distinct conclusions and criticises the movie, its strength stays untouched. Security issues on the other hand collapse, as soon as a doubt is concretised. Security is weaker than it pretends to be.

Still, the question whether film is a suitable method of resistance against the

security mania has not been answered fully. There must be something more about film – and there is: film creates creativity; it inspires the human mind and feelings. Film plays with the real by destroying its desert (Žižek 2001). Film is always political, especially if it tries not to be so. Political documentaries overtake the viewer's perception, sometimes manipulating, in the best case by replacing the real through a perceivable reality. What documentaries always do is create a universe that is not part of the movie but of its post-production process.

Film calls for dialogue.

Security stays tightened to technical tools.

Only movies can happen in our mind.

Security policies have to be proofed and repeated every day and mostly they need adjustment. However, film creates views. They might be uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous, but mostly they stick to the viewer's position.

So, finally the view of the spectator falls back on the topic. In the case of movies, this is part of the game and purpose: film supposedly gets re-created by being watched; whereas security mechanisms may get abrogated, as soon as the spectator decides to doubt its authority or necessity.

Reality plays a role in both: they ignore it and invent one that fits to their goals.

The camera looks for that reality. The difference is:

Film brings back imagination.

Film holds the power to heal – maybe even from the current obsession for security.

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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF REALTIME

Mukul Patel

### + 1. We can remember it for you wholesale

Manu Luksch's *Faceless* project (2002–07) is a series of works that intervenes in the quotidian recording and processing of CCTV (closed-circuit television) surveillance' camera images in the UK, and probes the laws surrounding these images. CCTV images are but one of many traces of data that citizens leave in their wake, voluntarily and involuntarily, while communicating, travelling, shopping, using medical services, or browsing the web. Legal frameworks exist to safeguard privacy by limiting access to such personal data to appropriate parties. Under the terms of the UK Data Protection Act (DPA),<sup>2</sup> 'data subjects' have a right to obtain copies of data held on them, such as medical or financial records, or CCTV recordings. By invoking the DPA, Manu acquired CCTV recordings of herself around London and composed them into the science fiction feature film,<sup>3</sup> *Faceless* (2007).

*Faceless* was made under the constraints of the *Manifesto for CCTV Filmmakers*,<sup>4</sup> which prohibits the use of any cameras in addition to existing surveillance cameras, and requires that images are obtained by the protagonist submitting 'subject access requests' under the DPA. In the process, the CCTV image, with its concomitant legal superstructure, is 'stumbled upon' as a found object (objet trouvé) – more precisely, as a *legal* readymade.

This text discusses the derivation of the film's scenario from the legal and

material properties of the constituent images and summarises the project's critical position by focusing on a key element of the narrative setting – the system of 'RealTime'.

## 2. A legal readymade

CCTV images are timecoded as they are recorded for evidentiary purposes, and this is the reason that they fall under the remit of the DPA. Timecode in CCTV systems functions not as an archival or indexical tool – few data controllers retain images for more than a month – but rather as a tool of discipline, to turn the observed space into a controlled space. Every frame of video that Manu received in response to a request displayed the date and time, but the code generators were often inaccurate, and in many instances there were multiple, conflicting timecodes within each frame, added by different devices in the surveillance system that were years out of sync with each other. These incommensurable clocks posed a challenge for the filmmaker – test audiences of an early movie version trusted the timecodes and attempted to reconstruct a chronology. Correcting the codes to cohere with the plot was unjustifiable (don't touch the evidence!) – so the anachronisms had to be embraced and explained. In search of a narrative foundation for the arbitrariness and multiplicity of indicated time, the idea of a system of artificially imposed personal 'life-clocks' was born – RealTime.

To comply with privacy legislation, CCTV operators are obliged to render third parties in the recordings unidentifiable before releasing them to the data subject. This anonymisation generates radical visual material – typically, CCTV recordings are supplied with the faces of third parties occluded by black ellipses, though in one recording that Manu received, a keyhole mask was used to censor everything except her, and in another, the only thing left visible was the system-generated timecode and name of the room under surveillance. These legally stipulated redactions of the CCTV images forced a setting for the film in which only the protagonist has a face – hence, *Faceless*.

Since only a small proportion of Manu's data requests were actually met – real or alleged equipment failure being a popular reason – many planned scenes never materialised. The plot of the film had to evolve continuously, in response to the availability of images, and the peculiarities of their annexations and redactions.

## 3. Life in RealTime

Concomitant with any major revolution in the organisation of society is a calendar reform. In Yevgeny Zamyatin's 1924 novel *We*, inhabited by a population which lives in transparent buildings under the gaze of the Guardians, the OneState organises not just the weeks and days, but also nearly every minute of the day. The citizens' lives are totally subordinated to the Table of Hours. Zamyatin's satire is clearly directed at the disciplining of industrial labour through scientific management and the factory time clock:

'Every morning [...] at the very same hour and the very same minute, we get up, millions of us, as though we were one. At the very same hour, millions of us as one, we start work. Later, millions as one, we stop. And then, like one body with a million hands, at one and the same second according to the Table, we lift the spoon to our lips. And at one and the same second we leave for a stroll and go to the auditorium, to the hall for the Taylor exercises, and then to bed.' (1993: 13)

RealTime in *Faceless* is analogous to the Table of Hours in *We*:

'The pulse of RealTime orients the life of every citizen. Eating, resting, going to work, getting married – every act is tied to RealTime. And every act leaves a trace of data – a footprint in the snow of noise [...].' (2007).

with two important differences:

- (1) The technology of Zamyatin's OneState maintains the population in absolute synchrony – 'millions as one' – whereas the New Machine that rules the *Faceless* world computes a unique timetable for each citizen.<sup>5</sup>
- (2) Under RealTime, not only is there a new calendar, but also – unlike the Table of Hours – the dominion of the present is guaranteed by the annihilation of the past and the future.

‘In the luminous world of the New Machine, each moment of RealTime saturates consciousness. There is no memory, no anticipation. There is no past, so there can be no guilt or regret, and no future, therefore no anxiety or fear. RealTime, the perfect and perpetual present, is the heartbeat of the healthy universe.’ (2007)

Here lies the critical point: there is (for normal faceless citizens) no option to recall a past or posit a future – they simply do not exist. What is promised instead is the perfection of each moment, devoid of temporal depth in which emotion can develop. It is this erasure of emotional life that renders faces vestigial (since their most notable quality, that of expressiveness, becomes redundant).

#### 4. The Perfect Present

The single-tensed world of *Faceless* bears a striking resemblance to the London keenly observed by Ian Sinclair:

‘Vague spectres of menace caught on time-coded surveillance cameras justify an entire network of peeping vulture lenses. A web of indifferent watching devices, sweeping every street, every building, to eliminate the possibility of a past tense, the freedom to forget. There can be no highlights, no special moments: a discreet tyranny of ‘now’ has been established. “Real time” in its most pedantic form.’ (1998: 91)

That Sinclair’s articulation of surveilled London resonates with the scenario of *Faceless* is to be expected: *Faceless* comprises documentary footage of the city – rearranged and augmented with sound, but only to construct a fiction that continually points back to the real world. Should we be surprised that the recording of every minute detail of life effectively erases the past? Under constant surveillance, every act becomes equally significant. How can history begin to grow out from under the dead weight of this data? The massive accumulation of data also assures the perpetual adjournment of the future, since the most powerful computers cannot mine the data mountain fast enough to leave the

present behind.

There is the idea that we can, on rare occasions and by an act of volition (of creation or renunciation, for example) access the present moment that everyday living shields us from. But we are more likely to inhabit the perfect present that the New Machine offers: less a succession of liberated ‘nows’, of moments of flow of free consciousness, of an ebbing away of the ego, and more an assembly-line stutter, a chain of obsolescent instants, a reinforcement of the functionary self. Narcotic rather than entheogenic, dulling the faculties, a denial of agency – there is no transcendence here. Instead: a case of running to stand still, of the continual arousal of and immediate gratification of proto-wants that are never allowed to develop into articulable desires; or again, of each moment being exactly sufficient to itself, paying its own way, the debt regenerated as it is repaid: a closed system of subsistence.

It is against the dreariness of the New Machine’s perfect and perpetual present that the protagonist of *Faceless* stands out when she awakes with a face and embarks in search of her story, of a meaningful trajectory, of the beginning of her existence (since she wants to look forward, too). Her quest is reminiscent of Eileen’s search for her child amidst rioting crowds in *Medium Cool* – Haskell Wexler’s 1969 film that radically intertwines the real and the fictive. Wexler set the story within documentary shoots during the ‘68 riots in Chicago. Eileen’s bright yellow dress, chosen to be trackable against the distracting, politically charged background, corresponds to the protagonist’s white jumpsuit in *Faceless*, chosen for visibility against the anodyne, but no less troubled, backdrop of 21<sup>st</sup> century London.

We [...] dwell in a present-tense culture that somehow, significantly, decided to employ the telling expression “You’re history” as a choice reprobation or insult, and thus elected to speak forgotten volumes about itself.’ (Hitchens 1998).

We do not read the past, and we cannot envisage the future either:

‘[T]he precarization of existence is reflected in the permanent instability of the most essential aspects of living that alter, in a profound manner, the very notion of a project of life [...]’ (Bergel & Risler 2006).

What *Faceless* ultimately warns of is the painkilling perfection of an instrumental present that we begin to celebrate out of an inability to remember or conceive an alternative.

### 5. Lapse: this is not a (CCTV) movie

The *Faceless* project is not a piece of CCTV art, nor even a study of dataveillance in general – it consists of investigations into constraints, standards, and systems of control, including legal processes (in the making of the works), time (explored through the narrative of the film), and standards of veracity (the intertwining of the fictive and the documentary).

*Faceless* is not a movie, in the same way as Chris Marker’s *La Jetée* (1962), to which it pays homage, is not a movie – but a succession of still images, instants held frozen. Although the video noise in *Faceless* is resolved at 25 frames per second, the useful signal is delivered much less frequently because of the time-lapse nature of most of the recordings. As a study in contemporary photography, *Faceless* is the digital mirror of *La Jetée*, 45 years on.

In *The Vision Machine*, Paul Virilio reports a conversation between Auguste Rodin and Paul Gsell, in which Rodin describes the photographed body as ‘struck with paralysis. [...] People in photographs suddenly seem frozen in mid-air, despite being caught in full swing [...] there is no gradual unfolding of a gesture’ (1994: 1).

Rodin counters Gsell’s championing of photography as an ‘unimpeachable mechanical witness’ with the claim that ‘[i]t is art that tells the truth and photography that lies. For in reality time does not stand still, and if the artist manages to give the impression that a gesture is being executed over several

seconds, their work is certainly much less conventional than the scientific image in which time is abruptly suspended. (1994: 2).

The photography in *Faceless* lies, because of the lapses that lie between the movements, and this is where the fictive aspect finds a roothold. But it is a record of a way of seeing in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century that is already, towards the end of its first decade, obsolescent. Contemporary surveillance cameras capture images with high definition lenses and sensors at ‘real time’ frame rates, and deploy accessory technologies (such as facial- and gait-recognition systems). Terahertz cameras that can detect concealed substances by their chemical composition are being trialled in public. And soon, the franchising of fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging)-based lie-detection centres will allow lies everywhere to be photographed.

Rodin would have been amused.

↻

The film *Faceless* [50 min, AT/UK 2007], conceived and directed by Manu Luksch, with a script co-written with Mukul Patel and narrated by Tilda Swinton, is available as a PAL DVD in English with Albanian, Czech, French, German and Italian subtitles through [www.ambienttv.net <http://www.ambienttv.net/content/?q=faceless>](http://www.ambienttv.net/content/?q=faceless).

*images overleaf: stills from the film Faceless*

02-01-96

0:00:

H/03

SUN R00

2

10-6-05

24H

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13:23:09

31/05/05

24HR



16:28:38 24/08/03

**NOTES:**

1. It is a measure of the current sleepiness of the population that they're happy to swallow this language – and not the more anodyne 'security' camera.
2. The Data Protection Act 1998 seeks to strike a balance between the rights of individuals and the sometimes competing interests of those with legitimate reasons for using personal information. The DPA gives individuals certain rights regarding information held about them. It places obligations on those who process information (data controllers) while giving rights to those who are the subject of that data (data subjects). Personal information covers both facts and opinions about the individual.  
The original DPA (1984) was devised to permit and regulate access to computerised personal data such as health and financial records. A later EU directive broadened the scope of data protection and extended the remit of the DPA (1998) to cover, amongst other data, CCTV recordings. In addition to the DPA, CCTV operators must comply with other laws related to human rights, privacy, and procedures for criminal investigation.
3. Manu chose to develop the film as a 'science-fiction fairy-tale action-thriller', in part to go beyond the non-narrative and database structures that she had worked with extensively till then, but more importantly, to divest the CCTV recordings of their documentary nature, to defamiliarise the commonplace, the given: to make everyday surveillance, again, something to question.
4. *Manifesto for CCTV Filmmakers* <<http://www.ambienttv.net/content/?q=dpamanifesto>>.
5. The metronome of RealTime is audible throughout the film as pulses that continuously circulate around the woman protagonist, and around the viewer. This 'life positioning system' operates rather like GPS (global positioning system), which uses pulses of 'real' time – time signals synchronised to an atomic clock – to determine position and velocity.

