

**Surveillance and Spectacle in Webcam-based Artworks:
Eyes of Laura by Janet Cardiff and *Homecammers – Women* by Cheryl Sourkes**

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ABSTRACT

Surveillance and Spectacle in Webcam-based Artworks:
Eyes of Laura by Janet Cardiff and *Homecammers – Women* Cheryl Sourkes

Dina Vescio

This thesis investigates two webcam-based artworks by Canadian artists Janet Cardiff (b. 1957) and Cheryl Sourkes (b. 1945), arguing that these new media artworks bring forward a consideration of the ways in which Michel Foucault's notion of the 'surveillance society' and Guy Debord's concept of the 'society of the spectacle' co-exist within digital society. Drawing from surveillance, media and feminist studies, the thesis briefly outlines the history of webcam use in contemporary art and provides reasons which support digital society's appeal toward webcam imagery. It then discusses Cardiff's *Eyes of Laura* (2002–2004) in connection with notions of public space spectatorship and theories of film noir, the 'flâneur(euse)' and the Panopticon. This is followed by an examination of Sourkes' *Homecammers – Women* (2006) in relation to notions of private space spectatorship and theories of the 'cam girl' and the Synopticon. I argue in both analyses, and through their comparison, how each instigates an institutional critique in their own way at the same time that they call upon spectators to consider the co-existence of surveillance and spectacle in digital society.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital Society and Surveillance

Now more than ever, we are under surveillance.¹

The rapid expansion of digital technology in the Information Age has led high-tech devices such as handheld PDAs (personal digital assistants), personal computers, laptops, wireless telephones and the cameras embedded within them, mobile audio devices, GPSs (global positioning systems) and video games to play significant roles in social communicative experiences. The Internet is situated at the core of these experiences, as a tool which fulfills digital society's growing demand – fueled by commercial capitalism – for real-time knowledge, entertainment and data exchange.²

The global widespread of the Internet has also facilitated the omnipresence of surveillance. Digital society is dominated by CCTV (closed-circuit television) surveillance cameras and intrigued by webcams.³ Surveillance technologies allow individuals to gaze upon the public spheres of urban and rural landscapes and the private lives of people. Digital society is also surrounded by surveillance-based or themed forms of popular culture – from films such as *The Truman Show* (1998) and *Eagle Eye* (2008),

¹ Thomas Y. Levin, Ursula Frohne, and Peter Weibel, eds., CTRL [SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother (ZMK / Center for Art and Media: Karlsruhe, Germany; Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002) 10.

² The term 'digital society' is used throughout this thesis to designate groups of people living in the Information Age – also known as the Digital Age – where digital media and technologies dominate and lead daily life. Bruce Wands, *Art of the Digital Age* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006) 8.

³ In February 2007 for example, CBC News reported that more than four million CCTV security cameras were installed in London, England. Individuals may therefore be 'caught on camera' approximately 300 times a day.

to reality television shows like *Big Brother*, and personal webcam websites and search engines including *AnaCam* and *EarthCam*.⁴

This thesis aims to support my argument which recognizes *Eyes of Laura* (2002–2004) and *Homecammers – Women* (2006) by Canadian artists Janet Cardiff (b. 1957) and Cheryl Sourkes (b. 1945) as artworks that bring forward a consideration of the ways in which the ‘surveillance society’ – introduced by French intellectual Michel Foucault – and the ‘society of the spectacle’ – broached by French writer and filmmaker Guy Debord – co-exist within digital society, merging panoptic and synoptic principals. This thesis seeks to analyze these new media webcam-based artworks to demonstrate new media critic and curator Peter Weibel’s formulation that the perception of surveillance traditionally thought of as intimidating has shifted in the twenty-first century to an understanding of surveillance as a source of “amusement, liberation and pleasure,” enthusiastically enjoyed by many.⁵

Developed in the early 1990s, the webcam is a digital camera characterized by its ability to capture real-time images, subsequently transmitted globally via the Internet. As a form of surveillance technology, the webcam allows multiple users to view live footage simultaneously from different geographical locations. Most theoretical sources on webcam-based practices start by acknowledging its most prominent initial use in 1996 by American college student Jennifer Kaye Ringley, who became an online celebrity for seven years when she made constant uncensored images of day-to-day happenings occurring in the private space of her college dormitory and later apartment, accessible to

⁴ Since its inception in 1996, *EarthCam* is a network which offers the most comprehensive search engine of live webcams from around the world.

⁵ Peter Weibel, “Pleasure and the Panoptic Principal,” *CTRL [SPACE]*, ed. Levin, et al., 215, 219.

web-surfers via a webcam on her website *JenniCam...life, online...* (1996–2003) (fig. 1).⁶ Since then, many individuals have incorporated the webcam as an artistic medium in which to capture, for the most part, mundane, transitional images within private and public environments. For example, since 1997 American artist Ana Clara Voog's website *Anacam* – showcased in exhibitions hosted by the Museum of Modern Art, the Walker Art Center and the Weisman Art Museum – has broadcast her daily domestic activities and artistic performances 24 hours a day live from her home in Minnesota, providing users with the opportunity to observe her everyday life. In his solo exhibition *2001* at Postmaster's Gallery in New York City, German artist Wolfgang Staehle, supplied visitors with global views for a 30-day period through three video projections in which live images were transmitted from webcams observing the Comburg monastery in Stuttgart, Germany, the Fernsehturm (a television tower) and Alexanderplatz (a large public square) in Berlin, Germany, as well as a panoramic view of lower Manhattan, famously capturing in real-time the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center/Twin Towers (fig. 2).

The authenticity of webcam imagery – the fact that it is displayed live and in real-time – generates a keen interest in digital society. According to digital media artist and educator Brooke A. Knight:

The webcam is remarkable because it presents the familiar, and in that presentation, asks us to question what we find so fascinating. Is it the

⁶ This was the first highly publicized use of a webcam to watch human life. The first webcam to be conceived however was the 'coffee cam'. Created in 1991 by Cambridge University computer scientist, Quentin Stafford-Fraser, the webcam documented the Trojan room coffee pot of the Systems Group at the University of Cambridge Computer Lab. A camera pointed toward a coffee machine, which was wired to the computing staff's network and publicly viewed, prevented wasted trips to an empty pot. The image was uploaded three times per minute and streamed for 10 years. Due to the fact that in 2001, the Computer Lab relocated from the Trojan room to a new building in West Cambridge, the 'coffee cam' retired. Quentin Stafford-Fraser, "The Life and Times of the First Webcam," *Communications of the ACM* 44:7 (Jul. 2001): 25-26.

obstinate consistency of it all; the predictable daily cycle; the endless refreshing of the image; the domesticity of the setting; or the candid, unmediated body? Privacy becomes publicity, and the performance is the never-ending nonevent.⁷

What sometimes occurs within the deeply banal and slow-paced images – the intimate displays of nudity and sexual activity as well as the birth of her first child in Voog's artwork, and the traumatic 9/11 attacks captured in Staehle's – are spectacular and mesmerizing events; the unpredictability of predictability finds digital society watching and waiting.

Surveillance has become an everyday aspect of contemporary living. This thesis examines the motivation behind digital society's appeal toward watching through case studies of *Eyes of Laura* and *Homecamers - Women*. It proposes that these two artworks support digital society as a culture which consists of panopticism and synopticism; a combination of Foucault's 'surveillance society' and Debord's 'society of the spectacle'.

Historical Overview of Surveillance and Surveillance Art

There is an extensive amount of scholarship on the history of contemporary surveillance and societies living under surveillance. Most frequently cite one of two references as their starting point: the Panopticon, a 1791 concept in prison architecture designed by English philosopher of law, Jeremy Bentham; and the novel 1984 (1949) by English author George Orwell.⁸

⁷ Brooke A. Knight, "Watch Me! Webcams and the Public Exposure of Private Lives," *Art Journal* 59:4 (Winter 2000): 25.

⁸ The Panopticon design formed the blue print of many nineteenth century prisons, including Canada's oldest, the Kingston Penitentiary, constructed from 1833-1834. Inmates could potentially be surveyed at all times by guards located in an 'inspection lodge' in the center of a semi-circular building; the perimeter was formed of cells. Control was maintained by prisoners' paranoia that they were watched by unseen eyes. David Lyon, *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1994) 62-63.

Though Bentham's penitentiary model struggled to be accepted by governmental authorities, it was admired by Foucault, whose book Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1977) situated the Panopticon at the helm of modernity's new social order.⁹ Instead of the public display of physical punishment as a method of social control, the Panopticon principal emphasized prisoner isolation and privatized monitoring as an improved disciplinary means. For Foucault, panopticism was a coercive yet effective alternative to violent acts, although it still nevertheless was "a cruel, ingenious cage," that induced "in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power," and regulated the individual's social behaviour.¹⁰

With the emergence of the industrial revolution and the city, Foucault proposed the Panopticon not only as a model for the operation of power within the prison system, but also as "a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men."¹¹ As panoptic features – minus its architectural structure – extended throughout modernist society, Foucault believed that factories, schools and hospitals all resembled the Panopticon in their specified regimes of examination, classification and individualized observation.¹² He argued that the integration of panoptic principals into any institution as a generalized model of functioning increased public morality as well as developed and strengthened social economic forces.¹³

⁹ David Lyon discusses the rejection of Bentham's plans by both British and French governments in his article, "Bentham's Panopticon: From Moral Architecture to Electronic Surveillance," Queen's Quarterly 98:3 (Fall 1991): 597, 600.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alain Sheridan, 1977 (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 201-202, 205.

¹¹ Kevin D. Haggerty, "Tear Down the Walls: On Demolishing the Panopticon," Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond ed. David Lyon (Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing, 2006) 25; and Foucault, 205.

¹² Lyon, "Bentham's Panopticon," 604, 607.

¹³ Foucault, 206, 208.

Foucault's formulation considers the public domain a 'surveillance society' – where everyday life is controlled by a constant, inspecting gaze.¹⁴ This authoritative, omnipresent gaze however, sparks a sense of anxiety in some individuals. Contrary to Bentham's proposition of the Panopticon penitentiary as "a utopian project for curing a number of social ills," Orwell's science-fiction novel 1984 portrays life in a panoptical society as a dystopian, repressive and totalitarian regime.¹⁵ In the book, the protagonist Winston Smith and the rest of the populace, live publicly and privately under permanent surveillance of the ruling 'Inner Party' and its leader 'Big Brother' via telescreens. 1984 depicts a society where a governing party seeking power increasingly invades individuals' rights by means of surveillance strategies. In this society, citizens are stripped of their individuality:

Never again will you be capable of human feeling. Everything will be dead inside you. Never again will you be capable of love, or friendship, or joy of living, or laughter, or curiosity, or courage, or integrity. You will be hollow. We shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves.¹⁶

Panoptical ideals and Orwellian critiques of them generate a two-sided equation of surveillance. On the one hand, this equation signals a positive effect: its consistent watch over society safeguards individuals from threats of violence and terrorism. According to Stephen Green of the London School of Economics and Political Sciences, "a watchful eye can be a reassuring, rights-protecting force for the majority of citizens."¹⁷ On the other hand, according to surveillance theorist David Lyon, for some, 'Big Brother'

¹⁴ Stephen Green, "A Plague on the Panopticon: Surveillance and Power in the Global Information Economy," Information, Communication & Society 2:1 (Spring, 1999): 30.

¹⁵ Lyon, The Electronic Eye 201; and Haggerty, 25.

¹⁶ George Orwell, 1984 1949 (New York: Plume, 2003) 265.

¹⁷ Green, 31.

and the Panopticon highlight what is negative and undesirable about surveillance: a system that is perceived as an invasion of individual privacy, autonomy and dignity.¹⁸

Panoptic ideology has been incorporated into most government institutions; electronic surveillance techniques are used as disciplinary mechanisms of social regulation. The permeation of surveillance technologies, their effects on society, and the multiple viewpoints they generate has led numerous contemporary video, performance and new media artists to present, analyze, and critique surveillance systems as the focal point of their artworks. A major exhibition, *CTRL [SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother* held at Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Germany from October 13, 2001 to February 24, 2002, showcased hundreds of important established and emerging international artists exploring various notions of surveillance.¹⁹ For example, American artist Bruce Nauman's innovative surveillance artworks, *Live-Taped Video Corridor* (1970) and *Video Surveillance Piece: Public Room, Private Room* (1969-1970) were included in this exhibition (figs. 3 & 4).²⁰ Nauman is well known for his work among a group of installation artists that embraced and experimented with the new medium of hand-held video technology between 1968 and 1975. Within the public space of the museum, these installations incorporate real-time and pre-recorded video footage of their visitors captured by surveillance cameras and

¹⁸ Lyon, *The Electronic Eye* 203.

¹⁹ 'CTRL [SPACE]' refers to the combination of computer keys that commands Photoshop software to 'zoom in' on an image. Recently, several exhibitions have taken place on the theme of surveillance, including *Good Morning Paranoia*, Galerie Motte et Rouart in Paris, France from March 26-April 26, 2008, see Judicael Lavrador, "Good Morning Paranoia" *Beaux Arts Mag* 286 (April 2008): 143; *Global Privacy*, Galerie 13 Sévigné in Paris, France in April 2007, see Manou Farine, "Sociétés de controle" *L'oeil* 590 (April 2007): 36; and *Conspiracy Dwellings*, Kunsthaus in Erfurt, Germany from September 28-November 16, 2007 and South Hill Park Art Centre, Bracknell, United Kingdom from December 1, 2007-January 20, 2008, see Mark Haworth-Booth, "Conspiracy Dwellings" *Aperture* 192 (Fall 2008): 84-85; and Michael Rush, "Security Art" *Performing Arts Journal* (January 2004): 114.

²⁰ In 1965 Sony introduced the Portapak: a portable video recording device.

displayed on monitors in a corridor and adjacent rooms, respectively; they provoke audience participation as visitors watch and are watched, evoke de-centered and de-synchronized perceptions and challenge notions of in/accessibility of public and private space. According to curator and media theorist Chrissie Iles, Nauman's use of video surveillance technology is most exciting because, "in contrast to film, the instant, real-time quality of the new video technology [...] presented, for the first time, the possibility of observing human behaviour as it occurred [...]"²¹ This feature led Nauman to adopt surveillance cameras not only to monitor others, but to also introduce the concept of self-surveillance: he recorded durational performances of his own mundane daily activities within the private space of his studio. "Nauman's studio activities conceptually mirror those of anyone's everyday life – the vital yet often pointless rituals that simultaneously impart and are assigned meaning and give shape to time," indicates curator Susan Cross.²² As the target of surveillance in his series of 60 minute videotapes including *Slow Angle Walk* (1968) and *Pacing Upside Down* (1969), Nauman's use of experimental techniques which invite the museum visitor to watch him, represent the functioning principals of the personal webcam, invented decades later (figs. 5 & 6).

Recent surveillance artworks which confront and resist the negative aspects of its intruding presence were also included in the exhibition; for example, documentation of *George Orwell's 1984* (1998), a five minute performance artwork based on the novel by

²¹ Chrissie Iles, "Video and Film Space," *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, ed. Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 253.

²² Susan Cross, *Bruce Nauman: Theaters of Experience* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2003) 14.

a group of New York City artists known as the Surveillance Camera Players (fig. 7).²³ Since 1996 this group of performers co-founded by Bill Brown and Susan Hull, have invaded the view of public security cameras on subway platforms and street corners, directing communication – using poster boards to convey dialogue – from the surveyed to the surveyors: the guards and governmental officers monitoring the cameras. Though it is possible that no one may be watching at any specific moment in time, performers re-enact short and silent scenes from plays, poems and books.²⁴ According to sociology scholar Gary Genosko, these guerrilla street performances are produced as community activism, critiquing “the diminishment of privacy and personal freedom in the Information Age,” of a society under surveillance.²⁵

The research and examples given above exemplify Lyon’s argument that surveillance has two faces.²⁶ On the one hand, surveillance can be situated as an oppressive and controlling entity, recognized as an intimidating governmental presence of power that invades individual privacy. On the other hand, surveillance acts as a disciplinary mechanism of social regulation, protecting innocent individuals from threats of crime. While I agree with Lyon, I propose, drawing from literature by Weibel, that digital society’s consideration of surveillance evokes a third aspect: the ‘pleasure principal’.²⁷ Postmodernity’s accelerated dependence on and appreciation of the image – a dominant presence within digital society manifest in the increasing popularity of

²³ For documentation, see performance recorded on November 9, 1998 at Seventh Avenue and 14th Street subway station in Manhattan, New York City: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RILT18mxEnE>>. See also: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COS0OonwRx4>>, filmed as a podcast in 2001 but never streamed. Surveillance Camera Players also participate in countries such as Colombia, England, Germany and Lithuania.

²⁴ Gary Genosko, “The Art of Surveillance,” *Border Crossings* 19:1 (2000): 14.

²⁵ Genosko, 13.

²⁶ David Lyon, *Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life* (Buckingham: Open University, 2001) 3.

