

ONE-TIME USE  
By Victor Margolin

Some time ago I received a letter from a librarian at a major university archive granting me permission for one-time use in a public lecture of five slides from the archive's collection. The slides, for which I paid \$3.50 each, included several graphic design pieces - magazine and catalog spreads as well as examples of typography. I was particularly glad to have the slides and had designated strategic slots for them in the lecture I was planning for a design conference.

When an envelope arrived in the mail with the five little pieces of film encased in cardboard mounts, I began consider how the archive was going to insure that I did not show the slides more than once. I imagined a gaggle of student workers assigned to follow me and other potential miscreants forever. Such employment would no doubt help all of these students through college and contribute mightily to the educated labor force of the United States. But I also had to face the fact that I was in for a life of surveillance. I would have to learn a new vocabulary of moves - ducks and feints to elude trackers, secret codes to throw telephone eavesdroppers off the scent and daredevil techniques to ditch drivers on my tail. I would also need an arsenal of disguises, false noses, fake eyebrows, plastic ears, and the like.

Without a policy of round the clock surveillance, however, I wondered how the archive could keep track of my whereabouts. Most of my lectures are out of town and the librarians would need to know where I was going and when, what flights I was booked on, what times the lectures were scheduled for and in which venues they were being held. Staff would have to arrange flights for the student surveillants, organize accommodations for them, pay conference registration fees, and make all other arrangements to insure that they would be present in the lecture hall at the moment when I showed one or more of the archive's slides. All this would entail an incredible amount of sleuthing, arranging, coordinating, and managing, not to mention providing support staff to process travel vouchers, per diem requests, and taxi reimbursements. My phones would have to be tapped, my mail inspected, and my e-mail and fax machines monitored. The archive would have to assign an expertly trained surveillant exclusively to me. That person would be obliged to attend all my lectures to see whether or not I was showing one of the forbidden slides. And then there was the chance that I might identify the surveillant, let him or her come all the way to London or wherever I was speaking, and then, in an abrupt act of *pictura interruptus*, pull the slide at the last minute.

But the defiant part of me also considered a confrontation with the surveillant. "Why," I thought, "should I be afraid to show these images and why should I pay for their repeated use?" In confrontation mode, I imagined a Robert Hunter Middleton typeface flashing on the

screen in a large lecture hall at some prestigious venue abroad as my student surveillant stood up in the audience to protest. “Halt,” I heard him or her shout, “you can’t show that image because you only have permission for one-time use.” The surveillant might then make a beeline for the slide projector and put a special clamp or boot on it, which would only be taken off when I forked over compensation on the spot for the additional use of the slide. Adopting a martyr’s role, I saw myself facing down the rude surveillant in front of hundreds of people and demanding in the name of culture that he or she unlock the projector without my handing over a plugged ha’penny. I was sure other scholars in the audience would cheer me on and might even threaten to tie the surveillant up and subject him or her to taped complaints about one-time slide use by disgruntled colleagues. Actually my defiance fantasies go well beyond the transgressive showing of slides in my lectures. I’d like to project the archive’s slides over entire cities with huge spotlights carefully hidden in secret locations. I would claim responsibility for the projections in the name of Scholars Against One-Time Use.

Now suppose that I am only one of several hundred scholars to whom the archive has granted limited permission for showing slides of material from their collection. This would mean an equal number of student surveillants assigned permanently and in perpetuity to keep tabs on each scholar. The travel budget and cost of stake out equipment might consume the entire university budget and then, as happens these days, the university would be forced to develop new sources of revenue. The archive would attempt to parlay the extravagant cost of surveillance into fistfuls of second, third, and fourth-time use fees. To make the collection of these fees more efficient, universities would begin to train students for doctorates in surveillance studies in order to devise more efficient methods of tracking lecturers. These students would learn how to use new technology so they could do virtual surveillance. Imagine a hologram of a surveillant standing up at a lecture to claim the archive’s fee and then putting a virtual clamp on a projector that would actually prevent it from working.

A vast surveillance industry is already growing up around the collection of permissions fees for unauthorized slide projections. I even heard that student surveillants across the nation are organizing because they are severely overworked and underpaid. Well, once this group of students is united and victorious, their enhanced wages will drive up permission costs even more. All of which is likely to bring life on earth to a halt by 2025 if not sooner.