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## IMPLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY

### The Institute for Applied Autonomy (IAA)

- + *Terminal Air* is an installation and data visualisation that examines the mechanics of Extraordinary Rendition, a current practice of the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), in collaboration with German, UK, other EU member states and 'rogue nations'. The programme allows for suspected terrorists detained in Western countries to be transported to so-called 'black sites' for interrogation and torture outside the eye of international human rights law.

The story of Extraordinary Rendition had been repeatedly broken in major media, but as it lacked the photographic record of Abu Ghraib to sustain it, it had little staying power amidst the daily onslaught of war imagery. *Terminal Air* responded to this vacuum by presenting a digital world map that displays the real-time movements of airplanes with suspected involvement in Extraordinary Rendition. *Terminal Air* also sought to provide branding for the anonymous front-companies through which the programme is administered.

#### **Reflecting on Rendition: Implausible Deniability, The New Black**

Secrecy is a well-defined concept among military planners. The US Department of Defense (DOD) classifies information and material depending on 'the degree of damage that unauthorized disclosure would cause to national defense or foreign relations'<sup>1</sup>. The DOD makes a distinction between clandestine operations, which are secret, and covert operations, which are anonymous.

These terms are rooted in WWII and cold war-era military thinking. During this era, there were essentially two reasons to engage in secret operations. Some programmes – particularly surveillance operations -- were rendered ineffective if their existence became known. With other operations, the concern was that publicity would adversely affect foreign relations. Specifically, fear of escalating regional conflicts into direct confrontation between superpowers led to a reliance on covert ops in which the US' role as sponsor was concealed.

The Extraordinary Rendition program is a new kind of secret operation that challenges conventional military thinking. On its surface, it has all the trappings of a covert operation – complex command and control systems, concealed identities, unnamed operatives, and so on. But the program stands in marked contrast to its WWII and cold war forebears. It fails to meet the criteria for either covert or clandestine operations as described above – knowledge of the programme is not likely to affect its efficacy, nor is there serious concern that acknowledging the United States' role in detaining and transporting terror suspects would lead to world war. Furthermore, the programme itself exemplifies the sort of muscular posturing employed elsewhere (e.g. 'the gloves are coming off',<sup>2</sup> 'we will smoke them out of their holes'<sup>3</sup> and 'we also have to work through the dark side'<sup>4</sup>) to convey the message at home and abroad that the US will combat terrorism by any and all available means.

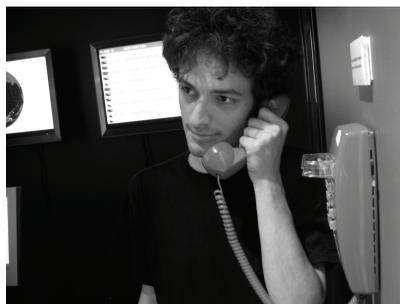
### **One might wonder why Extraordinary Rendition is secret at all?**

The answer lies in a recent transformation of military doctrine. American military secrecy has become less concerned with national security or global balances of power than with legal culpability and public relations. This shift has been accompanied by the advent of the term 'black ops' to denote illegal or extra-legal activities. Black ops employ secrecy to mitigate risks faced by operatives and their sponsors -- imprisonment or execution for individuals and embarrassing international scandals for governments.

If blackness denotes legal and political risk, it is striking to see how black ops are undertaken by an administration openly hostile to both law and diplomacy. In this context, old notions of plausible deniability – the ability for an operation's sponsor to credibly disavow its involvement – give way to open secrets. When George W. Bush claims that the United States doesn't engage in torture and denies the existence of the Extraordinary Rendition programme (or more precisely, acknowledges the programme but not that any renditions have taken place) he does so with a wink. His administration neither expects, nor it would seem even desires anyone to take such denials seriously. Such statements are required by lawyers and international notions of decency, but they are widely understood as political theatre not to be taken as literally as other, more widely circulated pronouncements about the seriousness, even ruthlessness with which the war on terrorism is to be prosecuted.

How else can we make sense of the apparent contradiction between describing an operation as 'black' – i.e. as illegal, even shameful – and the public way it is carried out, relying on civilian aircraft, with private contractors to fly the planes and arrange logistics? It has of course been suggested that this is an intentional strategy of maintaining invisibility by 'hiding in plain sight'. After reviewing all of the evidence, we must also consider an alternative hypothesis -- that the Bush administration thinks so little of international law and public opinion that it simply doesn't try very hard to conceal its actions. This would certainly be in keeping with the general tenor emanating from Washington over the past eight years. As the curtain begins to close on the Bush era and its primary players find themselves subject to worldwide scorn, ridicule, and a growing number of criminal indictments one wonders whether Cheney, Rumsfeld, Attenborough, Gonzalez, Yoon and the others are wishing they'd been a little more conventional in their thinking... if not by conforming to international law then at least by bothering to cover their tracks.

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*Terminal Air imagines the CIA office through which the Extraordinary Rendition programme is administered as a sort of travel agency: A clean work environment from which agents may coordinate complex networks of private contractors, leased equipment, and shell companies. In actuality, many of the Extraordinary Rendition logistics have been coordinated by Jeppesen DataPlan, a Boeing subsidiary based in San Jose, CA.*

*Airport-styled displays track the movements of aircraft suspected of involvement in Extraordinary Rendition, while promotional posters identify the private contractors that supply equipment and personnel.*

*Booking agents' desks feature computers offering interactive animations that enable visitors to monitor the relevant air traffic and airport data from around the world, and register to receive text messages when a plane lands at an airport near them.*

*Iconic red telephones ring each time a flight is updated with details provided by the familiar voice of a BBC news correspondent.*

*Travel posters advertising the various CIA front companies and the aircraft they lease adorn the walls. The Gulfstream IV shown here was used in the rendition of cleric Abu Omar from Milan, Italy to a prison Cairo, Egypt where he was held and tortured for four years. The plane is owned by Phillip H. Morse, part-owner of the Boston Red Sox baseball team. It has been used to fly players to spring training when not chartered by the CIA.*

*Data on the take-off, landing and flight plans of civilian aircraft are provided by the Federal Aviation Administration to companies such as travel agencies, by law. As the CIA chose to operate the Extraordinary Renditions programme using leased private airplanes, the movements of the aircraft have been hidden in plain sight for anyone who knew what to look for.*

# The *REAL* GUANTANAMO BAY EXPRESS



**N85VM**  
Weekly Flights!

Excerpt of flight log for N85VM  
Courtesy Stephen Grey

...		
05-01-2003	PALM BEACH INT, FLORIDA	BEDFORD/LAURENCE G. HANSCOM FIELD, MASSACHUSETTS
06-01-2003	BEDFORD/HANSCON FLD.	WATERBURY OXFORD, CONNECTICUT
17-01-2003	WATERBURY OXFORD, CONNECTICUT	DULLES WASHINGTON
17-01-2003	OXFORD CA	DULLES WASHINGTON
18-01-2003	DULLES WASHINGTON	FRANKFURT MAIN
18-01-2003	FRANKFURT MAIN	AMMAN / MARKA
18-01-2003	FRANKFURT MAIN	AMMAN/QUEEN ALIA
19-01-2003	KUWAIT INTL	SHANNON
20-01-2003	SHANNON	SCHENECTADY COUNTY, NY
20-01-2003	KUWAIT INTL	SHANNON
25-01-2003	EXECUTIVE, FLORIDA	BENNETT
31-01-2003	BENNETT	BEDFORD/LAURENCE G. HANSCOM FIELD, MASSACHUSETTS
31-01-2003	BEDFORD/HANSCON FLD.	COLUMBIA COUNTY
31-01-2003	DULLES WASHINGTON	
31-01-2003	DULLES WASHINGTON	GUANTANAMO CUBA
02-02-2003	GUANTANAMO CUBA	DULLES WASHINGTON
02-02-2003	PROVIDENCIALIES, TURKS AND CAICOS	GUANTANAMO CUBA
04-02-2003	DULLES WASHINGTON	RAMSTEIN
04-02-2003	DULLES WASHINGTON	RAMSTEIN
10-02-2003	RAMSTEIN	SHANNON
17-02-2003	CAIRO	SHANNON
17-02-2003	RAMSTEIN	CAIRO INTL
17-02-2003	CAIRO	SHANNON
17-02-2003	RAMSTEIN	CAIRO INTL
18-02-2003	CAIRO	SHANNON
18-02-2003	SHANNON	DULLES WASHINGTON
18-02-2003	SHANNON	DULLES WASHINGTON
18-02-2003	DULLES WASHINGTON	COLUMBIA COUNTY
18-02-2003	CAIRO	SHANNON
18-02-2003	RAMSTEIN	CAIRO INTL
18-02-2003	SHANNON	DULLES WASHINGTON
19-02-2003	REPUBLIC	OPA LOCKA, FLORIDA
19-02-2003	SCHENECTADY COUNTY, NY	REPUBLIC
21-02-2003	PALM BEACH INT, FLORIDA	BEDFORD/LAURENCE G. HANSCOM FIELD, MASSACHUSETTS
21-02-2003	BEDFORD/HANSCON FLD.	SCHENECTADY COUNTY, NY
21-02-2003	OPA LOCKA, FLORIDA	PALM BEACH INTL/FLO
01-03-2003	SCHENECTADY COUNTY, NY	DULLES WASHINGTON
02-03-2003	DULLES WASHINGTON	ROMA / CIAMPINO
02-03-2003	DULLES WASHINGTON	ROMA / CIAMPINO
02-03-2003	ROMA / CIAMPINO	ISLAMABAD
03-03-2003	DUBAI	GLASGOW
03-03-2003	GLASGOW	DULLES WASHINGTON
03-03-2003	DULLES WASHINGTON	SCHENECTADY COUNTY, NY
03-03-2003	DUBAI	GLASGOW
16-03-2003	SCHENECTADY COUNTY, NY	DULLES WASHINGTON
...		

*Terminal Air* was produced by the Institute for Applied Autonomy, inspired by conversations with researcher and author Trevor Paglen (*Torture Taxi: On the Trail of the CIA's Rendition Flights* – Melville House Publishing 2006). Data on the movements of the planes was compiled by Paglen, journalist Stephen Grey (*Ghost Plane: The True Story of the CIA Torture Program* – St. Martin's Press 2006) and an anonymous army of plane-spotting enthusiasts. *Terminal Air* was funded in part by the Rhizome Commissions Program and by a *Social Hacking* commission from KURATOR (2007).

**NOTES:**

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## ON MOVING: NOMADISM AND (IN)SECURITY

Norbert Koppensteiner

- + 'Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose' (Janis Joplin)  
'To think is to voyage' (Gilles Deleuze)

### **Diminishing Spaces**

It has always been important for me *to move*. I was born and brought up in Europe, in the closed and narrow confines of the Tyrolean Alps, yet what has always drawn me to North America is the longing for the vastness of its space, the desire to remain itinerant on an ever shifting trajectory, to become imperceptible under an open horizon. At junctures in my life I have sought out those unusual physical or mental spaces which disrupt established procedures of living and thinking. At times I have half-jokingly referred to my life as a permanent state of exception. The patterns that emerge can be followed only in hindsight; they constitute a series of positions and trace a path on a map that is constantly being redrawn.

I know how to move in the very sense denoted by its use as verb: as a practice, a doing. Also when used as a noun, *movement*, *motion*, for me is implied is not so much as a quality which a body can possess (to 'have' movement), but rather as a being in motion. 'Having motion' implies a pre-given body to which motion is just added as an additional quality. It propels a body through a medium (like space or time), with the body remaining self-identical throughout the movement. 'Being in motion', however, turns moving into a productive category. The being

is then not a stability but a becoming. Being in motion is a process of change and transformation in which there is no longer a pre-given stable being that could be defined independently of the motion.

This activity of moving thus affects both living and thinking. It implies an itinerant form of subjectivity that is perceived as a permanent, ongoing becoming. Seen from such an itinerant perspective, freedom is shaped by the extent to which one is able to think and live differently. It is defined by the always concrete space available for becoming and for the question *how else could I still live and think?* Now, the very facts of living and thinking already imply an opening up of freedom, because without this opening no life and no thinking would have been possible in the first place. Freedom is thus a permanent condition of our existence. Yet it is not unlimited. If moving enables ever-new ways of living and thinking, then the extent to which moving is possible also defines our horizon of freedom.