²⁷ Weibel, “Pleasure and the Panoptic Principal,” 208, 218, 219.

webcams, the proliferation of real-time and live broadcasting, and the global success of reality tv – has shifted Foucault’s ‘surveillance society’ to include the ‘society of the spectacle’, established by Debord.²⁸ In this society, visual observation is still a prominent aspect, however monitoring is decentralized; multitudes of surveillance cameras and webcams are employed by various individuals within public and private spheres, facilitating the spectatorship of, for example, weather and traffic conditions of urban centers as well as anonymous people’s revealing moments within their domestic environments. According to by communications and law theorist Clay Calvert, as a source of entertainment surveillance helps “to shape a person’s sense of self or individual identity; [...] to learn values and self-understanding, or alternatively, to reinforce or solidify preexisting values:” a new means of social discipline.²⁹ This follows Debord’s formulation of the spectacle as an ideological discourse that digital society pursues: “a sort of diplomatic representative of hierarchical society.”³⁰ Although his discussion of the ‘society of the spectacle’ is primarily negative in tone toward commoditization and consumerism, he still accepts it as society’s fate. Debord writes:

The spectacle appears at once as society itself, as a part of society and as a means of unification. [...] The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images. The spectacle cannot be understood [...] as a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images. It is [...] a world view transformed into an objective force.³¹

²⁸ In “The Viewer Society: Michel Foucault’s Panopticon Revisited,” *Theoretical Criminology* 1:2 (1997) Thomas Mathiesen criticizes Foucault for overlooking the relationship between society, surveillance and the mass media; and Levin, et al., 11.

²⁹ Clay Calvert, *Voyeur Nation: Media, Privacy and Peering in Modern Culture* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000) 58.

³⁰ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* 1st Paperback Edition, 1967 (New York: Zone Books, 1995) 18-19.

³¹ Debord, 12-13.

The growth of surveillance has led to its cessation as intimidating and embracement as pleasurable. Drawing from theories based on the Panopticon and Synopticon, this study brings forth a discourse that reveals the ways in which the webcam offers and enables digital society the possibility to watch, determines reasons for desired spectatorship, and provides explanations that support the activity of surveillance as entertaining.

Outline of Chapters

This thesis is made up of three parts. Chapter 1 draws from theories based on Foucault's ideology of the 'surveillance society' – centered on the Panopticon – to discuss notions of public space spectatorship through a case study of *Eyes of Laura* (2002–2004), a new media webcam-based artwork by Canadian artist Janet Cardiff (fig. 8). In relation to the artwork, my analysis considers theories of film noir and notions of the *flâneur(euse)*, providing three reasons which support digital society's interest in watching.

Chapter 2 critically examines the new media artwork *Homecammers – Women* (2006) by Canadian artist Cheryl Sourkes (fig. 9). Centrally rooted in theories based on Debord's concept of the 'society of the spectacle' – focused on the Synopticon – it provides a second case study to reveal notions of private space spectatorship while acknowledging theories of photography and notions of the 'cam girl', presenting two reasons that maintain digital society's fascination with watching.

My third and final chapter provides a comparison of *Eyes of Laura* and *Homecammers – Women*. It employs theories of institutional critique to examine how these two new media artworks defy institutional boundaries. It also exposes the thesis of

this study which demonstrates an ideology that merges Foucault and Debord's societies of surveillance and spectacle to form one which currently characterizes digital society.

The research for this thesis draws from multiple sources. My consideration of surveillance studies is primarily based on Michel Foucault's Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1977), the writings of David Lyon including his article "Bentham's Panopticon: From Moral Architecture to Electronic Surveillance," featured in Queen's Quarterly (1991), his books The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society (1994) and Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life (2001) and his edited anthology Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond (2006), as well as various texts within the electronic scholarly journal Surveillance & Society.³² From the discipline of art history, my reflection regarding the past and present background of surveillance art relies on the extensive exhibition catalogue CTRL [SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother (2002) edited by Thomas Y. Levin, Ursula Frohne and Peter Weibel. From the fields of communications and media studies regarding notions of the spectacle within digital society, I draw from discussions raised in Society of the Spectacle (1967) by Guy Debord and Peter Weibel's chapter "Pleasure and the Panoptic Principal," also in CTRL [SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother. My analysis of webcam-based artistic practice as a form of institutional critique draws from the writings of Adjunct Curator of New Media Arts at the Whitney Museum of American Art Christiane Paul, including her chapter "New Media Art and Institutional Critique: Networks vs. Institutions," in Institutional Critique & After (2006), edited by

³² To access Surveillance & Society, go to: <<http://www.surveillance-and-society.org/ojs/index.php/journal/index>>.

John C. Welchman and her article “Challenges for a Ubiquitous Museum: Presenting and Preserving New Media,” in the electronic journal NEME (2007).

In addition to these conventional sources, I examined periodicals, exhibition catalogues such as Janet Cardiff: Eyes of Laura Mars (2005) and Cheryl Sourkes: Public Camera (2007), and primary sources including archival files from the *Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal*, the Vancouver Art Gallery and Artex. Informal conversations and email correspondence with Cardiff, Sourkes and several museum professionals, based on the artists and their artworks, also provided valuable information toward this thesis.

CHAPTER 1

Spectatorship of Public Space: Janet Cardiff's *Eyes of Laura*

This chapter provides a reading of the new media artwork *Eyes of Laura* (2002–2004) by Janet Cardiff.³³ My analysis discusses notions of surveillance that focus on webcam spectatorship toward public space. Through this examination, *Eyes of Laura* offers three reasons which support digital society's interest in watching namely 1) the ability to create narratives; 2) the ability to acquire agency through role reversal; and 3) the ability to defy geographical distances. Elaborating on film noir techniques and the notion of the 'flâneur(euse)', this chapter draws from theories originating in film, urban, Internet, feminist, media and surveillance studies.

Electronic surveillance is a central and pervasive feature of social life.³⁴ According to Lyon, the influential idea of the Panopticon has sustained itself by monitoring the everyday public lives of individuals through electronic technology, resulting in society itself to be perceived as a panoptic prison.³⁵ Panopticism can therefore be viewed as a prototype for electronic surveillance. Though panoptic principals were invented almost 200 years before video surveillance technology, in Finnish urban geographer and surveillance theorist Hille Koskela's formulation, both techniques of

³³ Janet Cardiff (b. 1957, Brussels, Ontario) presently lives and works in Berlin, Germany and Kelowna, British Columbia. Cardiff obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Queen's University and a Master of Visual Arts from the University of Alberta. Her current artistic practice incorporates video, film, sculpture, sound and the Internet, evoking themes of temporality, fiction and reality, voyeuristic fantasies and narratives of suspense. She collaborates with her husband George Bures Miller; they represented Canada at the Venice Biennale in 2001.

³⁴ Lyon, *The Electronic Eye* 24.

³⁵ Lyon, "Bentham's Panopticon," 596.

observation rest on similar principals: “to be seen but never to know when or by whom.”³⁶

Koskela argues however, that the widespread of CCTV – employed by governmental presences to observe public space – is a bias:

Surveillance systems are presented as ‘closed’ but, eventually, are quite the opposite. In the age of collective imagination, televisualisation and cyberspace distribution, surveillance systems end up being, rather than a closed circuit television, an ‘open circuit television’ – OCTV.³⁷

Digital technologies such as the webcam and the Internet have transformed conventional politics of spectatorship, enabling individual public sphere observation. Webcam websites provide live access to and global reach of everyday life within urban built environments. The user’s ability to control the webcam online has contributed to a new perception toward surveillance: watching as amusement.

According to digital media scholar Sheila Murphy, even though nothing materializes on a regular basis, users are still attracted to this phenomenon: “I find the webcam views of empty spaces especially interesting in their very lack of compelling content or activity.”³⁸ Individuals usually experience the slow passage of time, waiting with hope for something – something *more* – to happen in the online webcam imagery. In fact, this entertaining pastime is a common activity to relieve individual boredom.

What seems like an odd leisurely hobby, has themed numerous texts based on surveillance and webcam culture. Writer and television producer Simon Firth states, “In their banality, these sites are offering us a new and unfamiliar aesthetic – one that is, like

³⁶ Hille Koskela, “‘The Gaze Without Eyes’: Video-Surveillance and the Changing Nature of Urban Space,” *Progress in Human Geography* 24:2 (2000): 243.

³⁷ Hille Koskela, “‘Cam Era’ – The Contemporary Urban Panopticon,” *Surveillance & Society* 1:3 (2003): 305-306.

³⁸ Sheila Murphy, “Lurking and Looking: Webcams and the Construction of Cybervisuality,” *Moving Images: From Edison to the Webcam*, ed. John Fullerton and Astrid Söderbergh Widding (Sydney, Australia: John Libbey & Company, 2000) 174.

all interesting art, visually fascinating, disconcertingly erotic and a provocative reflection of ourselves.”³⁹ Artists have also been inspired, presenting audiences the opportunity to observe webcam imagery, including Janet Cardiff with her webcam-based artwork *Eyes of Laura*. This chapter provides a description of the artwork based on viewer reception, followed by interpretations of the artwork informed by film, urban, Internet, feminist, media and surveillance studies.

Eyes of Laura

Resembling a personal website, www.eyesoflaura.org consists of two major elements: a blog and a webcam. The blog combines daily journal entries with audio and video clips. On Day 1, the blogger introduces herself to her online audience:

My name is Laura. I’m tall with reddish-blond hair. I’ve lived in Vancouver for 10 years working as a security guard. I’m waiting for something to happen in my life.⁴⁰

As she observes the happenings of Robson Square – located at the corner of Howe and Robson Streets in downtown Vancouver – via surveillance camera situated on the Vancouver Art Gallery’s rooftop, Laura illicitly distributes the information she acquires through blog posts over a 253 day period. A series of scattered narratives unfolds for her readers, generating an atmosphere of intertwining dramatic suspense and bizarre comedy. The user-controllable live webcam transmits real-time images of Robson Square and its vicinity to the website by means of the Internet. The spectator may log on and access a panoramic view of the Gallery’s public grounds at three minutes intervals, anytime. This is the same surveillance camera in fact, that acts as Laura’s omnipresent eye over

³⁹ Simon Firth, “Live! From My Bedroom,” *Salon* 21 (1998).

⁴⁰ Janet Cardiff, *Eyes of Laura* Day 1, Voice Message <<http://www.eyesoflaura.org>>.

Vancouver's urban landscape; that which she depends on for the subject matter of her blog entries.

Early visits to the website catch users by surprise; they are amazed by Laura's willingness to risk losing her job in several ways. Without the consent of her employer, Laura: 1) disregards the surveillance camera's professional purpose by employing it for personal usage; 2) blogs about confidential matters pertaining to her place of employment; 3) turns the surveillance camera into a webcam, transmitting its images globally via the Internet; and 4) occupies her time at work with personal activities, such as blogging and updating her website. Concerns about the stability of Laura's job are valid, as several professionals have been fired for statements made within their blogs.⁴¹ Aware of the liability of her actions, on Day 46 Laura posts: "Here's a picture of my boss coming into work. He'd kill me if he knew I was doing this!"⁴²

As time goes on, continuous visits to the website prompt different concerns: a sense of ambiguity leaves its intention and purpose questionable to users. Personal websites commonly include sidebars which provide biographical information, such as the 'About Me' section, and a list of various interesting blogs shared by the blogger. Another key aspect of a blog is its interactive format, where readers have the ability to leave comments based on postings.⁴³ This website lacks all three of these elements. Users start to doubt the truthfulness and sincerity of this website when they notice other cues beginning to surface.

⁴¹ Delta Air Lines fired flight attendant, Ellen Simonetti for her blog postings on the website [Queen of Sky: Diary of a Flight Attendant](#). She subsequently published the book, [Diary of a Dysfunctional Flight Attendant: The Queen of Sky Blog](#) in 2006. For more information, see <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3974081.stm>>.

⁴² Cardiff, Day 46, Blog Posting.

⁴³ For participants who would like to email Laura but do not necessarily want a response, Laura provides the address: me@eyesoflaura.org.

“Sometimes I wonder whether more happens because I’m watching or whether events line themselves up for my benefit or something,” writes Laura in her blog.⁴⁴ Entertainment reporter for the *Toronto Star*, Murray Whyte similarly questions Laura’s video blog which, “always seems a little more active than the camera you control.”⁴⁵ He is right: Laura regularly shows a variety of amusing video sequences, including chalk markings on the pavement and couples flirting; she blogs about diverse topics, from her love life to clues surrounding a potential murder. When users look through the webcam, the daily activities of people walking up the exterior stairs to the Gallery or eating lunch while sitting on benches seem to be the most exciting events spotted. At the same time, a user may notice a very interesting twist to the webcam: another surveillance camera sits directly above it. In fact, Laura blatantly shows us the positioning of her camera below the Gallery’s actual surveillance camera, in two photographs posted on Day 163 (figs. 10a & 10b). This leads the viewer to question whether the context of this website is real or staged: are Laura’s blog postings truthful responses to what she witnesses on a periodic basis or are they scripted narratives providing spectators with film-like sequences to be observed? Whyte suggests – and journalist Sarah Boxer agrees – Laura’s “voice is an easy first clue,” to the realization that this website is “a mixture of documentary film, fictitious blog and murder mystery,” created by Janet Cardiff.⁴⁶

Recognizable to patrons of her practice, the “low, insistent tone” of voice heard throughout the website also animates Cardiff’s signature artworks: her audio and video

⁴⁴ Cardiff, Day 1, Blog Posting.

⁴⁵ Murray Whyte, “Every Breathe You Take, She’ll Be Watching You,” *Toronto Star* 23 Jul. 2005: H8.

⁴⁶ Whyte, H8; Clint Burnham, “Here’s Looking at You, The Art of Surveillance,” *Vancouver Sun* 14-20 Dec. 2006: D17; and Sarah Boxer, “When Seeing is Not Always Believing,” *New York Times* 11 Jul. 2005: B3.

walks.⁴⁷ Since 1991, Cardiff has created site-specific perambulatory artworks which frequently transpire outside institutional settings and within quiet and remote contexts such as gardens, forests or underground parking garages. Similar to a museum audio guide, portable audio technology featuring Cardiff's soft-spoken voice instructs the individual's experience of the artwork, allowing for intimate and participatory spectatorship. Pre-recorded background noises mimic the listener's actual physical space; narrative elements instil a desire in the participant to continue the walk.⁴⁸ While Cardiff's first walk was created in Banff, subsequent walks over the years have been produced for international institutions in London, Montreal, New York, Rome, Sao Paulo, Washington D.C., etc. Commissioned by the Culture Department of Jena, Germany, her most recent audio walk, *Jena Walk (Memory Field)* (2006) takes participants on a journey over a rural landscape where Russian tanks engaged in military exercises and the battle between the Prussians and Napoleon took place 200 years ago.⁴⁹ Audio effects include battle sounds – cannons, muskets and horses galloping by – and excerpts from Goethe painter, Louise Seidler's diary entries. From physical to psychological states of consciousness, the listener's perception of time slips from one century to another.

Cardiff's unique engagement with public exterior space made her a strong contender for the Vancouver Art Gallery's *On Location: Public Art for the New Millennium* project. In 1999, eight artists were short-listed to submit proposals for public artworks that considered the Gallery's central civic location and active street culture,

⁴⁷ Whyte, H8.

⁴⁸ Janet Cardiff, and George Bures Miller, "Introduction to the Audio Walks," Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller <<http://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/index.html#>>.

⁴⁹ This work, as well as other audio and video walks and fixed installations, was created in collaboration with Miller. Cardiff, and Miller, "*Jena Walk (Memory Field)*," Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller <<http://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/jena.html>>.

which would become part of the Gallery's permanent collection.⁵⁰ Submissions were exhibited outdoors in display cases from May to September 2000 and the general public was asked to provide commentary on the artworks via comments cards, telephone and/or email.

Cardiff's proposal was acquisitioned in 2001.⁵¹ Though commissioned to create one of her reputable audio walks, Cardiff found the Vancouver Art Gallery's exterior public surrounding too noisy for a successful tour to be conducted.⁵² Cardiff believed a walk would be inaccurately conceived within the Gallery's environment and therefore proposed the alternative of an Internet-based artwork. The Gallery supported the production of this project and after a two-year period, *Eyes of Laura* was created. Bruce Grenville, senior curator of the Vancouver Art Gallery, deems *Eyes of Laura* expands the Gallery's technical capabilities and builds on its continual commitment to new media art.⁵³

The sense of uncertainty and doubt that website users felt when browsing this website was therefore legitimate; essentially, that was Cardiff and the Vancouver Art Gallery's ultimate intention. According to Grenville, the Gallery unconventionally publicized *Eyes of Laura* over an extended period of time, conceiving an intense ambiguity "of authorship and intent, of reality and fiction, of audience and participant, of voyeur and subject, of real and virtual space and of private and public realms," to

⁵⁰ The eight artists were Kim Adams, Persimmon Blackbridge, Janet Cardiff, Robert Davidson, Ken Lum, Myfanwy MacLeod, Judy Radul and Henry Tsang. The Vancouver Art Gallery, Exhibition Fact Sheet: Janet Cardiff: *Eyes of Laura* Archival Documentation (Vancouver: The Vancouver Art Gallery).

⁵¹ Two other works were acquired at the same time: *Four Boats Stranded: Red and Yellow, Black and White* by Ken Lum and *Squid Head* by Kim Adams.

⁵² Bruce Grenville, "Re: Eyes of Laura - Vancouver Art Gallery," E-mail to Dina Vescio 7 Nov. 2008.

⁵³ The Vancouver Art Gallery, Archival Documentation (Vancouver: The Vancouver Art Gallery).

emerge.⁵⁴ Initial announcements pertaining to *Eyes of Laura* were leaked strategically and anonymously through email campaigns and online newsgroups including websites, blogs and newsletters devoted to webcam and surveillance culture. In time, additional announcements were made directly from the Gallery in two ways: 1) factually, through print ads, online editorial coverage as well as official exhibition announcements and curatorial statements; and 2) fictionally, through rumors spread by staff members, spam mail-outs and falsified computer glitches.⁵⁵ Adding to the artwork's elusiveness, the website is not directly attributed to Cardiff or the Vancouver Art Gallery. Reinforcing the fabrication, Cardiff's artist website does not mention *Eyes of Laura* within her list of preceding artworks.⁵⁶

The most substantial sources of information based on *Eyes of Laura* are its exhibition catalogue, published by the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2005, and three feature newspaper articles written in the New York Times (July 2005), Toronto Star (July 2005) and Vancouver Sun (December 2006).⁵⁷ It is my intention that this study add to the gap in art historical scholarship written about this artwork. The remainder of this chapter explores Cardiff's inspirations for *Eyes of Laura* located in film, urban, Internet, feminist, media and surveillance culture and provides interpretations of the artwork that illuminate why digital society likes to watch.

