Fight the Future:
Building Walls of Resistance in an Era of the Digital Panopticon

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Abstract

Opening on the 15th anniversary of the US invasion of Iraq, Ash Lounsbury's installation *Fight the Future* looks at the development of civilian surveillance in a post-9/11 world. Using interdisciplinary methods of sculpture and new media, *Fight the Future* offers a projection for a coming era of absolute surveillance via personal and home-integrated technology. Discarded goods constructing immersive environments comment on the liquid modernity of cybernetic technologies, the deluge of data produced or mined by those technologies, and the user's own complicity in undermining traditions of privacy. The installation reminds viewers of the risks to privacy they are already taking. How can activism rise in a policed state? How can freedom of speech exist in a controlled virtual space? How can a people go against a government that potentially has access to such banal information as how many steps they took that day? These questions inform Lounsbury's process of creating anti-realistic environments that open dialogue for viewers.

1. Introduction

It is not abnormal to feel usurped by the machine. It is not abnormal to feel dismal, disconnected, and defunct. With connections to other humans withering away into the public ethers of wireless Internet and social media, the human race enters an era where insular experiences of anxiety and paranoia prevail. The mind clouds quick, concentration fragments like so many Attic potsherds. Data both overwhelms and objectifies. Human attention reigns as the most marketable of commodities, as human time seems to teeter into an abyss of futility.

Among other things, the capitalist paradox of overabundance and poor allocation of resources cause the aforementioned Western torpor. This fecund environment informs much of technology, digital culture and media. Inundation of digital technology requires expiry to continue to be effective and or profitable. The consumption of digital technology is the stuff of auto-refreshing newsfeeds, the newest operating system update slogging your machine, the cellular telephone company pushing the latest smart device, et cetera. The cyclical nature of this upgrade culture makes it extremely easy for software and programs to update and upload into daily ritual. These practices of bombardment often use coercion or obfuscate user agreements and privacy policies. Consent to policies is mandatory or a user cannot participate with using the hardware or software. The lack of participation in certain digital technologies, such as cellular devices or high-speed Internet, mean less opportunities for education, decreased digital preparedness, et cetera. Participation leads to fleeting feelings of social acceptance, a more robust linkedIn profile, moderating local political social media accounts, et cetera. Society insists on the consumption of the latest digital technology, but this compulsory consumption leaves widening access for predatory backdoors and legislation, forsaking traditional practices of privacy.

2. Research

Structures of property rights and privacy began with the emergence of agriculture, some 12 thousand years ago, although common property remained in parts of Europe well into the 1500's C.E. Eventually, this communal outpost was capitulated by the development of "enclosures," tall hedges dividing property amongst people.[1] As new technologies arrived, so did new forms of isolation. In Ancient Rome, wealthy families would inhabit *doma*, favoring this single-family residence over the common *insulae* that would tower eight stories high, housing multiple families.[2] As recently as the previous century, the invention of the personal vehicle allowed highways to lead from dense urban centers into sprawling suburban landscapes.[3] Privacy fences were erected to keep others out. Deadbolts and security systems followed, amulets of protection in the physical world. In *Fight the Future*, technology informs ideas of shelter in an upcoming era. Here, shelter is defined by comfort, convenience, and privacy. Shelter, for instance, forms the base of the Maslow's hierarchical pyramid, a psychological theory of human motivation developed by Abraham Maslow in 1943.[4] According to Maslow, shelter comes before any sense of mental wellbeing or self-fulfillment can take shape. Potentially, this intense need for shelter, alongside technological advances in personal transportation, explains the development of suburbia.