Recently I find my spaces to move diminished, encroached upon. Driving on the highway I am aware that the Austrian road control system makes it possible that my trajectory is being plotted and followed. Taking the subway in Vienna I am conscious of the surveillance cameras, opening the newspapers I read about new security laws. During air-travel the enforced rituals around embarkation have long surpassed the ridiculous and are approaching the bizarre. The contours of my data-body can virtually be traced in a world of cookies, data mining and the possibility to intercept e-mails. And all of this is from the extremely privileged position of a male, white, Western, middle class academic and does not even yet touch upon the questions of visa regulations, immigration, restrictions of movement for those termed foreigners, immigrants or asylum seekers - all of which I am also painfully aware of in my personal as well as professional life. Thinking differently, as the recent persecution of Steve Kurtz from the Critical Art Ensemble has shown, is increasingly precarious as it constantly teeters on the border of being labeled a security threat and thus penalised. Security, as many authors have already astutely remarked (Agamben 2001, 2005; Echavarría

2006; Jabri 2006; Sützl 2007; Wæver 1995) has become the paradigmatic legitimisation for politics with all the problems and - as Agamben argues - all the totalitarian dangers this entails. What is being restricted in this process is movement, the possibilities of becoming through the governmental (Dillon 2007) regulation of life-species circulation, contingency and connection (Dillon 2005). The politics of security foreclose all the spaces for the in-between. And this is no mere question of a restriction of physical movement. If moving is understood in the larger sense as possibility of freedom (to be different), then those restrictions touch upon the very possibilities available for continued 'subjectivation', they touch upon living and thinking and the concrete shape of being-as-becoming (Dillon 2005; 2007).

Here the postmodern forms of critique and celebration of plurality still hold pertinent as political positions of resistance. Postmodern living and thinking call for a perpetual need to open spaces. This can take the form of a local, contingent and relational practice, a dislocating movement that refuses the ascription of exclusive and unifying identity markers, while at the same time celebrating the multiplicity of culture, language, (trans)gender, class, religion as possibilities for impure becomings (Jabri 2006). In this paper, I will attempt to sketch what such an affirmative practice could look like, using the Deleuzian notion of the nomad as chiffre, as exemplary form which encompasses both the notions of resistance against homogenisation and the affirmative plurality of becomings.

### **Methodological Considerations**

The method deployed in this paper closely follows the concept of transpositions as detailed by postmodern feminist and theorist Rosi Braidotti (2006). According to Braidotti, transpositions have a double history in genetics and music and imply:

'an intertextual, cross-boundary or transversal transfer, in the sense of a leap from one code, field or axis into another, not merely in the quantitative mode of plural multiplications, but rather in the qualitative sense of complex multiplicities. It

is not just a matter of weaving together different strands, variations on a theme (textual or musical), but rather of playing the positivity of difference as a specific theme of its own. As a term in music, transposition indicates variations and shifts of scale in a discontinuous but harmonious pattern. It is thus created as an in-between space of zigzagging and of crossing, non-linear but not chaotic, nomadic, yet accountable and committed [...].’ (Braidotti 2006: 5)

The term transposition itself is made up of two parts. The prefix trans- derives from Latin and signifies across, beyond, through (Walch 2002: 120). *Position* refers to a concrete site or place, but also to being in one place, or locating oneself. Dealing with positions by way of an across, beyond or through implies establishing a movement in which single positions can still be discerned, yet no ultimate goal or final reference point emerges. Transpositions thus describe a process which, while acknowledging single positions, also transcends them through a perpetual movement. Positions can still be held and it is still possible to locate oneself. To speak metaphorically, the own location can still be traced on a map. Yet, since movement in the end always carries on and since each movement makes the whole map change, each location on this map does not remain self-identical but is constantly *twisted* and thus becomes different.

The two key features for transpositions are movement and difference. Transpositions carry out a perpetual form of movement in which, as Braidotti (2006: 5) puts it, the “positivity of difference” becomes a specific theme of its own. Deployed as a method in academic writing, trans-positions imply a perpetual, nomadic movement through concepts. In a series of differentiations and approximations, local points of reference (*trans-positions*) can be established while the guiding question is kept open as impetus. The movement so continues without ever finally settling on any one of those reference points (*trans-positions*).

Transpositions carry on in a non-linear manner in order to achieve, through variations and shifts of scale, a pattern that is discontinuous yet not without

harmony. Moves of transposition trace a path which appears to ‘proceed by leaps and bounds’ but is not ‘deprived of logic and coherence’ (Braidotti 2006: 5ff.). Transpositions in short, proceed in a rhizomatic fashion (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) and imply a movement of approximations, partial fusions with – yet also differentiations between – several related concepts. They are a ‘becoming-nomadic of ideas’ and carry out a Deleuzian ‘deterritorialization’ (Braidotti 1994: 37).

### **This Nomad’s Life**

‘The desert is a gigantic map of signs for those who know how to read them, for those who can sing their way through the wilderness.’ (Rosi Braidotti)

The modern, dualistic philosophy of the subject dates back to René Descartes. The term is derived from the Latin *subiectum* for the ground, the fundamental. The subject’s coherence is guaranteed no longer by God, as had been the case previously, but by the - for Descartes indubitable - fact that *I think*. Everything else derives from this first fact of thinking. Being is a consequence of thinking and the subject therefore is defined as the thinking, self-reflecting, perceiving being.

With the theory of the subject, Descartes inaugurates a division between this reflecting subject (*res cogitans*) on the one hand and the outside world, the to-be-observed object (*res extensa*) on the other (Dietrich 2008; Capra 1988). The subject (observer) and object (the observed) so form two separate entities. From the point of view of the subject, everything else - including other humans - is an ‘outside’, an object. The world is so divided dualistically in I and not-I. Between subject and object, between every ‘I’ and ‘not-I’ a chasm opens up which in principle can no longer be bridged.

Mediated through the works of John Locke and Immanuel Kant, the discourse of modernity echoes these foundations (Dietrich 2008: 35off.). The modern legal order proceeds from the foundations of the stable, autonomous and individually

responsible subject just as well as modern positivist science or the political frame of democracy within the nation state, which is built on the individual right to vote.

The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and his co-author Félix Guattari (1983, 1987) challenge these modern foundations in a postmodern vein. Deleuze and Guattari use different models to exemplify a difference between *nomadic* and *sedentary* living and thinking. In light of the above discussion on spaces and movement, one of those models – which might be called the *topological model* – seems especially pertinent for approaching this differentiation. Deleuze and Guattari therein differentiate the nomadic and the sedentary by two different types of space that correspond to the two forms of existence. The sedentary form of existence, they contend, is inherently linked to a certain form of space which relies on the state as instituting principle. The task of the state is essentially one of control over its territory and everything therein, including its people. This control is achieved by dividing and organising space, by parceling it out:

‘One of the fundamental tasks of the state is to striate the space over which it reigns, or to utilize smooth spaces as a means of communication in the service of striated space. It is a vital concern of every state not only to vanquish nomadism but to control migration and, more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire “exterior”, over all the flows traversing the ecumenon.’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 385)

Once more, some definitions are in order: *smooth space* stands for the plains and deserts as horizon for nomadic trajectories. As concept, smooth space is open-ended and without center. There is no longer any division between the earth and the sky as in the vast open spaces one directly melts into the other. The horizon then is a line of flight but no confining limit. Smooth space subsequently is unbounded. It is defined by the trajectories that traverse its surface. It thus knows points of reference, yet no overall fixed structure:

‘The sand desert has not only oases which are like fixed points, but also rhizomatic vegetation that is temporary and shifts location according to local rains, bringing changes in the direction of the crossings. [...] Their variability, the polyvocality of directions, is an essential feature of smooth spaces of the rhizome type, and it alters their cartography.’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 382)

In *smooth space* the cartography remains variable and is defined in terms of the trajectories that are possible at a given moment. Routes and movements fluctuate. Smooth spaces are defined by the relations and movements that traverse them. Relations and movements are not just something added to an already pre-existing space but are its characteristic. It is the apparatus of the state that turns smooth into *striated space*, installing the grids and divisions of cities, fixed roads, provinces and countries. Striated space is structured, patterned and hierarchical. It enables fixity, certainty and stability. Smooth space is not undifferentiated, yet its cartography is not organised according to pre-given categories but made up by the multiple movements that cross it. Smooth space is shifting and mobile – it transforms together with the patterns and relations of movement that define it. Striated space is organised in fixed patterns according to a pre-given unitary logic, that of the state.

Deleuze and Guattari use the concepts of striated and smooth not only as denominations for physical spaces. The process of striation is not only a matter of a territorialising geography but also of producing corresponding subjectivities. Striation introduces sedentariness and stability in both living and thinking. The statal apparatus produces disciplines and tools for a certain form of subjectivation just as it just produces borders and territorial divisions. A sedentary subjectivity is produced via schools, barracks, and prisons until psychoanalysis as method of mental normalisation. Striation implies a molding of concrete subjects according to the pre-established, supposedly universal, cast of the Cartesian subject.

Movement, as far as it exists in striated space, follows pre-determined and

approved channels; proceeds along well-defined and invariant physical and mental pathways. In light of the definition of moving offered at the very beginning, this movement is not the kind that leads to new becomings, but turns into a property ascribed to an otherwise stable entity. Rather than being in motion, in striated space one *has motion*. Rather than proceeding by transpositions, the modern method is to proceed by reasonable, linear movement.

Smooth space, on the other hand, corresponds to *nomadic subjectivities* (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Braidotti 1994 2002, 2006). The nomad is the permanently itinerant and voyaging form of existence. The nomad of Deleuze and Guattari is also an answer to Kant, who lamented certain kind of barbarism that had allowed 'for a kind of nomads who abhor all permanent cultivation of the soil' (Kant, quoted after Colebrook 2005: 180). Nomadism is defined by movement and difference, leading to a subjectivity that is an ongoing, open and fluctuating becoming. Nomadic subjectivity is not conceived as a coherent substance but as a shifting assemblage of diverse parts. Nomadic living and thinking still can be located in concrete surroundings at a given moment in time, yet those surroundings successively change as nomadic mobility implies a trajectory that no longer knows any final goal or ultimate resting point:

'The nomad's identity is a map of where s/he has already been; s/he can always reconstruct it a posteriori, as a set of steps in an itinerary. But there is no triumphant cogito supervising the contingency of the self; the nomad stands for diversity, the nomad's identity is an inventory of traces.' (Braidotti 1994: 14)

Nomadic consciousness re-introduces smooth, open, space into the striation. It disperses the subjectivity that the Cartesian cogito tries to make stable and coherent. Nomadic consciousness resists this Cartesian subjectivity point by point: instead of stability and sedentariness, the nomad is based on a movement leading to becoming and transformation. Instead of the subject-object duality, nomadic subjectivity is an ever shifting multiplicity in which the borders between self and other are constantly displaced. Nomadic subjectivity is never singular,

never individual, but always a multiplicity in relation to itself and with other co-subjects, and the nomadic strategy is one of a temporary and fluctuating becoming-in-togetherness, a co-emergence (Ettinger 2006). Even when by her/himself, the nomad is never single but always a multiplicity – a tribe, clan or pack. The nomad so forms a mobile subjectivity that fragments and dissolves the unity of the Cartesian subject. Nomadic movements challenge the striated distribution of spaces.

The nomad is not an essential category – one is not born a nomad. Becoming nomad arises out of a 'critical consciousness' (Braidotti 1994: 5) which seeks temporary linkages of (political) affinity to standpoints that share a common concern without, however, conflating this affinity into a sameness:

'the nomadic subject functions as a relay team: s/he connects, circulates, moves on; s/he does not form identifications but keeps on coming back at regular intervals. The nomad is a transgressive identity, whose transitory nature is precisely the reason why s/he can make connections at all. Nomadic politics is a matter of bonding, of coalitions, of interconnections.' (Braidotti 1994: 35)

From such a vantage point it becomes possible to sketch the outlines of a nomadic politics vis-à-vis the striation introduced by the security discourse; a politics that follows the rhizomatic characteristics of connection, circulation and movement and that draws its impetus from being transitory and transgressive, yet for all that still remains committed.

### Nomadic Politics

Nomadism today seems to be more important than ever, in a time when contemporary geo- and biopolitics of security aim at intensifying striation, at producing sedentary, stable - and thus predictable – subjects (Dillon 2007). While in the past, nomads of all stripes were forced to become settled under the master-signifiers of progress, enlightenment, civilisation or development, striation these days largely builds on the emotion of fear. Activating the

memories of past traumas, security discourses narrate threats into existence, which it afterwards pretends to fight. 9/11, terrorism, Muslim fundamentalism are the chiffres around which this fear can be crystallised and what it turns into are much broader categories - fear of the Other, fear of difference and of the uncertainties of becoming. Those strategies aim to incite subjects to invest in the identity positions so fabricated – the one of fearful citizens clamoring for security. The biopolitical move of striation is thus to *make* a certain form of life that corresponds to the needs of the security apparatus for fearful citizens, which then democratically provides it with the necessary legitimacy. Yet whenever power takes life as its object, as Gilles Deleuze succinctly remarked, it is inevitable that life becomes resistance to power (1988: 92).

A nomadic politics would therefore aim at re-introducing smooth space into the striation. At stake are concrete forms of living, possibilities of expression, of living and thinking *differently*. If fear is the primary incentive to accept striation, then refusing to let one's actions be guided by it turns into a political statement. Yet this fearlessness can not be born out of certainty, out of a superior position which knows better, but on the contrary out of embracing the very insecurity of existence which striation tries to banish. Openness, fluidity, risk, connection and circulation are acknowledged as parts of daily existence and welcomed as such, instead of feared. Not giving in to the striation also implies an openness towards transformation, a willingness to let the new emerge out of the concrete situation. This way the possibility for smooth space arises.

