Counter-Visual Artifacts: Negotiating Surveillance and Carceral Visuality in Public Housing through Videovoice

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Abstract

U.S. public housing is historically a site of racialized and carceral surveillance. Digital surveillance technologies reinforce this containment by mediating carceral visuality, the institutionalized visual and analytic lenses that shape perceptions and governance of public housing spaces and residents. This paper presents a videovoice project with a public housing community, for which residents used smartphones to capture their routines, spatial practices, and imaginaries in relation to surveillance. We analyze how these video artifacts enact alternative ways of seeing and knowing, surfacing overlooked routines, relations, and critiques of surveillance. These videos document what is often invisibilized: the lived consequences of carceral visuality and the situated knowledge of those surveilled. We propose "counter-visual artifacts" to describe the political and disruptive role these videos play in challenging dominant visual regimes and reclaiming the right to see and be seen otherwise. By advocating for counter-visual sensibilities, we invite HCI scholars to rethink how artifacts make room for alternative ways of seeing.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Collaborative and social computing theory, concepts and paradigms**; • **Social and professional topics** → **Surveillance**.

Keywords

public housing, surveillance, carceral visuality, counter-visual artifacts, community-based participatory research, videovoice

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1 Introduction

Human-computer interaction (HCI), along with related fields such as computer-supported cooperative work (CSCW) and science and technology studies (STS), has long been interested in the empirical study of artifacts in practice—how material artifacts are produced, used, and managed, as well as how they are embedded within social processes of negotiation [2, 62, 79, 80, 87]. Scholars have paid attention to the co-constitutive relationships between artifacts and coordinative practices, especially how information and knowledge artifacts support cooperative work across organizational and social settings [50]. Through generative foundational concepts like boundary objects [87], scholars have examined how artifacts traverse and bridge the boundaries of intersecting social worlds [90], and how communities of practice negotiate these artifacts' meanings to inform and support collaborative work within situated contexts [8, 9, 60, 91] and across organizational boundaries [49, 51, 62].

Notably, many of the artifacts examined in HCI are visual in nature, such as maps [87], architectural plans [80], photographs [3, 28, 57], and storyboards [55]. Drawing from the sociotechnical tradition, HCI has emphasized that these artifacts are socially constructed and enacted in practice, shaped through ongoing negotiations within and across communities of practice [1]. However, while HCI scholarship has attended to how visual artifacts coordinate and context meanings, it has paid less attention to *visuality* itself—that is, to the dominant regimes of seeing and the underlying power relations that shape the production, interpretation, mobilization, and political goals of visual artifacts [67, 68]. What remains under-theorized is how visual artifacts participate in structuring ways of seeing and thus embed and reproduce particular visual and analytic lenses across overlapping social worlds [67].

These visual and analytic lenses are certainly not politically neutral. Broader systems of power and authority condition how we perceive, represent, and understand the social realities that these artifacts were produced to represent [55]. HCI's understanding of visual artifacts can attend to the politics of visuality by extending beyond their support for coordinative practices to also consider

how they might reproduce dominant ideologies, institutional epistemologies, and systems of othering.

The politics of visuality are especially stark in the contexts of the carceral state [6, 13, 30, 71]. *Carceral visuality* is not merely a question of visibility or invisibility shaped by external indicators, as in Star and Strauss's seminal work [88], nor is it synonymous with the very act of seeing or surveillance itself. Rather, in thinking with visual cultural theorist Mirezoeff, visuality is a historically and politically situated way of seeing; it is a configuration of knowledge and power that directs *what is seen*, *how it is seen*, and *how it is interpreted* [67]. Carceral visuality thus structures the frameworks through which institutions, publics, and academics make sense of spaces like prisons and public housing, and the people and communities associated with them. Importantly, these visual and interpretive frameworks emerge from vantage points external to the on-the-ground lived experience of carceral control, shaping how certain viewers "see" while simultaneously producing residents as the objects of that gaze. As such, carceral visuality underpins dominant epistemologies that naturalize state violence and pathologize racialized poverty, often rendering the lived experiences and knowledge of affected people and communities invisible or, more bluntly, fundamentally unintelligible.

This carceral way of seeing has long framed the policy, public, and academic discourses around public housing communities—an integral yet often overlooked part of the carceral geography of U.S. cities—through naturalized criminality and social dysfunction [77, 82, 96, 98].[1] Visual artifacts such as surveillance footage, mug shots, and media imagery that depict public housing as spaces of crime, disorder, and deviance continually (re)produce and legitimize these narratives [13, 27, 45, 61]. These visual artifacts actively construct public housing as a carceral space, erecting and reinforcing spatial, social, and epistemological boundaries around the situated social worlds. In doing so, these artifacts deepen institutional control and justify continued surveillance and technological interventions, rather than bridging or reconsidering these boundaries.

Challenging and disrupting carceral visuality requires more than simply exposing surveillance or rendering the invisible visible. It demands a disruption of the dominant, naturalized ways of seeing that sustain discursive and material systems of control [58, 71]. This is the premise of *counter-visuality*, a concept emerging from critical visual culture studies that understands resistance not merely as visibility but as a contestation of dominant visual regimes and "the right to look" [67]. This paper builds particularly on Judah Schept's articulation of counter-visual commitments in critical prison studies [78] to develop the concept of *counter-visual artifacts*. We consider counter-visual artifacts as visual materials, such as videos and photographs, that directly impacted people and communities produce to intentionally *disrupt* the boundaries—whether social, organizational, or epistemological—that dominant visual regimes of carceral and state power erect and sustain. For Schept, the counter-visual is a sensibility and epistemological commitment that compels viewers positioned within dominant publics and institutional vantage points to attend to what is not readily "there." It asks researchers to recognize the historical formations, erased sociomaterial practices, and alternative ways of being that dominant visuality renders invisible. In doing so, the counter-visual challenges researchers to reconsider how the familiar ways of seeing that carceral visuality legitimizes often confine and co-opt our modes of understanding and visual languages. Therefore, counter-visual artifacts do not simply offer alternative representations or narrations per se; they intervene in the very logics of visuality, foregrounding situated knowledge and lived experience in defiance of institutional ways of seeing. In this sense, counter-visual artifacts are inherently disruptive and resistant, aimed at unsettling taken-for-granted boundaries. They adapt and extend the current HCI's theorization of artifacts by shifting the focus beyond coordination, collaboration, and boundary negotiation to include the contestation of power, dominant epistemologies, and institutional ways of seeing.

We demonstrate counter-visual artifacts through the video clips by a group of long-term public housing residents in Detroit, Michigan, a city historically shaped by carceral geographies and Black resistance [24, 43]. Through a multi-year participatory videovoice project, residents used their smartphones to document everyday practices and stories in relation to institutional surveillance and carceral power. We—a group of academic researchers and community organizers serving public housing residents—collectively conceptualized and developed the videovoice method with an explicit commitment to the counter-visual, seeking to redistribute the "sensible" and the power of seeing [74, 78]. As we will describe in section 3.2, our videovoice method extended photovoice, an existing community-based participatory research (CBPR) method established in social work and public health [38, 93] that HCI and critical computing research has recently adopted [57, 58, 72]. It aims to center the situated expertise and lived experiences of the members of affected communities by using photography as a tool to document, reflect on, and communicate their life stories as well as the community's shared assets and concerns. Through collective discussion and reflection, community members generated visual materials and narratives to raise awareness, inform community actions, and catalyze social change [100].

Our videovoice method extends photovoice by incorporating videography, which allows for the documentation of movement, sound, and temporal context, enriching the method's narrative and storytelling possibilities. This paper attends to the content and creation of videos that public housing residents produced through videovoice to analyze how these video artifacts enact alternative ways of seeing and knowing. Through *seeing back*, these videos surface critical reflections on surveillance infrastructure; through *seeing around*, they draw attention to overlooked daily routines and practices; and through *seeing self*, they enact the rearticulation of public housing residents' subjectivities and their relationships to space, self, and others. From the vantage points of public housing residents, these counter-visual artifacts redirect our attention to what carceral visuality often suppresses or renders invisible: the lived sociomaterial consequences of carceral logics and the embodied, situated knowledge and everyday practices of those navigating life within heavily surveilled communities.

[1] In the U.S., public housing refers to publicly subsidized housing managed by local housing authorities. Compared to social housing in Europe and many other contexts, U.S. public housing spaces and residents have historically been subject to spatial segregation and containment, as well as punitive surveillance integral to the broader systems of criminalization, which disproportionately target poor and Black people.

2 Related Work

2.1 Carceral Surveillance of Public Housing

2.1.1 Public Housing as Carceral Spaces. Public housing is at the center of poverty governance and crime control in the U.S. Carceral power has structured public housing developments into a "uniquely racial formation that spawns a society-web of material and symbolic associations between color, place, and a host of negatively valued social properties" [99, p.373]. U.S. public housing is deeply entangled with the country's social welfare system to discipline and surveil working-class and poor Americans, especially Black and other communities of color [39, 98]. Public housing residents have historically faced stigmas that associate them with deviance, welfare dependency, poverty, criminality, and violence [7, 82].

However, understandings of public housing are incomplete without situating it the within the broader prison industrial complex [23, 46, 101] and racial surveillance capitalism [34, 66, 76]. Carceral institutions benefit from the ongoing exploitation and dispossession of poor Black communities at the expense of the enclosure and containment of Black residents and their mobility—spatially, socioeconomically, and politically [39]. In this light, public housing in the U.S. emerged as what critical geographer Brett Story describes as a "carceral space" [89], where residents' movements and daily practices become sites of surveillance, discipline, and punishment [77]. As Story puts it, carceral spaces are "sites and relations of power that enable and incentivize the capture, control, and confinement of human beings through structures of immobility and dispossession" [89, p.3]. The production of public housing as a carceral space is historically intertwined with racialized policing policies and practices in urban spaces—from federal rules barring people with drug-related convictions from living in public housing [16], to the normalization of heavy patrols and gang injections in the name of crime prevention [39], and the rise of private security forces working alongside police to target poor and racialized neighborhoods [4, 43]. Such entanglements between policing and public housing have further naturalized the criminalization of public housing residents, making them especially vulnerable to police interactions, criminalization, and incarceration [39, 40].

Positioning public housing as a carceral space also highlights how carceral power extends far beyond the formal network of prisons, jails, and detention centers [48]. Critical geographer Shabazz theorizes public housing as an *in-between space* "between freedom and incarceration, between prison and home" [82, p.56-57]. Through a historical analysis of public housing communities in the South Side of Chicago, Shabazz offers a nuanced account of the blurring boundaries between public housing and prison through the very design of housing architecture and the use of security systems (e.g., heavy policing, curfews, parameter patrols, surveillance cameras, electronic identification systems). He uses the term *spatializing Blackness* to call out how the design of public housing manifests the carceral and racial urban geographies in the U.S. and erases the very complexity of Black people's lived experiences. The context of South Side Chicago in Shabazz's analysis shares parallels with Detroit, where our project took place. These similarities are rooted in their intertwined histories of racial segregation, systemic dispossession of Black communities, and carceral control.

2.1.2 Digital Surveillance Technologies and Public Housing. Data-driven digital technologies have become ubiquitous yet increasingly black-boxed. Their rapid growth has further mediated, shifted, and scaled up the control and surveillance of poor Black residents in public housing communities. The design and deployment of these digital surveillance technologies have increasingly blurred the spatial and temporal boundaries among different surveillance sites while paradoxically solidifying these boundaries and the containment of racialized others [19, 101]. For example, HCI scholars Shklovski and colleagues traced how GPS devices on specialized anklets have transformed the spatial meanings and power dynamics for sex offender parolees, blurring the boundaries between home and prison [84]. These authors have demonstrated how spatial boundaries and location information have become technological and commodified actors that shape parolees' everyday movements.

The integration of networked digital surveillance technologies into policing has further intensified discriminatory and violent practices targeting Black and Brown communities [97]. Critical computing scholars have repeatedly warned us that these systems are never neutral, as they reproduce the biases already embedded in policing institutions [6]. Predictive policing algorithms and facial recognition systems, for example, draw on large-scale data infrastructures to identify alleged crime hotspots [11, 29, 44] and to classify or track individuals [6] for heightened police scrutiny. Yet the data feeding these systems (e.g., arrest records, mug shots, stop-and-frisk encounters) are themselves products of racial profiling and selective enforcement [11]. When such data are used to train predictive models, they reproduce these biases and generate self-fulfilling prophecies that legitimize continued overpolicing and criminalization of Black and brown communities [6, 10]. In doing so, these technologies further entrench carceral geographies and contribute to the spatialization of Blackness as a site of data-driven surveillance in urban space [44]. In Detroit, Lu et al.'s recent work further shows how emerging policing surveillance infrastructures gain institutional traction through the rhetorical logic of being "better than nothing," enabling authorities to frame surveillance technologies as evidence of investment in long-neglected racialized neighborhoods while simultaneously obfuscating accountability for the material harms from these systems [56].

More recently, public housing has become a key frontier for testing and deployibg policing surveillance technologies [17], such as security cameras and facial recognition [26, 27, 61]. Funded by federal crime-fighting grants and justified as safety enhancements, these technologies are often used to detect minor lease infractions (such as unauthorized guests or everyday movements deemed suspicious) resulting in punitive measures and, in some cases, eviction [61]. As Monahan argues [70], such surveillance technologies further (re)produces an "electronic fortification" of public housing, reinforcing residents' containment and exposure to heightened scrutiny while further isolating them from the broader social world. In other words, digital surveillance technologies consolidate public housing as a carceral space—they tighten its boundaries of enclosure and control on the one hand, and they blur the boundary between home and public spaces to entrench policing into the intimate dimensions of residents' daily lives on the other.

2.2 Carceral Visuality and Counter-Visual Approaches

2.2.1 Carceral Visuality. As critical race and Black feminist scholars have reminded us, carceral power is also fundamentally visual [6, 13, 23, 64, 83]. *Carceral visuality* refers to how visual practices, technologies, and representations intersect with systems of incarceration, surveillance, and state control [67]. The term has emerged within a broader interdisciplinary inquiry into the visual culture of punishment, drawing from fields such as critical visual studies, cultural geography, and critical race theory. At its core, carceral visuality involves not just how carceral institutions (e.g., public housing and prisons) and incarcerated bodies are seen, but how *seeing* itself enacts and reproduces a power structure of discipline, regulation, and ideological reproduction [67]. Visuality, as visual cultural theorist Mirzoeff puts it, is "not composed simply of visual perceptions in the physical sense, but is formed by a set of relations combining information, imagination, and insight into a rendition of physical and psychic space" [67, p.3]. Through this lens, carceral visuality becomes a key mechanism through which the carceral state power makes racialized bodies legible, governable, and surveilled while defining the epistemological and analytical boundaries of what is (not) visible and perceptible.

Carceral visuality operates through two interlocking dynamics: surveillance and representation. First, carceral power relies on surveillance technologies and visual infrastructures to monitor, categorize, and discipline. Second, the images and visual materials produced through these mechanisms shape how communities understand their social realities, spatial relationships, and even themselves. In this sense, media representations of incarceration, such as surveillance camera footage and prison photography, also play a crucial role in shaping carceral visuality [13, 68, 85]. As Fleetwood writes, "carceral visuality makes incarcerated people both invisible and hypervisible, but also unseeing and unseen" [30].

Indeed, in her now-seminal book *Dark Matters* [13], Browne examines how racializing surveillance practices are historically rooted in the visualization and control of Black bodies. Browne argues that contemporary forms of biometric surveillance and predictive policing are continuations of racialized visual regimes that extend beyond prison walls. In HCI, Fox and colleagues have used the term *managerial vision* to describe a form of visuality, or structured ways of seeing, that organizes labor, enforces compliance, and determines access to resources [32]. Their work illustrates how this managerial visuality is enacted through the design of smart technologies, such as networked soap dispensers in smart toilets, which allow managers to monitor, analyze, and prompt workers to perform routine tasks like handwashing with greater speed and efficiency. This example highlights how visual regimes not only are embedded in everyday sociotechnical infrastructures but also actively structure social interactions, shaping the logic of what is seen, how it is seen, and how it is interpreted and acted upon. Following James Scott's analysis of state legibility [81], we can understand carceral visuality as both descriptive and prescriptive: it does not merely reflect social order but actively produces and maintains it, yet it is never complete [78].

2.2.2 Counter Visuality and Counter-Visual Commitments. If visuality is a tool of carceral power, it can also be a site of resistance. On this note, *o* provides a critical framework for challenging the dominant carceral ways of seeing while attending to possible alternative visualization projects [67] and seeking to redistribute what is sensible and visible [71, 74]. In this paper, we particularly build on what Schept describes as *counter-visual commitment* [78]. In the context of ethnography, he writes:

> A counter-visual ethnography looks for what is not there: the ghosts of racialized regimes past, the sediment of dirty industry that seeps into and imbues the present, and the trans-historical and trans-local circulation of carceral logics and epistemologies that structure the contemporary empirical realities we observe, record, and analyze. [78, p.203]

As Schept argues, understanding the carceral landscape requires seeing beyond the literal prison, excavating how punishment cultures are embedded in broader political and economic formations [78]. Doing so calls for a kind of committed epistemology and sensibility that intentionally and strategically confronts and disrupts the visuality of mass incarceration visualizing what dominant visual regimes otherwise obscure. In other words, committing to the counter-visual requires us to destabilize taken-for-granted analytical and visual frameworks of perception and foreground the carceral state power's structuring force of visibility and legibility. Therefore, for us, committing to counter-visuality is not simply producing alternative imagery, but reconfiguring who sees, from where, and toward what end. This entails disrupting normalized epistemologies, revealing buried histories, and amplifying experiences often denied legibility within dominant frameworks.

Besides Schept's counter-visual ethnography methods, counter-visual commitment can redistribute the power of seeing and the right to look by centering the situated viewpoints and ways of seeing from the people and communities experiencing direct impacks of the dominant carceral visuality. Such approaches deeply resonate with the Black radical tradition and what Browne describes as "dark sousveillance"—a practice of counter-surveillance rooted in Black life that mobilizes visual and cultural production to unsettle dominant representations and reclaim Black life [13]. Rather than simply observing the surveillants from below, dark sousveillance interrogates the very logics of visuality of racialized surveillance, reclaiming representational power and asserting alternative ways of seeing, knowing, and being. For example, Fleetwood's *Marking Time* examines the aesthetics and politics of visual art created by incarcerated communities [30]. Her work challenges dominant narratives by foregrounding the counter-visual practices and artworks that emerge from within carceral spaces and resist, reinterpret, and reclaim agency from the state's gaze. McKittrick's work reminds us of the need to liberate Black life from the plantation's spatial logics—what she calls the "plantation future" [63]. These interventions foreground vision not just as representation but as an ongoing contest over space, knowledge, and subjectivity. In HCI research, Lu et al. have collaborated with Black community members living adjacent to policing surveillance to coproduce photographs of their situated experiences, sensibilities, and practices of navigating safety [58]. These photographs reveal how perceptions of safety

are deeply embedded in complex, more-than-human relational contexts, directly contrasting with the coercive, objectifying visual logic of policing and surveillance technologies.

Our work seeks to extend a counter-visual commitment within HCI in two key ways. First, we present videovoice as a counter-visual participatory approach that centers the situated ways of seeing, knowing, and living articulated by public housing residents who have long been subjected to naturalized criminality and heightened regimes of social and policing surveillance. Second, we analyze videos that these residents have produced and theorize them as counter-visual artifacts—visual materials that disrupt the social and epistemological boundaries that carceral visual regimes construct and maintain. This framing allows us to expand current HCI theorization of artifacts, particularly in relation to their production and use within boundary work and collaborative practice. We argue that this approach is generative for HCI, as it opens up space for methodological and epistemic sensibilities that center the redistribution of visual power and the right to look, not as gaps for technical systems to fill, but as political and aesthetic strategies that actively unsettle dominant frameworks of visibility and legibility.

3 Method

3.1 Field Site and Partnership

3.1.1 Field Site Background. Our field site, Community P, is a public housing community located on the Eastside of Detroit. The community's residents are predominantly Black, with women comprising over 80% of the heads of households. As of 2022, the average annual household income at Community P was slightly above $12,000. This amount is significantly lower than the overall Detroit Eastside household and state averages as well as the federal poverty line.[2] Residents' incomes largely rely on social safety net welfare programs, supplemented by hourly wages and other sources of income. Residence units in this community are deeply affordable townhouses, with rent set at 30% of a tenant's income.

The community partner, which this article will refer to as CBO (Community-Based Organization), is located within the Community P space. Residents founded CBO in the early 1990s. CBO now serves and advocates for community residents and families, working to bridge residents and property management. CBO has dedicated significant efforts to support residents' well-being by developing programs tailored to different resident groups. Most of these programs aim to "get residents out of their house," attract more residents' participation, and weave community relations.

3.1.2 Partnership Between the University and the Community. The videovoice project was a partnership between university researchers and CBO staff from winter 2021 to summer 2024. The partnership spanned all phases, from conception and grant writing to research design, Instutional Review Board approval, participant recruitment, analysis, and dissemination. Since early 2021, the team leaders from the university (the first author) and community (the third author) met regularly to discuss their shared interests in surveillance, digital inequality, and community engagement. The university team was interested in how residents perceive, navigate, and interact with city's expanding policing surveillance infrastructure, such as Project Green Light (PGL)[3] and facial recognition. Meanwhile, the community team was interested in engaging residents in critical discussions of surveillance technologies for safety, given that Community P had become a PGL site and that there were several PGL sites (including liquor stores, gas stations, and fast-food restaurants) at the border of Community P. While the project was originally planned as a photovoice study, the community team leader proposed to extend it as a "videovoice" project (see section 3.2). Together, we conceptualized the videovoice project around the overarching theme of navigating everyday life and safety under carceral visuality and surveillance as public housing residents.

3.1.3 Researcher Positionality. This article draws from an ongoing relational process of knowledge coproduction. All members of the university and community teams are coauthors and collectively acknowledge our diverse backgrounds in terms of race, nationality, gender, educational attainment, and socioeconomic class. The first, third, and last authors have extensive experience serving and working with minoritized communities in various capacities. These differences have significantly shaped our situated ways of knowing and being. In our work, we sought to foster relationships and build connections through, with, and across these differences. As our partnership evolved, the research team consistently foregrounded and reflected upon these differences. By centering difference in our engagement, we sought to ensure incorporation of a range of voices, expertise, and perspectives at every stage of the research design and execution. Through this ongoing process of unlearning and relearning, we became not just collaborators, but friends, kin, and at times, chosen family. These relationships extend far beyond the project's temporal and spatial bounds and what this paper can fully capture.

3.2 Videovoice: A Counter-Visual Participatory Research Method

We position videovoice as a counter-visual and community-based participatory research (CBPR) method that extends the established photovoice method to video taking. Through collective photo taking, sharing, and dissemination, the original photovoice method centers the knowledge and viewpoints of impacted community members as experts in their own lives [100]. Photovoice advocates an asset-based perspective, encouraging participants to document and communicate both community assets and concerns and eventually identify community actions for change. Recent HCI scholarship has adopted the photovoice method to understand minoritized communities' sociotechnical practices and thereby disrupt the naturalized power arrangements embedded in technology design [57, 57, 72]. Our work extends photovoice to videovoice to further its commitment to social justice and foster impacted communities'

[2] As of 2021, the federal poverty line for households with three persons is $21,960. The median household income of the zip code where Community P is located is $28,718, whereas the median household income in the state of Michigan is $63,202 [14].

[3] Detroit's Project Green Light (PGL) is a surveillance program launched in 2016 by the municipal government and police department. This "public-private partnership" installs high-definition surveillance cameras and a flashing green light at businesses, such as gas stations, liquor stores, and fast-food restaurants. Participating businesses must invest in cameras from third-party vendors in exchange for priority police responses. These live video feeds link directly to downtown's Real-Time Crime Center and connect to the DPD facial recognition system to identify individuals who have committed violent crimes. For critical reviews, see [5, 73].

capacity with three motivations that are unique and specific to our research context and field site.

First, we envisioned videovoice as a site for enacting countervisuality and dark sousveillance [13] in response to the prevailing carceral power and visuality in public housing and Black communities. The project community and university teams initially conceived the project in the summer of 2020, a moment shaped by the circulation of smartphone footage documenting the murder of George Floyd, which catalyzed the nationwide Black Lives Matter uprisings against racial injustice and police violence. Additionally, a Pew Research Center report noted that over 80% of Black Americans own smartphones with cameras [18], making such technologies widely accessible for documenting lived experiences. Such access has enabled minoritized communities to record instances of policing violence and initiate social change [103]. These two conditions informed our initial conceptualization of videovoice as a countervisual participatory method aimed at reclaiming the right to look and reshape how public housing residents are seen and represented. This shared vision guided our collaborative grant writing, which secured this project's funding.

Second, aligning with the CBO's ongoing organizing efforts to build community capacity was a central focus. Despite increasing access to digital devices among Detroit residents, significant digital inequality persists including limited digital skills [52], infrastructural challenges in technology maintenance and repair [35], and the systematic knowledge-power asymmetries inherent in technology design and deployment, especially for surveillance technologies [6, 56]. A key component of our videovoice project thus involved engaging residents in a series of educational and training workshops covering the history of visual representation and visual culture, the basic technical skills of capturing and sharing photos and videos on smartphones, and the politics of surveillance technologies.

Finally, the community team was interested in fostering residents' leadership and participation in community decision-making, which was critical to videovoice as a CBPR method. Therefore, we engaged residents in all stages of the project, from project conceptualization and design to participant recruitment, research findings analysis, and research outcome dissemination. As part of this effort, we assembled a community oversight board comprising five residents who were not videovoice project participants. The community oversight board advised and offered insights into the execution of the videovoice project and the design of research plans and activities, making sure that the university and community teams' priorities aligned with residents' needs, desires, and expertise.

3.3 Participants and Recruitment

To encourage the videovoice project to and encourage the participation of a broad range of residents, the community and university teams conducted a series of recruitment activities from May to September 2022. We advertised the project to adult residents of Community P and CBO members by distributing printed flyers in the CBO community center and at community events. We also held two in-person information sessions to offer an overview of the videovoice project and answer prospective participants' questions.

We onboarded twelve participants, eleven of whom completed the project. However, two out of eleven residents did not complete taking videos because of family emergencies and disruptive life situations. Still, they participated in all other research activities, such as interviews and group reflection workshops. All participants were Black and current (n=9) or former (n=2) residents of Community P. Among the eleven participants, nine were women, and two were men. The average age of participants was 57.9 years (one in their thirties, five in their fifties, four in their sixties, and one in their seventies). Three participants were employed full-time or part-time, while the others were out of the workforce. Four participants had attended college but did not earn a degree, three were high-school graduates or GED recipients,[4] and four did not finish high school.

3.4 Videovoice Activities

The main videovoice research activities took place in person between September and November 2022, with approval from the university's institutional review board. We audio-recorded, transcribed, and took field notes for all sessions. Participants received $100 from the university for their time and a $25 stipend from the CBO for each workshop attended. The main research activities include four key phases. Figure 1 includes a detailed description of the research activities in these four phases.

3.4.1 Phase 1: Onboarding. In Phase 1, we hosted a two-hour onboarding session to introduce participants to the project's motivations, context, and timeline. We also discussed life as public housing residents at Community P, including participants' understandings of navigating safety in everyday life as well as the broader struggles of being a public housing resident. In addition, we engaged participants in a discussion on policing, surveillance technologies, and the broader carceral landscape shaping Community P and Detroit.

3.4.2 Phase 2: Education and Training. In Phase 2, we hosted a four-week education workshop series where participants learned about the history and ethics of video-taking and visual storytelling, developed basic video-taking skills, and practiced video-taking on their smartphones. Each workshop lasted two hours. We offered weekly office hours at the CBO, where participants could drop in to practice video-taking and address technical questions.

3.4.3 Phase 3: Video Taking, Editing, and Interviews. In Phase 3, participants had three weeks to take video clips on their smartphones in response to a set of prompts that the research team and the resident oversight board had developed collaboratively:

- How do you see yourself and your community?
- How do you look after yourself in everyday life?
- What surveillance technologies have you encountered, and how do you feel about them?

These prompts were open-ended questions that all participants received at the same time during the final educational workshop in Phase 2. Following photovoice methodology [93], we iteratively brainstormed and refined these prompts so they were focused enough to align with the project's overarching theme of navigating everyday life and safety under carceral visuality and surveillance as public housing residents, yet broad enough to allow for community

[4] GED stands for General Educational Development credential. It is an alternative to a high school diploma in the U.S. and is often pursued by individuals who did not complete traditional high school.

Figure 1: The videovoice study consisted of four phases: (1) onboarding, (2) education and training, (3) video taking and editing, and (4) reflection and actions.

members' agency in defining and conceptualizing them. We encouraged participants to interpret the prompts creatively and through the viewpoints of their own experiences, documenting their stories in ways that felt most meaningful to them.

Following the recommendations of the resident oversight board, we did not impose restrictions on the number of clips participants could record, the length of each clip, the time of filming, or the methods they used for filming. Participants were free to experiment with style, setting, or format to best reflect their own perspectives and experiences. We also invited participants to take videos in response to whichever prompt(s) resonated most with them, whether focusing on a single prompt or weaving multiple prompts together within the same clip. This openness was intended to foster participants' self-expression and accommodate diverse ways of storytelling. As in Phase 2, we offered in-person office hours at Community P twice per week during Phase 3. Besides maintaining rapport and addressing technical questions, these sessions provided space for participants to share the footage they had taken, unpack the stories behind those footage, and discuss their emerging and evolving ideas, storylines, and visions.

By the end of Phase 3, all participants produced a total of 27 short video clips ranging from 12 seconds to 6 minutes and 38 seconds, with a combined duration of 1 hour and 14 minutes. Some participants chose to record a single, extended clip, while others created up to eight shorter clips that could be combined into a cohesive narrative.

We conducted in-depth individual interviews with each participant at the end of Phase 3. In these interviews, participants first coedited their footage with the first author, who provided technical support in putting the video clips together into consistent storylines and adding elements such as titles, voiceovers, and text in alignment with the participants' visions. The resulting final videos ranged in length from 54 seconds to 8 minutes and 42 seconds. We then invited participants to walk through their completed video artifacts, unpacking the visual choices and verbal narratives they included or chose to leave out. This discussion prompted reflection on their creative and interpretive processes: how they made sense of the prompts, the stories they wanted to tell about navigating surveillance and safety in public housing, and the broader sociomaterial, cultural, and historical contexts shaping those stories. We also asked participants what they hoped audiences would take away from their videos, whom they envisioned their work speaking to, and what changes they hoped their stories might inspire. Finally, we discussed the challenges they encountered while filming and how they navigated them.

3.4.4 Phase 4: Group Reflection and Community Actions. In Phase 4, we hosted two group reflection workshops for participants to share their videos and collectively reflected on one another's video stories. In the first workshop, we viewed each video then invited its creator to share the backstory, motivations, intended messages, and visual presentation decisions behind their piece. The group then reflected on the video artifact using the "SHOWED" framework from the photovoice method.[5] This process allowed participants to articulate how they resonated with, were surprised by, or learned from each other's video stories and perspectives. In the second

[5]The "SHOWED" questions commonly used in photovoice [93, 100] include: (1) What do you **S**ee here? (2) What is really **H**appening here? (3) How does this relate to **O**ur lives? (4) **W**hy does this condition **E**xist? (5) What can we **D**o about it?

workshop, participants articulated how their individual video artifacts connected to form a collective narrative about public housing life and the role of carceral surveillance and technologies. Given videovoice's focus on community action as a CBPR method, participants also discussed how they could engage neighbors, CBO, and the research team to address concerns raised in the videos, update CBO programming, share the project's outcomes with other residents, and work with their resident council to inform advocacy efforts with management and the city's housing authorities.

Over the six months following the final workshop, working alongside the research team and resident oversight board, participants took the initiative to co-plan and co-organize a community-based movie night event, named "Voices of Community P," to showcase their video artifacts, stories, and voices to the broader community in August 2023. They led the brainstorming process, deciding whom to invite, what messages to convey, and how to structure the event. Together, we applied for and secured funding that allowed community members to transform the public housing community center for a formal, "Oscars-like" celebration, which was uncommon in the public housing context. