Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter now, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Ruth Emily Baker April 1, 2022

Seeing and Being Seen

by

Ruthie Baker

Jason Francisco
Adviser

Film and Media Studies

Jason Francisco

Adviser

Joel Silverman

Committee Member

Renée Stein

Committee Member

2022

Seeing and Being Seen

By

Ruthie Baker

Jason Francisco

Adviser

An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Film and Media Studies

2022

Abstract

Seeing and Being Seen
By Ruthie Baker

Atlanta, Georgia is the surveillance capital of the United States. For every 1,000 people there are 50 CCTV cameras, making Atlanta the most closely watched American city. The regime of surveillance is as much a part of "private," residential reality as it is present in the public eye. Under the guise of imagined security, Americans have become complacent in the inescapable presence of surveillance. By adopting participatory surveillance measures, subjecting our neighbors and fellow citizens to being perpetually watched, the American public has internalized the surveillant gaze and participated in our own violation of privacy.

We have normalized and contributed to the paranoia of average people. Surveillance involves a core dichotomy: it creates a sense of responsibility always to monitor the behavior of those around us yet distracts from the awareness of being watched. As a result, boundaries between private and public spheres have become uncertain, encouraging us to surveil our friends and neighbors and forcing us into the simultaneous position of watchers and watched.

By installing a security camera on your front door, you may feel safe and protected. However, if everyone did the same, we would all be subject to a decentralized and uncontrolled surveillance network designed to quell public fears of "suspicious" (often innocent) people. When we accept that everyone is potentially a criminal, we are invited to surveil ourselves and others for the sake of public good. I use "we" deliberately. I am not exempt from this pressure always to see and be seen; on the contrary, this photographic series is at once an exercise in watching and being watched by others.

In this photo-and-text work, I ask you to look again at the paradoxically unobtrusive/intrusive surveillance devices that are hidden in plain sight. Even where privacy should be reasonably expected, in domestic spaces and on college campuses, the unseen eye of surveillance is there to be seen if you're looking for it.

Seeing and Being Seen

By

Ruthie Baker

Jason Francisco

Adviser

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Film and Media Studies

2022

Acknowledgements

To Mom, Dad, Andrew, Caleb, Lillian, Jason, and more: this project would be incomplete without your endless love and support. Thank you.

Table of Contents

This work can be read in several ways and the pages are intentionally left unnumbered. I invite you to start at the beginning, jump into the middle, or work your way back from the end.

Photographs begin on the first page.

Writing begins 38 pages in.


SEEING
AND
BEING
SEEN

PLEASE
WAIT
HERE
WELCOME


RESEARCH
MEMORIA


Walmart
for members
Women's
13
9
12
11
8
Rooms
24.94
Walmart


The devil will decieve you into evil things. The devils light fades into darkness. The devil tempts with beauty that grows ugly. Resist the devil and he will flee from thee.
HOWARD FINSTER
Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?
(II CORINTHIANS 13:5)
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. (PSALMS 145:3)
COCA COLA


NOTICE
ALL ACTIVITIES
MONITORED
BY VIDEO
CAMERA

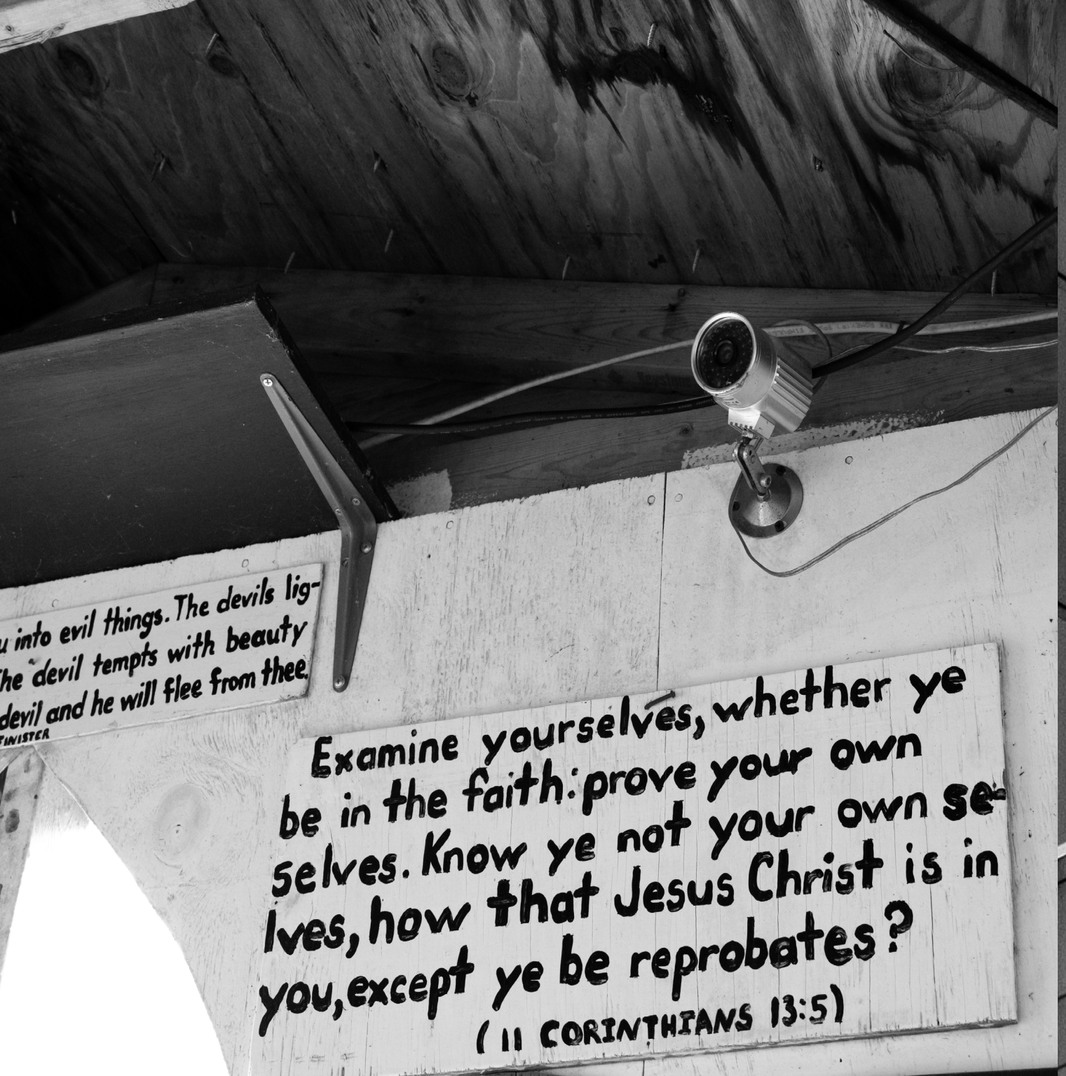

Smile, You're On Camera!


