THE NUMBER YOU HAVE REACHED

Lawrence Abu Hamdan | Michael Candy
Antoinette J Citizen | JD Reforma
Andrew Varano | Tim Woodward
Gavin Bell, Jarrah de Kuijer and Simon McGlinn (Greatest Hits)

Curated by Sarah Werkmeister & Tim Woodward

Reveal Their Secrets - Protect Our Own[1]

The Internet (Capital I intentional) acts as a prosthesis for our courage, our disappointments, our frustrations and our love. It can also act to mobilise us, against governments, against prejudices, against individuals, as well as for and against individualism. In it's swarming mass we are watched, watching each other, watching governments in distant lands, watching our loved ones and equally those we do not know. In this space, the ideology of surveillance is omnipresent. If it's not surveillance by government or private corporations, it's by each other. If it's not a surveillance of each other, it's of ourselves. The artists in The Number You Have Reached explore this complex web of surveillance technologies, and seek to undermine their use as strict appendages of control. Within an increasingly prevalent culture of surveillance, this exhibition addresses the social and political implications of big data, data retention, data clusters, profiling, simulated realities, information privacy and mining, consumer analytics, RFID technologies, LOGjects and ubiquitous computing.

In Deleuze's 'Postscript on the Societies of Control', he states: "The conquests of the market are made by grabbing control and no longer by disciplinary training... corruption thereby gains new power. Marketing has become the centre, or the "soul" of the corporation... control is short-term and of rapid rates of turnover, but also continuous and without limit, while discipline was of long duration, infinite and discontinuous. Man is no longer enclosed, but man in debt. It is true that capitalism has retained as a constant the extreme poverty of three quarters of humanity, too poor for debt, too numerous for confinement: control will not only have to deal with erosions of frontiers, but with the explosions within the shanty towns or ghettos." [2] When big social networking companies encourage users to share more personal moments, what happens when those moments are commodified and repackaged to exclusively sell the products of companies buying advertising space? What happens to the body? What happens to the soul?

Media theorist, McKenzie Wark goes on... "Looking at the excessive arc of 'new' media since the nineties, I think we won the battle and lost the war. Social movements around free information and new community broke through the carapace of old media. We won! And then a new ruling class of figured out how to commodify our emergent gift economies at a higher level of abstraction. We lost!"[3] So, how do these systems of control operate in an environment in which we're all being surveilled by marketers both in and outside of the internet? Where we have all become marketers? And how can we subvert these notions of surveillance past simply observing them? How do we un-claim or rather, re-appropriate fire — can fire be non-violent? How do you stop your smart TV from listening to your heartbeat?

In Michael Candy's work, 'Digital Empathy Device' (2016), the artist utilises open source technologies to monitor Livemap an online, citizen-run mapping service that correlates live information on bombings, hazards and attacks in war zones around the world. An air-raid or bombing report triggers a mobile phone activated device that's linked to a tear crown on the head of a statue, causing it to weep every time an attack occurs. The work has been developed in response to the proliferation and subsequent dehumanisation that occurs when we view facts of these bombings online—in this particular case, in Syria. The artist has also produced a video in Paris, where the device has been fabricated and mounted on the head of a statue called 'Marianne', who, among other things symbolises both the French Republic and égalité. The video was filmed at the same time as the Nuit debout protests.

Antoinette J Citizen has created a logging device which acts as a self-surveillance device for the artist's every day. Acting in a similar way to a mood ring, the device spits out colours in CMYK according to the representation of a point in time, in relationship to the artist. While 'Method for Mapping' (2016) addresses such concerns as the way that emotion is conveyed through digital mediums, the artist is also working around the ownership of her own emotions and her own being in the world through digital technologies.