In a nomadic politics the stake is always also the own becoming. Nomadic living and thinking lead to a form of resistance that tries to safeguard the possibilities inherent to movement and the becoming-differently that it might engender. As such, it is a risky strategy, for what is at stake is always the own becoming, the continued possibilities for the own living and thinking.

From the above rendering, it finally also follows that no *prescriptive* recipes for action can be forthcoming. Nomadic becomings are notoriously hard to predict

and enact rhizomatic fluctuations instead of following the pre-given paths of the sedentary. This will be a disappointment for everybody looking for universal 'how-to's' and global strategies of resistance. Instead, responses will have to be *elicited* (Lederach 1995) from the concrete situation. What is necessary is situational awareness instead of pre-given strategies, nomadic movements of displacement, which change together with the conditions. Just as smooth space is formed with the paths that traverse it and thus remains constantly emergent, nomadic movements cannot be charted once and for all. They affirm and create insecurity, instead of opting for the sedentariness and stability of the secured. Therein lies their exhilarating freedom, their potential for becoming and therein also lies, for whomever so inclined, their potential for resistance.

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## MY MOBILE WEIGHS A TON

Naeem Mohaiemen

### + 100 spoons but I need a knife

Ever have a morning so shitty you can't get out of bed? Or when you won't go to work unless Congress passes that \$700B bailout? I'll look back at 2007-2008 as a time when Bangladesh nursed that kind of hangover. A state of continual limbo, as we wait and wait. For elections to happen, for the Army to return to barracks, for the foul-mouthed politicians to return to the podium. For a limbo state to end.

Security panic is viral: crossing borders, morphing strains, bringing along multiple, overlapping agendas. Ominously, it replicates rapid-fire from North America to Europe to South Asia. Bomb in front of Indian Parliament, round up Pakistani insurgents. Then bombs go off on a commuter train and the lens shifts to illegal Bangladeshi migrants – there are so many more of them inside India. Then a day of synchronised bomb blasts inside Bangladesh as well. The terror analysts go into frenzy, Hiranmay Karlekar's 'Bangladesh: The New Afghanistan?' is one among many off the hook concoctions. Fear feeds hysteria.

A friend predicted early that panic over the Dhaka bombs would play into the hands of a security state. Aren't you worried I asked, and she replied, 'I'm more worried about who benefits from panic'. Sure enough, by the end of 2006 the message was seeping out from Dhaka's meddlesome Embassy Row: the politicians have failed, the country was being over-run by terrorism. A desperate

nation turns to the institution seen as strong on security: the Army. A 'Caretaker Government' (CTG) takes over on 1/11 ('07), a world driven by numerology.

By the end of year two of CTG, good intentions had been defeated by brute realities (neither the Army nor the Politicians get what they want). Exhausted by a seemingly endless national melodrama, I could feel my dissident energy seeping away. Using pen names is strangely disempowering. The only space in which I was able to be more vocal were projects that were published outside these borders: in distant art journals or gallery walls. In contributions for Raimundas Malasauskas' *William Blake Saved Documenta* and Carlos Motta's *Buena Vida/ Democracy* project. Where people would absorb the aesthetics but the politics would be too remote to have street impact. I wrote with grim pragmatism that I knew there would be no 'Last man in front of Tiananmen tanks'.

As catharsis for failure of nerve, I've been getting into arguments with old friends. This sometimes degenerates into shouting matches. Later we apologise over sms, email, gchat. On campus, it seems that everyone is strung on some narcotic. But maybe it's just nerves. As our brains cook to a crisp from un-ending political limbo, mass psychosis is tearing at friendships/communities/alliances.

August 2008 was the first anniversary of the anti-army riots that exploded on university campuses – a tectonic disturbance that was the first challenge to this neat security blueprint. Invited to show at Gallery Chitrak around this time, I finally thought I could dare a shadow commemoration of that August. The first priority was making sure the gallery stayed open for the full ten days. They wanted no fuss, no bother with the government.

It was true, I did have a set of mobile phone photos. Accidental ephemera from the moment. On day 3 of the riots, when the army lifted curfew for two hours, I went on a motorcycle ride with my friend, snapping shots of the wreckage from my mobile. 'Don't bring out your camera', my nervous friend warned, so I didn't. The mobile shots, disposable and forgotten (I had almost erased without

downloading), now became the tentpole for this project. Blown up to wall size, dyed in RGB palettes, they took on the timeline for the unravelling.

### **Wall Text @ Gallery Chitrak**

*Something is making me queasy. We are inside an Asian century, and a local situation, that is producing endless beautiful imagery. But it's all a little too gorgeous and refined. I get worried facing so much aesthetic perfection. Still need space for mistakes, rudeness, bacteria, and things that just don't fit.*

*My work is interested in damage and panic. Politics come from the context in which image war happens. Mobile phone photos – blurry, low dpi, poorly framed, no rule of thirds, no color depth. Giving you quick access to make temporary provocations, without planning, intention or press card. As accidental as the boy snapping his lover on Dhanmondi Lake. Koi, amar kotha shune hasho na to...*

*We crave more spaces for DIY. Yes, anyone can do this, and everyone should. No barriers, no high culture priests, no hierarchy, no gurus. Eventually of course, every rebellion becomes its own clique. That's when we need to move on to the next space. Friction and creative chaos. Accidental images get in the way of blueprints.*

*Some people want us to shut up and become a nation of shoppers. But we're not quite ready for our Singapore moment.*



*No network, 4:01 pm*

*Bones of Xindian, 4:10 pm*



*Didn't want to sit anyway, 4:20 pm*



*The sign said STOP so err... I didn't, 4:55 pm*



*Something happening in the air, 5:08 pm*

*Bones of Four Seasons, 5:55 pm*



*Heard it on TV must be true, 8:02 pm*



*Now I lay me down to sleep, 10:22 pm*

Balancing opposed needs for obscuring (from state censors) and revealing (to audience), I kept cutting/slicing the text. In early drafts, there was chatter about modes of production. I spent time debating whether I should keep quotes around ‘a very trivial matter’ on a wall label, thinking that would be enough of a signpost: to a statement made at a press conference about the riots. The problem with ellipsis is, in the time of brutal edges only a hammer is understood. With a few exceptions, many did really think it was a show about mobile phones. Bread crumbs were eaten & lost. But along the way, Annu Jalais argued over the various drafts:

**Naeem:** Ok, no more ‘all you need is love’ in the invite. Decided to go with FnF in the end because wanted to bring it back to mobiles... :-)

**Annu:** there’s a military govt on, you take pictures of curfew, Chitrak gives you space, and you decide to be cute... :-) ...

**Naeem:** Chitrak didn’t ‘give space’ as some act of charity. Empty slot before Ramadan. I’m happy they gave me space, but I don’t need to follow some kindness script. FnF reference isn’t ‘cute’, it’s friends helping each other and building communities. Friendship love, not the boinking kind.

**Annu:** yeah, friendship when the mobile connections were deactivated, yeah lots and lots of communities have been built in Dhaka since 1/11 as we’re all living in a spirit of genial camaraderie and people are getting involved in issues and not being paranoid about being watched – give me a break... *ar FnF tar mane ashole ki??* Finger-nose-finger??

**Naeem:** Friends n Family! The mobile package. You know, cheaper rates to all your FnF.

**Annu:** Also, was thinking why not ‘And lots of wall??’ as last line. I didn’t mean Chitrak ‘gave’ you space in the sense you understood it. Who cares if you

spent your own money or not? I was thinking more along the lines of – today – Bangladesh – a young man (punk ethics et al) – wants to show his mobile pictures of an age when things are not what they seem to be – what does he need? – wall, wall, wall – be it Chitrak or outside DU... *byas, ei tukui amar boktobbo.*

To really be ephemeral and for your work to, so to speak, ‘self-destruct’ it would have been great to take this exhibition to the streets. Outside Charukala? Don’t worry, the rain would make sure no visual trace is left of this visceral angst I feel needs outing. Otherwise it’s just more talk and talk and talk amongst ourselves, FnF indeed!

Ok, before we move to the next point, I need to get this out of my system. I don’t know if I explained why FnF was bugging me. So mobile gives you this ‘free’ talk-time to call your friends and family, right? And? During curfew, communication was brought to a standstill because the potatoes just switched off a button. All our lots and lots of FnFs all switched off at the same time. Silence.

Every time I’ve been trying to talk potato politics, you’ve been paranoid and asking me not to talk about this on the phone. So yeah, our phones are tapped, brains are being eaten raw – before they’ve had time to foment the slightest ideas of rebellion – our brightest and most courageous are being imprisoned and silenced. In other words, what does FnF bring me if I can’t talk politics/organize demos/discuss religion with my friends? Silence.

**Naeem:** But I never saw the mobile as a symbol of freedom. It’s limited, its role is instrumental in state control, and then there’s the ongoing bastardization of cultural space through sponsorship. FnF and other text in the show is just using mobile jargon as language. It’s not the mobile I care about, but ‘FnF’ as a signifier of friendship. The word, not the technical mobile function. Not the buttons, the talk time, the 25 paisa night rates.

**Annu:** Exactly, and...? Have we been able to take the discussion outside the FnF group? Lift it up a notch? Bad dao, let's talk about the statement... What exactly is the image war you're talking about? Or is it the battle against 'aesthetic fascism' as you earlier called it? Aren't sunsets just your pseudonym for 'aesthetic perfection'? And in that case isn't 'aesthetic perfection' a pseudonym for a greater stifling – not just of artistic creativity but in the end of life lived with a penchant for difference, a life with punk and spunk... 'with a little bit of creative chaos'. That's how I read it.

**Naeem:** When the newspapers accidentally printed the picture of the student's flying kick, that was image war (quickly snuffed out the next day). Accidental vs deliberate image warfare. Momentary forays and then retreat. One step forward...

**Annu:** I liked the Sultan part in your last draft! The bit where it says: 'Remember Sultan, he was turned away from his own show because the Shilpakala guard thought he was a fokirni (only after his death could they sell him at Sotheby's). That's punk before the Sex Pistols.'

**Naeem:** I think I will take it out though, runs the risk of some thickhead thinking I am comparing myself with Sultan. By the way, what's Bengali for DIY? Is there one?

**Annu:** I would say, *juto shelai theke chondi path* (from shoe repair to reading Chandi puja text). So somebody who can do everything by herself, i.e. the shoe repair job of the lowest caste as well as performing puja – in Brahminical Hinduism a job only performed by Brahmin males. And the juto, it goes with the kick.

Back to what personally interests me – the howl and the gall or the 'damage and panic'. As I see it, the fear, for the man on the street, of being insignificant and powerless, or silenced and snuffed out in a world of scandalous and outrageous in-your-face consumption or in a world where his vote, read voice, will not count,

where his difference will cost him his life. You on?

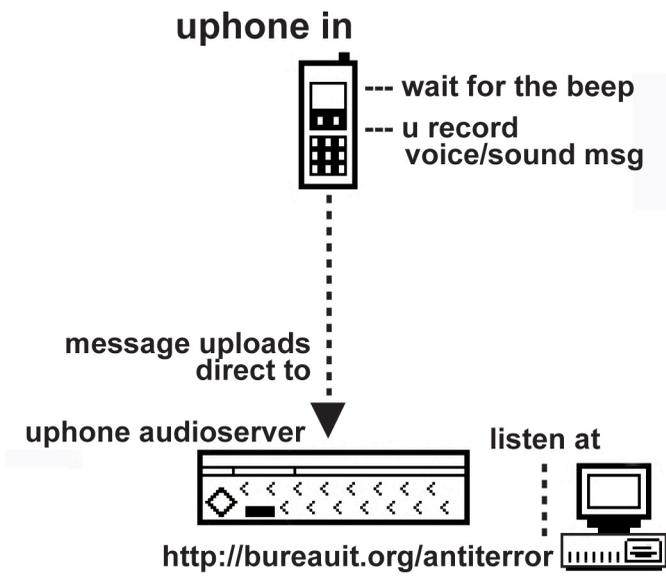
Also, do you need to justify mobile model, paper quality, cheapness??? All of it is relative - be a punk man, leave us out of these institutions... let the art critics do this job, no? Why explain, explain? why go school-teacherish? Give us some beatnik poetry instead... howl!

<<http://mobileton.wordpress.com>>

# ANTITERROR LINE: ANTI INTELLIGENCE AND THE PATRIOT ACT

project by Bureau of Inverse Technology  
text by Natalie Jeremijenko

+



The antiterror line is a project that enables phones – any mobile phone – to be reconfigured as a microphone and which uses this pervasive technology to capture data on an insidious social phenomenon: the infringements on civil liberties in the name of anti-terrorism, made legal in the United States by the Patriot Act and proliferating under Homeland Security measures. The input side to the antiterror line is not unlike most voicemail systems where you can record anything. You can access this voicemail system in the event of an antiterror attack – as you are being escorted off the plane for the national emergency of using the first class bathrooms while the other bathrooms were busy, or had your equipment seized and destroyed because the airport security didn't know what it was, or chased by eight New York State officers and Federal police and taken off a train for wearing rollerblades in Grand Central station (to list a few of my own recent experiences of the transformation of civil society in the name of anti-terrorism). With the phone number preprogrammed into the quick dial of your phone, with one 'Excuse me, I am just turning my phone off', you can discreetly record the events for legal posterity. Your recording will upload in near realtime to the antiterror webpage, the file will be named simply by the time of the recording. (It takes about 5-7 minutes to appear.) Later you can annotate the file and describe the event if you like – the sound quality is probably not great so your elaboration is useful – or someone else who witnessed the event can, or you both can. Even the officer who detained you can annotate. You can, of course, call-up anytime and leave a report. You can identify yourself and other actors or not, you can use it for evidence or not, but in any case, it is there, at least a trace of the event, marked, and accumulated, publicly writeable, publicly readable, and reinterpretable. Most of these 'antiterror' events that compromise civil liberties, are by themselves fairly minor inconveniences, and are not actionable. However, it is the accumulation of these micro-incidents that may provide evidence for a definitive response, or many such responses.