GEORGIA
MONITORING IN PROGRESS
self-
checkout
4
self-
checkou
5
Cheetos
Crunchy
Cheetos
Crunchy
VISA
Gift Card
$50
2.79
2.79

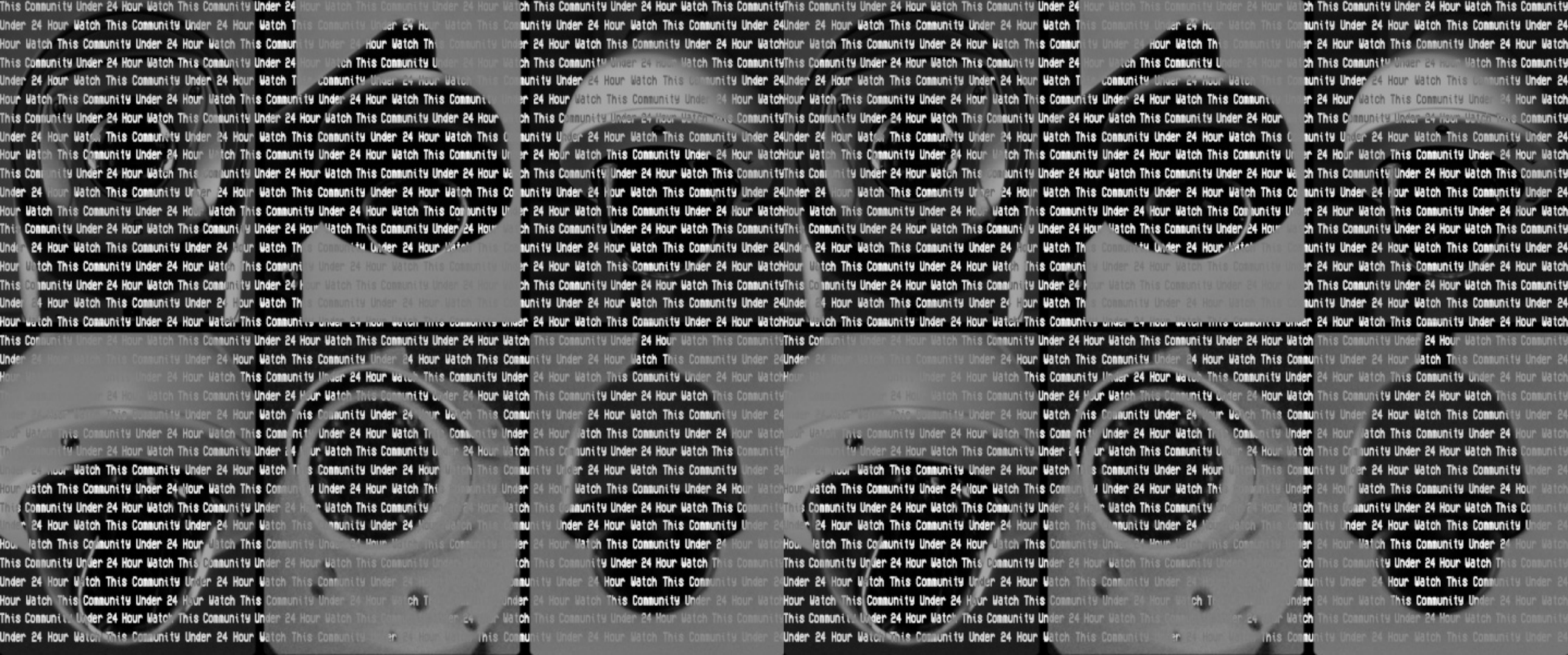

BOSCH


NOTICE
THIS AREA IS UNDER
24 HOUR TV SURVEILLANCE
TRESPASSERS WILL
BE PROSECUTED


PRIVATE
PROPERTY
Vehicles illegally or improperly
parked will be towed away
at owners risk and expense.
A Tow Atlanta, Inc.
930 Hamlet Street, SE
Atlanta, GA 30315
404.577.6666
MINIMUM FEE: $175.00
DAILY STORAGE: $25.00
Open 24 hours / 7 days
Cash, Major Credit Cards Accepted
Need A Tow or Roadside service?
Call: 404.577.9950


u into evil things. The devils lig-
he devil tempts with beauty
devil and he will flee from thee.
INISTER
Examine yourselves, whether ye
be in the faith: prove your own
selves. Know ye not your own se-
lves, how that Jesus Christ is in
you, except ye be reprobates?
(II CORINTHIANS 13:5)




This Community Under 24 Hour Watch


The management of this establishment has successfully completed a food safety training course provided by the
American Food Safety Institute
(800) 723-3873
Smile, you're on camera.
10 ITEMS OR LESS
EXPRESS
PEOPLE LOVE US ON yelp
Pay
Remember, if you see something, say something.


WARNING
Security
Cameras In Use
PRIVATE
PROPERTY


WARNING
Security
Cameras In Use
GEORGIA
SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION
1990
HONORARY
MEMBER


WARNING
24 HOUR VIDEO SURVEILLANCE
PRIVATE PROPERTY NO TRESPASSING
PLEASE DELIVER ALL PACKAGES TO FRONT DOOR
FedEx
USPS amazon
SMILE
YOU'RE ON CAMERA




Criminals Take Notice Block Watch In Effect


Get the Card.
Free Gift.
Free Today.
$100 Off
$50 Off
$25 Off
CLOSED CIRCUIT
TELEVISION ON PREMISES
CIRCUITO CERRADO DE TELEVISIÓN EN LAS INSTALACIONES
WARNING:
Products in this area are protected by an anti-theft device
ADVERTENCIA:
Los productos en esta área están protegidos con un dispositivo antirrobo


1554
OPEN
24
PRIVATE PROPERTY
CURRENT PATRONS ONLY
NOTICE:
To Protect Our Customer's Rights,
BOOTING / TOWING Enforced
Minimum $75 FEE
UPS
Access
Point


WAFFLE HOUSE
Lunch/Dinner
FAVORITES
PRICES INCLUDE SALES TAX
ORDER HERE




Encore


CLOSED CIRCUIT
TELEVISION
AND
AUDIO MONITORING
ON PREMISES


Surveillance You Are Protected By Video Surveillance


Valentine's Day!
carepass
Get member perks and discounts!
PAPER WONDER
ALL AMERICAN
FISHERMAN


WARNING
ALL ACTIVITIES ARE RECORDED TO AID IN THE PROSECUTION OF ANY CRIME COMMITTED AGAINST THIS FACILITY
A 1463
B 1463
A 1461
B 1461
C 1461
D 1461
NOTICE
THIS AREA IS UNDER
24 HOUR
VIDEO
SURVEILLANCE


TICKETS
AMERICAN FLYER
UNION WESTERN
PRESS AND HOLD BUTTONS TO RUN THE TRAINS
$2.00


BOSCH


CCTV Cameras In Use WARNING!


