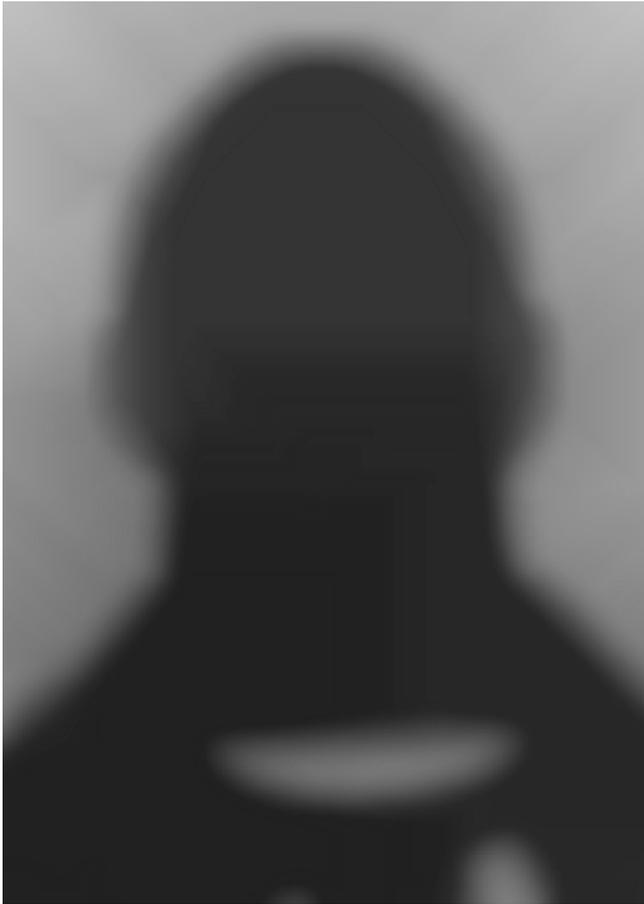


tive political realities seeped back in via, for example, the mediated routes of pirate radio (such as Radio Glasnost, founded in the 1980s by Roland Jahn, a political exile from East Berlin), thereby bolstering local dissident groups.

Despite the limitations of data obfuscation and other forms of digital secrecy, “the very oppressive pervasiveness of capitalist realism means that even glimmers of alternative political and economic possibilities can have a disproportionately great effect” (Fisher 2009, 80–81). Moreover, if we understand that political-technological settlements like shareveillance are historically contingent and open to challenge and change, and that hegemony is a constant articulation and disarticulation between dominant ideologies and those elements that exceed or challenge it, then attempts to renegotiate the settlement or distribution are always significant.

As a particularly decisive cut or intervention, one that utilizes obfuscation to show the perils of sharing in the form of open data, a project published in 2015 by artist Paolo Cirio called *Obscurity* is noteworthy. In the United States, the publication of police photographs, or mug shots, of arrestees is legal under freedom of information and transparency laws in most states. Websites scrape mug shots that have been published elsewhere, mostly on sites belonging to law enforcement, and republish the photographs, requesting money from the arrestee to remove the picture and details. In *Obscurity*, Cirio and his collaborators developed a program to clone and scramble the data available on mug shot industry websites such as Mugshots.com, JustMugshots.com, and MugshotsOnline.com. Using almost identical domain names to these sites, Cirio’s clone sites are uncanny. One might mistake them for the original at a quick glance. On closer inspection, they show hazy faces—misted mug shots—that are impossible to identify, and names have been changed. Cirio has singled out and enlarged some of the images from the clone sites in his shows. They serve as antiportraits, showing how each face has already been defaced (Figure 7).

While Cirio is most concerned with the right to be forgotten, as the issue has come to be referred to in the European Union after the landmark case in 2014 that ensured search engines are subject to the existing European Union data protection directive, we can also read this project as one that exposes the risks (of abuse and exploitation)



**FIGURE 7.** One of the obfuscated mug shots included in Paolo Cirio's project *Obscurity* (2015). Courtesy of the artist.

inherent to sharing and the limits and failures of some open data and transparency initiatives. In addition, the mug shot industry can be thought of as cynically aping the work undertaken by so-called data-preneurs to transform open data into profitable forms. After all, the websites Cirio is protesting against certainly have an entrepreneurial, creative approach to repurposing open data. In this way, they constitute a gruesome response to the call embedded in the Obama information imaginary described in chapter 2.

By cutting into shareveillance with opacity, Cirio demands that

incarceration be seen not as a decontextualized, individualized problem but as a collective social issue for which we all have responsibility. Cirio (2015) writes, “Obscurity proposes a democratic judicial system that would help to understand crime as a community-related issue, bringing attention to the victims of mass incarceration in the U.S. and the unscrupulous criminal justice system and law enforcement agencies that created this situation.” The project exposes the unethical cut of shareveillance with respect to a particular sociopolitical issue—in this case, how mug shot websites share data in such a way that presents incarceration as an asocial issue while in the process performing a second tier of punishment (shaming and extortion) on top of any lawfully imposed penalties. The project asks us to understand the political—and, crucially, racial—economy of criminalization and the carceral state in the United States. *Obscurity* cuts into this particular distribution with opacity in order to share anew. Creative interruptions of shareveillance can make ethical cuts and in the process show up the incisions that have constructed the neoliberal security settlement in which shareveillance plays a part.

### **A Right to Opacity**

These digital projects highlight concerns about information sharing and how surplus data and information are harnessed for profit in increasingly cynical ways. Obfuscation provides respite from processes that render human behavior and our data as capital. In this way it is political precisely because it questions the commercial appropriation of sharing and the capitalist realism underpinning acquiescence to data surveillance. It is also political because it deoptimizes the gaze of state security and its reliance on algorithmic governance. However, I also want to root these tactical interventions in a politics of and for the secret. Together, they constitute radical secrecy for the data multitude.

Derrida (2001a) professed a “taste for the secret.” As discussed in chapters 3 and 5, rather than the common, contextual secret that hides somewhere waiting to be revealed (the secret that is, in principle at least, knowable), the secret of Derrida’s formulation is unconditional. This irreducible excess, which never fully arrives and never fully presents itself, ensures an encounter with the other that should