Contrast the antiterror line with former Attorney General John Ashcroft's project for recruiting millions of Americans to report activity they think is suspicious to law enforcement authorities: Operation TIPS (Terrorist Information and

Prevention System). Ashcroft, though not an information technology expert, had to defend the technical design of his so-called 'snitch system', and he did not have an easy time. Ashcroft assured members of the Senate Judiciary Committee on 25 July 2002, that reports of suspicious activity would not be retained in a central database (which, of course, they are). In addressing the concerns surrounding how this information would not be improperly handled and could pose risks, he told the Senate committee, he did not want them to be kept permanently in a central database – but was unable to specify his political ideology in terms of the technical constraints of the database. The Bush administration launched Operation TIPS in ten cities in August 2002 targeting up to one million American workers 'who, in the daily course of their work, are in a unique position to see potentially unusual or suspicious activity in public places', according to the Operation TIPS Website. These TIPS 'volunteers' as they were called on the official site – specifically truck drivers, mail carriers, meter readers, train conductors and other workers – are asked 'to report what they see in public areas and along transportation routes', file the report on the government Website, or by calling a toll-free hot line. As volunteers they are not paid to assume the risks of looking for, finding and acting on suspicions – which in other situations would warrant witness protection measures. Moreover, there is a social cost with respect to the cumulative effect these unknown, unprotected informants can have on the fabric of social cohesion and social trust.

Both Operation TIPS and the antiterror line exploit the distributed presence of many people, and their actual intelligence, judgement and experiences. Although their topic or purpose and their technology may seem similar, they deploy very different structures of participation. They have a financial asymmetry marked in the first three digits. The TIPS line is a toll free 800 number of the type offered by larger entities, business (and only sometimes government agencies) to lower the barriers to participation. Civil society, that is the cultural workers, civic services, quasi-governmental organisations and NGOs, not-for-profits and educational organisations – the sort of organisations that Theda Skocpol argues are the basis of participatory democracy – rarely have the funds to supply an 800 option; as

such, a toll-free number is very useful for marking the power asymmetry that is implied in a financial asymmetry.

Both Operation TIPS and the antiterror line accumulate responses; both have a central database, which was the focus of the judiciary committee's concern; however, this similarity is a red herring. The antiterror line could well be on a distributed platform, like Gnutella, and so could the TIPS line, like say Napster (in combination with some IP blocking, it could work essentially in the same way), but while the difference between these two P2P clients may escape the general public's attention, the structure of participation does not. Condition two, the asymmetrical access to information, does not depend on a central or distributed database, both can be closed, both could be open to scrutiny. With the TIPS line, you are not sure what happens to your input, or even if it was useful. If it was useful, you may be at actual risk, and if you are at risk, what is the protection offered to you? How do you know that the data cannot fall into the wrong hands, now, or years from now, or that your colleague has not found out that you reported that you saw him talking to men who looked 'Arabic', for instance? You simply cannot know since you do not have access to the data.

There is a costly process to filtering information. But the cost of the closed approach amounts to more than the vague unknown risk and discomfort of losing control of one's information: it is the filtering cost that is arguably the most significant. Being able to see other posts helps you assess if a contribution may be useful or not. Lurking, as it is called online, enables people to develop good information filters. The antiterror line exploits both the distributed filtering and distributed judgments of many individuals. Anyone can go to the website and see other contributions, judging if they have anything of value to add, if and how their experience compares, to learn what counts as a civil liberties infringement or to 'get a sense'. Learning if and how to contribute is more difficult to do in the case of closed databases which require explicit instructions. If the capacity to self-filter is reduced, that means the system collects more junk and must bear the cost of excess information, i.e. pay someone, or develop processes or

algorithms to filter all the contributions.

In the TIPS database, workers were asked to be surveillance cameras of sorts, collecting information for a powerful entity, without the consent of those they were collecting information about, without being about to control how information is interpreted, and centralising the costs of doing so. By contrast, with the antiterror line costs are distributed; it costs anyone who uses it 10 pence in the United Kingdom or 25 cents in New York. Both are publicly writeable, but only the antiterror line is publicly readable, which also makes it publicly interpretable, and reusable by many people for many situations. This may amount to nothing; however, the probability of the antiterror files being used for many different things – a documentary radio show, a classroom lecture, a remix into ambient track – is certainly higher than for the evidence collected by the TIPS line. Moreover, the antiterror line cannot be compromised. So the costs associated with 'securing' this information are diminished.

The cumulative effect of an open database is not entirely predictable, but is predictably significant. Although both open and closed databases require participation, I would describe the antiterror line as participatory – specifically, it structures participation to maximise the capacity for many to judge, contribute and interpret the social conditions recorded by the system. Of course people participate in the TIPS, however this design does not draw on the intelligence of all of those participating.

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## THE OCCULTED STATE

McKenzie Wark

- + A woman with two small children tries to board a plane at Ronald Reagan airport. Security stop her when they discover that the child's sippy cup contains more than the permissible three ounces of liquid. At once, uniformed agents gather, superiors are notified. The boarding grinds to a halt. The child's sippy cup becomes an object of extreme suspicion. It is as if the greatest power ever to bestride the world could be brought low by the most modest formula.<sup>1</sup> As Gianfranco Sanguinetti once wrote: 'cowardice becomes, for the first time in history, a sublime quality, fear is always justified' (1982: 59).

What happens next is obscure, even on the security tape. Perhaps the woman throws the contents of the sippy cup on the ground. Perhaps they accidentally spill. Uniformed security guard encircle her and make her get down on her hands and knees and clean up the spilled liquid – twice. The first time she missed a bit. Shortly after, the authorities revoke the ban on liquids, describing it as an ineffective piece of *security theatre*. It is all in the name of the *war on terror*. A war which, as Vice President Dick Cheney once casually mentioned, can never end. Given that these were times when, during a hunting expedition, Cheney shot a friend in the face, and it was *the friend* who thought he should apologise, then naked displays of pure power legitimated by nothing much more than their own renown were the norm. The state of emergency, or the state of exception, is revealed once again to be merely the normal state of affairs.

That the state is founded on something other than justice, law or the social contract would hardly surprise the Situationists. As Guy Debord writes to fellow founding member Pinot Gallizio in 1958:

‘Yesterday the police interrogated me for a long time concerning the journal and the Situationist organization. This is only the beginning. One of the threatening principles that appeared quite quickly to me in this discussion: the police want to consider the Situationist International as an association dedicated to bringing disorder to France.’ (2008)<sup>2</sup>

Ever since he moved to Paris in 1950, Debord came into contact with the state mostly via its police. He did not work for any state media or cultural agency. He was not involved in the antics of its political parties. In his experience, the state was the police.

After the assassination of his friend and patron Gerard Lebovici in 1984, certain journalists took a certain relish in claiming to have been privy to certain details of secret police files on Debord. They claimed that he had been under surveillance for some time. This led him to remark:

‘What a strange and unfortunate land, where one is informed of the work of an author more quickly and confidently through police archives than through the literary criticisms of a free press or through academics who make a profession out of knowing the issues at hand.’ (2001: 60)

Debord specified, in a testament of sorts, that statements he had made to the police should not be included in his collected works. Not because any statements he made to them would cause him any embarrassment, but because of literary ‘scruples about the form’ (1991b:58).

Debord admitted to using false names and documents in Italy in the 1970s, but he had his reasons. This was a time of the *strategy of tension*, in which a rising

tide of working class militancy was diverted by a shadowy game of bombings and other terrorist acts by certain secretive groups, followed by repressions and reprisals of police agencies of the state. Things reached a certain peak in 1978 when the Red Brigades kidnapped Aldo Moro, who had twice been Prime Minister and was the architect of the so-called *historic compromise* which was supposed to bring the left into the government. Moro’s body was found dead in a car parked mid way between the offices of the Communist Party and that of his own Christian Democrats. The right blamed the Communists for the Red Brigades. The Communists blamed the far-left Autonomists. The Autonomists blamed each other.

Debord thought he saw the hand of the state in these murky events. He encouraged his young friend Gianfranco Sanguinetti to expose it:

‘I have known a man who spent his time among the party girls of Florence and who loved to keep bad company with all of the hard-drinkers of the bad neighborhoods. But he comprehended everything that went on. He demonstrated his comprehension once. One knows that he will do it again. He is, today, considered by some to be the most dangerous man in Italy.’ (2004)<sup>3</sup>

Sanguinetti had, with Debord’s assistance, pulled off a brilliant hoax in 1975, and Debord encouraged him to act again. Sanguinetti did not initially credit Debord’s theory of secret police involvement in the Moro affair, but he came around to it. He published a short book called *Terrorism and the State* in which he wrote that: ‘It is its own secret services which organize and pull the strings of terrorism. Is this not, then, the main secret of the Italian State?’ (1982: 14-15) This was an extraordinary thesis at the time, and it got Sanguinetti into even more trouble. It retrospect it doesn’t seem all that far fetched. A war on terror – led by a general no less – aided the consolidation of a state in crisis. The big losers in Sanguinetti’s account were the Autonomist left. Both the state and its official enemy, the Communist party, were united in condemning the Autonomists for sympathy, if not complicity, with the armed struggle, pushing

the Autonomists onto the defensive.

‘The poor Autonomists, who, for their part, never had much of a clue either about terrorism or about revolution, have thus ended up, like a coveted prey, in the game-bag of the Stalinists and the judiciary.’ (1982: 19)

Sanguinetti’s analysis of terrorism, while salutary, is nevertheless somewhat unsatisfactory. His identification of terror directly with the state feeds into a conspiratorial approach to thinking about state power, as if by uncovering the secret machinations of the state one could somehow apprehend its truth. Something like this was the aim of the 500 people who gathered at the Embassy Suites hotel in Chicago for a combination trade show and political convention for the 9/11 Truth movement. Given that Zogby polls show 42% of Americans doubting the conclusions of *The 9/11 Commission Report*, and 49% of New Yorkers believing that some leaders ‘knew in advance’ about the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, they are not alone. The Truthers are out there. In his keynote address, syndicated radio host Alex Jones rehearsed the main argument of the movement, that on September 9<sup>th</sup> 2001, it was ‘controlled demolition’ that brought down the towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, not the impact of hijacked passenger jets.<sup>4</sup> This is the central tenet of the 9/11 Truth ideology. To them it seems more plausible than imagining that, where 9/11 is concerned, the state has nothing to hide.

Sanguinetti distinguishes between offensive terrorism by non-state actors and defensive terrorism by the state. He judged Italian terrorism of the period to be defensive terrorism on the part of the state. This refreshing claim can be turned aside from the path of conspiracy theory and used for new tactics in thinking through the inscrutable surface effects of power at work. Perhaps the origins of terrorism are not so easily decided. Perhaps the origins are not even all that relevant. Perhaps the state can make use of what appears to be offensive terrorism coming from a non-state actor, as a way to consolidate power and preempt social movements. As the rather more sanguine Debord remarks: ‘Such

a perfect democracy constructs its own inconceivable foe, terrorism. It wishes to be judged by its enemies rather than by its results.’ (1990: 24) The state that makes a spectacle of responding to a need for security need not answer to any other desires.

In the disintegrating spectacle of the twenty-first century, truth is as strange as fiction. In his novel *Spook Country*, William Gibson writes of a *cold civil war*, all but invisible, waged within a state of Byzantine complexity and obscurity (2007: 74). His elaborate spy plot includes the usual agents and counter agents, but curiously enough mixes in the owner of an advertising agency with the improbable name of Hubertus Bigend. The son of a minor Situationist, Bigend has grasped that the secret is to the spectacle as art once was to culture. The secret is not the truth of the spectacle, it is the aesthetic form of the spectacle. Gibson intuits something central here to Situationist experience, if not its theory: that the spectacle of appearances has another side. That which is good appears; that which does not appear is better.

What is secret is not the truth of the spectacle. The division between the spectacle of appearances and the secrecy of non-appearances is itself an aspect of the falsification of the whole that the spectacle affects. While the spectacle renders all that appears equivalent, the division between the secret and the spectacular implies a hierarchy – the first principle of power. Appearances are exchangeable for appearances; secrets exchangeable only for secrets. For Debord and Sanguinetti, it is not knowledge which is power, but secrecy. A counter-power is then not so much a counter-knowledge as a strategy that is capable of both revealing secrets when it is tactically advantageous, but also of creating them. Against the power of the secret as the founding power of the state, the Situationists and post-Situationists alike pose the glamour of the clandestine as a kind of counter-power. The refusal to appear within the spectacle is also a refusal of the division between the spectacular and its secret. Which in turn makes the Situationists (and certain ex-Situationists) appear as dangerous to the state. The paradox is that this apparent danger, while only apparent, becomes in

spectacular society a real danger.

