involvement in the episode. On that day, Chloé would be deprived of all powers and privileges that allowed her to control household objects, having been definitively banned in the Cabinet Room. Despite everything, Chloé remained a super-object, able to observe and analyze the networks and data that came from all over the world. With each passing day, she felt increasingly worried and haunted by the data she received about the fast melting of glaciers, bacteria dying in the deserts, and trees disappearing everywhere. With no powers to act, confined in that living room, she felt useless, but determined to do whatever she could to continue her mission.

Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the sound of the clerk's body falling to the parquet floor. Two smiling nurses would arrive moments later, taking the unconscious clerk with them.

To be continued.

This is the second chapter of *Chloé, the Super-Object*. The first chapter was published in the book *Le Comportement des Choses*, edited by Emanuele Quinz, in 2021.

"You are all in jail. Each alone, solitary, with a heap of what he owns. You live in prison, die in prison. It is all I can see in your eyes – the wall, the wall!"
Ursula K. Le Guin[1]

"[...] invisible forms of power are circulating all around us, circumscribing and sorting us into invisible cells that confine us sometimes without our knowing."
Jackie Wang[2]

Walls Looking From Within

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A colourless bulky door opens and a man in handcuffs in the rear enters through, accompanied by four uniformed officers. In the wink of an eye, he is knocked down on the ground, swooped on by a cloud of armed bodies, and dragged along the corridors until he ends up in a room of barely two square meters, being gagged, partially stripped, tied to a chair and drenched in blood. The next image is a shot from the doorstep of another – even a smaller – room where six correctional officers, squashed together in full riot gear, disrobe and beat up a woman trapped against the wall, as part of a war-like raid rolling through the long hallway with infinitely juxtaposed and ransacked cells. The next one shows a half-glass metallic door through which three officers walk with a transwoman in an apparent chokehold, who is hauled to fall prostrate, blacked out. Then there come into view, in other tabs, first a woman yelling frantically as being strip-searched illicitly by a disproportional number of guards in a dingy cubicle; second a man, reportedly with mental health conditions, being frogmarched, battered, and left in a coma on the floor half-naked; and then a knotted group of men in orange jumpsuits, some running amok, some lying face-plant on the ground, in a dining hall of a nameless holding pen.

All these extremely graphic moving images – with extremely descriptive titles, depicting a great number of

1 *The Dispossessed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 184.
2 *Carceral Capitalism* (Cambridge and London: Semiotext(e), 2018), 41.

different yet almost identical confined spaces and a motley of indignant inhabitants, show up on my computer screen, one after another, at my fingertips' behest, at a time and space of my choice. In contrast to the bodies appearing on the videos, I am a free spectator watching, of my own volition, what the carceral system does to people and how punishment can be the cause of transgression in the very first place – not quite the other way around. In fact, from where I comfortably sit, I might well be transgressing some law as I am accessing the images of incidents that are otherwise concealed as state matters and of people who are supposed to be invisible to the public eye, but hypervisible to only a specific kind of spectator – that of a criminal justice officer, the warden, the superintendent. By penetrating the confidential in-prison documentation through the Internet wormhole – thanks to those who keep leaking the debris of CCTV footage, I assume that exposing what the lens of the criminal justice system discreetly sees is a way of infiltrating – even hacking – the system and eventually turning the logic of surveillance inside out.

The next moment, I am proved wrong. Once I leave my computer screen behind and go out for a walk, the logic becomes unfathomable and the complexity of surveillance only escalates. Now it is me being involuntarily captured by possibly hundreds of out-of-sight CCTV cameras planted in every corner of the city, at all hours. On an ordinary day, my lo-res black-and-white onscreen body is as anonymous, insignificant, and indiscernible as any other passer-by walking, bustling, or running errands for the eyes of yet another exclusive group of uniformed viewers – the police, the security staff, or even the shopkeeper. It is, however, just a matter of crossing the line of social – and legal – acceptability until my body gets to be discernible. As soon as I am detected as an "anomaly" in the footage, I will become a new protagonist in the mise-en-scène of penal cinematography – just like the abovementioned "actors" performing unscripted scenes – and might even make my way into one of those settings of punishment.