Sydney-based artist JD Reforma's work, 'Looking At You' (2005 – 2014) uses text sampled from the commuter newspaper, MX, which was circulated in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne between 2001 and 2015. Reforma has collated particular excerpts from the surveillant section called 'Here's looking at you', in which readers would write in to the newspaper to catch the attention of a fellow commuter. As the video progresses, you see a pattern emerge in the profiling of 'Asian' women and men by fellow commuters. This work throws up issues around not only surveillance, but of racial profiling and stereotypes in the [so-called multicultural] Australian consciousness.
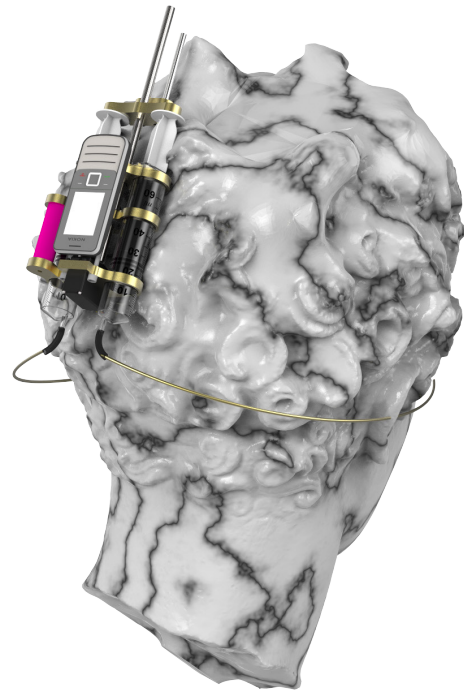

Image credit: Michael Candy, 'Digital Empathy Device' (2016)

Tim Woodward's film 'The Foreign Spokesman' (2016) maps a possible site for submarine data cables stretching hidden below the ocean floor, and incorporates field recordings made at the Perth Protection Zone. The recording device used is a Blackberry Bold 9000, the cellphone also owned by Indonesian Foreign Spokesperson, Dino Patti Djamal, who was revealed as an Australian Signals Directory (ASD) target within the Snowden revelations of 2013. Through narration and the language of the public service announcement, a text- to-voice web bot offers advice for secure cellphone use, cut across the ocean swell. Considering the slippery protocols of international intelligence gathering, Woodward's film highlights levels of infrastructure supporting both official and unofficial listening. It further examines distance, or lack thereof, in local matters and their extension to the universal.
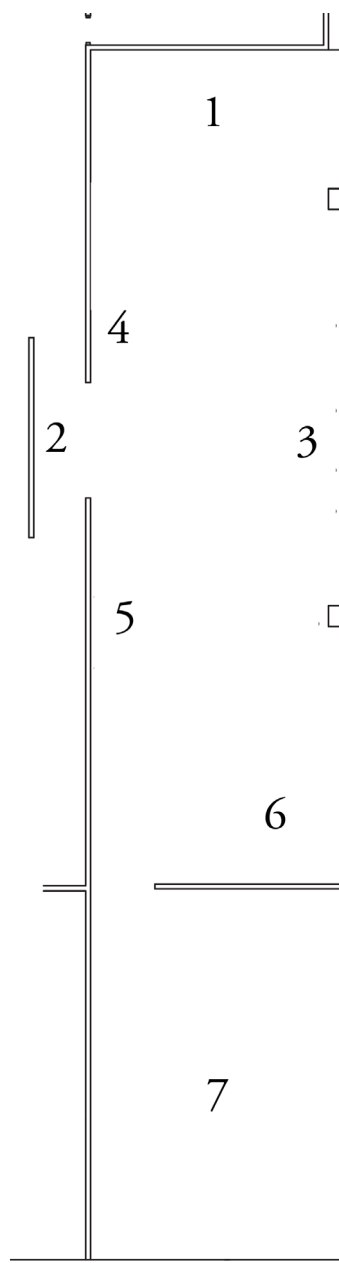
Also examining the aural is Beirut-based artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan's 'The All Hearing' (2014). In this video, two Sheikhs deliver a sermon on noise pollution in Cairo, the "loudest city on earth". The Sheikh's, on Abu Hamdan's request, extrapolate on issues of hearing when our everyday landscapes—when everything—is filled with noise; of noise's potential for corruption of the soul, and corruption of the mind. It was made in the week following the military government's announcement that such sermons will be restricted to government-sanctioned topics. In Cairo and other Middle-Eastern countries, the adhan, or call to prayer is usually broadcast across cities from minarets. The All Hearing sees this sermon delivered inside a mosque, but also spilling out into the streets and into the ears of passers-by, through the mosque's loudspeakers, while government-sanctioned topics were being discussed in the other mosques around the city. Abu Hamdan's work looks at the contradictions in speaking a message that infiltrates, quite forcibly, the minds of subjects in these areas, while at the same time speaking about noise pollution. The video brings up issues around censorship, control, and aural surveillance.