CLOSED
CIRCUIT
TELEVISION
ON PREMISES


1836
EXIT
HOT DRINKS
Doritos
Tostitos
Lay's
Takis
M&M's

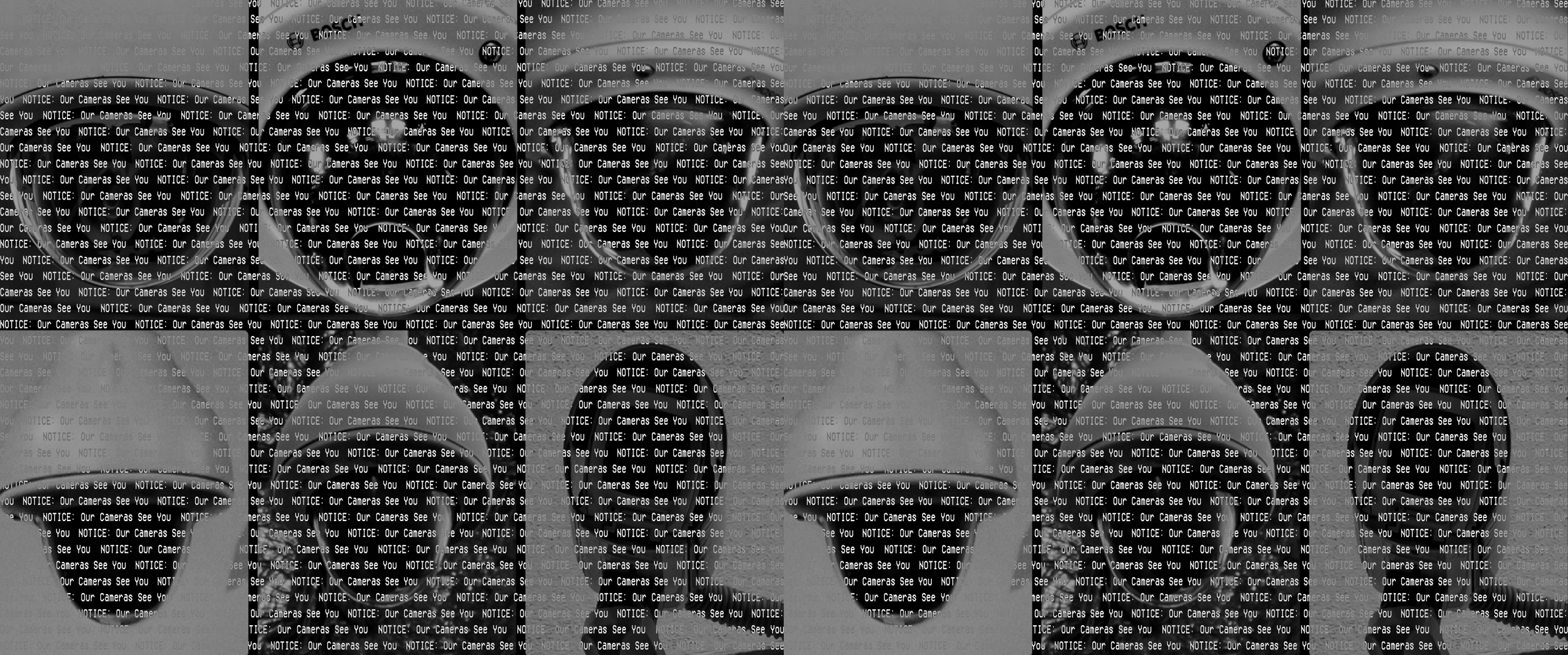

5
4
3
2


WARNING
Security
Cameras In Use
Homemade
Best
ATTENTION
This Area Is
Under 24 Hour
Video
Surveillance.




ARNING ASSISTANTS
CCESS WORKSHOPS
WELCOME!
Electronic
Security
Device
In
Use


BO PIERCING
2263
RM ANENT
AKE UP
Virtue & Vice
BODY
PIERCING
SECURITY
CAMERA


NOTICE: Our Cameras See You


EXIT
SINCE 2018, WE'VE USED OVER 6 BILLION
BOTTLES WORTH OF RECYCLED PLASTIC
TURNING YESTERDAY'S
SPRITE INTO TODAY'S COKE.
RECYCLE &
RE-ENJOY IT
E28
E27
AED
INFORMATION


SWEETS
SUGARED NUTS
DIPPIN' DOTS FUDGE
LOVE
EXIT
TEXAS BBQ


SPEED
LIMIT
25
CRIMINALS
TAKE
NOTICE...
BLOCK
WATCH
IN EFFECT
NOTICE
24/7 VIDEO
RECORDING
flock safety


PREMISES PROTECTED BY
24 HOUR
SECURITY
CAMERAS
2
COMMUNITY
We treat others with
mutual respect and
empathy in our pursuit
serve, and represent
our community. Our
Goizueta community is
based on trust, support,
and mutual respect.



Atlanta, Georgia is the surveillance capital of the United States. For every 1,000 people there are 50 CCTV cameras, making Atlanta the most closely watched American city. The regime of surveillance is as much a part of "private," residential reality as it is present in the public eye.

Under the guise of imagined security, Americans have become complacent in the inescapable presence of surveillance. By adopting participatory surveillance measures, subjecting our neighbors and fellow citizens to being perpetually watched, the American public has internalized the surveillant gaze and participated in our own violation of privacy.

We have normalized and contributed to the paranoia of average people. Surveillance involves a core dichotomy: it creates a sense of responsibility always to monitor the behavior of those around us, yet distracts from the awareness of being watched.

As a result, boundaries between private and public spheres have become uncertain, encouraging us to surveil our friends and neighbors and forcing us into the simultaneous position of watchers and watched.