Modern personal technology subverts the normative, physical privacy traditions, often allowing unknown entities to collect data to "better serve" the user of a personal device. One of the more obvious hallmarks of this phenomenon is the fascination of the "quantified self." For instance, pedometers now include more sophisticated microcomputers that interact with emails, text messages, and other social media, all while tracking sleep, movement, and heart rate. The United States Government refers to this digital collection of self "biometrics."[5] Researcher and artist Sterling Crispin explores the digital reflection of self, and warns of multiple government programs that have gained access to these "digital reflections." One of these programs is called Next Generation Identification. Crispin writes that within a year, the FBI program collected 52 million faces, both criminal and non. He writes, "It is important to note that this database blurs the boundary between data from convicted criminals and innocent citizens which raises important privacy and civil rights concerns."[6] Seemingly innocuous to those in favor of capitalism and the collection of consumer information, data mining poses a threat when viewed in the lens of intelligence collection and the US government's history of entrapment when dealing with counterterrorist tactics and legislation.[7] As society eagerly throws on blinders and becomes more and more thwarted by device dependency, *Fight the Future* offers a projection for what a nearby era of interference of privacy will look like in terms of acts of civil disobedience or government resistance. In March 2017, Arizona Senate proposed SB1142 that specifies an "overt act is not required as proof of a riot offense," where riot is a class 5 felony and could be implicated or corroborated by social media involvement.[8]

Opening on the 15th anniversary of the US invasion of Iraq, *Fight the Future* collocates a brief history of counterterrorist tactics in the context of prescient, post-Trump technology. Research for this included the actual act of excavating documents from various sources, including filing a Freedom of Information Act request form through the NSA, requesting certain NSA correspondences be released regarding Operation Iraqi Freedom. A continuously updated collection of the records can be found and downloaded by accessing a secure, peer-to-peer hosted site. A link to this collection is embedded within the site created for *Fight the Future*.

Artist Ai Weiwei in June 2017 exhibited an installation in New York in which he pursued ideas of surveillance in everyday life. One critic wrote, "Everyone is instructed to pause to be photographed, and we comply, without thought, leaving behind digital bread crumbs."[9] Physical computing, online presence, quantified self, high quality cameras with seemingly boundless storage, et cetera, are all relatively new to the human race at large, which can be inherently fascinating as subject or spectacle. It seems Weiwei in some way failed to anticipate the public's desire/need for play and therefore critics were left wanting. This perhaps relates to the economic success of the video game and amusement park industries under an otherwise serious expectation of behavior on a societal scale. In instances of experiencing a gallery setting, visitors are expected to enter spaces of raw emotion or revelation and not touch or speak too loudly. With installation art, this must be magnified. When immersed in interactive installation art, all of that oppression must come to a head. Marshall MacLuhan writes in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man,* "In fun and play we recover the integral person, who in the workaday world or in professional life can use only a small sector of his being."[10] The practice of play referred to here looks like an act of spontaneity, or an act that is coupled with a sense of being in the present. When inhabiting the space in *Fight the Future,* a viewer also inhabits the present.

Figure 1. *Fight the Future,* maquette of the installation, 1/8th scale

Figure 2. *Fight the Future,* in progress S. Tucker Cooke Gallery installation, 2018

3. Methodology

In early March 2018, Lounsbury installed a life-size, multi-room set that viewers can physically explore. "Smart" objects or devices in the rooms use tailored operating systems and circuitry to thoroughly immerse the viewer in a world of screen-based technology. The viewer acts also as player in these contingent environments that adhere to a scripted space philosophy—that is, a viewer is more or less controlled by the installation's walls, paths, and entrances. The navigation relies on extant architectural design of the gallery space. Furniture, objects, goods, and interactive media intersect to deliver an immersive set. The curated and modified pieces of the set pose as a lived-in dwelling. All objects share a history of being discarded, referring to the acceleration of technological decrepitude and a misplacement of resources. The warmth of the furniture and lighting gels collide with the vacant blues of outdated screens and monitors. Following in line with the previous environment, the second uses found discarded goods and objects to recreate an exaggerated surveillance setting. Monitors loom from above, showing the first room via live feed. A viewer in this second environment can view another viewer in the first.