Another Hotel Room: this time the Budapest Hilton, and this time the organiser is the International Republican Institute, a nongovernmental group which may or may not be in receipt of American government money. Retired Army Colonel Robert Helvey leads a seminar on the techniques of nonviolent resistance attended by about 20 leaders of Otpor, the Serbian opposition movement.<sup>5</sup> Helvey's approach is based on that of Gene Sharp, author of *From Dictatorship to Democracy* and other works, which in turn draw on the insight of Montaigne's friend Etienne de La Boétie (2004). The key to which is that if people withdraw their obedience to the state, the state cannot stand. Or as Debord says, in the same vein: 'This is how, little by little, a new epoch of fires has been set alight, which none of us alive at the moment will see the end of: obedience is dead.' (1991a: 46) And yet the outcome is far from certain. The withdrawal of consent from one state may just as easily serve another. Debord: 'Yet the highest ambition of the integrated spectacle is still to turn secret agents into revolutionaries, and revolutionaries into secret agents.' (1990: 11)

All the disintegrated spectacle might add to this transaction is that they might not even know it. There might be two ways of becoming an agent of the state. One is to be knowingly co-opted; the other is by descending into the spectacle of violence. Whether the Red Brigades were manipulated by the first method or not, they certainly became agents of the state via the second. Regardless of their allegiances and ideologies, both the secret agent and the armed revolutionary use the same forms of organisation. The state is a form of organisation: the form of hierarchy and secrecy. Sanguinetti:

'All secret terrorist groupuscles are organized and directed by a clandestine hierarchy of the very militants of clandestinity, which reflects perfectly the division of labor and roles proper to this social organization: above it is decided and below it is carried out.' (1982: 58)

Given that agents of the state invariably have much greater resources at their disposal, it is no accident who gets to infiltrate and manipulate who. But in the disintegrating spectacle, this may not even be necessary. Regardless of the inconvenience, a terrorist attack on the state provides the very pretext the state needs to consolidate its power, and in more recent times, perhaps, to go on the offensive, pre-empting popular self organisation in advance. Nothing succeeds as well as a terrorist attack in making the people feel as though they have a common enemy with the state. In the disintegrating spectacle, the state offers nothing but the spectacle of its own necessity. 'Until 1968 modern society was convinced it was loved. It has since had to abandon these dreams; it prefers to be feared.' (Debord 1990: 82)

The spectacle incorporates within itself images of its own overcoming. 'It is known that this society signs a sort of pact with its most avowed enemies, when it allots them a space in the spectacle.' (Debord 1991a: 65) It is personified by certain kinds of anti-celebrity, images of the integral action that would further disintegrate the spectacle, but which actually sustain it to the extent that they are mere images. The anti-celebrities appear as dangerous to the spectacle in spite of being useful for it, because the spectacle does not control them. They do its work for their own reasons. Since no other reasons besides the logic of spectacle are supposed to exist, their very existence is both useful and troubling. After the Lebovici assassination, Debord found himself cast as just such an anti-celebrity, who must be dangerous precisely because of his refusal of service to the spectacle.

The spectacle of communism hardly troubles the state any more. The representatives of organised labour found their place in the state. They became what they beheld. The enemy that the spectacle can recognise is, once again, as in certain times past – the terrorist. An act of terror aims above all at the production of the image. It is the spectacle for those who do not own their own news network or movie studio. It is a hijacking of the vehicle of the image itself. While terrorists appear as, and may even believe themselves to be, enemies

of the state, their role is quite different. They are the – apparently – external principle of necessity for the state. They provide it with its reason to exist. They may act of their own volition. They may be agents of another state. They may be agents of the very state they are attacking, or merely its dupes. It doesn't actually matter. They provide the state with a reason to exist, and can usually be assured of its full attention.

Certain states are less and less concerned with the well being and productivity of their subjects – their so-called *biopower*. The state of the disintegrating spectacle reveals itself as concerned mostly with its own sovereignty and the defense of property. It no longer makes any promises. For an anecdote revealing this quality of the disintegrating spectacle, consider the short story of the President and the tropical storm. When the storm breached the levees and sank a fabled southern city, the President deigned to visit and show his concern, as protocol requires. Only he did not set foot there. Rather, upon leaving his vacation home, he had his personal jet detour over the sodden earth en route back to his other house. This was in order to produce the requisite photographic opportunity, of the President looking out the window with a look of compassionate conservatism, while below private armies of goons with guns secured valuable property, and the homeless were left to make a spectacle of their own misery, fans without tickets in the stadium of the endgame.

There is a certain vanity in thinking that every aspect of our everyday life is of intimate concern to power. What if power, too, was not much more than a spectacle of appearances? Sanguinetti's greatest work did not just make an argument about the nature of power as appearance, it acted as the means by which power exposed itself in a less than flattering light. In 1975 Sanguinetti sent out a curious document to a hundred or so prominent people in Italian public life, under the pseudonym Censor. The text contained the Machiavellian argument to the effect that creating the appearance of the Communist Party joining the government does not negate the rule of bourgeois power, but could actually enhance it. The text apparently addressed itself to the real power elite,

and took a distinctive form: 'One reason we chose the ancient form of expression, the pamphlet, rather than a more systematic text, is that we do not want to renounce the pleasure of speaking with swords drawn.' (1997: 88)

Censor called for the power elite to at least attempt to be truthful amongst itself. It ought not to be duped by the specter of the power of the Communists. This was merely a phantom, which the power elite had itself invoked to strengthen the state during the cold war. But there was no need for power to believe in a phantom that was largely its own creation. The real danger was elsewhere, but before examining it, Censor expounded on the distinctive features of Italian capitalism of the seventies, features not unlike those Debord identified as the *integrated spectacle*. As a consequence of its own development, capitalism had expanded state power, which took on a nominally democratic form, but in the context of expanded secrecy and disinformation. Its principal means of dealing with conflict was to incorporate rather than repress it. Censor: 'The state is the palladium of commercial society, which converts even its enemies into proprietors.'<sup>20</sup> Development had one aspect that troubled Censor, namely that it made the economy an autonomous sphere. He offered a critique of it from the right. Left to its own devices, the autonomous development of the economy might generate the forces capable of overthrowing it. Censor called for the ruling class to think historically and politically rather than to let the economy take care of itself.

The organised labour movement, led by the Communists, were no longer the enemy. The project of post-war reconstruction had already incorporated them in a subordinate role of maintaining labour discipline, in the name of building a modern, democratic economy and society. Certain forces within the Communist party had threatened insurrection in 1948, but the party itself put down this revolt, thus confirming its allegiance to the bourgeois state. 'The Trojan horse should not be feared, except when there are well-armed Archaean troops inside.' (1997: 76) Much more damaging to the state in Censor's view was the behaviour of the Christian Democrats. He saw them principally as the party of the middle

classes who aligned their interests with the bourgeoisie. But the party was riddled with private interests who treated the various organs of the state as so many personal fiefdoms.

The main danger to the state came from neither the apparent strength of the Communists nor the unreliability of the Christian Democrats, but from a new kind of worker's movement. The working class had defected from its own party. After May '68 it could no longer be co-opted, via its leaders, with wage rises. The workers did not know what they were fighting for, but what they wanted was to fight. They had started to question private property itself – the one thing crucial to the state. 'Private property thus constitutes the fortress wall of society, and all other rights and privileges are the advanced defense.' (1997: 33) The internal weakness of the state made this movement particularly dangerous: 'on high reigns apathy, boredom and immobility; below on the contrary, political life begins to manifest feverish symptoms' (1997: 32). One such symptom was the Autonomist left, outside the Communist Party. But for Censor this was just the fever. The spontaneous action of the working class was the real disease. This was causing something of a panic among the ruling classes: 'The bourgeoisie is afraid of being right, and afraid of being afraid. It soon perceived that it was right to be afraid.' (1997: 37)

Censor stressed the usefulness of the Communist party in imposing discipline on the working class and keeping refractory elements in line. But this view was not shared by the ruling class, deluded by their own fiction which cast the Communists as the leadership of the dangerous classes against the state rather than as the police agent of the state against them. The ruling class thought the price the Communists demanded for their services outweighed the guarantees they could offer of their own effectiveness. And perhaps rightly so, as the Communists quite under-estimated the danger to themselves of rebel workers who no longer saw the unions and the Party as their representatives. And so, from 1968 on into the seventies, Italy descended into an undeclared civil war, in which 'the only things still functioning in Italy were the unions and the police'

(1997: 43).

The hot year of 1969 was the time when the possibility of a general insurrection was genuinely close. What averted it was a wave of bombings, variously attributed to anarchists or fascists, but behind at least some of which was the hand of the secret services of the state. Against this, not only the Communists but also the Autonomist left felt the need to rally around opposition to clandestine violence. But for Censor, the continued use of the terror tactic was dangerous. If the complicity of agencies of the state was to come to light, this risked alienating the very people that the strategy had neutralised, and re-establishing the conditions for worker's revolt. As Censor wryly observes: 'If no good policies have ever been founded on truth, the worst policies are founded on the improbable.' (1997: 49)

Re-founding ruling class power on firmer ground meant a more honest policy. The state had to reinstate legality or disappear. But the state couldn't count on anything but its secret services, and the continual use of force was weakening the state. Quoting Machiavelli's *Prince*, Censor argued that a state that used force too much and too often did not appear stronger for it, but weaker. And in any case, terrorism was less of a threat to the state than the mutiny of the working class. The real threat was not bombs, but as La Boétie would say, disobedience. The ruling class had discounted the threat of the working class because the new movement lacked leadership and organisation. Organised labor and Communist leadership was co-optable; *disorganised labour* was not. This was much more dangerous: 'all revolutions in history began without leaders and when they had them, they were finished' (1997: 56).

The state had to stop its short-term defensive tactics. Censor: 'our state, continually defending itself against phantom enemies – red or black according to the mood of the moment, all poorly constructed – never wanted to confront the problems posed by the real enemy' (1997: 58). The real threat was disorganised labour: 'this crisis is total because, intensively, it is life itself... that

has succumbed to the contagion' (1997: 64). It is not a crisis *in* the economy but a crisis *of* the economy. The workers gained wage rises, but were disenchanted with the flimflam that was all these wages could buy. Censor: 'we poisoned the world, and we gave the people a special reason to revolt against us every instant of their daily lives: we poisoned life itself' (1997: 66). It might still be possible to head off the danger from disorganised labor by bringing organised labour – the Communist party – more fully into the state.

This was the policy of the historic compromise, although as Censor points out it was neither historic nor a compromise. There is nothing historic about a merely expedient tactic that could later be reversed. There is no compromise when only one side – the Communists – gives anything up. On the international plane, the cold war had subsided into a period of *peaceful coexistence* between Moscow and its allies on one side and Washington and its allies on the other. For Censor this too was a mere tactic. Both sides faced troubling dissent internally. In the west, most clearly in France and Italy; in the east, the Czechs and Poles were creating their own forms of spontaneous withdrawal of obedience. This was the backdrop to Censor's support for the full incorporation of the Communists into a western state.

Censor called the ruling class to action. Power could not be delegated to others any longer. The maintenance of the state could not be entrusted to the secret police. Those who thought it better to govern with rifles than with Communists over-estimated the efficiency of rifles. Power could not be entrusted to the Christian Democrats, who were content to squabble over the spoils of each particular office and leave the state as a whole to its ruin. Power could not be left in the hands of managers, who were no better than over-paid wage earners, unable to grasp the historic process. Nor was it acceptable to cash out and leave the mess to someone else. The diffuse spectacle was undermining the very authority of the class that had created it, and was in as much trouble as the concentrated spectacle in the east. The ruling class risked being overcome by its own creation.

It simply had to be faced that capitalism had not delivered on its promises. The manufacture of abundance had led only to an abundance of boredom. The ruling class had lost sight of anything of real value. Far from securing power, abundance threatened it. Censor: 'We have thoughtlessly dispersed so much false luxury and comfort that the entire population is quite rightly dissatisfied.' (1997: 93) While the ruling class struggled against disorganised labour and its negation of property and the state, it had also the positive historical task of affirming something of value outside of mere abundance. This may be an even bigger challenge:

'this abundance of fabricated objects requires the demarcation of an elite more than ever – an elite that is sheltered by this abundance and takes what is really precious: otherwise, there will soon be no place on earth with anything precious left in it' (1997: 92).

Censor pointed the way to the seizure of initiative by the ruling class, as the seventies gave way to the eighties. Sanguinetti's pamphlet received creditable coverage in the news media, including much speculation about its author. When Sanguinetti revealed the hoax, scandal followed, but one aspect of the affair is often overlooked. Sanguinetti produced the aura of authenticity for his document by making it appear as if it were a secret that had been revealed. The secret quality of the document was what made it appear as if it had not truth, but power. So many believed that it could be what it appeared to be.