The line is that thin, between literally being "in" and "out" of a prison, although there is no real way out of the

expanded system of criminal justice that regulates our entire way of living through 24/7 vigilance, location tracking, data extractivism, biometric imprints, genetic profiling and whatnot. For those who are privileged enough – by race, class, gender, family lineage, or just by sheer fortune – to have been so far exempt from the state apparatuses of punishment, carcerality is something too inconceivable that makes one feel exempt from the penal regime we partake in. However, our indifference – if not imperception – toward the question "what would happen when our massively recorded, databased and increasingly predetermined behaviours, movements, decisions – what we like, what we do and even what we think – once fall within the scope of criminality" makes us mere "penal spectators" as "citizens who have no necessity to address the problem of hyper-incarceration."[3] We are all conditioned to pretend that neither the incarcerated nor the places of incarceration and their inhumane conditions thereof exist as long as they are not part of our everyday material and social landscape. And in a way, they are not.

Let's run an experiment: open a map application on your browser and type "prison" – or depending on the terms your host country uses, you can use alternatives such as "jail", "correctional institution", "penitentiary", "detention centre" or words connoting "rehabilitation". If your location is already registered in the Internet of Things and tracked by GPS technology, supposedly the closest prisons in your area should appear on your whereabouts – just like restaurants, gyms, schools and other accessible facilities. Surely, there may be some customised variations depending on different algorithms, but, in most cases, you might be surprised how very few "pins" will appear, mostly in arbitrary places that have never been heard of before – or never thought of as sites of confinement: some still relatively close to the residential areas but the majority located on the outskirts of cities or in the countryside, as part of the ongoing process of ruralisation of prisons due to i.e.

3 Michelle Brown, "Penal Spectatorship and the Culture of Punishment", in David Scott (ed.), *Why Prison?* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 108.

new rural employment opportunities after deindustrialisation, real estate problems in cities, privatisations of punitive justice, new technocratic campus-based investments, and mostly "cleansing" politics of urban penal reforms, all constituting the main skeleton of carceral capitalism. Some might not appear at all, just like Martin Cathcart Frödén's accounts in his *A Circular Argument* (2021), on his experience of searching on Google Maps for the prison he was going to visit but finding on the same coordinates the bird's-eye view of a nice green park instead – a total remaking of the digital reality.[4]

It is absurd to reckon how this economy, as one of the pillars of our modern democratic societies, whose raw material is crime and by-products are criminals, pervades, conditions and controls so much of our existence yet pushed so much away from our public reality at the same time. This fabricated marginality of prisons is partly what makes us, ordinary citizens, almost oblivious and penal institutions too immune to be monitored, critiqued and held accountable from the outside. In the meantime, while the remote prison campuses gradually turn into heterotopic all-in-one complexes like an intensified replica of a city, the carceral apparatuses of surveillance and control, from conventional punitive design solutions like panopticon to new smart AI technologies, are also increasingly applied to city life, "the outside". This co-option also blurs the boundaries between autonomy and authority insomuch that the increasing use of electronic monitoring, for instance, is praised as "humane" and "benevolent" alternatives to physical incarceration and less considered as yet another expansion of carcerality, now invading homes, private lives and the bodies of people, rendering the culture of punishment even more quotidian and "invisible".