By installing a security camera on your front door, you may feel safe and protected. However, if everyone did the same, we would all be subject to a decentralized and uncontrolled surveillance network designed to quell public fears of "suspicious" (often innocent) people.

When we accept that everyone is potentially a criminal, we are invited to surveil ourselves and others for the sake of public good. I use "we" deliberately. I am not exempt from this pressure always to see and be seen; on the contrary, this photographic series is at once an exercise in watching and being watched by others.

In this photo-text work, I ask you to look again at the paradoxically unobtrusive/intrusive surveillance devices that are hidden in plain sight. Even where privacy should be reasonably expected, in domestic spaces and on college campuses, the unseen eye of surveillance is there to be seen if you're looking for it.

***

Within my lifetime (I am twenty-two years old), surveillance measures have drastically increased and significantly impacted American lives. Before I was born, the average American citizen was mostly anonymous. Before the overwhelming abundance of security cameras in both public and private spaces, people could walk through cities without perpetually being watched from unseen eyes above, easily and quickly pass through an airport gate, and spy on their neighbors from the safety of their home only by peeking out their windows.

The strange contradictory anonymity that exists today stems from the excess of surveillance cameras which record indiscriminately. You remain anonymous in CCTV footage because the present technology allows for it, but as video quality improves and real-time facial recognition increasingly allows individuals to be picked from a crowd, your ability to remain anonymous in public lessens.

When I was two years old, long before my memory, the World Trade Center was bombed. In response, and with the intention to protect the American public, our government asked us to sacrifice individual freedoms, personal anonymity, and privacy for the sake of public safety. Yet, the long-term duration of such a dramatic increase in surveillance was either ignored or hidden. Time and time again, history has proven that in times of panic, people all too willingly give up freedoms that are not readily given back.

In 2022, more than two decades after the 9/11 disaster, emergent forms of surveillance technology like security cameras, facial recognition, and data monitoring collect and store more information about the average person than at any point in history.

The prevalence of surveillance technology presents a disturbing threat to democracy as there is currently the technological capacity to subject the American public to a full-blown surveillance state where every citizen's actions can be seen and recorded. Furthermore, with the increased ability to capture and distribute images as a result of digital photography and photo-sharing social media platforms, we have become vulnerable to surveillance from fellow media consumers and even ourselves as we become participatory surveillers by openly recording, identifying, and distributing our image and location online.

The benefits and costs of surveillance technology have long been debated, but the field of surveillance studies is comparatively new. Though media theorists and philosophers have attempted to understand the rise of surveillance and loss of privacy in recent years, I am specifically interested in how uninterrupted access to digital photography and photo-sharing platforms contributes to the wide-spread acceptance of participating in and contributing to surveillance.

I do not intend to argue that all forms of surveillance are damaging or unconstitutional, but I do hope to encourage you to consider what forms of surveillance are strictly necessary, to question whether you are willing to sacrifice all sense of privacy and anonymity, and to notice that in our current (largely unregulated!) surveillance state you are subject to the near-constant surveillant eye and encouraged always to watch yourself and others.

***



As I understand it, there are four main sources of surveillance. The most recognizable form is top-down surveillance, which occurs as those in positions of power observe the public in order to regulate society and record criminal activity.

This is the most visible source of surveillance in the photographs of this book, as I call attention to the frequently unnoticed watchful eyes above us. Often, I allow the intrusive devices to occupy entire pages. Though helpful for identifying suspects in criminal investigations, the near-constant presence of this form of surveillance subjects you to being perpetually watched as you innocently walk through a park, shop in the grocery store, or eat in a restaurant.

Similar and adjacent to this source is the simple threat of being watched when in reality, no surveillance devices are in use. The psychological response to control your behavior under the threat of being watched even if nobody is truly watching is best understood in terms of English philosopher Jeremy Bentham's panopticon control system.

As is well discussed and understood by philosophers and psychologists, the panopticon originated as a disciplinary system in which a guard tower stands at the center of a round prison. From the tower, the guard can see every prisoner, but the prisoners cannot see the guard. The prisoners, unaware of whether they are being watched, therefore behave as if a guard is constantly present.

In my endeavor to photograph surveillance devices and signs I found an obviously defunct security camera with a wasp nest growing inside and several signs advertising 24-hour watch with no visible cameras nearby. Either through signs advertising security cameras that are not present, dummy cameras that record nothing, or simply the expectation that surveillance devices are in use at a location, the threat of surveillance is often enough to deter criminal activity and reinforce the feeling of being watched in public spaces.

Also important to consider, even when working cameras are present, is how unlikely it is that the majority of surveillance footage is even watched. The abundance of cameras creates a problem for those watching; they cannot watch it all. With over 50 CCTV cameras for every 1,000 people in the Atlanta area, those cameras record thousands of hours of video that unnecessarily violate your privacy and sit unwatched in a digital cloud with little to no legal regulation on how long that footage is stored and who has access to it.

Another source of surveillance, and the one I tend to be most optimistic about, is when video recording is used as a form of activism. When the public turns the surveillant eye back on the police, the government, or others in positions of influence, surveillance is transformed into an act of resistance against top-down observation. Surveillance, while a potent threat to privacy, can simultaneously be a tool to protect the public and spread awareness about abuse of power that might otherwise go unnoticed.

We've seen this recently in the United States as videos of police brutality, recorded by citizens on the street and uploaded to social media platforms, helped to expose the unjust and violent actions of police officers against people of color. Bystander videos of law enforcement interactions with civilians have proved immeasurable in bringing police brutality into public awareness and debate. By turning the camera back to those in positions of power, the average citizen has the ability to police the police.

The police can also police themselves through body-worn cameras ("bodycams"). In this case, surveillance protects you from unjust treatment from law enforcement and reminds the police that their actions and use of power do not go unchecked. However, as of 2021, only seven states (Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, and South Carolina) mandated bodycams statewide. And even in those states, regulations for when bodycams start recording and how long the footage is stored are inconsistent.

But just as the average citizen can use surveillance as a form of activism, bodycams limit the power differential between you and law enforcement. If your daily activities cannot go unwatched by the police, the same should at least be said for them.

Finally, the source of surveillance that we have the most control over and the form I will spend a significant portion of this text talking about, is what I have come to call "participatory surveillance." As the sense of responsibility to monitor ourselves and others transfers into the hands of the public, we become active participants in the creation and distribution of surveillant imagery.