⁵⁴ Deanna Ferguson, ed., *Janet Cardiff: Eyes of Laura* (Vancouver: The Vancouver Art Gallery, 2005) 10.

⁵⁵ The Vancouver Art Gallery, *Eyes of Laura – Marketing Plan* Archival Documentation (Vancouver: The Vancouver Art Gallery).

⁵⁶ On Cardiff's website, the *Eyes of Laura* exhibition catalogue is mentioned in the "Publications" section and the artwork is noted in the "Selected Solo Exhibitions" section of the downloadable PDF version of her CV.

⁵⁷ *Eyes of Laura* is also described in: Laurent Piché-Vernet, « En temps et lieu. Le programme d'art public de la Vancouver Art Gallery et les dynamiques urbaines, » Master's thesis (Montreal: Concordia University, 2006) 97-107.

Creating Narratives

The 6th manifestation of *Eyes of Laura* began June 1, 2009. Initially launched on June 1st, 2004, the blog postings run for a nine month period; the website then sits dormant for three months until it is restarted with the first posting. This artwork is similar to Cardiff's video walks in the way that the architecture in the video and in reality, are one in the same.⁵⁸ An extensive editing process is used: scenes are staged with actors and props, and audio-visual effects generate a continuous narrative, providing a bizarre detachment for the spectator concerning what is real and what is fiction.⁵⁹

According to Rhizome contributing writer Ben Davis, who discovered *Eyes of Laura* in February 2005, "...as you watch the narrator piece together the clues, you can never be sure whether something is 'really' going on, or whether it's in her head."⁶⁰ Davis further suggests that Laura's blog postings, "have slowly coalesced into a mystery of sorts, as the narrator obsesses over the interactions of the milieu's recurring characters," such as the Inspector; Rabbit, a teenage skateboarder; Mohawk Girl, a loitering punk; and Helen, a sexy woman.⁶¹

As any security guard would, Laura keeps a chronological blog of her suspicious sightings, including a dossier of archived postings on each character for future reference.

⁵⁸ In addition to audio walks, Cardiff produces video walks. Instead of wearing an audio headset, participants receive a small digital video camera with headphones and follow a series of pre-recorded sequences on the video monitor.

⁵⁹ Cardiff, and Miller, "Introduction to the Video Walks," Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller <<http://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/index.html#>>.

⁶⁰ Affiliated with the New Museum since 2003, Rhizome is an online resource for artists and researchers working in new media art. Ben Davis, "Re: Watching the Detective Watching the Detective," E-mail from Rhizome New Art News to Bruce Grenville 11 Feb. 2005.

⁶¹ Davis.

A recent interview with Grenville comically revealed that all of the characters in *Eyes of Laura* are actors; most of which are Vancouver Art Gallery staff.⁶²

Eyes of Laura mixes reality and the imaginary by commingling everyday life with the cinematic. On the one hand, viewers experience real-time images of the Vancouver Art Gallery's public grounds while peering through the live webcam. On the other hand, they read, watch and hear scripted scenes performed by actors throughout Laura's blog postings, where she creates stories to escape the monotonous boredom she experiences throughout her quotidian job of watching banal events with rational eyes. According to Knight, while webcam-watching:

...the viewer does not concentrate on the images, but rather chooses when she or he looks. [...] it is up to the viewer to actively create the story as she or he watches. [...] as the narrative is really the person's life. [...] what continues 'the action' is unbearably boring [...].⁶³

As a result, *Eyes of Laura* locates the spectator in an ambiguous in-between space of fragmented narratives.

In its factual and fabricated form, the narrative is an important aspect of Cardiff's work. According to art scholar Alix Ohlin, "unravelling a story is the central [...] activity of Cardiff's art, just as unravelling a murder is the central activity of noir."⁶⁴ Ohlin suggests that the use of film noir tropes such as location shooting, unevenly paced action, flashbacks and voice-over narration from an individual's point of view who tells a murky, private story centered on a mystery, can be found within Cardiff's narratives.⁶⁵ For example, *Eyes of Laura* is narrated by a security guard who blogs in a vacillating manner

⁶² *Eyes of Laura* was filmed over a one-week period; some supplementary filming subsequently took place.

⁶³ Knight, 24.

⁶⁴ Alix Ohlin, "Something to be Desired: Janet Cardiff and the Pull of Film Noir," *Art Papers* 28:1 (Jan./Feb. 2004): 39.

⁶⁵ Ohlin, 34.

through multiple types of communicative media, about personal issues and unusual events that materialize, for the most part, within the vicinity of the Vancouver Art Gallery. In the same way that noir crimes are unsolvable, Ohlin reveals Cardiff's narratives "offer no solution to the searches [...] that instigate them."⁶⁶ A permanent mystery replaces an explanation. *Eyes of Laura* also employs the film noir tradition of contradicting the expectation for the happy ending in conventional Hollywood film: Laura suddenly gets fired on Day 253, leaving the assemblage of stories and clues brought forth throughout her blog open-ended, with an anti-climactic feeling for her audience.⁶⁷ In an interview with curator and writer Corina Ghaznavi, Cardiff states: "Sometimes I let people down because at the end there is no answer. But to me, it's so much about the experience."⁶⁸

Cardiff's inspiration of film in *Eyes of Laura* does not end with her use of noir techniques. In Laura's blog, Cardiff appropriates several audio-visual clips from 1970 cinematic thrillers based on narratives of surveillance, including *The Conversation* (1974) directed by Francis Ford Coppola; *Blow Up* (1966) directed by Michelangelo Antonioni; and *Eyes of Laura Mars* (1978) directed by Irvin Kershner, which provides the artwork's title.

In *The Conversation*, audio surveillance specialist Harry Caul – played by Gene Hackman – is asked to record a couple's conversation as they stroll through an urban square, discussing what seems to be their love affair, and an attempted murder scheme. Cardiff includes snippets of this conversation on Days 39, 70 and 121 of Laura's blog.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ohlin, 39.

⁶⁷ Ohlin, 37.

⁶⁸ Corinna Ghaznavi, "Making Sound Tracks," *Art Press* 269 (Jun. 2001): 51.

⁶⁹ Cardiff uses additional audio-visual sequences from *The Conversation* on Days 26, 63, 106 and 127.

Pieced together, the audio snippets on Day 39 reveal, “Later in the week, Sunday maybe... Sunday definitely... he'd kill us if he had the chance... Jack Tar Hotel, three o'clock, Room 773,” leading website users, unfamiliar with the film, to believe these as clues to Laura’s murder mystery narrative.⁷⁰

In *Blow Up*, starring David Hemmings and Vanessa Redgrave, a fashion photographer bored with models seeks inspiration from nature in a public park. After enlarging the photographs he has taken of a couple conversing and walking in the park, he realizes that within the negatives, he has potentially caught a murder in progress. A series of these images are included on Days 40, 55, 60 and 92 (figs. 11a, 11b, 11c & 11d). A voice message from Laura on Day 92 proposes another clue to her narrative, “I’m almost asleep but I woke up thinking about the still from *Blow Up*. In the movie there was a murder in the bushes behind the model. I should check the bushes tomorrow.”⁷¹

The artwork’s title is an obvious reference to the film *Eyes of Laura Mars*. Laura Mars – played by Faye Dunaway – is a high-fashion photographer who stages fictional violent murder scenes to showcase articles of clothing. Throughout the movie, these fictional scenes haunt her; she has premonitions of actual murders before they happen to her friends and colleagues. Mars is unable to identify the murderer because she witnesses the violent attacks through the eyes of the killer. She therefore unknowingly falls in love with him: Detective Neville – played by Tommy Lee Jones – is a policeman who ‘protects’ her throughout the film. This narrative, exemplifying the proximity between murderer and victim, is also apparent in Laura’s blog postings which discuss the dates she has been on with a man she calls ‘M’. Her postings suggest a relationship between

⁷⁰ Cardiff, Day 39, Audio Track.

⁷¹ Cardiff, Day 92, Voice Message.

this character and the character of Hans Beckert – played by Peter Lorre – in Fritz Lang's classic noir film *M* (1931). When he is identified as a child murderer, Beckert's shoulder is marked with a letter 'M' in white chalk; a photograph of this film sequence is posted on Day 95 of Laura's blog (fig. 12).⁷² By naming her date 'M', Laura persuades spectators to believe that he is the criminal in her narrative of mystery.

In her artwork, Cardiff offers cues which bring viewers back to reality from constructed fictional narratives. Curator and pre-eminent scholar of Cardiff's artistic practice Christine Christov-Bakargiev believes that Cardiff "slips film into the real space of the viewer. It is about the intrusion of plot into life."⁷³ As Cardiff states:

When I'm in a strange city, my mind is constantly inventing scenarios. I imagine all of these incredibly violent scenes – detective scenes – because I've seen so many movies and read so many novels. The mundane in life gets built up into being a mystery. We invent little stories that have no relation to reality, but we layer them on top of reality anyway.⁷⁴

As Cardiff explains, creating narratives is a normal personal experience. In her audio and video walks, she asks audiences to follow her narratives. She also does this in *Eyes of Laura*. What makes this artwork different however, is Cardiff's inclusion of the webcam, utilized by participants to invent their own narratives. This generates reasoning for digital society's pleasure in watching: accessibility to webcam imagery allows spectators to immerse themselves and participate as storytellers. As they control the surveillance camera observing the Gallery's public grounds, users are free to form their own narratives based on the banal events they witness. *Eyes of Laura* makes the enjoyment of watching readily available to its users.

⁷² The letter 'M' also appears on Days 143 and 145 in audio-visually discussing Laura's male friend, 'M'.

⁷³ Christine Christov-Bakargiev, *The Paradise Institute: Exhibition Brochure* Archival Documentation (Montreal: Artexpte).

⁷⁴ Ghaznavi, 50.

Role Reversal

According to Davis, the fictional narrative presented in cinematic thrillers, where the “observer becomes the observed,” seems to have inspired Cardiff’s production of *Eyes of Laura*.⁷⁵ Indeed, this element ties *The Conversation*, *Blow Up* and *Eyes of Laura Mars* together, as all three protagonists hold occupations in which their main responsibility is to watch others. A crucial part of these films however, is when the main characters realize that they have actually been victims of surveillance all along.⁷⁶ This narrative also occurs in *Eyes of Laura*: as a security guard for the Vancouver Art Gallery, Laura sees one of the regular characters look directly back at her through the surveillance camera. “The Inspector was staring right at me!” Laura exclaims in paranoia, in her blog posting on Day 100 (figs. 13a & 13b).⁷⁷ Aware of her presence behind the camera, other urbanites present mini-performances for Laura on Days 186, 198 and 211. Using poster boards and props similar to those of the Surveillance Camera Players, the public looks back at Laura: she becomes the watcher being watched.

Cardiff’s incorporation of the website’s webcam however, reverses this and produces a dualistic perspective. The webcam acknowledges the camera as two-sided, allowing the general public – accustomed to living under governmental surveillance – to watch: the observed become observers. According to art writer and curator Berin Golonu, the webcam functions as a tool for voyeuristic pleasure, “demonstrating that it can be somewhat empowering, not to mention extremely entertaining to be on the side of the

⁷⁵ Davis.

⁷⁶ In *The Conversation*, Caul receives telephone calls from unknown stalkers and has surveillance tapes stolen from him by a seductress. The fashion-photographer in *Blow Up* has photographic evidence stolen from his home. In *Eyes of Laura Mars*, Mars is stalked by, and falls in love with, the murderer.

⁷⁷ Cardiff, Day 100, Blog Posting.

camera, where we can be privy to the gaze of surveillance's electronic eye."⁷⁸ This justifies another reason why we like to watch: webcams situate the everyday citizen in a position which is not normally accessible. *Eyes of Laura* privileges its viewers, offering an opportunity behind – rather than in front of – the camera; furthermore, agency is gained through role reversal. Individuals watch public space as unseen, active participants in panopticism; in this instance, from the perspective of a Vancouver Art Gallery security guard.

According to Grenville, the Vancouver Art Gallery daily staffs roughly 8-10 security employees. They survey the Gallery's exhibition halls as well as the security monitor room, which includes 25-30 screens exposing real-time images of the Gallery's interior and exterior spaces. It is estimated that 75% of these employees are male, and 25% are female.⁷⁹ As a female security guard, Laura's persona causes conventional gender roles within museum security – and more importantly within modern society – to be challenged.

New media, economics and feminist scholar Gillian Youngs suggests the Internet as a potentially revolutionary site for women, representing a space where women have the ability to offset their pre-determined position as excluded from public space.⁸⁰ The categorization of public space as male and private space as female – private space being inferior to public, resulting in women viewed as inferior to men – has led women to confront this unfair and unbalanced gender division for generations.⁸¹ As a female

⁷⁸ Berin Golonu, ed., "Surveillance," *Artweek* 31:9 (September 2000): 13.

⁷⁹ Grenville, E-mail, 7 Nov. 2008.

⁸⁰ Gillian Youngs, "Cyberspace: The New Feminist Frontier?" *Women and Media: International Perspectives*, ed. Karen Ross, and Carolyn M. Byerly (Malden, Maryland: Blackwell, 2004).

⁸¹ Katharine Sarikakis, and Leslie Regan Shade, *Feminist Interventions in International Communication: Minding the Gap* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008) 36.

security guard using a blog to communicate and exchange information, Laura's intimate engagement with public space can be seen as a metaphor, enabling women to escape their lengthy confinement to private space. Laura's gaze also provides a sense of agency for women, empowering their position within the traditionally male dominated public sphere. Laura acts as voyeur, collapsing customary gender identities which presuppose the male as voyeur and the female as the object of his gaze – a concept further explored in Chapter 3 in connection with Sourkes' artwork.

Seeing without Being

The history of women's problematic relationship with public space can be discussed in connection to the key cultural figure of modernity and urbanisation of nineteenth-century Europe: the 'flâneur', which symbolized an individual – a critic, writer, artist, sociologist, and detective of sorts – with the freedom to wander and experience urbanity, observing sights through a controlled and unacknowledged gaze.⁸² Urban culture and feminist theorist Elizabeth Wilson marks the 'flâneur's' earliest writings as a pamphlet published in 1806 by Monsieur Bonhomme whose objective was to maintain a diary, recording his most fascinating experiences encountered during his wanderings.⁸³

Functioning within bourgeois ideology, which imposed gender segregation upon public and private space, the 'flâneur' was exclusively male.⁸⁴ While men moved freely between public and private spheres exploring urban zones of pleasure such as cafés,

⁸² This study draws from feminist perspectives of the 'flâneur', however important texts regarding the 'flâneur' were also written by German philosopher and literary critic, Walter Benjamin and French poet and critic, Charles Baudelaire. Griselda Pollock, Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art (London; New York: Routledge Classics, 2003) 94.

⁸³ Elizabeth Wilson, The Contradictions of Culture: Cities, Culture, Women (London; Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE, 2001) 75.

⁸⁴ Pollock, 94.

restaurants and the theatre, women were restricted to domesticity. According to feminist theorist Griselda Pollock, other than bourgeois women who went out in public to promenade, shop, or simply be 'on display', working-class women who frequented the public sphere were subject to inaccurate evaluations of their status: their femininity was questioned and they were labelled lesbians or prostitutes.⁸⁵ Women were therefore deprived of the privilege to look, stare, watch and scrutinize; the female version of the 'flâneur' – 'flâneuse' – did not, and could not exist.⁸⁶ Women were positioned as the object of the gaze – a notion further illustrated in Chapter 3:

It is this 'flâneur', the 'flâneur' as a man of pleasure, but more, as a man who takes visual possession of the city, who has therefore emerged in feminist debate as the embodiment of the 'male gaze'. He represents men's visual and voyeuristic mastery over women.⁸⁷

Had they been invented, the webcam and the Internet would have been considered the perfect tools for nineteenth-century women, supplying the opportunity to safely connect with public space within a domestic setting. Women's need to disguise themselves would have been replaced by Internet capabilities which support identity anonymity.⁸⁸ Firth suggests that the webcam and the Internet jointly establish a new, contemporary breed of 'flâneur'.⁸⁹ Digital society therefore likes to watch because of the webcam's ability to reconstruct the notion of the 'flâneur', allowing viewers to see

⁸⁵ Pollock, 96.

⁸⁶ The 'flâneuse' did emerge in both historical practices and literary representations by the late nineteenth-century, but the department store – not the city – was the promenade for the 'flâneuse'. This was unequivocal to male 'flânerie', but provided a socially sanctioned context for respectable women's 'flânerie'. Aruna D'Souza, and Tom McDonough, eds., *The Invisible Flâneuse?: Gender, Public Space, and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006) 113-115; Wilson, 84; and Janet Wolff, "The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity," *Theory, Culture & Society* 2:3 (1985): 37-46.

⁸⁷ Pollock, 100; and Wilson, 79.

⁸⁸ Some women disguised themselves to achieve the same freedom that the 'flâneur' enjoyed: George Sand dressed in male attire to freely roam city streets and Delphine de Girardin took on a male pseudonym in her writing.

⁸⁹ Firth.

without being seen. The webcam is a versatile alternative that lends individuals the occasion to watch public spheres in a comfortable environment at their own convenience. Laura personifies the contemporary 'flâneuse' in *Eyes of Laura: experiencing the city of Vancouver* through a controlled and unacknowledged gaze available via the webcam, she critiques and responds to what she experiences in her blog.