Sanguinetti's *Real Report* still works as an allegory for the relation between power and the secret in the age of the disintegrating spectacle. Unlike Censor's Christian Democrats, the Congressmen and Senators of the early twenty-first century cannot be bought; one rents them by the hour. They squabble over the particulars while the state, as the guarantor of the property interests of the ruling class, as a totality becomes nobody's business. Terror still forms a convenient alibi, if not always a terribly effective one. The major differences between the diffuse spectacle of the 1970s and the disintegrating spectacle are twofold:

Firstly, organised labour is thoroughly integrated into the state, and disorganised labour no longer even takes it as a point of reference. Secondly, the state as the centralised power over the double form of spectacle and secret gave way to a disorganised and decentralised distribution of such powers. Debord: 'the liars have lied to themselves' (1982: 2).

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#### NOTES:

1. As broadcast by *Now Public*, 14th June 2007.
2. Debord to Gallizio, 17th July 1958.
3. Debord to Sanguinetti, 21st April 1978.
4. *New York Times*, 5th June 2006.
5. *New York Times Magazine*, 26th November 2000.

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## FAILURE TO COMPLY: BIOART, SECURITY AND THE MARKET

Tiziana Terranova

- + ‘How many crimes must be allowed? And how many criminals must be left unpunished? This is the problem of penalties.’  
(Foucault 2005b: 211, my translation)

What is the nature of the ‘accident’ – and the chain of events which it sets in motion – that befell Steve Kurtz on the 11th of May 2004? A terrible accident, surely to start with – kick-starting a surreal series of events. The sudden, premature death of Hope Kurtz – Steve’s wife and co-member of the collective Critical Art Ensemble; a paranoid emergency crew, so sensitised by the war on terrorism to signs of virtual threats as to report to the FBI the presence of harmless bacterial cultures glimpsed in his house; the encounter with the security apparatus; the long, ongoing journey through the courts; the ‘prosecutorial circus’ resulting in a change in the charge laid on him and Robert Ferrell, the academic who helped him – from bioterrorism to trade law infringement – once the biological material found in his flat was proven to be harmless.<sup>1</sup>

As Anna Munster puts it in her critical account of the case, one should be careful not to miss the problematic nature of such an event, which is not simply another case of an artist on trial because of the nature of his artwork. In the first place, it is significant that Kurtz’s prosecution was not the outcome of a deliberate process of targeting an artist for the morally subversive content of his work. Munster argues that it is a serious interpretative mistake to judge this case as

simply a return of McCarthyist censorship tactics in a post-9/11 context. The genealogy of the case, the series of which it is a part, is not that of ideological warfare which, in her opinion, defines the long history of censorship against artists, and of which McCarthyism was an instance. There was no campaign or conspiracy mounted to 'get' to the CAE so as to punish them for the years of radical activism in the field of new technologies and art (although there was definitely no sympathy for the 'lefties' in the courts that judged them). Neither was it an explicit attempt at censoring a piece of artwork which could potentially cause great damage to multinational corporations trading in Genetically Modified Organisms, for example. The project the CAE was working on, just to remember, included a 'home DNA extraction machine' as part of an exhibit *Free Range Grain*. This portable machine could be used to test food brought in by the audience for the presence of genetic modification (Babin 2005). And yet, he was not sued by one of the wealthy bio-tech corporations that his work attacked. His past and current activity as radical artist had an impact on this case only after the accidental event that triggered off the policing and legal procedures. He was not targeted ahead by the FBI because of his history of political practice, but he '*contingently* became part of a diffuse and modulated logic of control... a biopolitical logic.' (Munster 2005).

As Munster recounts, it is the *contingency* of the event that befell Steve Kurtz that marks it as belonging to a different series other than that of ideological censorship against art, that is to the series of the recent 'chance' harvesting of mainly Middle Eastern, Indian and Pakistani immigrants from various Western nations in the post-9/11 conjuncture. Kurtz's case shares with these arrests the randomness of the event that led him to be charged and prosecuted; and the easiness by which once the original charges were formulated, they were switched to something else.<sup>2</sup> For Munster, the logic of control that links these different cases is biopolitical. It is biopolitical not only at the level of the exhibits that triggered the arrest (the potential threat of bioart) but also in the way the security apparatus has come to draw on predictive models adapted from biology.

Kurtz's chance arrest would have probably triggered his appearance in the new database software adopted by the FBI after 9/11 that explicitly utilises algorithms developed by network theory and adapted by biology. The data collected by different agencies and sources is now modelled and visualised as a scale free network – whose evolution over time leads to the inevitable formation of powerful hubs, which can now become the target of network warfare (unlike a distributed network, a decentralised network can be seriously damaged by taking down its hubs). In these models, information captures the unfolding of recursive events of linking and interconnecting through 'the morphogenic forms of growth, development and decay' of a virtual, that is unstable, network of relations (Munster 2005). Kurtz's name might have surfaced first on the bio-terrorism network as a lonely node – no other virtual connections with potential bioterror networks. But then, his name probably would have appeared again in another network where Steve Kurtz is definitely a dense node – that mapping aberrations of conduct, such as anti-market activities, signalled by his political activity and connections with the Critical Art Ensemble. The virtual network of relations changes: from threat to security to threat to the market.

In two courses held at the Collège de France in the years 1977/1978 and 1979/1980, Michel Foucault saw exactly in these two mechanisms (security and the market) the heart of a new dispositif of power which rising numbers of neo-liberal theorists and apologists have explicitly discussed, described and actively lobbied for since the aftermath of World War II. He looked at the two different schools, German and American, that can be properly called 'neo-liberal', in order to reconstruct in their writings the framework of political rationality which made possible and also explained the emergence of what he had previously called 'biopolitics' (that is the emergence of a technology of power that takes life as its object). In doing so he described how the moment whereby life becomes the new object of power is also the moment of affirmation of powerful new technologies of power such as those described by liberal and neo-liberal political economists.

These powerful discourses are not 'ideologies' which cover what is basically

a process of intensification of the economic logic of capitalism, based on exploitation, which remains substantially the same that Marx had already mapped. On the contrary, they are discourses that emerge very close to the exercise of the actual power of government – so as to make them real pragmatic knowledges, existing at the edge of that ‘mute and blind’ Nietzschean play of forces that he understood to be power. Neo-liberalism is then not ‘nothing’ (that is nothing new) as many would have it. If nothing else, it is definitely the expression of a radical mutation of liberalism, in as much as, unlike the latter, it sets itself up specifically to limit and contain as much as possible the action of the State in such a way as to create ‘a state under surveillance by the market’. In doing so, it does not so much destroy the State as invent a new art of government which induces a radical upheaval both in the rules of formation and operation of the law and in the production of the very fabric of society.

Neither liberalism nor neo-liberalism, for example, can be said to have invented ‘security’ as such, but they have definitely made much of this ‘third modulation of the law’ which Foucault sees as supplementing both the old form of the law based on the paradigm of sovereignty and the modern disciplinary modulation. Unlike the law which operates in the Imaginary (it ‘imagines’ the crime and the punishment) and discipline which operates in a space which is complementary to reality (the perfect prison is a utopia whereby a simple system of visibility, a docile conduct is induced in individuals who are flawed by nature), security, Foucault tells us, operates *within the play of reality*. The object of security is the life of a population – a life that is inextricably productive of and exposed to a variety of events. Security does not aim at eradicating evil (such as crime), because it accepts the *naturalness* of the phenomena it aims to govern (the naturalness of crime as a phenomenon that *will* take place, it does not matter how much one legislates or punishes). Such naturalness is not given by the eternal and essential immutability of vital phenomena, but by their very resistance to power – and in particular, their stubborn and mute indifference to the sovereign command and the irreducible element of disorder that they always bring to the disciplinary assemblage. What security is dealing with, then, is not life as an object, but life

as chains of diverging and converging series of probable effects without causes, chains of effects which have happened, are happening but which also might happen (Massumi 2005). It is out of this series of ‘connected, discontinuous, contingent and purposeful events over time’ that scale-free networks emerge by means of maps and diagrams as a new mode of representation (Munster 2005).

In a way, security can be said to be that operation by which the problem of order, already posed by the XVIII century state of police, is subjected to a strictly economic calculus. Taken with the same phenomenon, such as a theft (or bioart) the mechanism of security is that which places it within a series of more or less probable effects, described according to the overall logic of cost. It does not think that it can eradicate the activities in question completely, but it can set up such measures as to make them expensive and hence keep them within limits. The network intervenes in this calculation as a productive machine *and* as a predictive/preemptive mode of simulation. As a mode of simulation, it allows one to model and rehearse possible strategies of preemption. As a productive, concrete assemblage, it acts as an uncontrollable multiplier and as a medium of diffusion of a series of effects. How much does not only a theft, but a series of thefts (such as those which the recording industry considers to be the ‘theft’ of its products by the file-sharing mobs) cost? What is the cost of bioart – should it set upon to actively undermine the monopoly of the biotech industry? What are thresholds that define the acceptability of such series of thefts or bio-artistic projects? What are the measures that should be taken, the *punishments* that should be introduced and the *rewards* awarded to ‘virtuous’ behaviour (purchasing of copyrighted material; funding for ‘virtuous’, that is a-critical bioart projects)? What is the mechanism or protocol that would naturally draw limits around the catastrophic potential inherent to such a series of events (Digital Rights Management software, high profile prosecutions)?

As Munster reminds us, security is still a *biopolitical* mechanism of power and in as much as its object is the life of a population, it ends up also taking upon itself the intrinsically murderous *racist* element of biopolitics – whereby a population

is segmented and hierarchised on the basis of racialised differences. Because the life of a population is not simply biological, racialisation does not simply have biological connotations, but increasingly also *cultural* connotations. Modern racialisation becomes *ethnicisation* while retaining the homicidal function that racism performs within the biopolitical dispositif (see Venn 2007). (It is this function which makes Steve Kurtz's arrest an anomaly when compared to the ethnic arrests of Pakistani and South Asian immigrants, Middle Eastern citizens, etc.). In such a security regime, the power of killing (and letting die) is ethnicised. There is always 'one' population, whose life is worth more, which must be defended against those modulated foreign bodies who would infect, alter or destroy its ways of life. On the other hand, it is impossible to think about security without the other 'regulating principle' of neo-liberal governmentality – that is the market. Security's calculus is biopolitical and economic – indeed it is as if the two elements cannot really be disjointed.

On the one hand, it is liberal political economy that insists that economic phenomena are akin to vital phenomena in as much as both cannot be commanded or disciplined. When Adam Smith talked of the 'invisible hand of the market', Foucault insists, he was stressing the 'invisibility' of the hand. Not so much the purposive nature of the mechanism which allowed the market to self-regulate, but the radical obscurity of the causes of economic processes, whose dynamics exceed the vision and power of the lawmaker and the institutional man. And yet, for Adam Smith and the liberals, Foucault argues, the market was still a natural place. This is something that neo-liberals will strongly object to.

Liberal political economists will be criticised by neo-liberals for not having understood that one cannot really deduce the dynamics of the market from the laws of nature, because the market is something that is other than the laws of nature. It is an *eidos*, a Husserlian idea, a perfect, but fragile mechanism that will not spontaneously emerge unless the proper conditions for its emergence will be laid out. The market is a formal game or mechanism that the neo-liberals claim to have discovered, whose key dispositif is not so much exchange as *competition*.

Competition for the neo-liberals, 'is not a phenomenon of nature, it is not the result of a natural play of the appetites, instincts, behaviors etc. Competition owes its effects, in reality, only to its own essence... Competition is an essence, an *eidos*. Competition is a principle of formalization. It possesses its own internal logic, it has its own structure... One is dealing, in a certain sense, with a formal game between inequalities, not a natural game between individuals and behaviors. And exactly like for Husserl a formal structure is not given to intuition without a certain number of conditions, so competition, as essential economic logic, can appear and produce its positive effects only if a certain number of conditions are present, which will be accurately and artificially pre-disposed.' (Foucault 2005b: 111, my translation)

The introduction of principles of competition into the mechanisms of exchange guarantees the automatic operation of a libidinal economy of gains and losses, rewards and punishments, that like an immanent *telos*, drives the whole process towards infinite growth. Competition is ultimately meta-stable because it solves all its tensions by growth – it pushes them towards the next limit – and does not allow a system to become too structured, that is, not sensitive enough to the intrinsic instability of the series of events to which it is exposed. Neo-liberal competition is thus not the Hobbesian war of all against all because it does not operate in a Malthusian economy of limited resources, but in the open duration of unlimited growth. Competition is what wards off stasis and unleashes productivity and makes possible that solution offered by neo-liberal policies to all social discontent: endless economic growth, stabilised by policies such as low inflation, minimum unemployment, marketisation of the public sector, and securitisation. This is not the liberal *laissez faire* market economy, but it entails an active politics of 'vigilance, activity and permanent intervention' (Foucault 2005b: 115). The meta-stability and growth of the market is guaranteed by competition and security.

Foucault sees this new rationality (and the mechanisms which it indexes) as constituting a new hollow, a new species of human: *homo oeconomicus*, on

whose individual conduct and rational behaviour the operations of security and competition depend.

