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Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails

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Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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ABSTRACT

Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails is an installation of photographs and a three-channel video crafted from an eclectic combination of government archival material, the theory of panopticism, Cold War propaganda, and satellite photographs of secret or obscured sites. Probing the creation and interpretation of what remains "unseen" within these satellite images, *Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails* decodes the anxious ambitions and failed promises of totalized surveillance.

Satellite surveillance both envisions the surface of events and creates a map of their socio-political significance. But just as clouds obscure the view of earth from a CIA satellite, our pursuit of a totalizing surveillance apparatus generates a type of vision which obscures humanity itself. My large prints show satellite surveillance images taken covertly by the US government between 1960 and 1985: a sublime Arctic landscape, beautiful cloud formations, and a secret Cold War nuclear test facility. What these images fail to capture are enemy submarines beneath the Arctic ice, a panoptic prison and the political prisoners living there, and the radioactive legacy of mass nuclear detonations. Each of these images evidences the state's attempt to totalize its vision through the satellite's lens. They also evidence an irreducible conflict between the state's panoptic goals, the physical limits of what film and satellite technology can capture, and the illegibility of the human condition. In a three-channel video, *autonomous*, I dramatize these themes by weaving together roughly sixteen thousand covert US satellite photographs with Cold War propaganda and marketing materials related to space and atomic energy. *Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails* is an art installation exploring disembodied technological vision and our ever-shifting definition of what it means to see and be seen.

Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails

As Major T. J. "King" Kong descends toward the earth straddling a hydrogen bomb, he waves his hat in his free hand and lets out a blood-curdling yet triumphant "yahooooo." Actor Slim Pickens's nuclear rodeo ride lasts a scant sixteen seconds in a film that runs nearly two hours, yet this scene sums up *Dr. Strangelove* and functions as an interpretive key for my thesis, *Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails*.[1] *Dr. Strangelove* illustrates a world hurtling toward total annihilation in blind pursuit of a semi-autonomous nuclear apparatus.[2] Many moments in *Dr. Strangelove* show modern military technological obsession overriding self-preservation. The precarious apocalyptic path of Pickens's bomb ride brings home the fatal divergence between technocratic ambition and lived outcome. The staging of his atomic ride as he falls downward away from the camera replicates the satellite's alien view from above. But our voyeuristic engagement with Pickens's humanity as we observe his face and gestures neutralizes the disembodied vision a satellite entails in favor of a perspective emphasizing human mortality.

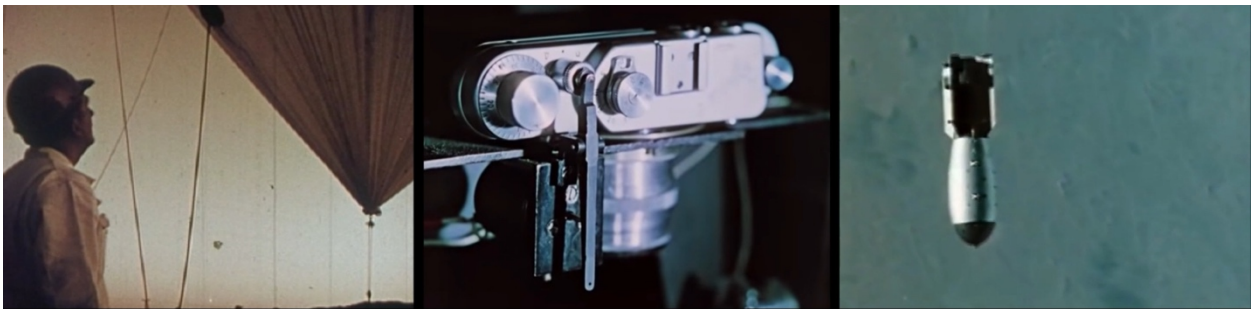

Fig. 1. Still from *autonomous.* Anson Wigner, three-channel video, 2021.

[1] Stanley Kubrick, dir., *Dr. Strangelove, or, How I learned to stop worrying and love the bomb*, 1964. New York, Criterion Collection.
[2] William G. Simon, "Dr. Strangelove: Or: The Apparatus of Nuclear Warfare," in *Camera Obscura, Camera Lucida: Essays in Honor of Annette Michelson*, eds. Allen Richard and Turvey Malcolm, 215-30 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003).

Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails is an installation of photographs and video exploring Cold War-era satellite surveillance and atomic-age propaganda. The installation consists of three large photographic prints and a three-channel video piece. These appropriated photographs were originally made by government bodies including the Central Intelligence Agency, the United States Air Force, and the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) using film-based satellite imaging systems between 1960 and 1984. The multi-channel video combines films and photographs created by the US and Soviet militaries, private and state-run energy companies, and satellite surveillance stills from the same Cold War era. *Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails* explores the legacy of satellite surveillance in order to better understand the implications these systems of looking, concealment, and control have on our continuously amplified present-day surveillance culture.

Fig. 2. *Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails* installation view, Anson Wigner 2021.

Before we can understand satellite vision, we must wrangle with what it was designed to see. Let's return to Slim Pickens. During Pickens's ride, he is not facing the enemy in determined contemplation of the unfortunate military necessity of his death. Rather, he faces the audience, activating our voyeuristic gaze and, with his twisting bodily gestures, turning our gaze behind him toward an aerial view of a Soviet ICBM complex. There are two key elements in this scene for my purposes. First, Pickens's eyes are mostly if not entirely closed during his ride; and second, the image in the background is a photographic still from a US aerial reconnaissance plane, likely a U-2. In combination, these elements simultaneously convey the distinctly separate spaces of top-secret aerial surveillance and Pickens's internal view, obscuring the relationship between his final expression of individualism and his part in bringing about doomsday. Kong's one last humanizing gesture as he retreats into the familiar experience of a rodeo ride figures in irresolvable conflict with the genocidal impact of his atomic descent. This visual juxtaposition echoes the duality of mass nuclear armament meant both to preserve humanity and to destroy it. The primary tenets of these weapons have been dominated by the concept of *always* and *never*. The weapons must *always* be deployable, at any moment, for any reason, and without warning, and yet at the same time they must *never* be used.

My research for *Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails* started in an unlikely manner, with the Zen concept of *me nashi*, meaning "no eye" or "no self-centered viewpoint."[3] I was reading the works of Ikkyu, a fifteenth-century Zen monk, and was struck by his vivid koanic descriptions of a flesh-bound existence interwoven with existential musings on perception and death. For example, after a tale of his drunken misdeeds, Ikkyu writes, "this boat is and is not, when it sinks

[3] Janine A. Sawada, "No Eye: A Word to the Wise: Teshima Toan's Commentary on Ikkyū's 'Mizu Kagami,'" *The Eastern Buddhist*, New Series, 24, no. 2 (1991): 98-122.

both disappear."[4] In this *koan*, Ikkyu asks us to consider our mortality and the unseen, and urges us to ponder transformation and our frequent inability to perceive it. After five hundred further years of technological development of disembodied modes of seeing, from mirrors to satellite networks, an inability to perceive remains at the core of human experience. In recent decades, it has become popular to decry the incomplete nature of photographic documentation as half-truths. This is well trodden ground. Beyond highlighting the limitations of any visual aid, *Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails* questions both the eyes and the mind as generators of half-truths fueled by our ideological imperatives, paranoia, and drive to dominate.

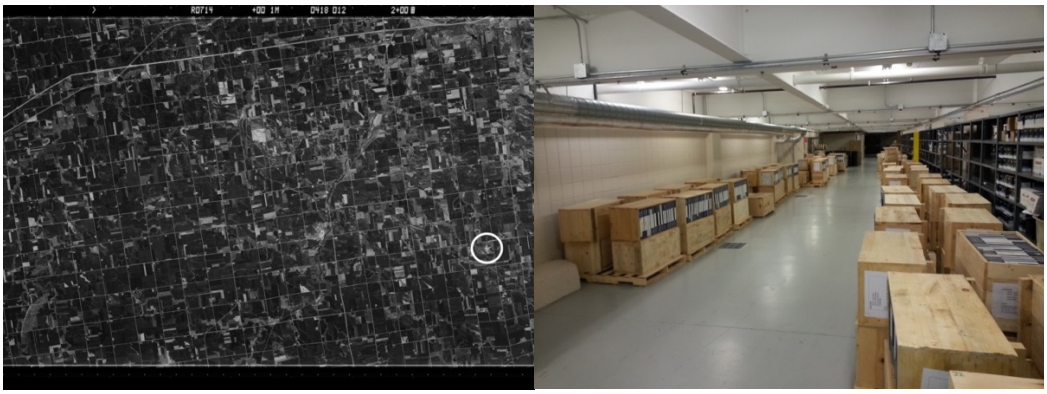

Fig. 3. Left: KH-9 Satellite image of the EROS Archive from mission 1219-2, 8 Aug. 1984.
Right: Crates of Landsat [satellite information about land] data from Pakistan at EROS, 2016.