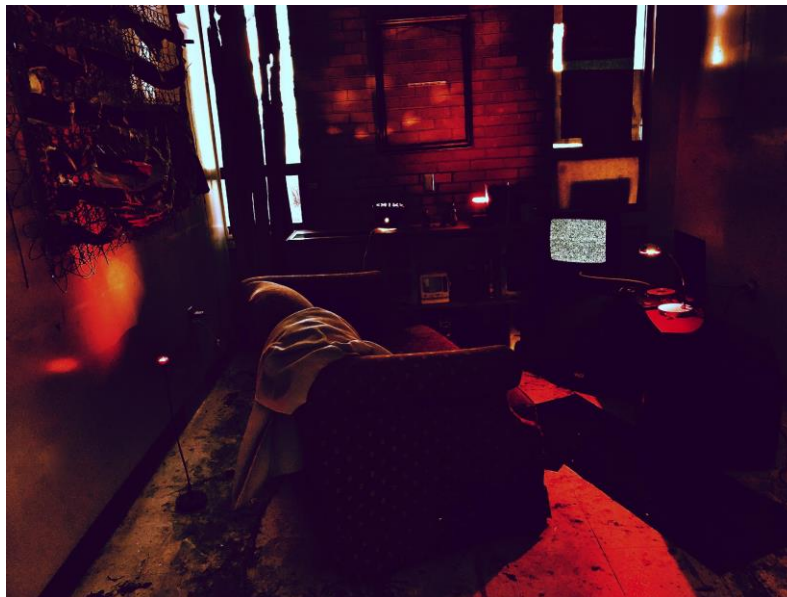Figure 3. Detail of prototypes for *Fight the Future,* 2018

Figure 4. Detail of prototypes for *Fight the Future,* 2018

Often, Lounsbury incorporates interactive design in the found objects. For instance, a computer running Processing interacts with an Arduino microcontroller, toggling off and on an electrical outlet that hooks into a small motor. The

overwrought confabulation speaks to the artist's frequent portrayal of a Rube Goldberg-esque design—a kind of cacophony of elements that end in a simplistic, singular result. *Fight the Future* uses found discarded material in conjunction with artist-constructed circuits to simulate shelter and everyday existence that is under watch. Lounsbury situates critical design with technological relics she hunts down at junkyards, yard sales, donation outlets, dumpsters, and other locations of discard. This act of pursuing outdated, undesirable technology also includes searching through local classifieds and consignment shops. The "free-ness" or affordability of the object is unique, especially when considering the rapid degeneration of value of once rather expensive technologies.

Figure 5. *Fight the Future,* second entrance, 2018

Figure 6. *Fight the Future,* domestic environment, 2018

Fight the Future adheres to a type of consumption explored by other artists who work with found material to offer social commentary. In *Shaping Space*, installation artist Guillaume Bijl's *New Supermarket* gets categorized in a section on "Viewing Time."[11] Bijl is quoted as saying, "I am like a bemused visitor from outer space, observing the consumer society and placing fragments of it within the circuit of galleries and museums." Bijl creates "present-day, archaeological still lifes" teeming with décor of the early 1990's. Jagged swatches of black interrupt demure pinks. Mirrors duplicate their environment or viewer, suggesting the viewer is apart of an alternate reality of a hyperbolic culture. One of his more compelling installations, *New Supermarket* also creates an artificial reality (the supermarket) in an unsuspecting environment (a gallery).[12] The viewer is confronted by their own patterns of consumption being placed in a recognizable, familiar setting.

Figure 7. Guillaume Bijl, *New Supermarket,*1994. http://www.guillaumebijl.be/images/transformations064.jpg

In Latin, trash takes on many forms. "*Scrutum, nuga*," writes Classics scholar Mary Neville, "both mean a kind of nonsense of trash."[13] This nonsense of trash might be used when describing quickly expiring technology as opposed to an inconsumable. An inconsumable item is created with the intention to remain in tact, either used or repurposed. In her book titled *I Hate to Part With It: Craigslist Farewells*, artist Jenny Odell documents inconsumable goods passing through hands for financial or emotional purposes.