Seeing without being seen predicates the viewer's enjoyment of watching with the ability to be somewhere, without actually 'being' there; telepresence occurs, courtesy of networked digital surveillance technologies.⁹⁰ Laura explains this notion on Day 60 of her blog:

By the way, I hope that everyone can work the web cam. I like the idea that someone in Japan or Italy can be watching people here, in my city, Vancouver. Now you know how I feel watching people. It's boring but strangely fun at the same time.⁹¹

The webcam minimizes geographical distances via the Internet; it globalizes local happenings. The instantaneity and simultaneity of webcam imagery transmits ideas of telepresence which, according to communications theorist J. Macgregor Wise, is "the idea of being two places at once – to be where you are, but to feel like you are someplace else."⁹² Individuals can experience international urban centers within the privacy of their homes. Urban culture theorist Thomas J. Campanella states:

[Webcameras] enable us to visit cities and rural landscapes around the world in real time. [...] Webcameras are tiny windows through which we catch glimpses of far-off worlds. [...] Webcameras collapse the immensity of time and space into the click of a mouse.⁹³

⁹⁰ Ken Hillis, "Modes of Digital Identification," *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader* ed. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, and Thomas Keenan (New York: Routledge, 2006) 353.

⁹¹ Cardiff, Day 60, Blog Posting.

⁹² J. Macgregor Wise, "An Immense and Unexpected Field of Action: Webcams, Surveillance and Everyday Life," *Cultural Studies* (Mar./May 2004): 428.

⁹³ Thomas J. Campanella, "Be there NOW," *Salon 21* (Aug 1997).

The live webcam component of *Eyes of Laura* broadcasts the events which occur in the public space of the Vancouver Art Gallery in real-time through personal computers worldwide. The imagery transmitted via the webcam in comparison to the imagery exposed in Laura's blog, creates a bizarre perception of time for the spectator: nine months have passed – the user has endured Summer, Fall and Winter – yet the weather and time of day always seem to be the same; time seems to stand still. Grenville indicates that there are certain moments when the artwork “seems like a real anomaly.”⁹⁴ Users question the integrity of the image in *Eyes of Laura*; individuals are aware of commonly manipulated digital imagery, but should they also be suspect of those received by the webcam? As Koskela's formulation suggests:

... webcams create an interesting tension by challenging the contemporary concept of space: they seem to fall ‘in between’. [...] In having connections to both virtual and material realms, webcams contribute to the ‘blurring of our perception of different levels of reality’.⁹⁵

Furthermore, Grenville believes *Eyes of Laura* plays upon a sort of happenstance: the viewer lacks clarity and context to determine exactly what he/she is looking at and is subsequently enticed by fictional possibilities.⁹⁶ Cardiff blends “belief and disbelief” and plays with an individual's sense of being somewhere they are not. Superimposing reality onto film-like sequences, the viewer creates his/her own perspective and narrative.⁹⁷ Wilson concludes, “... [there is] something interminable about the progress of the

⁹⁴ Bruce Grenville, Telephone Interview with Dina Vescio, 20 Jan. 2009.

⁹⁵ Hille Koskela, “The Other Side of Surveillance: Webcams, Power and Agency,” *Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond* ed. David Lyon (Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing, 2006) 165; and C. Bernard, “Bodies and Digital Utopia,” *Art Journal* 59:4 (2000): 27.

⁹⁶ Grenville, Interview.

⁹⁷ Grenville, Interview.

‘flâneur’. The huge metropolis always offers the tantalizing prospect of something *more*. The explorer never does reach either the centre or the end.”⁹⁸

Conclusion

The few texts which have been written about *Eyes of Laura* all comment on its engagement with the concept of surveillance. Intrigued by the sense of control that the user has over the webcam and fascinated by the images it produces, the journalists, critics and curators all mention digital society’s tolerance, comfort and indifference toward surveillance cameras and webcam-based Internet imagery. According to art critic Clint Burnham, “we are used to being watched and we are used to watching: we like the voyeurism.”⁹⁹ These writers’ opinions coincide with my investigation of *Eyes of Laura* which identifies reasons for watching and perceiving it as interesting and entertaining.

Cardiff’s use of the Internet as exhibition space creates an indefinite availability of the artwork. Permanently displayed online since its launch in 2004, *Eyes of Laura* questions Internet art’s dependence on the institution, crossing boundaries of time by prolonging the usual short-lived exhibition length that artistic institutions offer and suggesting an alternative to exhibition spaces within galleries and museums by gaining global exposure in other ways.¹⁰⁰ Grenville does not see an end to *Eyes of Laura*. At the time of acquisition, the Gallery arranged upgrading possibilities with Cardiff and has recently begun reconfiguring the server and software to allow for Open Source

⁹⁸ Wilson, 149.

⁹⁹ Burnham, D17.

¹⁰⁰ *Eyes of Laura* has been part of two online exhibitions: 1) *Subversive Souvenirs: Questioning the Institutional View in the Imagery of Tourism and Surveillance*, a project by Gallery TPW (Toronto) for the Virtual Museum Project (2006); and 2) *revolutionsonline*, part of the Sydney Biennale (June 18-Sept 7, 2008). For more information, see: <<http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Photos/dynamic/en/index-mk.html>> and <<http://www.bos2008.com/revolutionsonline/>>.

interaction with the artwork, making it easier to perpetuate and adapt to new technologies in the future.¹⁰¹

Though *Eyes of Laura* seems to break institutional boundaries by exhibiting itself online, a particularly strong connection between the institution and artwork still exists, since the artwork was commissioned, and is hosted online by, the Vancouver Art Gallery. The millennium brought new ideas about exhibition procedures: critiquing its role as artistic institution, the Vancouver Art Gallery contradicted its traditional acquisition policies by extending its comfort zone from interior to exterior spaces. Notions of institutional critique regarding webcam-based artwork will be further explored in Chapter 3 through a comparison of *Eyes of Laura* and *Homecammers – Women* – my case study in Chapter 2 – both exhibiting themselves outside institutional space.

Eyes of Laura is accessible to digital society, enabling spectators to watch real-time events occurring in the Vancouver Art Gallery's public space via the webcam from global distances, up close. As Grenville states: "It is a work that melds the lapse of real time with fictional time as well as producing and occupying an alternative space – a hybrid space that purposefully confounds fictive events with real-life events and virtual space with actual geographic space."¹⁰² By exemplifying the abilities to create narratives, acquire agency and defy geographical distances, my analysis of *Eyes of Laura* has enabled a demonstration of digital society's interest in watching.

With my first case study focusing on the spectatorship of public space complete, my discourse continues in Chapter 2 with a consideration of private space spectatorship through a second case study based on the artwork *Homecammers - Women* by Cheryl

¹⁰¹ Grenville, Interview.

¹⁰² Ferguson, 11.

Sourkes to demonstrate that act of watching as entertainment within digital society through the Synopticon.

CHAPTER 2

Spectatorship of Private Space: Cheryl Sourkes' *Homecammers – Women*

This chapter analyzes the new media artwork *Homecammers – Women* (2006) by Cheryl Sourkes, focusing on notions of surveillance connected to the spectatorship of private space.¹⁰³ The analysis demonstrates how *Homecammers – Women* offers two reasons which support digital society's enjoyment of watching – and looking – at images, specifically because they are offered as 1) commodities; and 2) depictions of truth. Drawing from photography, Internet, media, surveillance and feminist studies, this chapter locates the practices of women webcam operators – in relation to concepts of the Synopticon and spectacle – at the forefront of its discussion.

In his examination of Bentham and Foucault's panoptic ideology, Norwegian sociology of law theorist Thomas Mathiesen argues that within digital society, not only does panopticism exist but synopticism is also present. The term Synopticon is composed of the Greek words 'syn' meaning 'together' or 'at the same time' and 'optikos' referring to 'visible'.¹⁰⁴ Mathiesen explains that the synoptical process – a globalization of heterogeneous gazes via contemporary mass media gateways such as magazines, cinema, television and the Internet, where the many see the few – contrasts the panoptical, a centralized hierarchical presence, where the few see the many.¹⁰⁵ According to Green,

¹⁰³ Cheryl Sourkes (b. Montreal, Quebec, 1945) is a media artist and curator who currently lives and works in Toronto, Ontario. Sourkes obtained a Bachelor of Science from McGill University, majoring in Biology and Psychology. She began her artistic career in Intermedia in the late 1960s in Vancouver, British Columbia. Since 2001, Sourkes has used cyberimagery – screenshots from webcams of public and private spaces – to create video and photographic installations.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Mathiesen, "The Viewer Society: Michel Foucault's 'Panopticon' Revisited," *Theoretical Criminology* 1:2 (1997): 215; and "optic," Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary* (Jul. 2009) <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/optic>>.

¹⁰⁵ Mathiesen, 219.

synopticism has led digital society to move beyond the singular Orwellian ‘Big Brother’ gaze, “to a conception of decentred surveillance, consisting of multiple glances from different agents, often operating informally.”¹⁰⁶

Sociology and criminology theorists Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson indicate that the prevalence of synopticism within popular culture has positioned viewing as an inherently pleasant act. Haggerty and Ericson suggest that the public display of formerly private actions and the uninhibited scrutiny of others as increasingly accepted cultural concepts provide evidence that spectators enjoy watching.¹⁰⁷ The synoptic principal, and its active, enthusiastic spectators, has triggered numerous ‘lifecasting’ websites featuring personal webcams to emerge since the late 1990s. The ‘lifecasting’ phenomenon – where an individual’s daily life is continuously broadcast live through digital media technology – was popularized by Ringley and her website *JenniCam...life, online...* (figs. 14a & 14b). A massive online fandom took pleasure in watching Ringley for seven years via the Internet and her personal webcam – initially employed to contact friends and family in other geographic locations – which disclosed imagery of her everyday life within her dormitory, and later apartment – where she lived alone – including sleeping, eating, surfing the Internet, doing homework and participating in sexual activities.¹⁰⁸ At the peak of her popularity in 1999, Ringley was considered an online ‘celebrity’; her website visitor counts were estimated at 3 to 4 million per day.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Green, 38.

¹⁰⁷ Kevin D. Haggerty, and Richard V. Ericson, eds., *The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006) 28.

¹⁰⁸ Mark Sinker, “The Trucam Show,” *Sight & Sound* 9:7 (Jul. 1999): 28.

¹⁰⁹ Ringley’s fame led to her appearance on the “Late Show with David Letterman” on July 31, 1998. She also owned the web address <www.jennicam.org>. *Pop 17* <<http://pop17.com/category/videos/page/6/>>.

As Ringley's intimate actions were made available to the public gaze of millions of online spectators, synopticism occurred.

While 'lifecasting' websites have been developed by men, couples and families, who broadcast their daily domestic lives and communicate with spectators through email, blog posts and personal webcams, the majority of these 'lifecasters' are women, who have been inspired, directly or indirectly, by Ringley's innovative work in the field of webcam culture. Using surveillance to generate spectacle, these female 'lifecasters' are precisely the topic of Cheryl Sourkes' webcam-based artwork, *Homecammers – Women*. This chapter provides a description, followed by interpretations, of the artwork informed by photography, Internet, media, surveillance and feminist studies.

Homecammers – Women

Cheryl Sourkes' *Homecammers – Women* is featured in Volume 18 of the international feminist art journal n.paradoxa (fig. 9).¹¹⁰ Specifically produced for the *curatorial strategies* issue – guest edited by art critic and curator Renee Baert – which focuses on feminist curatorial practice, the artwork consists of a photographic tableau of 40 black and white images. The images each measure 1 x 1¼”, are arranged in a grid-like formation and presented on a full double-page spread measuring 10¼ x 16½”. Each image depicts a woman within an interior domestic setting while performing various activities such as Internet surfing, talking on the telephone, smoking, reading, etc. For the most part, each woman is captured above the bust line and facing front.

¹¹⁰ London-based art critic and lecturer Katy Deepwell founded n.paradoxa online in 1996 and established the printed version as a bi-annual publication – published by KT press – in 1998. The journal's mandate is to explore feminist theory and contemporary women's art practices.

To produce the images, Sourkes executed numerous screen grabs from online personal webcam streams and transformed these fleeting live real-time images into photographic stills. Sourkes displaces these images from their natural habitat online and publishes them in a hard copy journal, severing the images' relationship with technology. There are some inconsistencies in the quality of the images: while some are in focus and clearly defined, others are grainy, blurry and occasionally illegible due to the close proximity of and the different webcams employed by the women operators.

A one-page statement written by Sourkes precedes the centerfold of black and white photographic webcam stills. This statement provides a short biography of the artist, discusses her understanding of surveillance in webcam culture and introduces her artistic practice using webcam imagery. Sourkes has incorporated webcam imagery found while Internet surfing as the main element of her artistic practice since 2001, after a residency at Studio XX in Montreal where she first experienced webcam culture.¹¹¹ Predominantly producing inkjet prints and videos from appropriated webcam imagery, Sourkes indicates that her artwork “gives webcam-generated images an unanticipated life off-screen. It allows viewers a chance to consider this production in slow time and in nuanced ways.”¹¹² She began this undertaking by accumulating images of urban public exteriors, exemplified in *Cam Cities* (2001), consisting of screenshots of London, Taipei, Toronto, Vienna and Warsaw in a linear graphic panel (fig. 15). Sourkes' attention then shifted toward more private, interior spaces occupied by people, demonstrated in *Interior* (2003),

¹¹¹ Founded in Montreal in 1996, Studio XX is a feminist art centre for technological exploration, creation, and critique, committed to establishing women's access to technology by providing training and instruction. <<http://www.studioxx.org/en/>>.

¹¹² Cheryl Sourkes, “Homecamers – Women,” *n.paradoxa* 18 (2006): 57.

showcasing imagery of individuals mostly located in settings such as barbershops, schools, radio stations and government offices (fig. 16).

In *Homecammers – Women* Sourkes further immerses the spectator into the private domain, specifically into the setting of the home, and the bedroom. According to Sourkes, “In *Homecammers – Women* [...], we see women around the world caught by webcams in the thrall of daily life. This is a new species of self-portrait. [...] Each woman presents her life as spectacle of her own free will.”¹¹³ Facilitated by the personal webcam, which according to curator Cheryl Simon, produces “an ever-increasing publicization of private life,” the women webcam operators featured in the images which constitute this artwork choose to make their private lives, public, to potential online audiences of millions.¹¹⁴ As participants of synopticism, these women use surveillance to produce spectacular images. The remainder of this chapter provides interpretations of *Homecammers – Women* located in photography, Internet, media and surveillance and feminist studies to illuminate why digital society likes to watch.

Objective versus Subjective Commodities

According to media and cultural theorist Sue Thornham, the empowered male gaze has commercially exploited women in images circulated by the media, where portrayals of

¹¹³ The term ‘homecammer’ resembles ‘wunderkammer’ – known as a ‘cabinet of curiosities’. The structure of Sourkes’ artwork is reminiscent of the ‘wunderkammer’. Having emerged in approximately the sixteenth-century as a place of retreat and contemplation, the cabinet of curiosities was a room which served to categorize and display one’s collection of objects and commodities purchased during exploring expeditions and trading voyages. Visitors perused the miscellaneous collection with amazement, as a way to understand the world globally. Within an organized grid, Sourkes displays images from the ‘world wide web’ for spectators to discover. The artwork is a digital manifestation of the ‘wunderkammer’. Sourkes, 57.

¹¹⁴ Cheryl Simon, “Loitering in Cyberspace: Cheryl Sourkes Takes Snapshots of the Web’s Digital Citizenry,” *C: International Contemporary Art* 94 (Summer 2007): 26.

'real' women are substituted for displays of objectification.¹¹⁵ Media theorist Michele White indicates that the style of image which traditionally allures the male gaze portrays females lounging or reclining on a diagonal plane, tilting their heads and making their bodies available for the spectator's visual contemplation.¹¹⁶ The centerfold is a key example of this imagery, featuring highly sexualized misrepresentations of women. The term 'centerfold' was coined by Hugh Hefner, founder of the pornographic men's magazine Playboy, when the first issue included a centerfold of Marilyn Monroe in 1953. It constitutes a photographic portrait, usually in the form of a pin-up or nude, which is allocated to the two middle pages of a magazine publication. Though Hefner intended the centerfold to offer opportunity and a sense of respectability for the female model who was to be portrayed in a natural setting while engaging in intelligent and productive activity, the fact that he also indicated a successful centerfold suggested the presence of someone outside the frame – inherently a male gaze – transformed the centerfold into an image of seduction defined by gendered spectatorship.¹¹⁷

Communications theorist Patrice A. Opplinger and Wise argue that through their online visibility women webcam operators reproduce imagery which repeatedly objectifies the female body through the male gaze.¹¹⁸ Performing arts theorist Amy Shields Dobson explains this formulation in her essay "Femininities as Commodities:

¹¹⁵ The male gaze was familiarized by feminist film and media studies theorist Laura Mulvey who positions looking and gazing as gendered activities. The active subject of the gaze is male and its passive object is female. The male projects his gaze onto the female who is simultaneously looked at and displayed. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 1975 Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings ed. Leo Braudy, and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford UP, 1999): 837; and Sue Thornham, Women, Feminism and Media (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) 6, 21.

¹¹⁶ Michele White, The Body and the Screen: Theories of Internet Spectatorship (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006) 3, 4.

¹¹⁷ Molly Young, "Playboy: The Complete Centerfolds," N1BR 1 (13 Jan. 2009).

¹¹⁸ Patrice A. Opplinger, Girls Gone Skank: The Sexualization of Girls in American Culture (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2008) 171; and Wise, 431.