In Figure 3, I show two images of the Earth Resources Observation and Science Center (EROS). On the left is one of the few satellite images of the EROS archive successfully produced by the CIA during the Cold War. In the vast majority of such attempted surveillance shots, EROS is completely obscured by clouds. Here it is visible, and I have marked the

[4] Ikkyū Sōjun, *Crow with No Mouth: Ikkyū Fifteenth-Century Zen Master*, Stephen Berg, trans. (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2000), 29.

archive's location with a white circle. On the right is an interior image of the same building, produced by an employee, displaying crates of archival material awaiting processing. Viewed side by side, the images bear no obvious relation to one another. On their own, each image inclines us to believe that we have seen and understood some totality of what there is to be seen. Yet each photograph occludes more than it reveals. The satellite image on the left gives no indication as to why the CIA and US military were interested in secretly surveilling South Dakota in 1984. Likewise on the right, half-opened crates of Landsat data from Pakistan indicate the global mission of EROS, yet shed no light on the US's fraught relationship with Pakistan's territorial sovereignty, or why US surveillance of Cold War hot spots persists to this day. As a boat is and is not when it sinks, so too the archive both is and is not. Whether it sinks or floats, is seen or unseen, the archive contains. But however much it accumulates, the collection is finite, and only hints at the infinite beyond its borders.

EROS has been scanning declassified negatives and making the resulting digital materials available through the US Geological Survey. My collection contains over forty thousand of these digitized satellite images created between 1960 and 1984. The sourcing of these images alone has taken about seven months and filled twenty-one hard drives. Of the roughly two hundred thousand images digitally available, I've managed to look at 17 percent, which accounts for an even slimmer 1 percent of the current archive. At present, only about 3 percent of the declassified satellite images have been digitized, and I know of no further plans for mass digitization. Instead, these hidden images are commodified, digitizable on request for thirty dollars per image, or $30,364,760 for the full set. However, digitization does not equal accessibility. The images now digitized are twice compressed into file formats which range in size from one to thirty gigabytes each. Due to slow government interfaces and constant outages,

at my current rate acquiring full access to the satellite images would require a single computer to be constantly downloading for 118 years. This means that if I live to be 159 years old, I might be able to glimpse the totality of our declassified Cold War satellite surveillance program. Like nuclear armament ideologies of the Cold War, archival research is paradoxically guided by totalities similar to *always* and *never*. Surveillance must always be ongoing; by the same token, all that is surveilled can never fully be seen. I started my research with the premise that in order to understand the archive, I had to see everything it held. No image or group of images could assuage my fear of having missed some miraculous image that would be a key to decoding the archive and illuminating its meaning. Understanding was therefore always suspended in a state of never. But meaning is rarely fixed and there is no key, only a comical combination of enormity and lack.

Fig. 4. First declassified satellite view produced by the CIA using the Corona KH-1 satellite, 18 August 1960.

The first satellite photograph ever taken and declassified was produced by the CIA using the Corona KH-1 satellite on 18 August 1960. The photograph is a giant panorama of the east Siberian sea and the northern edge of the Soviet Union. However, we can see neither an identifiable landmass nor a political mass. Instead, the world's first fully intact surveillance photograph shows nothing but a cloudy sky. This image is not unusual in failing to display the landscape it was meant to surveille. In fact, as a whole, this declassified satellite surveillance mission returned 1262 panoramas of Earth, of which, scarcely two percent showed anything other than clouds. I incorporate these clouds and other obscuring features of the satellite archive

into my video *autonomous* to deprioritize our desire that what's spectacular and identifiable within a satellite view emanates from the ground.

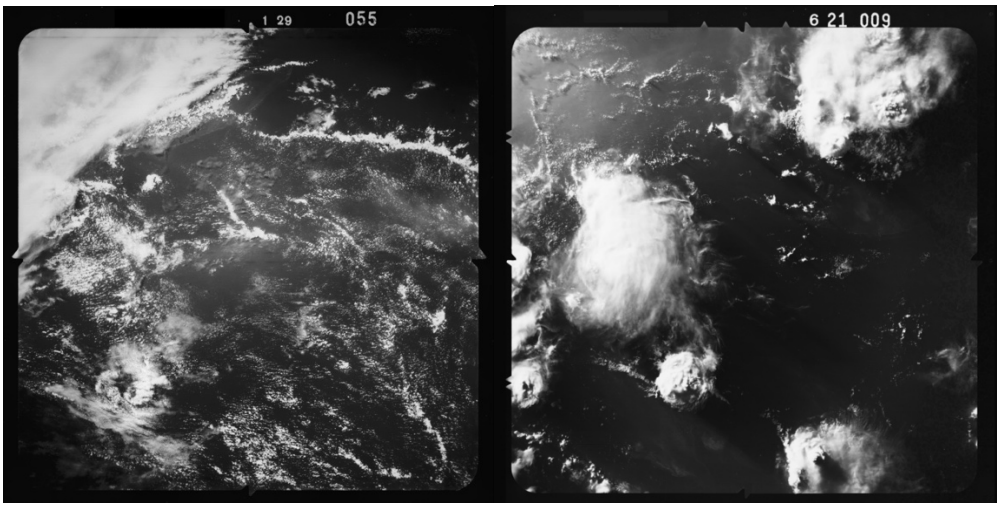

Fig. 5. Left: KH-5 Satellite image of Cuba from mission 9034A, 17 May 1962.
Right: KH-5 Sattelite image of Cuba from mission 9066A, 21 Aug. 1964.

While these satellites purported to offer the cutting edge of disembodied, high-altitude objective vision and image resolution, they also inadvertently recorded breakdowns between the intentions driving satellite vision and what was actually seen. Searching through these images of clouds, I discovered a particularly compelling example of the disconnection between the intention of satellite vision to capture pertinent political or military imagery and what the satellite actually saw. The Images in Figure 5, made on 17 May 1962 and 21 August 1964, ostensibly show Cuba and the Isle de la Juventud resting at its northern tip. However, in both photographs we can hardly identify any land let alone Cuba and are instead presented with a view dominated by clouds, haze, and ocean. What we cannot see is that hidden below gestural clouds and amidst swelling waters is the Presidio Modelo, a series of five panopticon prisons constructed by dictator Gerardo Machado in 1927. These panopticons were still in operation when these images

were taken, and more important than the unseen buildings were the unseen prisoners housed within. These prisoners were mostly political dissidents, including allies of the United States' efforts to topple Fidel Castro in the Bay of Pigs invasion that failed in 1961, shortly before the satellite generated these unrevealing shots. Castro's suppression of the attempted coup produced a massive swell in the population at the Presidio Modelo, and overpopulation contributed to its eventual closure due, in part, to near continual riots.

Fig. 6. Left: Aerial view of construction of the Presidio Modelo, *Presidio Modelo en construcción*, 1929. Archivo Fototeca del OHC. Right: Interior, Presidio Modelo, 20 July 1933. Gamma Keystone Collection.

Contrary to the ideals of its panoptic design, the Presidio Modelo's prisoners, a cohort of political dissidents, counter revolutionaries, homosexuals and other "enemies" of the state, cared little if they were watched or not. While this was due in part to overcrowding, it's also because the morality of the prisoners was at odds with the politics of their incarceration. Thus, the threat of surveillance only served to heighten the prisoner's commitment to resistance. Castro understood this relationship, having been a prisoner there himself for two years before taking power from his oppressors. Knowing that mechanisms of surveillance were not the same as powers to control, Castro had the panoptic prisons' interconnecting tunnels lined with high

explosives to kill everyone in the event that he lost control. I appropriate these CIA satellite images, installing them in the gallery, to explore the indications of human histories resting outside state visualizations. In doing so, I seek to make the unseen accessible while highlighting how, in pursuing technical knowledge and its visualization, we often overlook or intentionally blind ourselves to other and possibly more important knowledge.

I am not the first artist to mine archives to unearth concealed histories bearing contemporary relevance, or to use surveillance technologies and government secrets to expose the connective tissue between state power and the surveilled citizen. David Maisel, Trevor Paglen, Taryn Simon and Yoneda Tomoko all work to bridge the gap between the invisible historical and political circumstances a view or an object have been witness to, and the mundane visibility of the same sights and objects seen in a contemporary photograph. For me, these artists and their works have served as guides, inspirations, and subtle warnings in the intricacies and difficulties inherent in this kind of work. For instance, David Maisel's images of Mt. Saint Helens and the Dugway Proving Grounds pushed me to explore the site specificity of my appropriated sources and to compare images taken over time of a site impacted by a destructive event. Maisel's juxtaposition of the site of Mt. Saint Helens with the devastation of industrialization, much like his aerial views of chemical weapon test grids at Dugway, assess modern humanity as another category of natural disaster. While I'm not creating a comparative map of the destructive force of humanity and nature, Maisel's work is nonetheless a spectacular example of how to combine site specificity with the distance and flattening effects of the view from above to interrogate totalizing systems. However, I harbor doubts about Maisel's use of the sublime landscape and aerial photography to explore historical sites of violence. For instance, the images he made at Dugway awkwardly straddle documentation of one of the deadliest military