The introduction of digital photography and the photo-sharing focus of social media platforms encourage us to expose our own private information online and derive pleasure from viewing intimate details of others' private lives. Access to at-home surveillance technology like Amazon's Ring Doorbell camera assists the

public in accepting the responsibility to turn the surveillant gaze on ourselves and our peers. We sacrifice our own privacy and the privacy of our innocent neighbors for perceived personal protection.

***



Uninterrupted access to media, in particular the constant presence of smartphones in public locations, paradoxically encourages media users to create a sense of privacy through individual exposure online. We are expected to publish our private lives to the public world, while isolating ourselves from face-to-face interaction. Sharing images online, often with geo-location tagging and identification of who is in the photograph, illogically allows social-media users to feel safe and protected from the outside world by exposing our lives publicly.

This inclination toward sharing personal information online has become particularly true in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Face-to-face interaction, an essential aspect of human culture and community, has become life-threatening. Amid the perpetual pandemic of the past two years, the freedom to blend into the crowd and wander aimlessly through a city has become impossible. When public spaces shut down to prevent the spread of the virus and protect the wellbeing of our society, people were required to limit social interactions to the internet.

Yet, online interactions too involve a core dichotomy, promising users a sense of community while removing them from the warmth and life of true community. When the only way to communicate and interact with those around you is by sharing private, personal information online, community is redefined entirely to mean watching, tracking, and all-together stalking our peers while begging them to notice and do the same for us.

Beyond redefining community engagement, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also affected what information we are willing to share with our government and what data our government demands from us. Digital location data, harnessed from smartphone devices, helps the U.S. to track and predict the spread of the pandemic. Contact tracing has long been used in times of global illnesses, yet in the past it was conducted by individual workers who interviewed infected people to identify who they were in contact with to monitor those at-risk contacts. Location data now makes contact tracing faster and easier, limiting the spread of COVID-19.

However, data collection relies on mass surveillance programs that harness location information arbitrarily. Furthermore, your location exposes more than your geographical coordinates. Through your movements your consumer habits, religious affiliation, family contacts, political associations, and other intimate aspects of your life become traceable. This technology may be used to identify when a COVID infected individual leaves their home before the isolation period is over, but it could also be used to see who attends protests, abortion clinics, therapists, churches, mosques, and political rallies. As I have already argued, giving up personal liberties for temporary benefits in times of panic has long lasting consequences.

***



Although we are mostly accepting of, or perhaps blissfully ignorant to, the constant presence of surveillance in public and residential spaces, individual photographers carrying cameras outside a typical tourist location are often received with skepticism and concern.

In my experience, when the camera is visibly removed from the human eyes watching you, people fear, notice, or think about the camera considerably less. When the camera photographing you is held in a person's hands, you have a face to blame for the concern and anxiety you feel while being watched. Yet, we are comfortable ignoring the cameras above us every day.

While making several of these photographs, I placed myself into rather uncomfortable situations. In the airport, I feared questioning or punishment for making images of the watchful eyes above me. Though I could see dozens of cameras on the ceiling, I felt as though I was engaging in suspicious and criminal activity for photographing those cameras in return. I also received shocked and dirty looks from those in the airport security line with me. The man behind me in line even warned me, "You're brave to take photos of TSA."

I wish I could say I boldly stood my ground and informed him of my legal right to photograph in the airport, but I sheepishly snapped my final picture and hid my camera away for fear of further attention from those around me.

Where I was not worried about the consequences of photographing, my requests to take pictures were either ignored or outright denied. There were several places on Emory's campus where I was told I could not photograph. When I asked to take photos in the Woodruff Library and in the Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, I was informed it was a "security issue" for me to take images of the cameras that were taking images of me.

Explaining that my request pertained to this thesis project, I also attempted to contact both Emory's Campus Police and the Campus Services department to request access to the CCTV video of myself in classroom buildings. Understanding it is difficult to identify an individual in a crowd, I asked, "If I inform you of my location ahead of time, tell you what I will be wearing, and when I will be there, are you willing or able to share a copy of the security camera footage with me?" Yet, I received no response from either department.

In classroom buildings and outdoor spaces on Emory University's campus, students and faculty were more cautious of my own camera than the cameras in plain sight on the ceiling and disguised on light posts.

In grocery stores, gas stations, and restaurants, I was asked not to photograph though their own video cameras were recording me from above. At a Waffle House in Atlanta, I was told photographing at the take-out window was an invasion of employee privacy. They did not, however, seem to appreciate my suggestion that their surveillance cameras were an even greater invasion of privacy for their employees and customers alike.

In residential areas, I experienced homeowners complaining about me standing near their property, telling me I did not have the right to photograph them as they were photographing me. One woman spoke to me through her Ring Doorbell camera to shout, "You have no right to take a picture of my house!" Naturally, she didn't seem to think it was a problem that she was recording me as I stood benignly on the sidewalk. And of course, I do have every legal right to stand on the sidewalk and photograph her house, whether or not it is private property.

Even when I was able to take pictures of residential security cameras without complaints, I found myself feeling anxious about the homeowners viewing their surveillance footage after I left and reporting me to the police for "suspicious activity." Or somehow worse, posting screen-captured images and recorded video of me online in neighborhood watch forums, violating my privacy and publishing my face as a suspected criminal.

Because I am not a disembodied camera hidden on the ceiling, disguised as a light post, or fixed onto a tree or a mailbox, my camera was more frightening for the people I photographed. As a white woman, the complaints and pushback I experienced were minimal; I imagine if I did not hold the same privilege I do, this photographic endeavor would have been much more difficult and even dangerous. Still, I feared, and was repeatedly treated as if, taking photos transformed my innocent act of looking into a delinquent deed.

***



Photography is not only at the center of the historic and modern use of surveillance; it is nearly inescapable in every aspect of contemporary life. I am hard-pressed to think of any present human activity that does not currently incorporate photography or provide opportunities for it to be used in the past, present, or future.

In our undeniably image-focused culture, every person is simultaneously a spectator and an object of the universal gaze. Photography allows the individual to see more than one person alone could witness first-hand in their lifetime.

As such, individuals agree to share their "visual field" with one another, entering into what Ariella Azoulay has called "The Civil Contract of Photography." As a result, the roles of watcher and watched have become intertwined. One cannot exist without the other. Photographers are photographed as much as the photographed become photographers with the innovation of smartphone cameras and easily accessible digital photography.

It is in this context that we become more comfortable and accepting of the constant presence of a camera. When we are already photographing and watching each other perpetually, does it matter that the city, or the state, or the country is watching us as well?