Cam Girl Culture” (2008), indicating noticeable links between the practices of ‘cam girls’ and sex trade practices as well as the pornography industry which have led to a resurgence of oppressive stereotypes upon women.¹¹⁹

According to Shields Dobson, ‘cam girl’ practices – where women webcam operators participate in online ‘lifecasting’ – can be divided into three categories: ‘cam girls’, ‘cam whores’ and ‘cam artists’.¹²⁰ ‘Cam whores’ are those which exhibit sex trade and pornographic tendencies by constructing sexualized performances and providing provocative imagery of their entire bodies, as well as body part close-ups, for the male gaze. Explicitly for profit, these women invite users to become website members and include ‘wish lists’ on their websites which feature items that spectators may purchase in return for chats and/or performances.¹²¹ Within undecorated and neutral spaces, ‘cam whores’ are willingly submissive to their spectators, constructing themselves as objects rather than subjects.¹²² The earliest and most well-known example of this type of ‘cam girl’ is nude model and former adult entertainer Danni Ashe, whose ‘lifecasting’ website *Danni’s Hard Drive* (www.danni.com), markets and sells depictions of nude and partially clad female bodies enacting eroticized performances.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Amy Shields Dobson, “Femininities as Commodities: Cam Girl Culture,” *Next Wave Cultures: Feminism, Subcultures, Activism* ed. Anita Harris (New York: Routledge, 2008) 133.

¹²⁰ ‘Cam artists’ – which are outside the scope of this thesis – use their technical skills to portray mundane to sexually exploitive to grotesque imagery. Self-aware and self-reflexive, ‘cam artists’ consider themselves performance artists, displaying their true identities to gain a sense of power. Ana Clara Voog’s website *Anacam* fits into this category. Shields Dobson, 124-125, 140-144. Theresa M. Senft divides ‘cam girls’ into five categories: real-life, artist, porn, cam-community and cam house girls in *Camgirls: Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Networks* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008) 38-41.

¹²¹ Shields Dobson, 124.

¹²² Shields Dobson, 137.

¹²³ This site was launched in 1995 – almost two years prior to Jennifer Ringley’s website – and still exists. White, 65.

Feminist perspectives suggest that this imagery promotes the destructive and dehumanizing perception that women are products for consumption.¹²⁴ Throughout art history, some female artists have continuously attempted to re-establish their subjective identities by employing techniques of self-monitoring and self-representation to produce imagery which, as law and technology theorists Jane Bailey and Ian Kerr put it “reclaim the copyright of their own lives,” freeing themselves from patriarchal oppression.¹²⁵ White and Koskela however, oppose Opplinger and Wise’s argument which indicates that women webcam operators perpetuate the commercialization of the objectified female body by suggesting that women operators in fact continue the departure from enforced patriarchal structures, using personal webcam images as commodities to challenge misrepresentations of women and concepts of gendered spectatorship.

In Shields Dobson’s formulation, the women webcam operators to which White and Koskela refer are categorized as ‘cam girls’. These women – and sometimes teenage girls – present themselves as the ‘girl-next-door’. The primary purpose of their websites is self-expression; through mundane candid imagery, which very rarely contains nudity, ‘cam girls’ share their likes, interests and hobbies – not their bodies – with users.¹²⁶ ‘Cam girls’ fully control the imagery they produce, providing spectators with views of their natural environments – usually their bedrooms – in order to accurately portray their

¹²⁴ Lisa Bennett, “Feminist Media Round-Up: The Good, The Bad and The Ugly,” National Organization for Women (Feb. 2002).

¹²⁵ This has been exemplified in many video, performance and photographic artworks since the 1970s. Jane Bailey, and Ian Kerr, “Seizing Control?: The Experience Capture Experiments of Ringley & Mann,” Ethics and Information Technology 9:2 (2007): 129; and Hille Koskela, “Webcams, TV Shows and Mobile Phones: Empowering Exhibitionism,” Surveillance & Society 2:2/3 (2004): 206.

¹²⁶ Shields Dobson, 133-134.

identities.¹²⁷ As previously discussed, Ringley's website *JenniCam...life, online...*, falls into this category.

Instead of attempting to diminish the amount of commoditized imagery circulated and created, 'cam girls' use the webcam to increase their visibility and generate more images.¹²⁸ Following Foucault's ideology in "The Subject and Power" (1982), 'cam girls' are released of the power exerted over them when they grant consent to be surveyed.¹²⁹ The webcam's characteristic to transmit ephemeral imagery, as well as its physically close proximity to operators, permits only brief glimpses of women operators, helping to disrupt the male gaze.¹³⁰ With heightened command over the webcam, these commoditized women use surveillance to generate spectacle, confronting the empowered male gaze to gain authority and agency.¹³¹

What Sourkes considers and actualizes through *Homecammers – Women* is Shields Dobson's argument, suggesting:

...the materialist feminist struggle against gender stereotypes and objectification no longer seems relevant in this contemporary context. Instead, the concern expressed by the emergence of the cam girl scene seems to be how to make the concept of the female-body-as-commodity and the dominant images of femininity, with which we are constantly bombarded, materially and socially valuable to girls themselves.¹³²

With "high professional, social and material ambition," postmodern women use techniques of visibility and self-disclosure as paths toward success and empowerment.¹³³

¹²⁷ Shields Dobson, 134, 136.

¹²⁸ Koskela, "Webcams, TV Shows and Mobile Phones," 206, 208.

¹²⁹ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Boston: D.R. Godine, 1984) 426-427.

¹³⁰ White, 77.

¹³¹ Koskela, "Webcams, TV Shows and Mobile Phones," 208.

¹³² Shields Dobson, 125.

¹³³ Shields Dobson, 124, 126.

Thus, by appropriating patriarchal and capitalist technological and marketing methods ‘cam girls’ exploit notions of femininity for their own personal gain; not for the pleasure of the male gaze.¹³⁴

Presented within the center pages of the journal, *Homecammers – Women* is n.paradoxa’s centerfold, depicting imagery opposite of that which is usually found in popular culture magazine centerfolds; the artwork shows realistic portrayals of women – produced by them, in a controlled manner – within their domestic natural habitat performing mundane activities.¹³⁵ The images reveal partial and grainy depictions of ‘cam girls’ – which emphasize the face and head – costumed in casual, everyday clothing. Sourkes capitalizes on the journal’s elite readership – feminist scholars who question and seek alternative models to existing patriarchal structures – to promote this commoditized imagery of women, which incorporates archetypes of femininity, as self-portraiture.¹³⁶ With *Homecammers – Women* Sourkes’ make spectators aware that images produced by women can be circulated throughout the media and enjoyed without being exploited by the male gaze. Digital society likes to watch and look at commoditized imagery simply because it is abundantly produced and made readily available for consumption. *Homecammers – Women* encourages digital society to appreciate views of women as commodities rooted in identity and subjectivity.

¹³⁴ Shields Dobson, 131, 145.

¹³⁵ Thornham, 2.

¹³⁶ Katy Deepwell, “Curatorial Strategies and Feminist Politics: Part 2: An Interview with Maria Lind,” n.paradoxa 18 (2006): 13.

Promise of Reality¹³⁷

Deriving from the concept of the portrait – the most popular photographic genre, where the subject’s individuality is revealed and documented – the self-portrait exposes the subject but also makes him/her responsible for capturing the image.¹³⁸ The photographic self-portrait entices spectators to believe that which is depicted within the image as real. It is within the history of photography that surveillance theorist Nic Groombridge and Koskela’s formulation, suggesting that visual imagery is loaded with ‘the promise of reality’, originates.¹³⁹ Societal tendencies emphasize photography’s referential nature and capacity to document the truth of the visible world in detail.¹⁴⁰ The presence of photographic veracity lies within what French literary philosopher and critic Roland Barthes’ refers to as ‘that-has-been’ in Camera Lucida (1981), which proposes the photograph as an emanation of the referent, identifying a past reality.¹⁴¹ Despite the major impact of digital technology on photographic practice, which has somewhat removed photography’s accepted certainty – specifically the advent of computer technology which makes the manipulation of photographic imagery possible – most public responses toward photography still typically accept it as true.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Sourkes’ exhibition at Galerie Division in Montreal (November 27 – December 27, 2008) was titled *Promise of Reality*.

¹³⁸ Miles Orvell, American Photography (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 20.

¹³⁹ Groombridge, Nic, “Crime Control or Crime Culture CCTV?” Surveillance & Society 1:1 (2002): 38; and Koskela, “Webcams, TV Shows and Mobile Phones,” 200.

¹⁴⁰ Michele White, “Representations or People?” Ethics and Information Technology (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002): 258; and Amelia Jones, “The ‘Eternal Return’: Self-Portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment,” Signs 27:4 (Summer 2002): 974.

¹⁴¹ Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography trans. Richard Howard (New York: Noonday Press: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981) 77, 80, 88.

¹⁴² Lynn Berger, “The Authentic Amateur and the Democracy of Collecting Photographs,” Photography & Culture 2:1 (March 2009): 36.

White indicates that Internet settings are reminiscent of photography in that they share “a discourse about aliveness, and present themselves as ‘the reality’.”¹⁴³ The difference between the two is based on the fact that while photographs portray ‘that-has-been’, live webcam footage viewed via the Internet exposes current happenings – the here and now. Rather than the photograph which “congeals time,” the screen of the Internet, with its “shifting, quivering and pixelated surface,” seems to provide an imprint of that which rests on its other side, offering users direct public viewing access of the operator’s personal and private domain.¹⁴⁴ The Internet therefore provides a spectatorial experience that the photographic medium cannot match: real-time.¹⁴⁵

Whereas some contemporary feminist photographic self-portraiture is characterized by performance – as in artworks by Cindy Sherman and Hannah Wilke for example – the ‘cam girls’ featured in *Homecammers – Women* return to traditional notions of self-portraiture which disclose depictions of truth. ‘Cam girls’ emphasize the production of images which constitute portrayals of their real subjective identities – including “personal life, interiority and ‘true, authentic’ self” – which they offer to spectators.¹⁴⁶ The qualities articulated and valued within the imagery are confession, display and exposure of the private, honest and individualized self, allowing a sense of freedom and empowerment to be gained by women operators.¹⁴⁷

‘Cam girl’ culture conveys the importance that digital society places upon the postmodern value of constant visibility by employing surveillance to produce

¹⁴³ White, “Representations or People?” 260.

¹⁴⁴ Dominique Baque, “Still Images for Rethinking the World,” *Art Press* 350 Trans. C. Penwarden (2008) 55; Jones, 949; and White, “Representations or People?” 258-259.

¹⁴⁵ Baque, 55.

¹⁴⁶ Shields Dobson, 127.

¹⁴⁷ Shields Dobson, 127.

spectacle.¹⁴⁸ According to Debord, the spectacle “philosophizes reality, and turns the material life of everyone into a universe of speculation.”¹⁴⁹ The “appeal of the real” dominates digital society.¹⁵⁰ Authentic experience is desired. The enjoyment of watching and looking at webcam and photographic images therefore exists because they offer access to documents of truth.

While the method of appropriation – where an artist incorporates an existing image, produced by another party, in his/her own artwork by means of reproduction – has long existed within artistic practice, photography historian Geoffrey Batchen indicates that “the reproduction and consumption” and “flow and exchange” of digital images “constitute our culture”.¹⁵¹ *Homecammers – Women* is situated in the very center of this cultural manifestation, since Sourkes appropriates and (re-)reproduces the images featured in the artwork. The images were first created and transmitted online by ‘cam girls’ employing personal webcams. Sourkes subsequently ‘grabbed’ or captured 40 stills from the live ‘cam girl’ footage without permission, archiving the images in a digital archival database. She then submitted the stills in a grid formation – which together create *Homecammers – Women* – to [n.paradoxa](#), where they were positioned within the journal layout for publication. Finally, the journal printed numerous copies of the issue featuring the artwork, viewed by subscribers and other prospective readers. The process of appropriation which occurs in *Homecammers – Women* demonstrates that although the

¹⁴⁸ Shields Dobson, 127.

¹⁴⁹ Debord, 17.

¹⁵⁰ James Poniewozik, “We Like to Watch,” *Time* (26 Jun. 2000).

¹⁵¹ Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001) 155.

imagery which ‘cam girls’ produce is protected by copyright to a certain degree, fair use positions the imagery at the mercy of the spectator.¹⁵² In Koskela’s formulation:

What, how and when is presented is controlled by the person(s) whose images are circulated. How these pictures will subsequently be used, runs out of control. This however, is precisely the point of the phenomenon: to reject the regime of shame means rejecting the traditional understanding of objectification.¹⁵³

When appropriating these images – which are ‘sourced’ rather than ‘found’, since they constitute the aim of a focused exploration – Sourkes eliminates many of their digital qualities.¹⁵⁴ She rids the images of their specific medium: spectatorial views of these images are now directed toward the pages of a hard copy journal instead of the Internet on a screen; presented in rows within a book format, the images are viewed similar to that of a photo album. Homogenized by their black and white color scale, the images which are usually viewed solitarily are now considered within a group, providing spectatorship which facilitates a comparative analysis and generates various narratives.¹⁵⁵ Sourkes captures the images and displays them without reference to date or time, transforming them from their real-time and live online condition of self-portraits into fixed photographic portraits.

With *Homecammers – Women*, Sourkes impedes time. On the one hand, Sourkes critiques digital society’s fast-paced lifestyle within a culture driven by production and consumption. On the other hand, Sourkes comments on what artist and writer Robert Bean suggests is one of “copious observations on the obsolescence of photography” within the recent “transition in photographic technology from the nineteenth-century

¹⁵² Senft, 47.

¹⁵³ Koskela, “Webcams, TV Shows and Mobile Phones,” 211.

¹⁵⁴ Martha Langford, “Strange Bedfellows,” *Photography & Culture* 1: 1 (Jul. 2008) 77.

¹⁵⁵ Langford, 84.

gelatine silver processes to digital media.”¹⁵⁶ Using digital photographic technology, Sourkes seems to return to more traditional and historical photographic practices, substituting rapid temporality for duration and exchanging digital image grabs for found snapshots – employing an updated version of the ‘found vernacular photograph’ method of artistic production.¹⁵⁷ Sourkes references histories past and illustrates ‘that-has-been’.

Conclusion

Sourkes also considers time in *Homecammers – Women’s* mode of display. As a female artist and curator, Sourkes was asked by Baert to contribute an artwork to n.paradoxa’s *curatorial strategies* issue. Her participation strengthens the platform of feminist curation concerned with defining the “possibilities, limitations and shaping influence of institutional settings,” questioning existing structures and finding new spaces of exhibition for contemporary art.¹⁵⁸ By presenting *Homecammers – Women* within a journal, Sourkes broadens conventional notions of exhibition practices and breaks institutional boundaries.¹⁵⁹ Since the journal is printed bi-annually, *Homecammers – Women* was exhibited for six months from July 2006 until January 2007 – when the next issue was published – and continues to be displayed with an indefinite shelf-life. The span of the artwork’s exhibition run – which within an artistic institution would ordinarily last only a few months – is therefore extended. If the journal is not purchased or lays closed, the artwork’s time of exposure stays the same, much like artworks that are

¹⁵⁶ Robert Bean, “Questions of Obsolescence,” *Image and Inscription: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Photography* (Toronto: Gallery 44: YYZ Books, 2005) 194.

¹⁵⁷ Bean, 192, 203.

¹⁵⁸ Renee Baert, “Editorial,” n.paradoxa 18 (2006): 4.

¹⁵⁹ While many of Sourkes’ artworks have been exhibited with galleries and museums, *Homecammers – Women* has never been shown outside n.paradoxa.

displayed within exhibition halls empty of visitors. Furthermore, *Homecammers – Women* bears resemblance to the documentation of an artwork within an exhibition catalogue. In this instance however, the actual exhibition has been bypassed. Once again, Sourkes manages time, noting the lifecycle of an artwork which, once it is presented in a museum or gallery, eventually emerges within the pages of an exhibition catalogue.

At the same time that duration is expanded throughout *Homecammers – Women’s* exhibition, the artwork’s reception is limited. Sourkes diminishes the artwork’s spectatorship: while the images are commoditized through the major media of art world circulation – the art magazine, journal or catalogue – they are made available to a pre-determined elite market, rather than, as in their former state, being globally accessible online.¹⁶⁰ Despite the fact that the reception of the images has transformed from being viewed within the Synopticon to being viewed within a structure similar to that of the Panopticon, the images are still spectacles which, according to Debord, represent digital society’s popular culture:

Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production. [...] It is the very heart of society’s real unreality. In all its specific manifestations – news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment – the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life.¹⁶¹

While numerous sources have been published throughout her career, my research led to the conclusion that the majority of recent scholarship which examines Sourkes’ artistic practice employing webcam imagery, does not specifically mention

¹⁶⁰ Issues of [n.paradoxa](#) may be purchased for approximately \$23.00CAD.

¹⁶¹ Debord, 13.

Homecammers – Women.¹⁶² Through an examination of spectatorship toward digital imagery as commodities and depictions of truth, my analysis of *Homecammers – Women* enables a demonstration of digital society’s interest in watching and looking. It is my intention that this study add to the gap in art historical scholarship written about this artwork.

Now that my case studies which focus on public and private spectatorship are complete, Chapter 3 proceeds with a comparison of *Eyes of Laura* and *Homecammers – Women* in order to analyze how these two artworks defy institutional boundaries and support surveillance and spectacle. Drawing from theories of institutional critique as well as theories based on scholarship by Foucault and Debord, I demonstrate how these two artworks come together within digital culture.