sites in the world and a peculiar celebration of the formal visual elements of absolute military control of a landscape. Maisel's use of the sublime in this context serves to connect the U.S. military's projection of control, scientific precision, and power to the universal, beautiful, and totalized landscape. As Maisel put it, the site at Dugway is a "hidden, walled-off, and secret site that offers the opportunity to reflect on who and what we are collectively, as a society."[5] I would argue that the idea that a secret site with limited oversight reflects who we are, collectively, as a society presumes a greater degree of integration between military and civilian ideology and action than actually exists. Contrary to Maisel's use of the sublime to render a somewhat universal landscape for us to "reflect" on, I am interested in employing the incidentally sublime view created by the CIA in pursuit of other goals to investigate our relation to the specific site the sublime disguises.

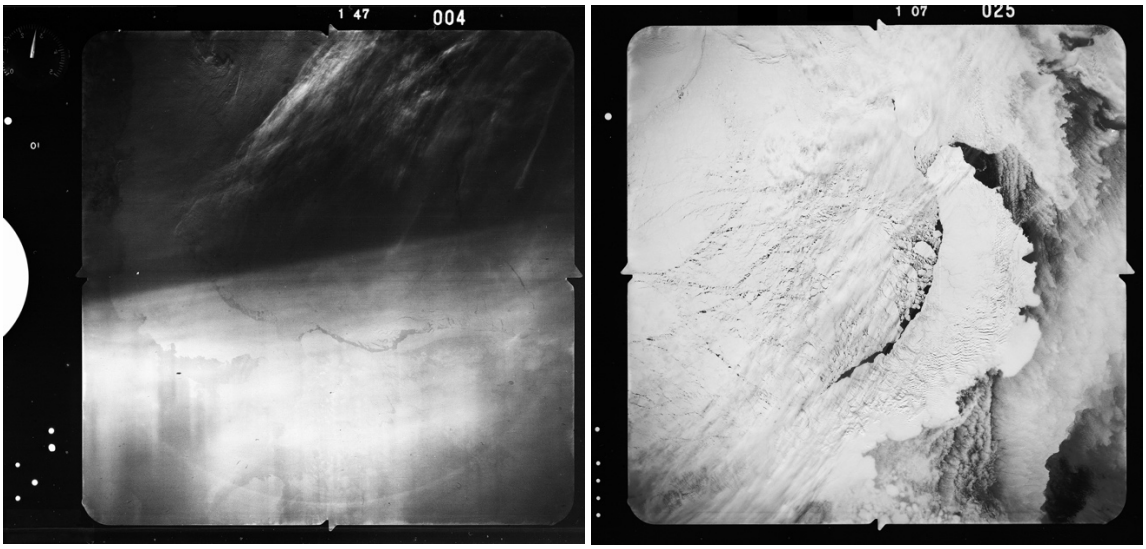

Fig. 7. Left, "Five Years After Detonation." Anson Wigner, 2020.

Right, "6 Months 19 Days After Detonation." Anson Wigner, 2021.

[5] David Maisel, *Proving Ground*, https://davidmaisel.com/works/proving-ground-2/, accessed 10 January 2021.

My work engages with three types of site specificity: the specific site captured on surveillance film, the invisible history of the site which the film does not capture, and the material origin of the film and camera through which the satellite saw. For example, my print "Five Years after Detonation" seen in figure 7, shows a mostly obscured Arctic landscape where the Soviet Union detonated a fifty-megaton bomb in 1961. I pair images of sites of historic violence with text recalling that unseen violence in ways reminiscent of Yoneda Tomoko's photographs of quotidian landscapes and architecture which she reveals through textual clues rooted in site-specific histories of warfare and occupation. However, while Yoneda's horizontal photographs from human heights provide instant legibility and an inhabitable perspective, images shot from orbit offer a destabilizing view of land that alienates viewers from both experience and context. This distinction was immediately visible to me when I photographed physical sites tied to the satellite surveillance programs. Figure 8 shows a photograph I took of Hawkeye Labs building 5 beside a redacted floor plan of the top floor of that building, which I appropriated from a declassified NRO report.[6] Both images show little or no useful information about the site or its CIA-backed history, but both orient the viewer within a particular human lens. The photographer and the map-drawer create images we can recognize and situate ourselves within. Even the redacted floorplan helpfully includes an arrow pointing North to orient the viewer. Any illegibility imposed on these images or incomprehension imposed on the viewer are effects demonstrating the power and control of photographer and government. Had I persisted in an approach similar to Yoneda's, photographing surveillance sites from a human vantage point, I