Digital photography has dramatically changed the way images are made and distributed. Having a camera constantly in hand encourages the taking and sharing of photographs to become a part of people's daily routines. Consequently, smartphone cameras take on broader functions as memory-capture devices, communication tools, and personal diaries. And the photo-sharing focus of social media encourages us to make family photo-albums, day-to-day activities, and private information available for the public to see, save, alter, and do what they please with that information.

Access to digital photography and photo-sharing platforms make us at once photographer and spectator, watcher and watched. Because no one in modern culture is free from the photographic gaze, the loss of personal anonymity and private rights to our own image is inescapable. However, the extent of that loss of privacy and the willingness with which we give up our personal anonymity can (and I believe should) be changed.

***

Even when addressing non-photographic and non-video forms of surveillance like data collection and biometric technology (i.e., fingerprint and facial recognition software), photography is an essential part of the discourse on surveillance. Facial recognition technology is a particularly pressing topic right now, as the Internal Revenue Service faces backlash for their recent decision to rely on facial scanning to identify taxpayers in the coming years.

In February 2022, the I.R.S. responded to privacy concerns by begrudgingly providing a separate option for those who decline to use facial recognition. Taxpayers unwilling to allow the I.R.S. to scan and store their "faceprint" must verify their identity in a live video call.

Yet, like many other surveillance and tracking methods, the default assumption is that you will be willing to sacrifice your privacy and you must therefore choose to opt-out of this biometric data collection rather than opt-in.

There are also several types of cameras that create images from non-visual data. Surveillance technology can now provide photographic form to data information like sound and temperature. All surveillance technology stems from and is still rooted in imagery, even more reason to question who has access to the images we share online and upload to the internet.

Even "private" accounts are not truly private. As exemplified by the National Security Agency's classified information leaked by Edward Snowden in 2013 (another defining moment for surveillance in my lifetime), your personal emails, instant messages, intimate photographs, phone calls, and anything else you might consider to be private information is accessible by the U.S. government or, for that matter, anybody good enough with technology to hack your online accounts.

End-to-end encryption and Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) can make accessing your personal information more difficult, but even those complex algorithms can be cracked when deemed necessary by our government. A recent example of this is when the F.B.I. requested that Apple provide the data from two iPhones belonging to the gunman who attacked a naval base in Pensacola, FL. in 2020.

Apple's technology encrypts your phone's data so it can only be viewed by entering the password, meaning even Apple can't bypass this encryption. The F.B.I. demanded that Apple create a "backdoor" entry to access the phones' but Apple refused. Thankfully, they argued that creating such a backdoor would compromise the security and privacy of every single Apple product and could be used again and again on any number of personal devices. So instead, the F.B.I. found a private company that was willing to risk the privacy of every Apple phone (for context, there were about 211 million iPhones active in the U.S. in 2021) and hack the phones' encryption.

I don't mean to imply that private information should not be made available to law enforcement once a crime has been committed. Certainly, I am also aware of the many instances where smartphone photos and security camera recordings have helped solve criminal cases and bring justice to light. But, I am concerned specifically with the average, innocent person whose privacy is under constant threat. Making personal sacrifices for the wellbeing and safety of society is reasonable and essential, but completely sacrificing all privacy and willingly allowing our government to violate the privacy of every American citizen for the sake of perceived public safety is not.

***





We are not only complicit in our own violation of privacy by trading private information for perceived social benefits; we are willing, active producers of surveillance. As a result of governmental and social pressure, we accept partial responsibility for public safety. Accepting this responsibility means we turn the surveillant gaze back on ourselves, sacrificing our own privacy and the privacy of our neighbors for perceived public safety.

Participatory surveillance derives from a cynical mistrust of others. When we perceive unknown people (or even familiar people) as naturally dangerous, we are encouraged to always keep an eye turned out to the world. In our present surveillance state, we are taught to recognize and record the assumed suspicious behaviors of others. In other words, Jonathan Finn argues, we are compelled to "see surveillantly."

Our acceptance of this civil duty to watch those around us is not only present on social media. Do-it-yourself surveillance technologies like home security cameras, online neighborhood watch forums, and easily concealed "nanny cams" make achieving the sense of responsibility to watch others easy. The same online network that encourages us to violate our own privacy offers us plenty of ways to violate that of others.

Monitoring techniques which once would have seemed paranoid are now mundane and accessible. Technology previously limited to law enforcement and professionals now easily falls into the hands of consumers.

The most concerning source of participatory surveillance is personal home security cameras. Having a doorbell camera may make you feel safe and protected, but it unnecessarily threatens the privacy of your innocent neighbors and fellow citizens, and further places the responsibility of "seeing surveillantly" into the public's hands.

A core component of home surveillance devices is the ability to save and distribute security camera footage online. Amazon's Ring Doorbell has its own social media site, Neighbors, with over 10 million users specifically for this purpose. On Neighbors, people post videos and photos of suspicious figures on and around their property to alert their neighbors of potential criminal activity. Other neighborhood apps like Nextdoor advertise a similar purpose to help protect your home by exposing suspicious activity before it becomes criminal.

Yet, these neighborhood watch sites are frequently used to violate the privacy of a funny or unusual delivery person, or mildly annoying kids cutting across somebody's lawn, or people like me simply admiring or photographing a house.

By recognizing the act of watching and recording others as a personal responsibility, we also allow the police to rely on average people for surveillance. Neighbors by Ring has a law enforcement section of the site called "Neighbors Public Safety Service" which allows the police to view videos already uploaded and ask camera owners to provide their personal footage for investigations.

While there is a way to decline police access to your footage, and a way to opt-out of the Public Safety Service altogether, once again the default setting is to opt-in to this service. And if a police officer requests access to your home security footage, will you really feel comfortable turning them away or will you feel socially and morally obligated to sacrifice your privacy? In that scenario, choosing to protect your right to privacy gets reframed as suspicious and morally condemnable behavior.

***

We have a responsibility to protect our right to reasonable expectation for privacy at home, online, and even in public spaces. We will not be able to, or even want to, eliminate all forms of video surveillance, but we must be aware of our involvement in the creation and distribution of surveillant imagery. As I have come to understand, any and every photograph can become surveillant imagery once it is distributed online.

I do not mean to suggest that the photographic medium is inherently dangerous. Of course, I am both a photographer and a frequently photographed individual myself. Rather, the threat stems primarily from the constant presence of cameras in places where privacy and anonymity should be available and expected, and from the ways we are encouraged to violate our own privacy and the privacy of our friends, family, and neighbors on online photo-sharing platforms.