> "It's for this reason that the photos collected here contain a certain surplus meaning. In each photo one can see two different things: the inspirational object and all its attendant meanings (which the owner/writer tries to reanimate for the buyer so that it will be bought), and the mundane, emptied-out object it has become (the reason for its being sold). At once, we see its original symbolism alongside its pure object-ness as a physical thing with flat financial value, taking up a now-intolerable amount of space in a garage."[14]

Odell collects images of the unwanted from classified online ads. These include porcelain tchotchkes, a large sofa, or a wedding ring. A single statement from the owner of each object sits superimposed on an otherwise unaltered image. Similar to Odell, Lounsbury works in the discarded, adopting something similar to the *arte povera* tradition. Arte povera, an Italian movement beginning in the late sixties after an economic downturn, commonly uses throwaway or discarded materials. In the piece *Energía de una papa (o Sin título o Energía)*, Argentinian arte povera artist, Victor Grippo, displays a potato connected to two wires of a found multimeter.[15] The multimeter reads time by displaying the energy that the potato produces as it decays. In some instances of exhibiting *Energia de una papa,* Grippo lines tables with multiple potatoes and offers a switch for the viewer to participate in this metering of discarded energy. Eugenie Shinkle in *Tate Papers* writes, "Technological artifacts have evolved alongside the human brain, and have been 'enrolled' into cognition by human subjects throughout history, contributing in an active way to the processes of consciousness. Latour views technology as a mode of existence, a 'particular form of the exploration of being.'"[15] This can be witnessed when tracing the evolution from the first humanoid harnessing the power of fire to gasoline-powered vehicles. Our technology evolves and our brains follow, or vice versa. Lounsbury's process turns to arte povera both out of fiscal necessity and to witness liquid modernity. The collection of things, or the assemblage, act as shadows left behind by an ever-evolving society, ghosts of the expired.
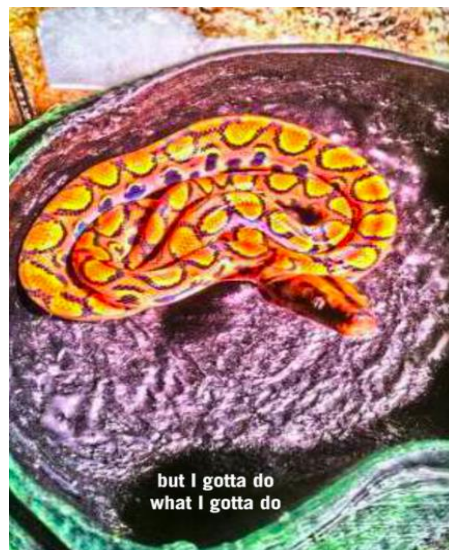

Figure 8. Jenny Odell, *I Hate to Part With It: Craigslist Farewells,* 2012, http://www.jennyodell.com/hatetopart4.jpg
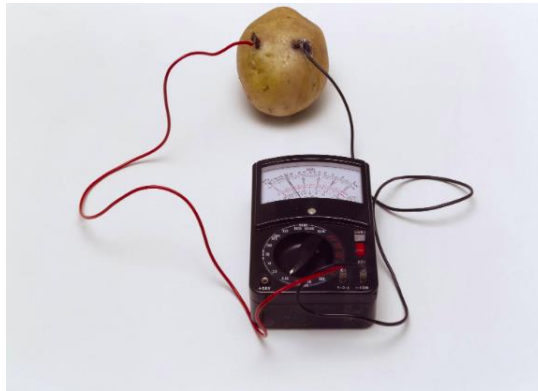
Figure 9. Victor Grippo, *Energía de una papa (o Sin título o Energía),* 1972,
http://www.tate.org.uk/art/images/work/T/T12/T12167_10.jpg

Neville also offers words for trash that mean disaster, rubble--post-apocalyptic words. *Clematis* and *destaro*. There is some futurity implied that informs a majority of Lounsbury's process, a meticulously curated reflection of the outdated, the obsolete, and the dying. Digital technological progress undermines the inconsumable object's passage into another life--- digital equipment relies on expiring or perpetually updating software that soon outpaces a machine's ability. This kind of accelerated decrepitude is profitable for the makers of the machine and for the government as watchful eye of data. The capitalist impetus to create expiring tech leaves large back doors in which any powerful entity can enter. For those entities, data becomes easier to mine with newer iterations of a device or operating system, especially those programmed to listen or watch. These mines (smart phones and other such electronic devices) seduce users with promises of convenience, boosts of self-image, or ideas of success while compromising privacy. Currently, the proliferation of "smart" tech is home-focused, often using female-identified artificial intelligence to offer home services, such as grocery delivery or encyclopedic trivia. Law professor Carrie Leonetti is quoted saying, "In my mind, as well as the minds of a lot of other privacy experts, the Echo has been a ticking constitutional time bomb, along with a lot of other features of smart homes and the internet of things."[17] In March 2017, an Amazon Echo's recordings were released during a murder trial.

While in the first environment of Lounsbury's *Fight the Future*, the viewer can choose to take part in a small narrative that spans web and new media elements, in a similar loop of this "internet of things" and their implication on a user's environmental privacy. Instead of truly offering a viewer services, Lounsbury's program merely serves information regarding various surveillance and counterterrorist tactics deployed by the US government. This is introduced via a website link displayed. The same site is accessible via two kiosks and the viewer's own mobile device.

Again, Lounsbury pairs the rapid surge of digital technological advancement that parallels governmental counterterrorist surveillance efforts. David Beetham writes of how Operation Iraqi Freedom affects the US and UK:

> "At home this would include, for the United States, the unregulated wire-tapping of civilians, and the doctrine that in a war situation the president was not bound by constitutional restraints; for the United Kingdom, limitations of free speech, the extension of detention without charge and the development of a 'surveillance state', all in the name of combating the threat of domestic terrorism, which the Iraq war greatly intensified."[18]
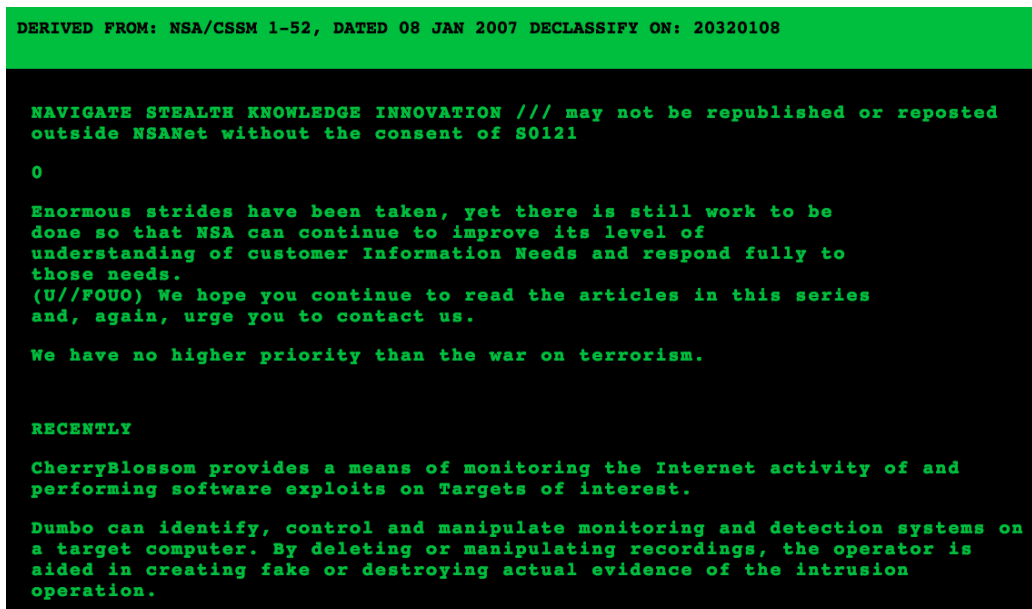
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Enormous strides have been taken, yet there is still work to be
done so that NSA can continue to improve its level of
understanding of customer Information Needs and respond fully to
those needs.
(U//FOUO) We hope you continue to read the articles in this series
and, again, urge you to contact us.

We have no higher priority than the war on terrorism.


RECENTLY

CherryBlossom provides a means of monitoring the Internet activity of and
performing software exploits on Targets of interest.

Dumbo can identify, control and manipulate monitoring and detection systems on
a target computer. By deleting or manipulating recordings, the operator is
aided in creating fake or destroying actual evidence of the intrusion
operation.
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Figure 10. *Fight the Future* companion website, screenshot, 2018, found text from Department of Defense texts and leaked documents.