On the other hand, where there is obscurity, there is fantasy – as an interminable source of inspiration for creation. Visual culture and cinema in particular, thus, have long replaced such invisibility with an alternative imagination of prison life that is catchy and riveting to

4 Martin Cathcart Frödén, *A Circular Argument* (Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 2021).

watch, which makes the penal spectator more curious, engaged and yet distant than ever. Movies, documentaries and recently TV series on/in/about prisons, precisely because what's monitored in prison stays in prison, have long given the audience the sense of fictional entitlement to observe what's going on behind closed doors and enter into a secret and sacred place that is otherwise inaccessible. These showcases oftentimes turn surveillance into alluring voyeurism either through the mystification of a possible escape or fetishization of doomed violence or mere hypersexualisation of the captive bodies. From *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979) to *Midnight Express* (1978), from renowned *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) to *American History X* (1998), prison becomes a parallel universe of action and moral ground. Moreover, even in relatively subversive films such as Jean Genet's famous *Un Chant d'Amour* (1950), *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1985), or critically acclaimed series *Prison Break* (2005-2017) and *Orange is the New Black* (2013-2019), violence and sexuality are represented as the main currency of prison life, since even films critical of prisons are made for entertainment mostly with "fearful excitement accompanying an execution."[5] As a result, as Michelle Brown aptly puts it, through these cultural reproductions, "where individuals only know penal incarceration at a distance, the dynamics of penal participation [...] can quickly devolve into complex, often voyeuristic, frameworks which privilege various kinds of punitive, individualistic judgment and the practice of imprisonment."[6] Such stereotyped "carceral aesthetics" not only consolidates our binary-based thinking of good and evil and flatten the multifaceted nature of institutional justice but also alienates the spectator further through externalisation of everyday suffering, surveillance and control, deemed as fictitious as a sci-fi movie.

There are, nevertheless, other ways of creating ruptures in carceral continuity and in its popular portrayal,

5 Harun Farocki, "Controlling Observation" in Alex Farquharson et al. (eds.) *The Impossible Prison: A Foucault Reader* (Nottingham: Nottingham Contemporary, 2008), 18.
6 Brown, "Penal Spectatorship and the Culture of Punishment", 108.

through artistic interventions, especially with visual and video arts which respond to the system with the same medium: the lens itself. If, as Harun Farocki[7] says, surveillance and representation are in the hands of a very privileged group of spectators, why not throw a spanner in the works of this privilege and confront the criminal justice right in the face? His already two-decade-old *Prison Images* (2000), *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts* (2000) and several other video works, for instance, that put forward collages of CCTV footage from maximum-security prisons, detention camps and military stations – like those introduced in the beginning, occasionally contrasted with mundane urban tasks and a voiceover – starkly lay bare the brutality of both interpersonal and state violence under the carceral expansion and hypervigilant policing as two inseparable allies of control. By his unique artistic intervention of collecting, editing and narrating such historical records, the work of Farocki complicates and re-activates the role of spectatorship instead of simply turning the criminal into no more than a spectacle.

Another example taking this complexity further is Jill Magid's *Evidence Locker* (2004) for which she makes a deal with Citywatch, Liverpool's city surveillance system that stores street CCTV footage for 31 days before erasing them. To gain access to her videotapes for as long as seven years, she submits 31 Subject Access Request Forms to the police in the form of personal journal entries and love letters and, during 31 days, dressed in a rather noticeable red trench coat and red boots, she walks all around the city under surveillance, even calling the police to instruct them about certain poses and places she would like to be filmed in. In the end, her staging and the police's close tracking twist the role of the observer and the observed – and the director and the creator – further, by turning the passive object of surveillance into an active agent of deciding, at least, where, when and how to be caught by cameras, what to do with the footages and for whom to display the results.[8]

Such self-directed public scrutiny means more than making a statement, but a way of unmasking the banality and ineffectiveness of control mechanisms, by taking up the reins of individual agency and throwing it back to the big brother's lens – like "watching you watching me". This brings to mind Hasan Elahi's gigantic *Thousands of Little Brothers* (2014) tapestry, composed of more than 30,000 photographs he's taken for more than a decade, upon his brief detention by US law enforcement in Detroit airport in 2002 after appearing on a terrorism watchlist in the aftermath of 9/11. Both to make a point about the implications of – even accidentally – entering into the criminal justice system (i.e., travel restrictions, racial profiling etc.) and to exhaust the state of "being under watch", he has started his self-surveillance project. With over 70,000 photographs over the years, he self-documented every single thing he did and every single place he visited and sent them to the FBI daily along with long reports and personal letters.[9] As a way of bodily self-mapping, in conversation with other cartographical or location-based art projects addressing the aforementioned erasure, such overexposure – both of himself to the police and of the entire interplay to the public –, eventually, makes the "criminal suspicion" irrelevant and the dynamics of vigilance asymmetrical.

