





## Introduction

# Watching Europe and Beyond: Surveillance, Art and Photography in the New Millennium

LOUISE WOLTERS

I

The 175th anniversary of photography was recently celebrated in a world in which cameras, photographs and the act of photographing and distributing images now dominate everyday life and spaces, and where, moreover, we live in a full-blown surveillance society in which the medium of photography plays an inextricable role. Since its invention, photography has had a major role in the theory and practice of surveillance. Photography has been used to identify and record people in the bureaucracy of state archives, in scientific maps and aerial photographs taken from hot-air balloons, planes and other aircraft, in covert recordings made by the cameras of detectives, paparazzi and journalists, and in voyeurism, selfies and self-exposure on social media – to touch on just a few points in the history of photography's technological and socio-political contexts. Throughout, photography has also been used by artists, documentary photographers and activists as a tool to critique this very surveillance, to expose the visual exercise of power, to generate counter-images and carry out acts of 'sousveillance' (looking back at those conducting surveillance 'from below').

*Watched!* presents a selection of post-millennial art addressing surveillance issues. The main focus is on lens-based media and photography in its broadest sense: as trace, representation, identification, evidence, communication and 'overview'. As well as presenting artworks that

address the current surveillance complex and the potential of surveillant practices, the book also explores themes of visibility, transparency and the gaze in a collection of new essays by surveillance researchers, art theorists, historians of photography and artists.

This introduction outlines forms of countersurveillance in art after 2000 and some of the perspectives this art has to offer with regard to key socio-political surveillance debates today. These artworks interact with a complex of shifting surveillance sites, some of which might otherwise slip under the radar. Artists have a long history of critiquing dominant viewing positions and manifesting alternatives to them – exposing and intervening in the many forms taken by contemporary surveillance in time and space in the field of what could perhaps more accurately be called 'multiveillance'.

Over the past fifteen years, surveillance practices, technologies and debates have multiplied, the academic field of surveillance studies has emerged, and the number of artists, exhibitions and publications dealing with surveillance has continued to increase. *Watched!* contributes to this expanding field with a historical and geopolitical focus on Northern Europe in the new millennium. Major US events such as 9/11 and Edward Snowden's exposure of the National Security Agency's (NSA) global surveillance programme have dominated public debates on surveil-



low-tech as well as ephemeral and poetic approaches. As today's multiveillance complex is so rapidly expanding and difficult to grasp, it seems crucial to deploy a broad range of tactics.

The majority of the artworks in *Watched!* incorporate a range of imagery, perspectives and positions. Footage from a surveillance camera is combined with biometrical data, data registration is converted into a visual flow, historical technologies and figures are inserted into a contemporary social analysis, and photographs from new media are combined with satellite images. For clarity, the artworks in this book are loosely divided into categories that nevertheless reflect issues of multiveillance and overlap either thematically, formally or conceptually: Screening, Controlling, Scanning, Tagging and Exposing all indicate the performative approach and engaging agency of the artists. Below is an analysis of how specific works address and introduce multiveillant perspectives under the overarching themes of Tagging, Tracking and Mapping, Machine Identification, Border Control and Drone and Satellite Views – all perspectives readers can explore in more depth in the other artworks and texts contained in this volume.

### **Networked Traces: Tagging, Tracking and Mapping**

History is full of examples of the surveillance, scrutiny, persecution, and involuntary exposure of ethnic and sexual minorities specifically and women in general. This continues in the present, now with the use of new, overlapping technologies for tagging, tracking and mapping.

British suffragettes, who fought for women's right to vote in the early twentieth century, were regarded as revolutionary subversives and many of them were placed under surveillance, arrested and forcibly photographed by the police. Evelyn Manesta is one such example. She resisted being photographed by moving her head and body so much that a prison guard had to restrain her by the neck. This is the story Paula Roush reminds us of in her performance work *Bowville*, whose main character – Marion Manesta Forrester – is named after three suffragettes. The work unites the past and the present as Marion Manesta Forrester is electronically tagged using a method tested by the British Home Office and developed by major UK secu-

rity companies. She has three days to earn her citizenship of the fictional Bowville. In Roush's work, the literal long arm of the law, which was erased from the ID photograph of Evelyn Manesta taken by the police, is symbolically represented by the tagging device around Marion Manesta Forrester's neck. Punishment, control and biopolitics are thus united in automated technologies, which, whilst they might be new, are clearly historically rooted in police photography and registration by the authorities to marginalize undesirables and new arrivals.

'Antisocial' individuals were also placed under surveillance to find incriminating evidence of their 'immorality'. This happened in another historical case, the criminal trial at Chester Assizes in 1936 of twenty-nine men suspected of homosexual acts. This incident of surveillance, harassment and fatal scrutiny is addressed in the performance-based work *Untitled (On a day unknown...)* by Jason E. Bowman. The performance is a re-enactment of the trial conducted by members of the present-day LGBTQ community in a court without an audience. The resulting physical work consists of 'filtered' documentation of the trial in the form of pinhole photographs and portraits drawn by a court artist. Bowman's piece tells the story of the pursuit and persecution of a group of criminalized individuals who were charged with indecency and sentenced to years of hard labour, penal servitude and electroshock aversion therapy. The performance is an act of communal solidarity that traverses time, as well as an empowering reclamation of a forgotten historical event. Male homosexuality was decriminalized in the UK in 1967, but even today this group continues to experience surveillance by the authorities. These are the same authorities who turn a blind eye in cases where people could have been protected by measures like video surveillance: failing to 'see' or prosecute gay bashing<sup>27</sup> can, for example, be seen as a conscious act of 'screening out'.

Homosexuality was decriminalized in Denmark as early as 1933, but in the recent project *WHO'S NEXT?* Charlotte Haslund-Christensen invited over forty gay and lesbian people to the photography cell of Copenhagen Central Police Station to be 'documented' as the criminals they are still judged to be in many countries. Haslund-Christensen uses the classical mugshot format as a way of reclaiming the surveillant gaze as well as making a communal declaration of solidarity in the form of the participants' voluntary exposure to public scrutiny. In 2015, a selection of the



# paula roush

## *Bowville*, 2004

Locative media performance, installation

In a three-day live performance, paula roush created an interactive social game of surveillance, identity and locative media. An official electronic tagging system developed by major UK security companies and used by the Home Office was simulated to create a fictional game in which the character Marian Manesta Forrester (named as an homage to the historical suffragettes) was electronically tagged and given three days to earn her citizenship to the fictional place *Bowville*.

Fig. 01–02

paula roush, *Bowville*, 2004

Locative media performance,  
installation