¹⁶² These published sources include feature newspaper, magazine and journal articles in the *Globe and Mail*, *C: International Contemporary Art and Blackflash* written by artist and art critic Gary Micheal Dault, Cheryl Simon, and Cyril Reade, respectively, as well as Cheryl Sourkes: Public Camera (2007), an exhibition catalogue co-published by the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, the Southern Alberta Art Gallery and the Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery and “Questions of Obsolescence,” a chapter by Robert Bean in the book Image and Inscription: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Photography (2005).

CHAPTER 3

New Media Practices of Institutional Critique, Surveillance and Spectacle

The proliferation of surveillance within digital society has led innovative manifestations of its model to be conceived, in particular the webcam, located at the core of this thesis. Literary and cultural theorist Vincent P. Pecora indicates that the webcam transforms the limited framework of surveillance – as a controlling and intimidating presence which constantly surveys – into an open, informal, decentralized and globally accessible practice that everyday individuals manipulate.¹⁶³ In conjunction with the Internet, the webcam allows surveillance to emerge as an activity of leisure where images are produced and circulated within mediated cultures, “offering the chance of social inclusion, of consumer choice and of democratic rights.”¹⁶⁴

This thesis has offered multiple reasons which support digital society’s appeal toward watching – and looking at – images. In Chapter 1, drawing from theories based on Foucault’s ideology of the ‘surveillance society’ – centered on the Panopticon – I demonstrated notions of public space spectatorship through a case study of Cardiff’s *Eyes of Laura*. In Chapter 2, following theories based on Debord’s concept of the ‘society of the spectacle’ – focused on the Synopticon – I revealed notions of private space spectatorship by examining Sourkes’ *Homecammers – Women*. My findings in these two chapters establish the foundation for my comparison of *Eyes of Laura* and *Homecammers – Women* in this final chapter. It does not offer an exhaustive list of similarities and differences between the artworks but focuses on their corresponding relationship outside

¹⁶³ Vincent P. Pecora, “The Culture of Surveillance,” *Qualitative Sociology* (Fall 2002): 347.

¹⁶⁴ Green, 29.

the art institution as well as their readings rooted in surveillance and spectacle. This chapter consists of two parts. First, drawing from theories of institutional critique, it demonstrates the 1) collaborative participation; 2) prolonged spectatorship; and 3) varied audiences that *Eyes of Laura* and *Homecammers – Women* offer. Last, employing theories based on the scholarship of Foucault and Debord, this chapter presents the thesis of this study which recognizes *Eyes of Laura* and *Homecammers – Women* as artworks that bring forward a consideration of the ways in which Foucault's 'surveillance society' and Debord's 'society of the spectacle' co-exist within digital society.

Institutional Critique

As a hybrid manifestation, new media struggles to situate itself, surfacing somewhere at the intersection of art galleries and museums and the various sectors of scientific and entertainment industries.¹⁶⁵ New media consequently has an exhibition history outside the art institution, showcased at festivals, fairs, international exhibitions and biennales. The tentative relationship between new media and the art institution is reciprocal. On the one hand, the institution's reluctance toward new media initiates from its fear of experimenting and failing with new technologies, generating a loss of funds.¹⁶⁶ According to curator and new media theorist Rachel Greene, institutions perceive new media as uneasily commodifiable, ephemeral, technologically complex and prone to obsolescence.¹⁶⁷ On the other hand, new media artists indicate that the institution's

¹⁶⁵ Hans-Peter Schwarz, Media-Art-History: Media Museum, ZKM, Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe Trans. Freiherr von Teuffenbach (Munich; New York: Prestel, 1997) 8.

¹⁶⁶ This resistance to technological change also occurred with the institution's decision to accept photography as an artistic medium as well as its deployment of audio-visual viewing within exhibition halls. Schwarz, 13, 17.

¹⁶⁷ Rachel Greene, Internet Art (London; New York: Thames & Hudson) 79.

archaic and elitist practices – configured to accommodate the exhibition of the immobile art object – oppose the “democratic character of new media.”¹⁶⁸ Traditional institutional policies based on the concept of the ‘white cube’ do not facilitate the new media spectator: a viewer, user and consumer.¹⁶⁹ Adjunct Curator of New Media Arts at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Christiane Paul therefore suggests that new media is best suited in a ‘museum without walls’ – a notion conceived by French author André Malraux and theorized by American art critic and theorist Rosalind E. Krauss – consisting of a “distributed, living information space open to artistic interference – a space for exchange, collaborative creation, and presentation that is transparent and flexible.”¹⁷⁰

Cardiff and Sourkes deliberately exhibit *Eyes of Laura and Homecammers – Women* outside the art institution. While there are multiple reasons which support the art institution’s traditional exhibition model as unfit to display new media, my study focuses on three accounts particular to the two artworks in discussion, including: 1) collaborative participation; 2) prolonged spectatorship; and 3) varied audiences.

Like the majority of new media that requests spectators to participate, navigate and contribute, the collaborative nature of *Eyes of Laura and Homecammers – Women* challenges the ways in which spectators conventionally partake in the act of viewing

¹⁶⁸ Christiane Paul, “Challenges for a Ubiquitous Museum: Presenting and Preserving New Media,” *NEME* (Jan. 2007); and Julian Stallabrass, *Internet Art: The Online Crash of Culture and Commerce* (London: Tate Pub., 2003) 8.

¹⁶⁹ Brian O’Doherty discusses the white cube in *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, (Santa Monica, California: Lapis Press, 1986); and Schwarz, 11.

¹⁷⁰ Christiane Paul, “New Media Art and Institutional Critique: Networks vs. Institutions,” *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zürich, Switzerland: JRP/Ringier, 2006) 191; Rosalind E. Krauss, “Postmodernism’s Museum Without Walls,” *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London; New York: Routledge, 1996) 341-348; and André Malraux, *Museum Without Walls*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, and Francis Price, 1st ed. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967).

within the museum context – for example, as a painting’s passive observer.¹⁷¹ Users experience *Eyes of Laura* by actively manipulating the website, viewing audio-visual clips, reading blog entries and employing the webcam to watch real-time, live events occurring on the grounds of the Vancouver Art Gallery. In a like manner, spectators physically handle and peruse the n.paradoxa journal when experiencing *Homecammers - Women*. According to Paul, the spectator’s involvement with new media opposes the long-established principal and basic rule of museum culture: “please do not touch.”¹⁷² Both of these artworks welcome individualized collaborative participation, establishing an intimate and accessible experience for the spectator.

The term ‘spectatorship’ refers to the ways in which individuals look at representation, acknowledge and identify with characters and imagery, understand the narrative experience and process this knowledge once viewing is complete.¹⁷³ Since art institution visitors usually spend mere seconds contemplating traditional artworks such as paintings and sculptures, the gallery and museum context initiates potentially disastrous views toward new media which requires prolonged spectatorship. According to Paul, one of the main institutional challenges of exhibiting new media is “to engage the audience for a period of time that is long enough to allow a piece to reveal its content.”¹⁷⁴ In art historian and media theorist Christine Ross’ formulation, lack of time haunts the art institution; spectators must make and take time to fully engage with new media.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Paul, “New Media Art and Institutional Critique,” 198.

¹⁷² Paul, “New Media Art and Institutional Critique,” 198.

¹⁷³ White, 5, 6.

¹⁷⁴ Paul, “Challenges for a Ubiquitous Museum.”

¹⁷⁵ Christine Ross, REFRESH! The First International Conference on the Histories of Media Art, Science and Technology (2005) <<http://www.banffcentre.ca/bnmi/programs/archives/2005/refresh/lisiten.asp>>.

In order to maintain the extended period of engagement necessary to experience new media, *Eyes of Laura* and *Homecammers – Women* are available outside the art institution, within the private space of the user. By accessing *Eyes of Laura* online, spectators escape the hassle of visiting the institution during opening hours and finding individualized time to appreciate the artwork amongst swarming visitors.¹⁷⁶

Homecammers – Women's book format allows spectators to invest time viewing the artwork and analyzing its relationship in combination with the rest of the journal's content. Both of these artworks invite prolonged spectatorship from within personal space, providing the new media spectator with a relaxed and enjoyable experience.

Fusing art, science and technology, new media art attracts a diversified group of spectators – not necessarily the elitist patron of the art institution – and therefore devises its own systems of distribution and circulation. By employing the Internet to exhibit itself online, *Eyes of Laura* reaches global audiences, everyday individuals. *Homecammers – Women* displays itself through n.paradoxa in order to target feminist spectators – the journal's predominant readership. Both of these artworks displace conventional sites of exhibition and expand pre-determined spectatorship within the art institution, allowing globalized and socialized discourses to emerge amongst varied audiences.

Employing new media – a platform that renegotiates the borders between center and margin, politics of inclusion and exclusion, and institutional boundaries – to welcome collaborative participation, prolonged spectatorship and varied audiences, rejecting conventional exhibition models established by the art institution, suggests that Cardiff and Sourkes participate in a form of institutional critique.¹⁷⁷ Following art and cultural

¹⁷⁶ Christiane Paul, *Digital Art* (London; New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003) 23-24.

¹⁷⁷ Paul, "New Media Art and Institutional Critique," 192, 208.

critic and activist Brian Holmes' formulation, institutional critique is conducted by artists who perceive the art institution as a confined space and aim to revolutionize its hegemonic nature, desiring a departure from the customary 'white cube' model of display found in the static, modernist, bourgeois art museum to a mobile, liberal space immersed with "living knowledge that can reach out into the world."¹⁷⁸

While artists have participated in institutional critique for over 40 years, since the turn of the millennium the art institution came to realize that the proliferation of new media art in other venues stressed the importance of modifying its own policies and procedures to harmonize its relationship with new media culture. Engaging in a self-reflexive process, the art institution seeks ways to adapt to new media art by providing necessary platforms for artworks contingent upon, "transient encounters, states of flux and open-endedness."¹⁷⁹ As founding Director of the Museum of Modern Art Alfred H. Barr, Jr., suggests, "A museum has to follow what artists are doing. Art history has to follow art. Not the opposite. Too much today the museum wants to prescribe what art is."¹⁸⁰ Present-day institutional critique therefore appears to be institutionalized.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ It has been debated that the term 'institutional critique' was coined in the writings of art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and artist Andrea Fraser. The first wave was initiated in the 1960-1970s by conceptual artists who assaulted the status of the art object by re-considering and de-constructing its traditional visuality, commoditization and form of distribution and attempting to break away from the ideological and economical framework posed by the artistic institution. A second wave of artists emerged in the 1980-1990s who were influenced by feminist and postcolonial historiography and disputed and re-constructed hierarchies of museological representation and economic power. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962 – 1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 107; Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum* (Sept. 2005); Isabelle Graw, "Beyond Institutional Critique," *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. Welchman, 138; Brian Holmes, "Extradisciplinary Investigations: Towards a New Critique of Institutions," *Transform* (Jan. 2007); and Simon Sheikh, "Notes on Institutional Critique," *Transform* (Jan. 2006).

¹⁷⁹ Claire Doherty, "The Institution is Dead! Long Live the Institution! Contemporary Art and New Institutionalism," *Engage* 15 (Summer 2004).

¹⁸⁰ Peter Weibel quotes Alfred H. Barr of the Museum of Modern Art in an unpublished interview by Sarah Cook (2000). Forthcoming transcript: <<http://www.newmedia.sunderland.ac.uk/crumb/>>. <<http://www.archimuse.com/mw2001/papers/graham/graham.html>>.

¹⁸¹ Fraser, 278.

Curator Claire Doherty terms this technique ‘new institutionalism’, constituting “a field of curatorial practice, institutional reform and critical debate concerned with the transformation of art institutions from within.”¹⁸²

The Vancouver Art Gallery is a key player in ‘new institutionalism’ in Doherty’s sense. With its *On Location: Public Art for the New Millennium* project in 2000, the Gallery embraced artworks that push institutional limits and are exhibited unconventionally. According to Grenville, “the Gallery has primarily focused attention on the exhibitions inside, resulting in a sharp distinction between interior activities and the outside world.”¹⁸³ The Gallery realized change was necessary; it followed Cardiff’s lead and expanded its exhibition space outward with the commission of *Eyes of Laura*.

Grenville indicates:

There is certainly a place for museums to support new media, that’s how the Vancouver Art Gallery got interested in Janet’s work. It was a definitely a bit of a stretch for us, in terms of, ‘What are we buying? What are we supporting here? In the end, what do we get?’ that constitutes an artwork that would come into our collection. [...] It was a bit of a gamble on our part, but I think it is something that galleries should do, which is, in a sense support new media, in different kinds of ways and to acknowledge that not all art will take on the traditional forms or media that are much more easily contained and controlled within the museum. This is a [...] piece which is exciting to put into the collection context. There is certainly a role for institutions to do this.¹⁸⁴

New media art such as *Eyes of Laura* and *Homecammers – Women* challenge traditional notions of the modernist museum – the ‘white cube’, cultural consensus and timelessness – so that an experimental space where collaborative participation, prolonged

¹⁸² Doherty.

¹⁸³ The Vancouver Art Gallery, [News Release for the Millennium Project](#) Archival Documentation (Vancouver: The Vancouver Art Gallery).

¹⁸⁴ Grenville, Interview.

spectatorship and varied audiences can exist.¹⁸⁵ Institutional critique artist and theorist Andrea Fraser suggests that while evading “the limits of institutional determination, to embrace an outside, to redefine art or reintegrate it into everyday life, to reach ‘everyday’ people, and work in the ‘real’ world,” artists and the art institution work collaboratively to expand the institution’s framework, escaping elitism and favoring inclusiveness.¹⁸⁶

Surveillance and Spectacle

The aim of this thesis has been to conceive a framework from which to convey my argument recognizing *Eyes of Laura* and *Homecammers – Women* as artworks that bring forward a consideration of the ways in which Foucault’s ‘surveillance society’ and Debord’s ‘society of the spectacle’ co-exist within digital society. The grounds upon which my claim lays are rooted in Mathiesen’s formulation which suggests that contemporary culture is characterized by a mergence of the systems of panopticism and synopticism: one strengthens the other.¹⁸⁷ As *Eyes of Laura* and *Homecammers – Women* generate notions of surveillance and spectacle, they point toward a society composed of what Haggerty and Ericson term the ‘surveillant assemblage’ where surveillance theory no longer privileges the Panopticon but expands its margins to also encompass the Synopticon.¹⁸⁸

While Foucault made an important contribution to surveillance studies, he neglected to consider the relationship between surveillance and mass media, which

¹⁸⁵ Stella Rollig, “Contemporary Art Practices and the Museum: To Be Reconciled at All?” *Beyond the Box: Diverging Curatorial Practices*, ed. Melanie Townsend (Banff, Alberta: Banff Centre Press, 2003) 100.

¹⁸⁶ Fraser, 282.

¹⁸⁷ Mathiesen.

¹⁸⁸ Kevin D. Haggerty, and Richard V. Ericson, “The Surveillant Assemblage,” *British Journal of Sociology* 51:4 (2000): 605-622.

simultaneously increased in popularity within modernity. Foucault recognized the spectacle when he wrote, “our society is not one of spectacle but of surveillance,” however he was referring to the spectacle as a form of disciplinary violence – such as penitentiary torture and/or infliction of pain – situated in an entirely different context from the commoditized media spectacle theorized by Debord and discussed throughout this thesis.¹⁸⁹ As Mathiesen suggests, even though Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1977) was published a decade after Debord’s The Society of the Spectacle (1967), Foucault’s writings fail to consider how surveillance and spectacle collaborate; a collaboration which acts as the foundation of contemporary culture.

According to Debord, the spectacle is the economic center directly responsible for the production of an increasing amount of images.¹⁹⁰ As socialization is dominated by an accumulation of this commoditized imagery, the spectacle is the source from which society allows itself to be informed; the image is society’s predominant mode of experience.¹⁹¹ Debord suggests that this capitalist system produces and reinforces isolation: “The origin of the spectacle lies in the world’s loss of unity. Spectators are only linked by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from one another.”¹⁹²

Media culture theorist Douglas Kellner indicates that the spectacle within digital society still surfaces from media culture, colonizing most fields of experience from television, film and popular music to fashion, art, sports and video games, and

¹⁸⁹ Debord terms these two distinct models of the spectacle as ‘concentrated’ and ‘diffused’. Debord, 40; Foucault, 217.

¹⁹⁰ Debord, 16.

¹⁹¹ Debord, 16, 19.

¹⁹² Debord, 22.

permeating and shaping consumers' everyday lives.¹⁹³ In philosopher Steven Best's formulation, the society of the spectacle has been referred to as "an apparatus of contemporary capitalism which subjects individuals to societal manipulation" through the consumption of images, commodities and spectacles, dictated by advertising and commercialized media culture. Digital society therefore consumes fabricated spectacles but also produces its own spectacular images via the webcam – the subject of this study – to be viewed as forms of leisurely entertainment.¹⁹⁴ Debord indicates that "a culture now wholly commodity was bound to become the star commodity of the society of the spectacle."¹⁹⁵ As consumers and producers of individualized, commoditized and exchanged imagery based on everyday life – aided by visual technologies such as the webcam and the Internet – digital society emerges as an inclusive globally networked community where surveillance and spectacle collapse onto one another.

As a screen capable of both monitoring and acting as the object of visibility, the webcam effectively fuses surveillance, and its panoptic principals, and the spectacle, and its synoptic principals, within digital society. The webcam evokes a response in digital society: according to Groombridge, conventional feelings toward the surveillance camera as an oppressive force and an encroachment of privacy no longer stand: "We cannot simply reject [surveillance] as invasion when we seem to welcome invasion."¹⁹⁶ The Internet facilitates digital society to be "surrounded today, everywhere, all the time, by arrays of multiple, simultaneous, images."¹⁹⁷ The spectacle is a global vista for

¹⁹³ Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003) 2-10.