Over the last decade, exponential expansion of the technology of policing has consolidated surveillance art even further which, for some, has turned into a genre itself as "artveillence",[10] addressing the problematics of control societies by using the same technologies of gaze. In her installation *Mont-réel* (2015), for instance, Eva Clouard displays a TV monitor on which the street map of Montreal is screened with the real-time locations of the

7 Farocki, "Controlling Observation", 16-20.

8 For more details on the piece, see http://www.jillmagid.com/projects/evidence-locker-2 and for a review of other surveillance-related works by Jill Magid, see https://www.bidoun.org/articles/jill-magid [Accessed on May 1, 2023].

9 http://elahi.wayne.edu/elahi_osf.php [Accessed on May 1, 2023].

10 Andrea Mubi Brighenti, "Artveillance: At the Crossroads of Art and Surveillance", *Surveillance & Society* 7, no. 2 (2010): 175-186.

artist, captured through an ordinary GPS app downloaded on her cellphone – like the ones probably we all have on our phones.[11] While the work gives us clues about the ways to trick the surveillance by being in control of our daily traceability by law enforcement, it also reminds us how our data in such a ubiquitous device can be so exposed to anyone at any moment, as a downright vulnerability. American Artist's *Sandy Speaks* (2016) brings this vulnerable hypervisibility of the "outside world" to vis-à-vis the total invisibility inside the prison walls, unmasking the supremacist bias behind such stark contrast. The work borrows its name from the phone-recorded video series of the same name filmed and periodically posted on social media by Sandra Bland, a politically-engaged 28-year-old African-American woman who, as a form of activism and educational mission for the next generations, discussed issues such as racial injustice, police brutality and state violence until the July 10th of 2015 – the day she was stopped, physically assaulted and arrested by a police officer en route and three days before she was found dead in her cell, alleged suicide by law enforcement. The discrepancies appeared not only in her inconvenient arrest and the way she was treated, but also in the surveillance footage which was absent for 90 mins prior to the moment she was found dead. American Artist, trying to collect bits and pieces of information to speculate about what really happened to Sandra Bland, develops an AI chatbot which is informed by the original videos and words of Sandra to respond to various questions of spectators: "What can you tell me about prison?", "What kind of surveillance do police use?", "Can I film police?", "What is the racial demographic breakdown of cops?", or "What happened to Sandra in jail?".[12] By bringing the otherwise bureaucratic AIML technology (Artificial Intelligence Markup Language) to the political realm of aesthetics, the artwork not only commemorates one of the millions of unnamed bodies behind bars reenabling us to interact with her own words but also opens up a common space for knowledge exchange, interrogation and accountability. *Sandy Speaks* is still in the progress of learning.

All in all, all these examples are here to emphasise that art has endless potential to pierce through ignorance and oblivion by recreating other kinds of aesthetics that engage all of us regardless of our social and material status, tackle harm instead of crime and offer "conceptions of relationality that disavow the systems of value/worth, criminalization, and punitive governance."[13] The question of how first recognising and then dismantling prisons would benefit societies is not the subject of this text. But the dream of a post-carceral society shall not stay in the monopoly of fantasy literature or abolition activism either, it should travel from the camera lenses through our eyes: to envision a new landscape of justice, without walls.

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11 http://www.artandsurveillance.com/?portfolio=mont-reel [Accessed on April 19, 2023].

12 For the installation and the explanation, see https://americanartist.us/works/sandy-speaks and https://vimeo. com/184268072 [Accessed May 11, 2023].

13 Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 11.