The participatory monitoring by and between peers is more than encouraged on social media platforms; it is expected. The reciprocity of this type of surveillance stems from our desire to gain information about friends, family, and strangers and the hope that they do the same for us.

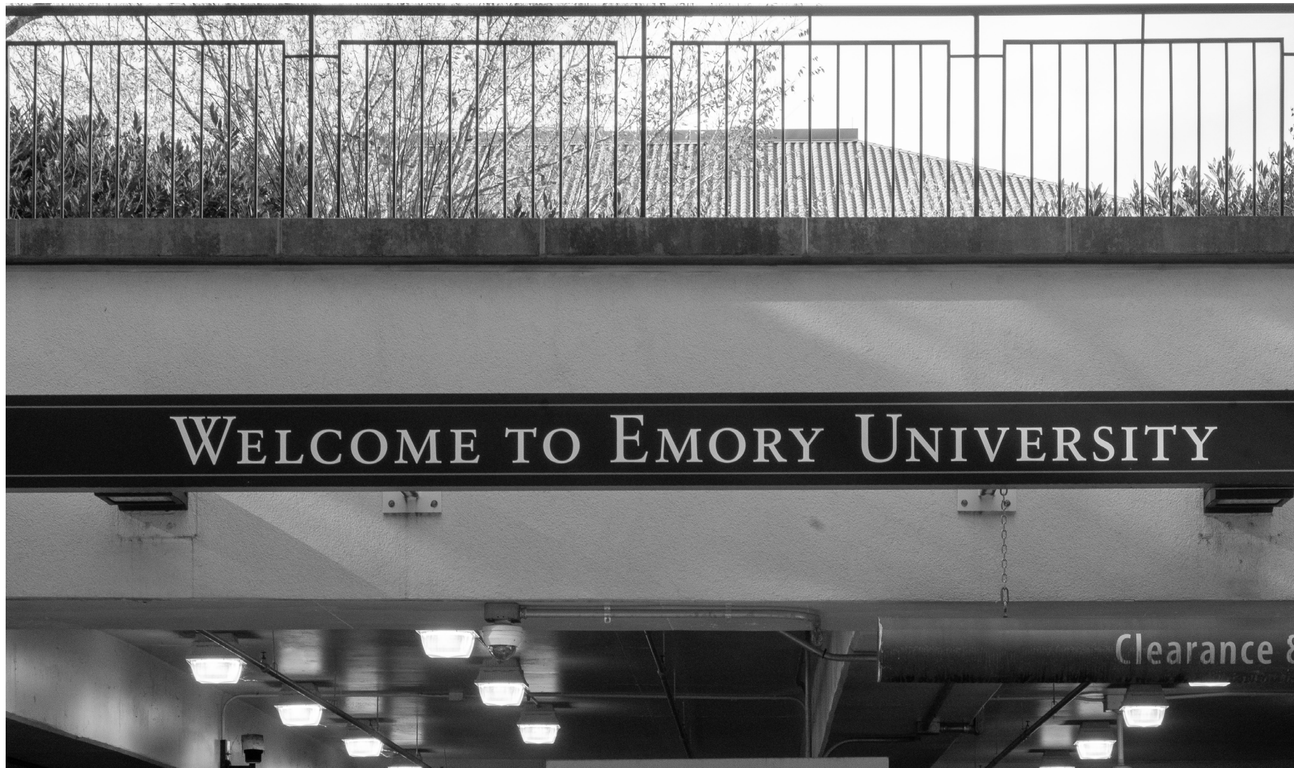
This pressure to watch and be watched has developed into a dangerous engagement and participation in surveillance. As I stated earlier, surveillance comes not only from those in positions of power. Rather, we contribute to being perpetually monitored. In the case of photo-sharing platforms, there is not one Big Brother, but all participants act as little brothers as we are invited to watch each other, to judge each other, and to expose oneself to each other.

The photo-sharing emphasis of social media requires us to expose our own private information and promises us community engagement and connection from viewing others' private lives. The ubiquitous use of mobile devices has led to a decisive shift in the production and viewing of images with both benefits and risks for users. The greatest risk being an unavoidable loss of privacy. However, the extent of that privacy loss is still in your hands.

The experience of exchanging personal information through photographs is valued and expected online. In this interaction, users are aware of the threat to their privacy. Yet, user concerns are often outweighed by the perceived "social" benefits, the fascination with seeing and being seen, and the sense that online interactions are highly meaningful and foster community.

I urge you to consider what aspects of genuine community are lost by prioritizing online interaction and what costs you pay by openly allowing yourself to be watched and tracked online (and hoping others do the same).

***





My purpose of photographing and writing this work is not to argue that surveillance in public and residential spaces is without benefits. The advantages of turning the surveillant gaze back on people in power as a form of resistance, the convenience of biometric data collection, and the assistance of CCTV footage in criminal investigations are all well documented benefits of the present surveillance state.

Yet, by focusing only on the positive aspects of surveillance culture and ignoring the dangers of sacrificing individual anonymity and privacy for the perception of safety, we risk mindlessly adopting participatory surveillance measures and normalizing the paranoia of average people by participating in our own violation of privacy through online interactions.

Though we feel the pressure always to see and be seen, we are paradoxically distracted from the constant presence of surveillance cameras in public spaces as well as residential areas. The boundaries between private and public spaces have become blurred, and in the age of digital photography and digital surveillance, we are compelled simultaneously to act as watchers and watched.

Through reading the images and text of this book, I invite you to think twice about installing a security camera on your front door, to consider the limits of what you are willing to sacrifice in the name of public safety, and to pay greater attention to the unobtrusive/intrusive surveillance devices that you'll begin notice nearly everywhere when you decide to see them as they see you.

***

References

Ahlberg, Jörgen. “Visualization Techniques for Surveillance: Visualizing What Cannot Be Seen and Hiding What Should Not Be Seen.” Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/Journal of Art History, vol. 84, no. 2, Apr. 2015, pp. 123–38. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1080/00233609.2015.1019921.

Andrejevic, Mark. “The Work of Watching One Another: Lateral Surveillance, Risk, and Governance.” Surveillance & Society, vol. 2, no. 4, 2004. ojs.library.queensu.ca, https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v2i4.3359.

Azoulay, Ariella. The Civil Contract of Photography. Zone Books, 2008.

Fassman, Jon. We See It All: Liberty and Justice in an Age of Perpetual Surveillance. 1st ed., PublicAffairs, 2021.

Finn, Jonathan. “Seeing Surveillantly: Surveillance as Social Practice.” Eyes Everywhere: The Global Growth of Camera Surveillance, 2013, p. 15.