¹⁹⁴ Steven Best, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997) 79, 85.

¹⁹⁵ Debord, 137.

¹⁹⁶ Nic Groombridge, "Crime Control or Crime Culture CCTV?" *Surveillance & Society* 1:1 (2002): 44.

¹⁹⁷ Beatriz Colomina, "Enclosed by Images: Architecture in the Post-Sputnik Age," *CTRL [SPACE]*, ed. Levin, et al., 323.

entertainment.¹⁹⁸ As Weibel indicates, surveillance “becomes pleasure” and is enthusiastically enjoyed when it exists as spectacle.¹⁹⁹

While studies have had a tendency to separate the two, surveillance and spectacle have actually existed concurrently from the outset. Mathiesen indicates that in Orwell’s 1984 for example, panopticism and synopticism had already completely merged: through the two-way function of the telescreens, ‘Big Brother’ watched Smith at the same time that Smith watched ‘Big Brother’.²⁰⁰

This thesis has attempted to provide a discourse which considers surveillance and spectacle conjointly, arguing that the webcam-based new media artworks *Eyes of Laura* and *Homecammers – Women* by Canadian artists Janet Cardiff and Cheryl Sourkes bring forward a consideration of the ways in which Foucault’s ‘surveillance society’ and Debord’s ‘society of the spectacle’ co-exist within digital society. In Chapter 1, drawing from theories centered on the Panopticon, I examined Cardiff’s *Eyes of Laura* through notions of public space spectatorship. In Chapter 2, following theories based on the Synopticon, I revealed notions of private space spectatorship by investigating Sourkes’ *Homecammers – Women*. This chapter provided a comparison of the two artworks rooted in institutional critique and contemplated the co-existence of surveillance and spectacle in digital society. Through my analyses of *Eyes of Laura* and *Homecammers – Women*, the contribution of this thesis to new media art history lies in showing how contemporary art practices prompt a reconsideration of how the webcam extends visibility.

¹⁹⁸ Murphy, 177.

¹⁹⁹ Weibel, “Pleasure and the Panoptic Principal,” CTRL [SPACE], ed. Levin, et al., 219.

²⁰⁰ Mathiesen, 223.

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FIGURES

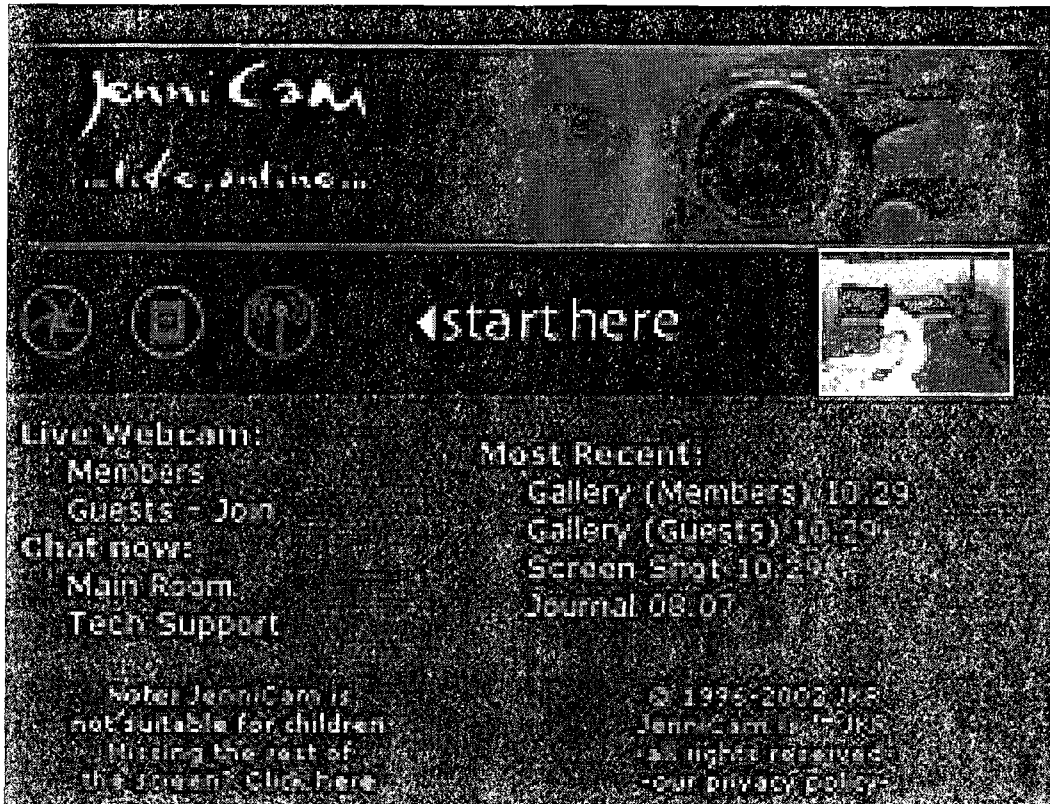


Figure 1 *JenniCam...life, online...*
Jennifer Kaye Ringley
1996 – 2003
Website Screenshot

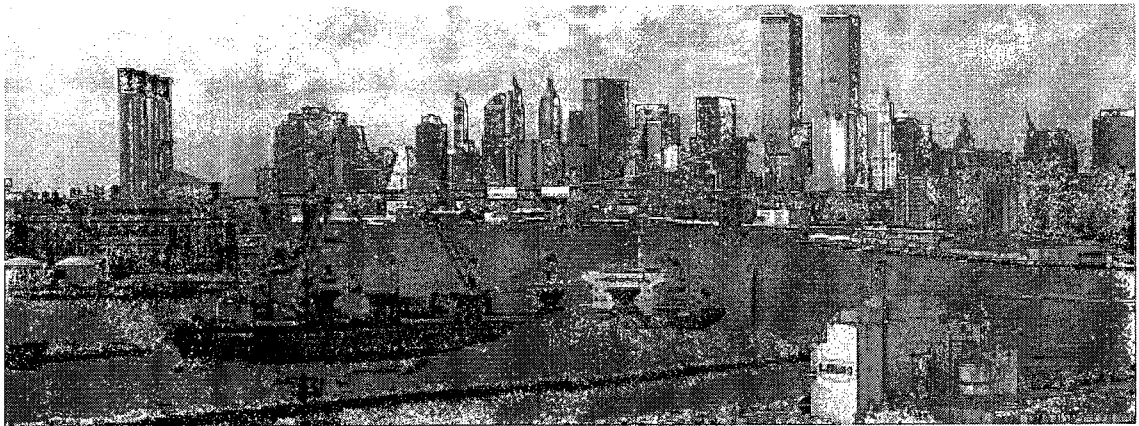


Figure 2 *Untitled*
Wolfgang Staehle
2001
Video Still

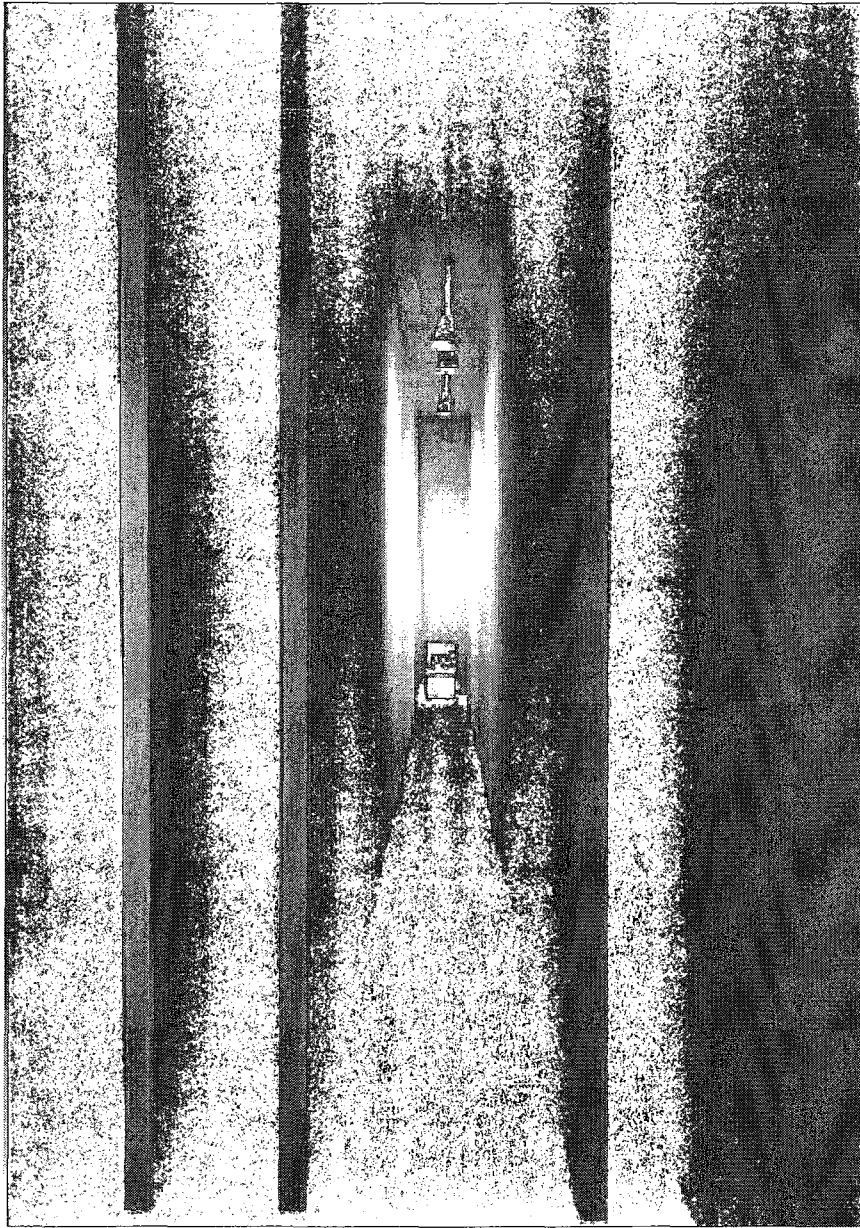


Figure 3 *Live-Taped Video Corridor*
Bruce Nauman
1970
Installation View

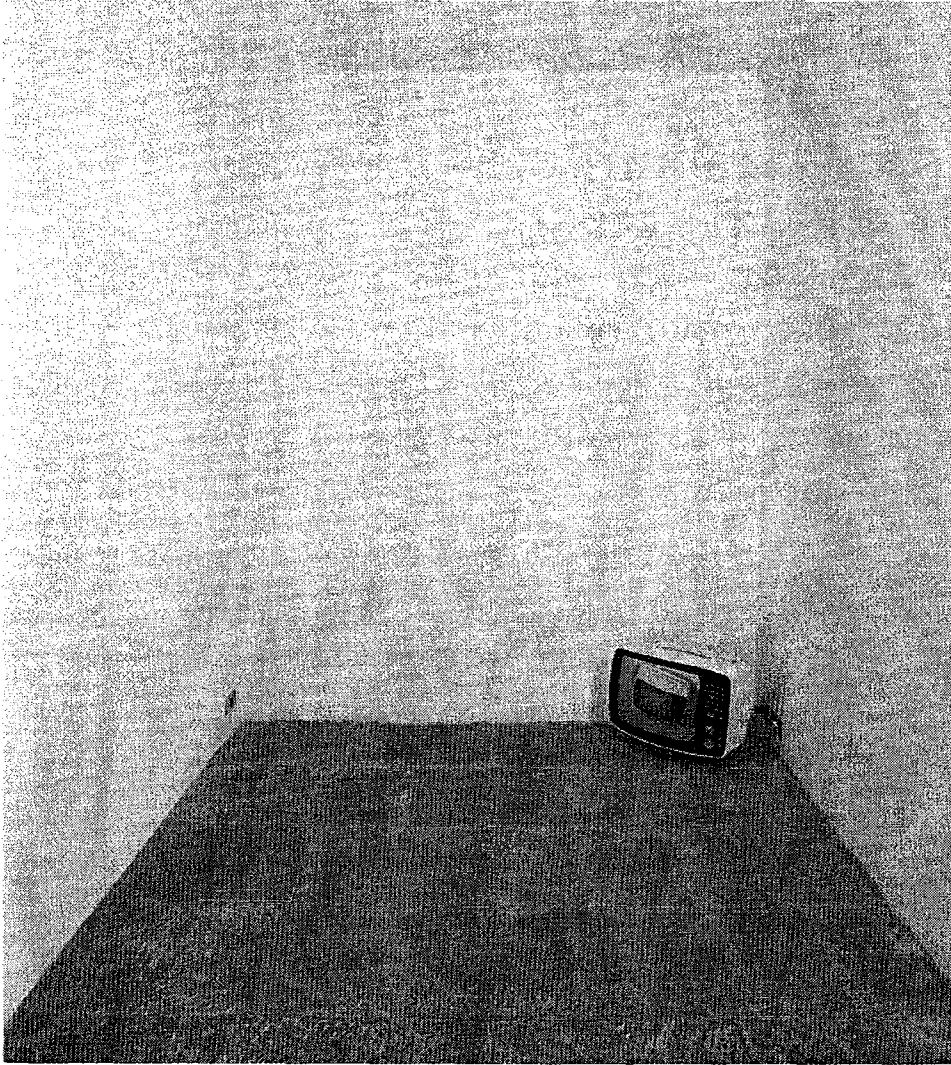


Figure 4 *Video Surveillance Piece: Public Room, Private Room*
Bruce Nauman
1969-1970
Installation View



Figure 5 *Slow Angle Walk*
Bruce Nauman
1968
Video Still



Figure 6 *Pacing Upside Down*
Bruce Nauman
1969
Video Still

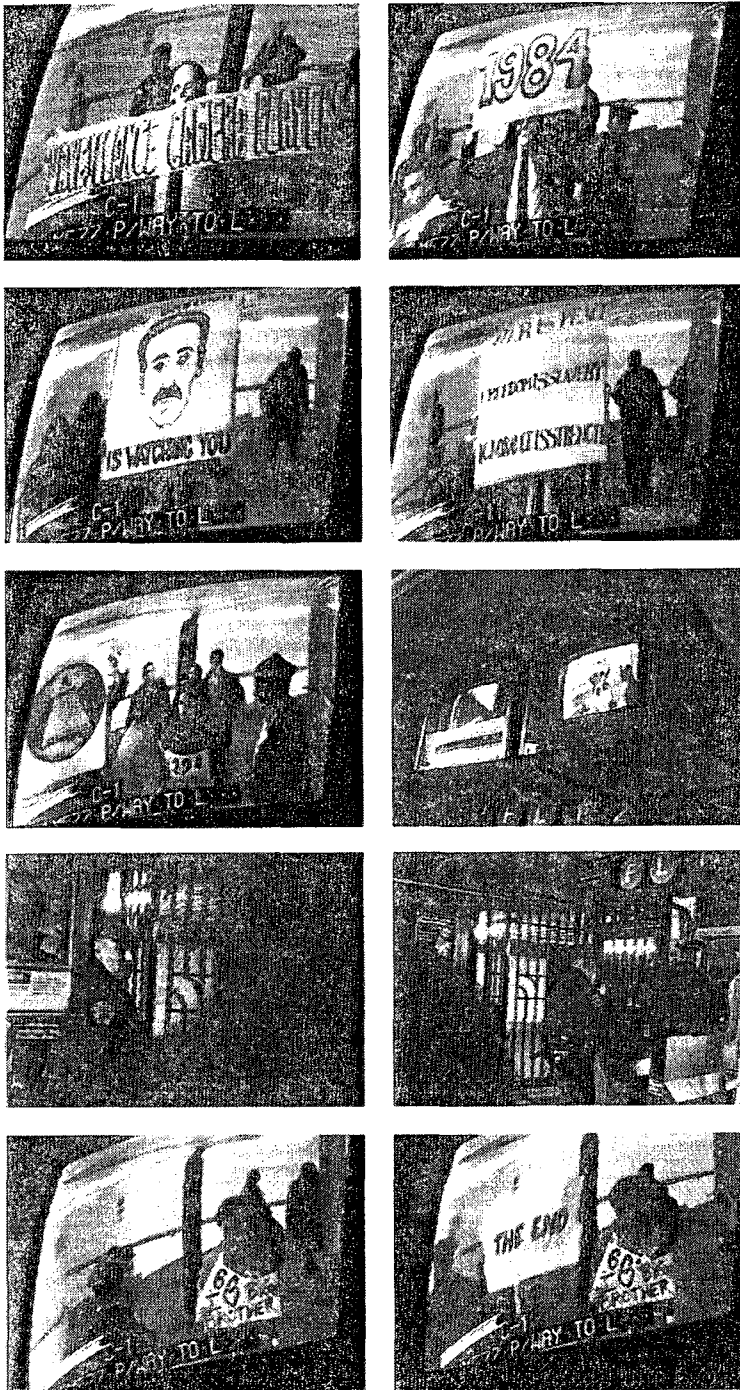


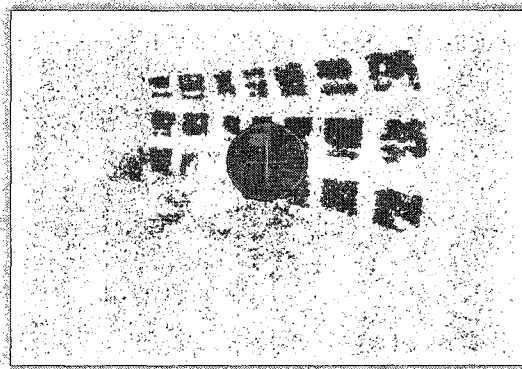
Figure 7 *George Orwell's 1984*
 Surveillance Camera Players
 1998
 Performance, Stills from Video Documentation