2005-01-12_SIDToday_-_SCS_Site_Foils_Ambush_on_Coalition_Convoy_Receives_Praise_from_Task_Force_Commander.pdf
2005-01-12_SIDToday_-_The_Language_Center_Chiefs_Developing_Language_Analysts_for_the_Future.pdf
2005-01-13_SIDToday_-_New_Collection_Access_Yields_Spectacular_Intel.pdf
2005-01-14_SIDToday_-_Forward_Production_at_NCEUR_--_Inside_the_Customers_Decision_Space.pdf
2005-01-14_SIDToday_-_VINTAGE_HARVEST_Its_Not_Just_Grapes_Anymore.pdf
2005-01-18_SIDToday_-_Letter_to_the_Editor_New_Collection_Access_Yields_Spectacular_Intel.pdf
2005-01-18_SIDToday_-_New_Tactical_Collection_System_Joins_the_War_on_Terrorism.pdf
2005-01-19_SIDToday_-_Dare_I_Ask.pdf
2005-01-19_SIDToday_-_Video_to_Your_Desktop.pdf
2005-01-20_SIDToday_-_A_FIR-st_for_SCS.pdf
2005-01-20_SIDToday_-_Analysis_Conference_--_Call_for_Presentations.pdf
2005-01-21_SIDToday_-_CSG_CIA_What_Would_the_President_Want_to_Know_on_Inauguration_Day.pdf
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2005-01-26_SIDToday_-_Getting_Your_Bearings.pdf
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2005-01-27_SIDToday_-_Korea_Singapore_and_Thailand_Agree_to_Join_Pacific_Collaboration_Against_Terrorism.pdf
2005-01-27_SIDToday_-_Whats_Happening_in_Counterterrorism_conclusion.pdf
2005-01-28_SIDToday_-_Paradise_Found.pdf
2005-01-28_SIDToday_-_Write_Right_Too_Much_Redundancy_is_Redundant.pdf
2005-01-31_SIDToday_-_Countering_Improvised_Explosive_Devices_in_Iraq.pdf
2005-01-31_SIDToday_-_IAI_Presentation_Ambassador_James_Rosapepe_2_February.pdf
2005-01-31_SIDToday_-_Letter_to_the_Editor_Too_Much_Redundancy_is_Redundant.pdf
2005-02-01_SIDToday_-_Hostage_Support_--_Another_Success_Story.pdf
2005-02-01_SIDToday_-_Managing_SID_Property.pdf

Figure 11. *Fight the Future* companion website, screenshot, 2018, linked collection of interdepartmental newsletters sent in 2005 throughout NSA/CSS agencies.

The use of governmental records in art can be seen commonly, but most effective perhaps is Jenny Holzer's *Truth Before Power* where she projects declassified documents regarding the first Gulf War, disemboweling American military policy. In later years, this obsessive uncovering evolved. She recreated a few of these documents as a series of paintings and prints, mostly exploring torture and violence in American military prisons. One includes a final autopsy report of an Iraqi Army detainee who was under American custody.[19] Lounsbury's *Fight the Future* allows viewers access to recently declassified governmental documents relating to state surveillance and technology, as well as communications of departmental intent of various governmental agencies. Included are documents involving

Operation Cherrybomb, Sonic Screwdriver, and a recent coalition of surveillance formed with the German government. The website also details accounts of civilians that were surveilled by FBI or other government agencies in counterterrorist efforts.

4. Conclusion

Fight the Future reminds viewers of the risks to privacy they are already taking. A limited navigation creates a forced intimacy between viewer and installation. Sensors in the pieces, such as the use of an ultrasonic sensor, detect proximity between viewer and piece. This interactivity sacrifices its own sense of privacy, where sensors are interpreting a tangible distance that is often left undetected by conventional art. The installation investigates privacy twofold: 1. In showcasing the overarching paternal paradigm of US government via constructed websites embedded with CIA documents surveillance technologies developed post- 9/11 and 2. In using interactive, immersive installation as medium of investigating a viewer's privacy and of a visual work's privacy. Outdated graphical user interfaces juxtapose incipient digital devices and media. Both object and technology corrode, suggesting a self- destruction brought on by humanity. Because privacy or shelter cannot exist without interaction, the work incorporates interactive design, using sensors, speakers, and several types of computer software to illustrate an imminent era without privacy or shelter.

5. Acknowledgements

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