Herida, Magid, et al. “Economic Evaluations of Public Health Surveillance Systems: A Systematic Review.” The European Journal of Public Health, vol. 26, no. 4, Aug. 2016, pp. 674–80. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckv250.

Lasén, Amparo, and Edgar Gómez-Cruz. “Digital Photography and Picture Sharing: Redefining the Public/Private Divide.” Knowledge, Technology & Policy, vol. 22, no. 3, Sept. 2009, pp. 205–15. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1007/s12130-009-9086-8.

Legislatures Require Police Body Camera Use Statewide. https://www.ncsl.org/research/civil-and-criminal-justice/legislatures-require-police-body-camera-use-statewide-magazine2021.aspx. Accessed 27 Feb. 2022.

McCarthy, Anna. Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space. Duke University Press, 2001.

Nicas, Jack, and Katie Benner. “F.B.I. Asks Apple to Help Unlock Two IPhones.” The New York Times, 7 Jan. 2020. NYTimes.com, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/07/technology/apple-fbi-iphone-encryption.html.

Prins, Esther. “Participatory Photography: A Tool for Empowerment or Surveillance?” Action Research, vol. 8, no. 4, Dec. 2010, pp. 426–43. SAGE Journals, https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750310374502.

Ram, Natalie, and David Gray. “Mass Surveillance in the Age of COVID-19.” Journal of Law and the Biosciences, vol. 7, no. 1, July 2020, p. lsaa023. Silverchair, https://doi.org/10.1093/jlb/lsaa023.

Rappeport, Alan. “I.R.S. Will Allow Taxpayers to Forgo Facial Recognition Amid Blowback.” The New York Times, 21 Feb. 2022. NYTimes.com, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/us/politics/irs-facial-recognition.html.

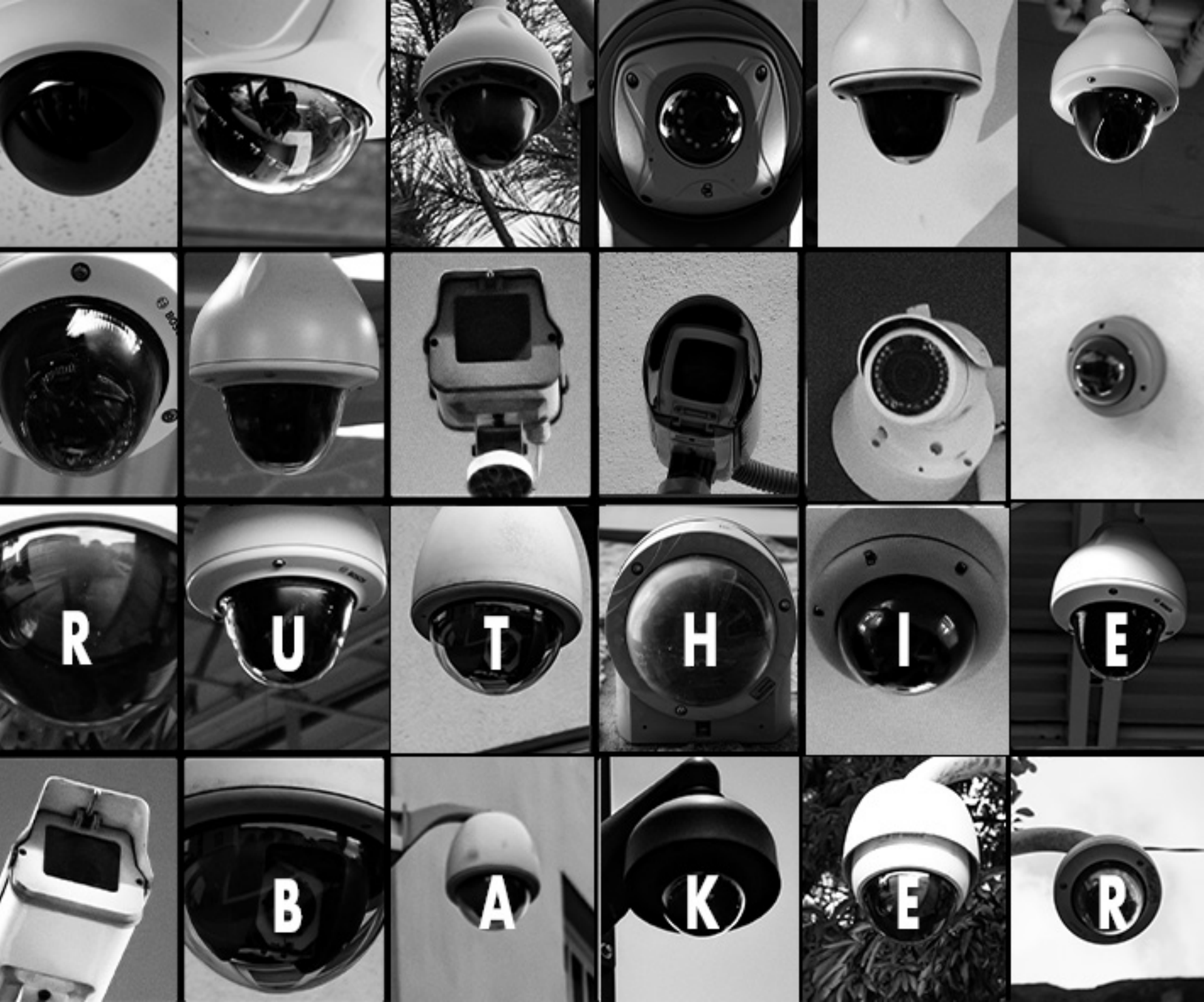
“Research on Body-Worn Cameras and Law Enforcement.” National Institute of Justice, https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/research-body-worn-cameras-and-law-enforcement. Accessed 27 Feb. 2022.

Serafinelli, Elisa, and Andrew Cox. “‘Privacy Does Not Interest Me’. A Comparative Analysis of Photo Sharing on Instagram and Blipfoto.” Visual Studies, vol. 34, no. 1, Jan. 2019, pp. 67–78. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2019.1621194.

“Share of People with IPhone in the US.” Statista, https://www.statista.com/statistics/236550/percentage-of-us-population-that-own-a-iphone-smartphone/. Accessed 8 Mar. 2022.

Wolthers, Louise, et al. Watched! Surveillance, Art, & Photography. Verlag der Buchhandlung, 2016.


PELCO
BOSCH
BOSCH


RUTH
BAKER