VOICE
MESSAGE
FEEDBACK

June 1, 2008

Sometimes I wonder whether more happens because I'm watching or whether events line themselves up for my benefit or something. Some of the things I see are pretty strange.



calendar navigation



NIETYESOFLORA.ORG

Figure 8 *Eyes of Laura*
Janet Cardiff
2004
Website Screenshot

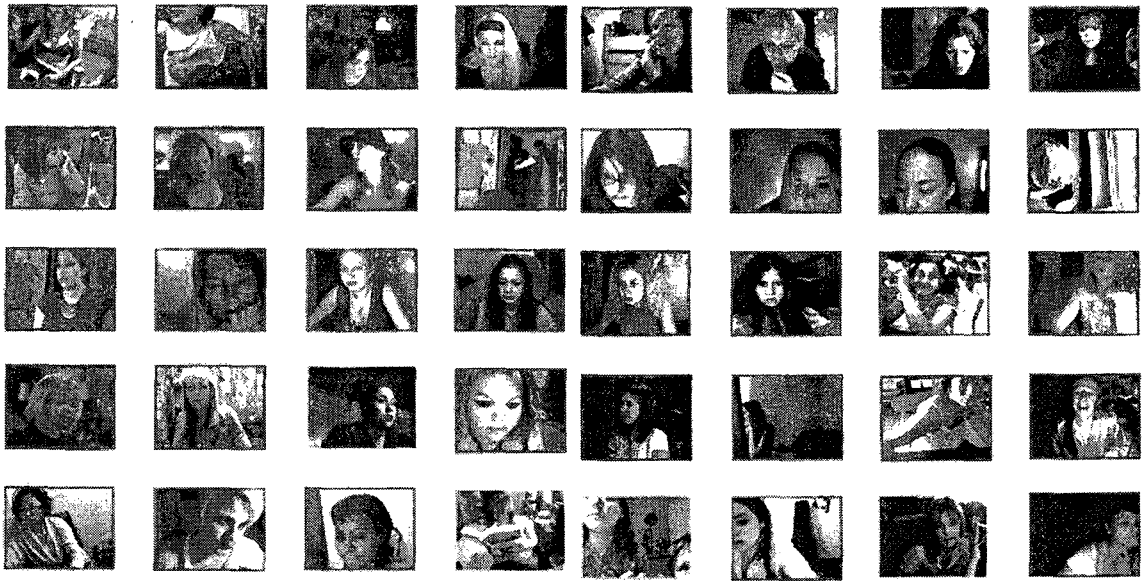
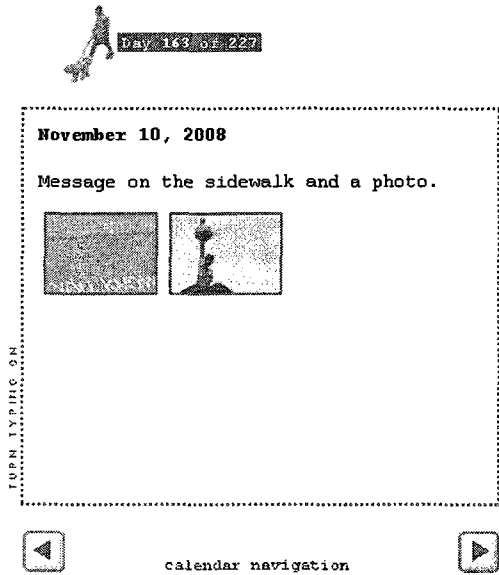
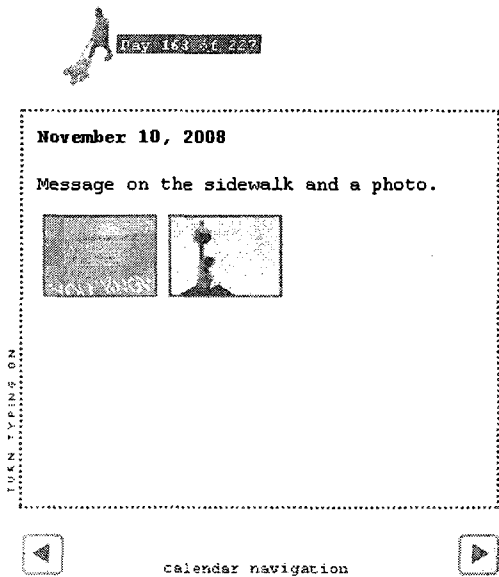


Figure 9 *Homecammers - Women*
Cheryl Sourkes
2006
Published in n.paradoxa, p. 57 – 59



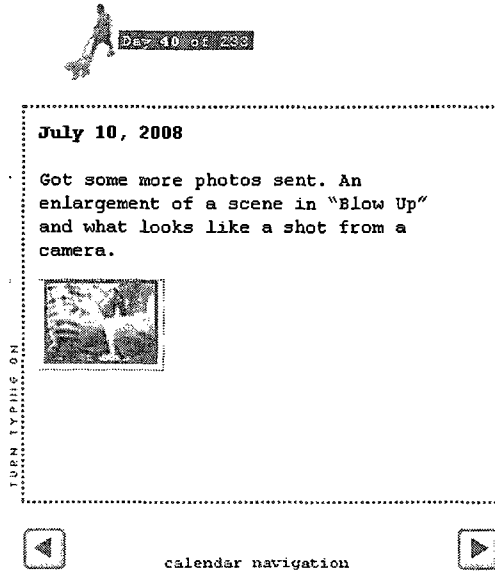
ME EYES OF LAURA.ORG

Figure 10a *Eyes of Laura*
 Janet Cardiff
 2004
 Website Screenshot, Day 163



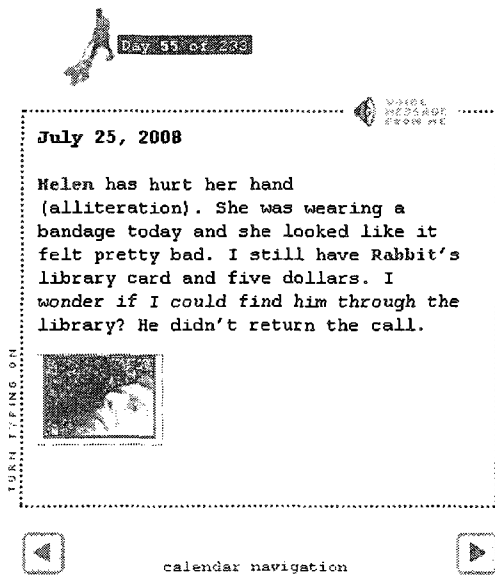
ME EYES OF LAURA.ORG

Figure 10b *Eyes of Laura*
 Janet Cardiff
 2004
 Website Screenshot, Day 163



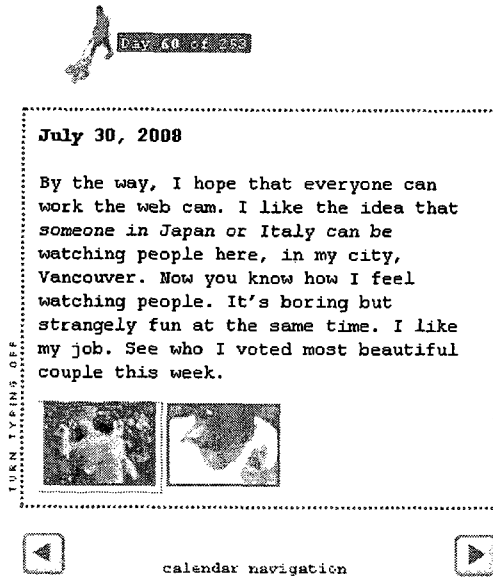
ME EYES OF LAURA.ORG

Figure 11a *Eyes of Laura*
Janet Cardiff
2004
Website Screenshot, Day 40



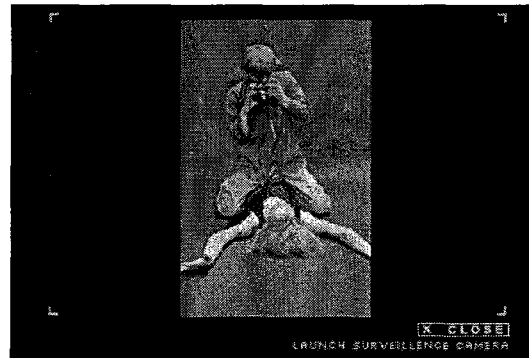
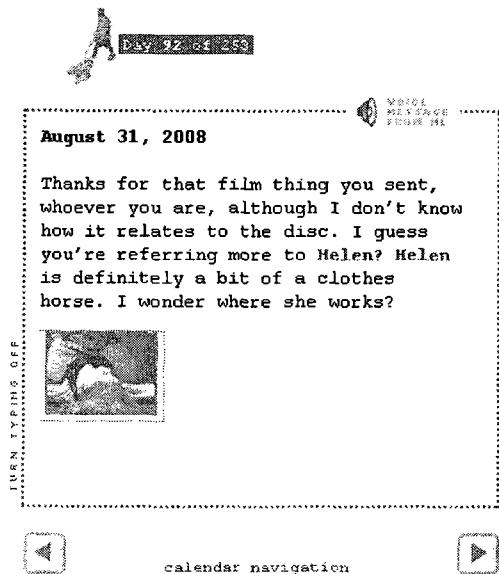
ME EYES OF LAURA.ORG

Figure 11b *Eyes of Laura*
Janet Cardiff
2004
Website Screenshot, Day 55



ME EYES OF LAURA.ORG

Figure 11c *Eyes of Laura*
Janet Cardiff
2004
Website Screenshot, Day 60



ME EYES OF LAURA.ORG

Figure 11d *Eyes of Laura*
Janet Cardiff
2004
Website Screenshot, Day 92

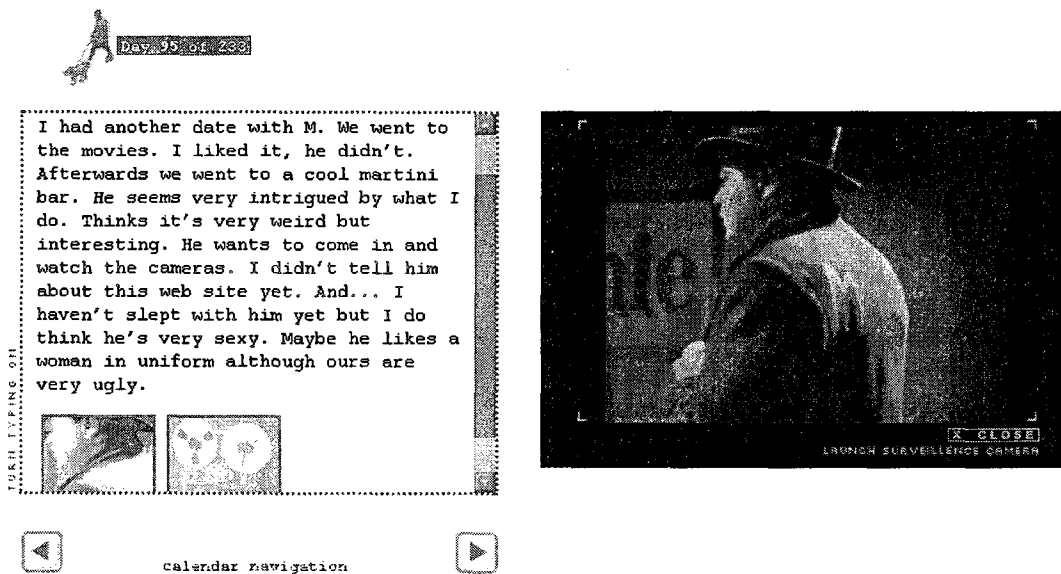
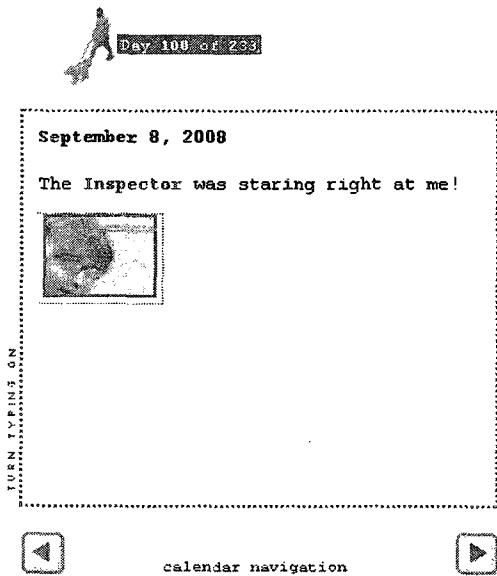
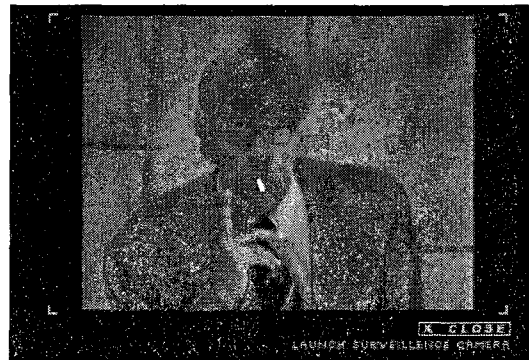
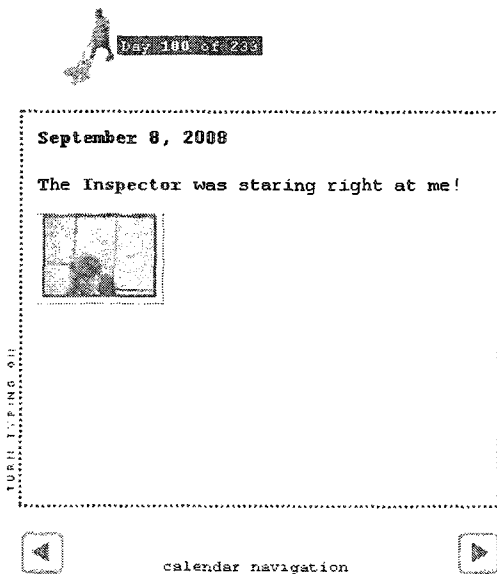


Figure 12 *Eyes of Laura*
 Janet Cardiff
 2004
 Website Screenshot, Day 95



NEEYESOFLAURA.ORG

Figure 13a *Eyes of Laura*
Janet Cardiff
2004
Website Screenshot, Day 100



NEEYESOFLAURA.ORG

Figure 13b *Eyes of Laura*
Janet Cardiff
2004
Website Screenshot, Day 100



Figure 14a *JenniCam... life online...*
Jennifer Kaye Ringley
1996 – 2003
Webcam Still



Spent the day trying to install a USB cam under Win98. Giving up after 6 continuous hours. Using the iMac in the bedroom again

Figure 14b *JenniCam... life online...*
Jennifer Kaye Ringley
1996 – 2003
Webcam Still

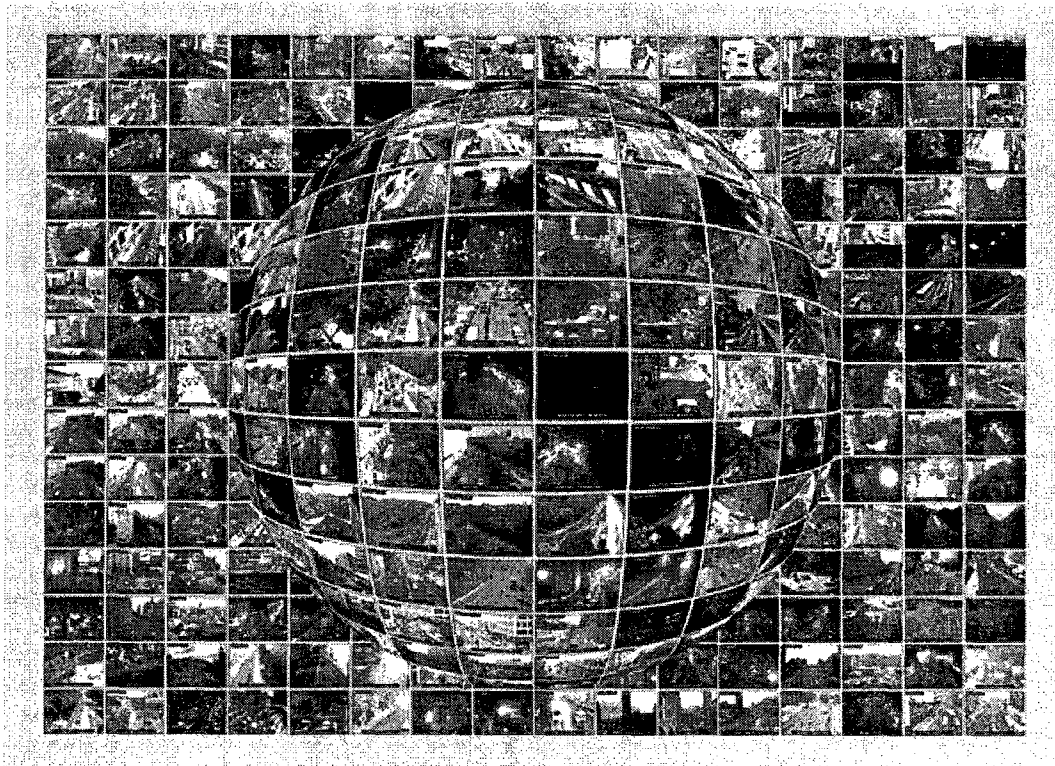


Figure 15 *Virtual London*
Cheryl Sourkes
2001
From *Cam Cities*



Figure 16 *Moda Burgo, Fashion Design School, Milan*
Cheryl Sourkes
2003
From *Interior*