



the viewer in the role of surveillant, highlighting our penchant to make tidy, if untrue, narratives about what we see but do not fully understand. James Coupe, who teaches media arts at University of Washington,

is originally from England, a country infamous for its own governmental observation program. Coupe claims that currently there are the equivalent of sixteen surveillance cameras per person in England, yet his piece here, *(re) collector* (2007), focuses not on quotidian issues of rights to privacy as much as on the frightful potential of the human imagination. *(re) collector* was inspired by "Las babas del diablo," a story by Julio Cortázar. It tells of a man who photographs a woman talking to a boy in a public area. Upon printing and blowing up the image, the man believes he may have witnessed a crime. This same story inspired Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 movie *Blowup*. In making *(re) collector*, Coupe placed ten cameras around Cambridge in various public places: inside a café, outside on a patio, by the river with sculls aligned in a neat row, in a nearby field, in a nightclub. The cameras were up for four days. Coupe intentionally wanted to link Cortázar and

sounds a bit arcane, the results were not.

In the darkened gallery, one is confronted with four monitors displaying sequential narratives. The Cambridge shots, awash in lush color, are repeated along with fragments of Cortázar's printed text (such as "all this seemed so clear 10-feet away ...") and a man's voice reading the text, but nothing is ever shown in precisely the same sequence. After watching it for a short while, the concept is clear. One can't be sure how to make meaning of these documentations, as there are an infinite number of them, but that doesn't stop our drive to create and re-create a narrative. It simply renders it suspect.

Manu Luksch (also from the UK) is part of a collective that uses hybrid media installations; Luksch is represented in this exhibition with *Faceless* (2007), a video incorporating real footage from England's surveillance system and narrated by Tilda Swinton. This sci-fi fantasy focuses on a working class woman who analyzes data in an office and lives in a world where everyone's face is covered by Baldessari-like blobs. This work was recently lauded in *Newsweek* magazine of all places, but unfortunately for me (and presumably other viewers) it was terrifically difficult to watch here. The screen was placed in a hall above the lavatory as high up as a surveillance camera itself and the DVD was garbled.

*Blind Spot* (2003), by Gary Hill, is a tangible reminder of what this artist does so well. It represents Hill's inimitable blend of the personal spreading out to the social without being self-indulgent. A short, one-channel video, *Blind Spot* begins with the image of a narrow street populated by what appear to be North

Africans (it was filmed in Marseilles). With one exception, all the women wear long flowing gowns with scarves carefully drifting over their shoulders. A middle-aged man in a crocheted fez and caftan emerges from a door. All this would seem folkloric in a *National Geographic* kind of way, except that it

is accompanied by a very loud beat that sounds like helicopter propellers. This rhythmic bop is heard instantly and constantly, so it takes a second to realize that what initially appears to be shadows cast upon the figures are actually quick, mil-

lisecond blackouts. It is a brilliant and frightening meld of aural and visual dissonance. As the man slowly crosses the street, approaching viewers, his wrinkled face fills up more and more of the screen. At the same time, the blackouts grow longer, slowing down with the sound of the motor. At one pivotal point in the video, the man turns, sees the camera and a faint smile appears on his lips. We, the surveillants, are caught in his gaze.

—Frances DeVuono

*Don't You F#(%ing Look At Me!* Surveillance in the 21st Century closed in October at 911 Media Arts Center, Seattle.

Frances DeVuono is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

## 'Don't You F#(%ing Look At Me!' at 911 Media Arts Center

911 Media Arts is well known for its classes, full service editing lab and online magazine, but it also has a gallery program and Misha Neininger, the director for more than a year, has made a strong commitment to that part of 911's programming. If this show is any indication, he is on the right track. *Don't You F#(%ing Look At Me! Surveillance in the 21st Century* is smart and timely. However, with its combination of irregular furniture and equally irregular spaces, Neininger would be well advised to make commitments to 911's interior; viewing one of the works here became more of test than a testimony to his curating, and that's too bad.

Except for intermittent attention (such as the renewal of the FISA extended wiretapping bill this past July), the very ubiquity of surveillance in our daily lives often makes us forget its existence, but these three artists have not forgotten. What makes this work so smart is that each piece raises questions that are deeper and more open-ended and unsettling than the usual précis on civil liberties. Rather than equating surveillance with omniscience, in the video pieces by James Coupe and Gary Hill, both artists place

Above: James Coupe, still from *(re)collector*, 2007, video; below: Manu Luksch, still from *Faceless*, 2007, video, at 911 Media Center, Seattle.



Antonioni by creating a computer program that would organize each of the days' data and connect it to various parts of Cortázar's text and images from *Blowup*, ultimately creating endless potentially disparate narratives. If this