[6] National Reconnaissance Office, *Bridgehead* report BIF-OOBB-GH- 09136- 1- 80, declassified 29 March 2012, https://www.nro.gov/Portals/65/documents/foia/declass/HEXAGON%20Records/103.pdf, accessed 2 February, 2021.

could have called into question the photographic practice of the CIA and NRO. But I could not have interrogated the power dynamic generated by automating and disembodying the photographic process itself. In other words, while Yoneda creates photographs that literally depict specific sites, I decided to appropriate photographs which, for all their scientific precision in documenting exact locations, are abstractions. In my installations and three-channel video, I seek to expose and disrupt the state's mobilization of disembodied views of abstracted sites to achieve a totality of imaging power. Whereas a redacted image implies that to see is to know, and that knowledge worth knowing is already in government hands, I use satellite images as a lens on what remains unseen and unknown. Even with deployment of global imaging systems of unprecedented scope, scale, and technical sophistication, epistemological limits remain.

Fig. 8. Left, Hawkeye Labs, Rochester NY, Anson Wigner, 2021.

Right, 4th floor plan, redacted from a declassified report on Hawkeye Labs.

My site-specific use of this archival material is embedded in Rochester, New York, the material origin of the film and cameras that created the satellite images. While I found making images of the sites where these were created of limited use, the importance of my proximity to those sites remains. *Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails* uses images recorded on top-secret film

and emulsion engineered, produced, and processed in Rochester, where I created and installed the show. The bulk of top-secret design and optical engineering for the satellite's imaging apparatus was also performed by Rochesterians working jointly for Kodak and the US government, largely at the Hawkeye Labs. Hawkeye was Kodak's primary site for covert government projects, located at the Lower Falls less than two miles from downtown Rochester.[7] Part of this project has been an exploration of the material loop created by the cycle of production, archiving, and appropriation.

Trevor Paglen's works on black sites and surveillance infrastructure paved the way for artists like myself to utilize the act of looking as a central theme. Unlike Trevor Paglen's photographic imaging of the secret, hard to find, or intellectually elusive elements of surveillance and photographic vision, I employ the record created by a government surveillance apparatus as a tool to surveille the state. I am interested in how our presumptions of power and knowledge break down when we position ourselves as state actors and trace the moments and human lives that satellites failed to see.

Fig. 9. Still from *autonomous.* Anson Wigner, three-channel video, 2021.

[7] National Reconnaissance Office. *BRIDGEHEAD: Eastman Kodak Company's Covert Photoreconnaissance Film Processing Program*. National Reconnaissance Office Center for the Study of National Reconnaissance, Chantilly, Virginia 2014.

Placing artificial eyes beyond the clouds and seeing only clouds was one way in which CIA intentions failed to materialize in satellite images. Early satellite imaging bridged our individual intention of seeing with that of a semi-autonomous state apparatus, which imaged a great portion of the earth, yet rarely informed us of what was transpiring within its view. A sublime landscape of windswept ice in the Arctic, with its simple lines and effervescent tones, may produce a contemplative meditation on the constantly shifting physical facets of an evaporating Arctic climate. Or the cracked ice and exposed murky depths below may stand as evidence of the recent surfacing of a Soviet submarine with its payload of sixteen R29-R nuclear ballistic missiles in a training exercise. In *Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails,* the visually banal and innocuous images of satellite surveillance maintain their Cold War historical reference and site specificity, functioning as a looking glass through which we can contemplate the mechanisms and shortcomings of the cultural and political systems that commanded them.