The installment of mechanisms of competition as the ruling principle of economic growth implies a decomposition and recomposition of the social fabric – to which now corresponds a new unit: *homo oeconomicus* who is the subject of the enterprise or business. In order for the market to function as the regulating principle of society, the whole social fabric must be decomposed in an infinite number of businesses – so that, as Foucault put it, business might become the soul of the society. This decomposition of the fabric of society into a multiplicity of unit-enterprises of variable extension and size allows for the parallel production of cooperation among businesses within an overall economy of competition. In this way, neo-liberal economists answer Marx's critique of the contradiction introduced within the economic process by the exploitation of living labour. The neo-liberal market knows no exploited worker – only minor businessmen and businesswomen who might sometimes get a rough deal. All capital/labour relations are resolved into cooperative relations within the overall formalism of competition: '... businesses are constantly introducing an inexorable rivalry presented as healthy competition, a wonderful motivation that sets individuals against one another and sets itself up in each of them, dividing each within himself' (Deleuze 1995: 179).

What used to be called 'workers' do not so much sell their labour as extract an income from the capital they have invested in themselves and form cooperative temporary associative networks with other businesspeople which would allow such capital to grow. Business-like, he will accept that having crossed the border to work in the West means that he will have lost all the cultural capital accumulated by degrees at home in exchange for some other gain (freedom) and he will exchange his old profession as a doctor for a new career as a taxi driver. Businesslike, she will naturally accept that investing in a child is worth losing a job in terms of the affective and emotional rewards that it does and will eventually bring. As a businessman again, he will accept that being over 50 and out of a job,

means that his personal capital has dramatically decreased and will not expect to make as much now as he did during his prime years. As good businesspeople, they will do what businesspeople do: buy insurance; gauge themselves against their rivals and think about where better to invest that endlessly increasing/decreasing capital that is one's self.

Interestingly, Foucault quotes human capital theorists such as Gary S. Becker to show how such a *homo oeconomicus* is by definition rational whereby to be rational means to behave realistically, that is in ways which are not aleatory but systematic. Economic analysis then depends on a postulate of the 'realistic conduct' (or good conduct) of the individual.

'... economic analysis, ultimately, can perfectly find its points of anchorage and its efficacy too only if the conduct of an individual fulfills the clause by which the reaction of such conduct will not be aleatory with relation to reality. This implies that every conduct which answers systematically to modifications in the variables of the environment will have to be able to relay to an economic analysis, meaning, then, to say it with Becker, all conduct which "accepts reality". *homo oeconomicus* is he who accepts reality. Rational conduct is then all conduct which is sensitive to modifications in the variable of the environment and which answers it in a non-aleatory way, and hence systematic, whilst the economy will be able to define itself as the science of the systematicity of the answer to environmental variables.' (Foucault 2005b: 219)

In a sense, then, the radicality of CAE's foray into bioart derives as much from the situation created in the actual piece of art whereby a layperson can learn that she too can 'do' science, as from their refusal to practice 'good' bio-art. Well behaved bio-art fosters social cohesion (that antidote to the cold, disintegrating social effects of competition) or creates marketable value, it does not try to interfere or even worse to subvert the market. CAE bioart failed to comply to the rules of good conduct and thus attracted a surplus of punishment from the judiciary apparatus. To act with one's interest in mind and one's own capital at

heart within the limits set by security is what makes one virtuous in neo-liberal times, where rational/realistic conduct is conduct which accords with the rules of the market. All failure to comply will make you a virtual threat.

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This essay was first published in 2007 as part of 'art and police', in *transversal*, published by eipcp – European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies <<http://transversal.eipcp.net>>.

#### NOTES:

1. At the moment of writing, the legal case is ongoing and expected to go to trial in the summer of 2008, if not sooner. The Critical Art Ensemble Defense Fund website <<http://www.caedefensefund.org/>> offers useful, updated information about the case while also raising funds for the legal fees. [Since first publication of this essay, Steve Kurtz was cleared of all charges in June 2008. For more information, see the website <<http://www.caedefensefund.org/>>.]

2. On the relationship between Kurtz's case and other legal cases against alleged terrorist activities resulting in a number of unlawful arrests of Muslim citizens and other kinds of political and cultural dissidents under the Patriot Act, see also Claire Pentecost 'Reflections on the Case by the U.S. Justice Department against Steven Kurtz and Robert Ferrell', April 6, 2005 <<http://www.caedefensefund.org/reflections.html>>.

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### Konrad Becker

Konrad Becker, founder of *Global Security Alliance* cultural peacekeeping agency, is an interdisciplinary communication researcher, theorist and practitioner. He has been active in electronic media as an artist, writer, composer as well as curator, producer and organiser. Director and co-founder of the Institute for New Culture Technologies/t0, and of Public Netbase from 1994 to 2006, he started World-Information.Org and World-Information Institute, a cultural intelligence agency. An upcoming publication is *Strategic Reality Dictionary* (Autonomea 2009).  
<<http://www.t0.or.at>>  
<<http://world-information.org>>  
<<http://global-security-alliance.com>>

### Bureau of Inverse Technology

The Bureau was formed in Melbourne Australia in 1991 by engineer/theorist Natalie Jeremijenko and radio journalist Kate Rich, with artist Daniela Tigani; and incorporated in the Cayman Islands in 1992. It was originally constructed as an anonymous group, a kind of guerilla technical intervention into some of the emergent techniques and technologies of the Information Age. BIT works with Information Technology as its primary material, re-engineering technical systems to address the hidden politics of technology. The anonymity of the Bureau was in part a strategy to reflect on the anonymity of technical production - the diffused accountability and ethnographic anonymity in which information technologies and software are generally produced.  
<<http://www.bureauit.org>>

## Geoff Cox

Geoff Cox is a lecturer in art and technology at the University of Plymouth, UK, and member of the research faculty of Transart Institute. As co-editor of the DATA Browser book series, he co-edited *Economising Culture* (2004) and *Engineering Culture* (2005). Amongst other things, he is also treasurer of The UK Museum of Ordure and Associate Curator of Online Projects at Arnolfini, Bristol, UK.

<<http://www.anti-thesis.net/>>

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Florian Cramer is Reader in Media and Communication Design at Piet Zwart Institute, Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam, and a writer on experimental arts and contemporary culture, including diverse papers on electronic literature, text and code, Internet arts and computer culture, published between 1997 and 2004 <<http://cramer.pleintekst.nl/>>, summarised in *Words Made Flesh* (2005). Since then research has focused more closely on areas of contemporary aesthetics and culture.

<<http://cramer.pleintekst.nl:70>>

## glorious ninth

glorious ninth is a collaboration between artists Kate Southworth and Patrick Simons. They make artworks and DIY installations for galleries, online and other places. Recent works have started to explore the use of protocol as a medium. Kate Southworth is research leader of iRes, University College Falmouth.

<<http://www.ires.org.uk>>

<<http://www.gloriousninth.net>>

## Brian Holmes

Brian Holmes is a cultural critic, living in Paris and Chicago, working with artistic and political practices, moving restlessly around the world. He holds a doctorate in Romance Languages from the University of California at Berkeley, is the author of *Hieroglyphs of the Future: Art and Politics in a Networked Era* (Zagreb: WHW, 2002) and *Unleashing the Collective Phantoms: Essays in Reverse Imagineering* (New York: Autonomedia, 2008). He lectures widely, and currently collaborates with the 16 Beaver group on the *Continental Drift* seminar. His forthcoming book and text archive can be found at <<http://brianholmes.wordpress.com>>.

## Daniela Ingruber

Daniela Ingruber works as editor-in-chief for the Austrian magazine *planet*°, based in Vienna, Austria. At the same time she is staff-member of the UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies at the University of Innsbruck, where she lectures at the MA Program in Peace, Development, Security and International Conflict Transformation. She furthermore lectures at different universities in Europe and at the Institute of International Studies at Ramkhamhaeng University, Bangkok, Thailand. Since 2007, she also works for the Diagonale – Festival for Austrian Film. Current topics of research are war-photography, film, migration in Europe and food (e.g. for the exhibition *Mobile Food* in Linz, Austria, 2011).

<<http://www.nomadin.at/>>

## The Institute for Applied Autonomy

The Institute for Applied Autonomy (IAA) was founded in 1998 as an anonymous collective of engineers, designers, artists and activists who are united by the cause of individual and collective self-determination. The group's stated mission is to develop technologies that extend the autonomy of human activists in the performance of real-world, public acts of expression. Towards this end, the IAA has produced several projects that combine the proven tactics of street action with appropriated military and commercial strategies. The results have included: robots designed for

high-speed graffiti deployment from a remote location; a web-based navigation service called *iSee* that allows users to avoid surveillance by providing them with the path of least surveillance; a cellphone text message broadcasting system called *TXTmob*, used as an organisational technology during several large-scale public events; and an inverse-surveillance system for monitoring the movements of CIA planes used to transport suspects for torture and interrogation.

<<http://www.appliedautonomy.com/>>

## Natalie Jeremijenko

Natalie Jeremijenko is an Associate Professor at New York University in the Visual Arts department, and has affiliated faculty appointments in Computer Science and Environmental Studies. She is an artist and engineer whose background includes studies in biochemistry, physics, neuroscience and precision engineering. Her projects – which explore socio-technical change – have been exhibited by several museums and galleries, including MASSMoCA, the Whitney Museum, Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt.

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natalie\\_Jeremijenko](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natalie_Jeremijenko)>

<<http://www.nyu.edu/projects/xdesign/>>

## carlos katastrosfsky

carlos katastrosfsky is a Vienna-based artist working primarily in the field of new media art. His work examines the politics of Internet-based art production, distribution and consumption, and how dominant practices of the artistic modus vivendi - curating, dealing, showing, and reviewing - function in the virtual realm, where the immaterial has replaced the object. His works explore characteristic features of the Internet such as software, interfaces, language, and discussion forums - to question the current development of the Web. He is co-founder of CONT3XT.NET (2006) - a collaborative platform for the discussion and presentation of issues related to Media Art.

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## Martin Knahl

Martin Knahl is currently based at the Faculty of Business Information Systems at the University of Applied Sciences, Furtwangen, Germany, and he is an associate research fellow of the Centre for Information Security & Network Research at the University of Plymouth, UK. His research interests are in the areas of IT management and operation, internet governance and distributed service development and utilisation.

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## Naeem Mohaiemen

Naeem Mohaiemen is an artist and writer working in Dhaka/New York, exploring historic markers through video, installation and text. His projects deal with security ([disappearedinamerica.org](http://disappearedinamerica.org), excerpt shown at Whitney Biennial), partition (Dubai Third Line), militarisation (Dhaka Chitrak), architecture (NY Exit Art), assassination (Berlin Transmediale), etc. He is currently working on a long-term project on failed revolutionary utopias of the 1970s. Naeem's publications include *Collectives in Atomised Time* (with Doug Ashford, Idensitat, Spain, 2008), 'Islamic Roots of Hip-Hop' (*Sound Unbound*, DJ Spooky ed., MIT Press, 2008), 'Mujtoba Ali: Amphibian Man' (*Manifesta 7* European Biennial of Contemporary Art, Trentino, 2008), etc.

<<http://www.shobak.org>>

## Mukul Patel

Mukul Patel works with various and hybrid media: sound, text, light, networks. Sound works range from generative site-specific installations to composed suites for contemporary choreographers. Strong influences include the work of OULIPO, and Indian art music, of which he is a continuing student. Since 2001, he has codirected Ambient Information Systems (AIS) with Manu Luksch. AIS conceives and produces critical intermedia projects, events, and tools that deal with concrete contemporary issues at the interface of social and technical infrastructure: access, privacy, surveillance. In 2008, Mukul directed residencies at the AIS studio in East London for artists from New York, Vienna, Helsinki, and Tokyo. A major publication by AIS is forthcoming in Spring 2009. <<http://www.ambientTV.NET>>

## Luís Silva

Luís Silva is currently General Co-ordinator of Lisboa 20 Arte Contemporânea and Curator of LX 2.0 and Upgrade Lisbon. Besides his institutional practice, Silva has curated several projects independently, including *Online - Portuguese Netart 1997-2004* (Lisbon, 2005) <<http://www.atmosferas.net/netart>>, *I tag you tag me: a folksonomy of Internet art* (TAGallery, Vienna, 2007) <[http://del.icio.us/i\\_tag\\_you\\_tag\\_me](http://del.icio.us/i_tag_you_tag_me)>, and *FW: Re: Re:* (Rhizome at The New Museum, New York, 2008) amongst others. He recently collaborated with Rhizome at The New Museum as Curatorial Fellow and has published extensively reviews and texts addressing issues of art and technology. <<http://www.lisboa20.pt/lx20/>>

## Wolfgang Sützl

Wolfgang Sützl is a media theorist, philosopher, and translator based in Vienna. His work revolves around the contemporary critique of violence. He teaches at various Austrian and international universities and is a faculty member of the Transart Institute's MFA programme. His recent publications include 'Tragic Extremes. Nietzsche and the Politics of Security' (*ctheory* 2007) and 'Gewalt und Präzision' (*Violence and Precision*, ed. with Doris Wallnöfer, Vienna 2008). <<http://suetzl.netbase.org/>>

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