Focusing on the idea of augmentation and authenticity in the age of 'reality' television, as well as the idea of 'capital' in relation to these augmentations, Gavin Bell, Jarrah de Kuijer and Simon McGlinn (Greatest Hits) have lifted an image from the Japanese game show, 'Susunu! Denpa Shonen', in which protagonist, Tomoaki Hamatsu (Nasubi), a comedian, lived in an apartment primarily in Japan, and later in and Korea, naked, for almost two years, while living only on winnings from online sweepstakes. A precursor to Big Brother, the show documented Nasubi's every day, and while he knew that there was filming involved, he didn't know to which extent. The image that Greatest Hits have used in 'Untitled (Nasubi)' (2016) is taken from the final episode, where Nasubi's blindfold (for purposes of locational anonymity) was removed, and it is revealed that the apartment he was in was actually a television studio — his contorted hand, a result of the shock induced by the revelation, is impressed onto cotton using UV degradation methods, making the image both impermanent and intentionally hard to read. The work examines the use of 'reality' television to make caricatures from emotions, and asks what it is about these 'realities' that so entices viewers.

Andrew Varano's work, 'Support for some kinds of primitive objects' (2016) appropriates Vimeo's "Sorry: Because of its privacy settings, this video cannot be played here" message, which is displayed when either an online video has been made private by the uploader, or with geolocation tracking, the video cannot be viewed in your country. The work reconstructs parts of the landscape of the Vimeo 'forest' which is underlaid behind the aforementioned message. Varano points to the vectorisation — the smoothing out, the flattening — of meaning behind not only the digital, but of assumed privacy/ies. Using corflute, the artist prints this 'forest' onto flat shapes, indicating a certain neutralisation, each object sitting removed from its context. Here, the artist recontextualises the vector into reality, and examines the fluxes that we face between reality and glamorous digitised, and manipulatable virtual world.

The artists in The Number You Have Reached each demonstrate different aspects of surveillance—whether personal or communally-minded—but resist making overarching statements on the topic. They use the language of the pluralistic network to rebuild a sense of the self in a world where we are all watched, attempting to incite futures that see us removed from technology that's seen as simply a form of control. They envisage alternatives and contradictions in the way that these positions of control can be reconfigured. The number you have reached has not been disconnected, it is just being redistributed.

Sarah Werkmeister

1 The motto of the Australian Signals Directory (ASD)
2 Deleuze, G 1992, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control' in October, Vol. 59. (Winter, 1992), pp3-7
3 Wark, M 2014, 'Where Next For Media Theory' on Public Seminar, Apr 9, 2014 <http://www.publicseminar.org/2014/04/where-next-for-media-theory/>. Accessed Sun Apr 17, 2011

1. Andrew Varano
Support for some kinds of primitive objects, 2016, Digital print on corflute, aluminium

2. JD Reforma
Looking at you, 2005 – 2014, Single-channel HD video (silent)
Text sampled from 'Here's looking at you' section of mX, a commuter newspaper circulated in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane from 2001 – 2015, 17 minutes

3. Gavin Bell, Jarrah de Kuijer and Simon McGlinn (Greatest Hits)
Untitled (Nasubi), 2016 UV degradation of cotton 1830 x 1370 mm

4. Tim Woodward
The Foreign Spokesman (2016), Single-channel HD video with sound, 6 minutes, 20 seconds

5. Antoinette J Citizen
Method for Mapping, 2016, Inkjet printer, arduino, various electronics, zip ties, tape, mac mini, paper, ink

6. Michael Candy
Digital Empathy Device, 2016, IED activation technologies, live digital social war-mapping service Livemap, syringes, model bust, tears, copper, and various electronics, single channel HD video with sound

7. Lawrence Abu Hamdan
The All-Hearing, 2014 Single-channel HD video, 12 minutes, 42 seconds