Yet the Cold War doomsday ideology may be less of a relic of past fears than a lasting indicator of our collective willingness to accept the annihilation of the world, or at least the collapse of our own society. Satellite images of the Sedan Crater at the Nevada Test Site show little more than a few divots in the ground. Unseen are the radiation and nuclear material produced during testing, which continue to pose a grave threat to humanity. It is a sad irony that the climate change that Cold War satellites witnessed in the dwindling Arctic ice may pose an even greater threat than the nuclear submarines and ICBMs the United States was intent on tracking.

To tease out the relationship between the seen and unseen, and to further detail how historical and site-specific archival images can speak to contemporary and global circumstances, I look to scholarship at the nexus of modern state-sponsored surveillance, automation, panoptics

and panopticism. By panoptics I mean the technical apparatus and acts of surveillance, such as the architecture and staffing of Cuba's panoptic prison, the Presidio Modelo, and the design and deployment of satellite surveillance. By panopticism, I mean the conviction that a sufficiently elaborate system of surveillance will coerce human targets to internalize surveillance – thereby rendering them automata, effortlessly policed. To extrapolate from Michel Foucault's theory of panopticism a doctrine of satellite surveillance, once the United States developed the ability to surveil the earth from orbit, and the Soviets were aware of that ability, their internalization of US surveillance should have been enough to discipline and deter Communist expansion.[8] As Petra Gehring puts it, a successful panopticon makes "the observer superfluous in the control of human beings"[9] and all but eliminates the reciprocity of the gaze. Satellite imaging ushered in an unprecedented panoptic regime, where the earth itself was rendered a circular prison, and the eye of the guard, liberated from the confines of a body, was set free to gaze down from the darkness of space. In reality, photographic surveillance from orbit erased the difference in surveillance value between inhabited and uninhabited land. Unpopulated spaces like cloudscapes, empty mountain ranges, and barren oceans, were rendered with the same attention and detail as city centers, suburbs, and farms. However impressive the technical resolution of a satellite image, satellite imaging and our awareness of being surveilled were and are no adequate deterrent to war, nor did the internalization of surveillance lead to peace or moral uplift.

As James C. Scott argues, "any large social process or event will inevitably be far more complex than the schemata we can devise, prospectively or retrospectively, to map it."[10] In this

[8] Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1991).
[9]Petra Gehring, "The Inverted Eye. Panopticon and Panopticism, Revisited," *Foucault Studies* No. 23, (2017), 50.
[10]James C. Scott. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1998), 309.

passage, Scott analyzes the inability of state planners and mappers to predict the dire effects of forced collectivization of agrarian production under Stalin and Mao. Elsewhere, he advances the same critique of inevitable failures in forestry management, urban design, and modernist projects in general. His insight is equally applicable to the state mapping conducted by the CIA Corona satellites. Despite the complex system of data collection, record keeping, and analysis, archives and intelligence inevitably understate the complexity of the world, with consequences ranging from comic to tragic. Providing they were not obscured by clouds, many of the photographs taken from orbit by the CIA were sharp enough to identify an individual house, municipal building, school, or factory. These satellite images may resolve down to the smallest rooftop, but they do not let us inside.

The many early failures of US government satellite programs were a stark and alarming departure from the generally preferable, though hardly perfect, success rates of contemporaneous aerial reconnaissance programs using spy planes such as the U-2. However, success, when achieved, bred its own problems. Ironically, cover stories that these top-secret satellites were engineering and science initiatives became a liability once Corona proved successful enough that the civilian science community started petitioning to have their equipment added to the payload. Civilian scientists were also keen to review the copious data they presumed had been gathered by dozens of "science" satellites. As US Air Force historian Robert Perry notes, "Pacification of the scientific community became particularly awkward."[11]

Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails utilizes the framework of Cold War containment culture to identify satellite images as evidence of both the uncontained and uncontainable. US satellites attempted to visualize global communist encroachment on capitalist terrain while

[11] Ibid, 13.

containing the US scientific community's growing interest in satellite technology. However, because satellites cannot see into hearts and minds, much of the Cold War and its ideological battlegrounds remained invisible. Satellite images recording ephemeral and impermanent locations, like the constantly shifting Arctic ice, hint at a historical lack of fixity and challenge the degree to which a state can see and control shifting terrain, be it material, cultural, or political. These images raise the question of whether containment culture receded with the close of the Cold War, or if instead, we continue to define culture only in opposition to the Other and project false fantasies of control on the unknown terrain of the future.

Konrad H. Jarausch described the Cold War as a "conflict between the communist and democratic blueprints for shaping the future."[12] Each side attempted to maintain elements of separate cultures – communist and capitalist – deemed the blueprint of society while projecting those static blueprints onto an unpredictable and multi-cultural future. In other words, the Cold War was a paradoxical attempt to export normative stability and revolution at the same time. Containment culture, much like Jarausch's "blueprints," casts normativity and revolution in opposition to each other, when in reality they are codependent. The Cold War was a war of gesture and imagination. Stockpile statistics, projected military capacity, and satellite surveillance of clouds were arguably more important than bullets and bodies. It was a war based on the idea of war, sutured to the pursuit of an unattainable totality of power and knowledge.

For the researchers who have since used CIA satellite images to locate sites of archaeological importance or trace prehistoric travel and premodern trade, the Cold War origin

[12] Konrad H. Jarausch, *Out of Ashes: A New History of Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 455.

of satellite imaging is of little note. The images are simply repurposed to tell a different story.[13] Yet between their present-day scientific use and their previous military origin, the images retain a theme of the fragility of human society. These photographs were made in large part to deter a nuclear holocaust and reduce the chance that our civilization would cease to exist in a single bright flash. The visual record created by our own fear of societal collapse has revealed evidence of a continuum of collapsed societies rising and falling long before our own.

My installation of Cold War surveillance images, looped video and sound, collocates the viewer within these disparate histories of the land, site history, image production, and image reception through a present act of looking. While the installation focuses on extra-state vision and the construction of invented totalities, the intent of the installation is to mobilize the viewer's gaze to see themselves within these broken modalities. The soundscape, which I mixed from barely identifiable recordings of moments in my life interwoven with harsh electronic tones sourced from works by Sakamoto Ryuichi and Carsten Nicolia, form a countercurrent to the potentially seductive experience of viewing sublime, beautifully printed satellite photographs at large scale. I tap contradictions, too, between the abstract beauty of those satellite views and their content of landscapes scarred by atomic tests and hidden panoptic prisons; between the high resolution with which these photographs render landscapes and cloudscapes and the human suffering they render invisible. The video encourages us to scrutinize our hope and fear of state power, propagandized and real, which inevitably collides our own delicate and precious lives.

The CIA, my unwitting artistic collaborators, created a visual bridge between the unseeable, as contained in a view of the past, and our intention to see. As art objects removed

[13] Jason A. Ur, "CORONA Satellite Imagery and Ancient Near Eastern Landscapes," in *Mapping Archaeological Landscapes from Space: In Observance of the 40th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention,* eds. Douglas C Comer and Michael J Harrower, 19-29. (New York: Springer, 2013).

from the world of covert looking and the maintenance of state power, my appropriated satellite photographs speak to how images that envision a past can illuminate the present. By placing the unaltered works of the CIA within a gallery, a scant 1.8 miles and six decades from the site of their inception in Rochester, I invite the audience to engage with what Foucault would opaquely call their polyvalent modes.[14] These images are a record, an echo, and an incitement, that have set the stage for a future of constant surveillance or at least constant recording. Whether all that is recorded will ever be seen is a separate question. Paradoxically, the blind collection of mass data, automated on an enormous scale, has eliminated the gaze of an embodied eye and the mind that might comprehend it.

Fig. 10. *Satellite Vision and Atomic Trails* installation view, Anson Wigner 2021.

[14] Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Vintage, 1995), 195-230.

Among other things, the Corona program was a performance of our deep and frustrated desire, as statesmen, scientists, covert operatives, and laymen, to produce an infallible record, and with it, a stable society. The allure of the Corona images stems less from what they show than from that frustrated desire. Theorist Paul Virilio discusses the illuminating tension between optical failure and what might be seeable in terms of "awareness of hiddenness."[15] I activate an awareness of hiddenness in my work by sourcing thousands of orbital images of clouds and unrecognizable terrain, which we search for what they suggest of the unknown. Virilio argues that the development of global nuclear deterrents entailed "a catastrophic process of total colonization."[16] Satellite surveillance is indeed a cutting-edge technique of colonial cartography and imperialist planning, the efficacy of which I call into question by cultivating an "awareness of hiddenness." The fantasy of power projected onto satellite surveillance persists, regardless of what is imaged, and what is imagined. It may be a Sisyphean effort to destabilize that persistent power fantasy. In challenging the notion of a knowable landscape with knowable inhabitants, my prints and three-channel video pose the power of looking as a question, and ask my audience what it means to see and be seen.

[15] John Armitage and Ryan Bishop, eds., *Virilio and Visual Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 65.
[16] Ibid., 54.

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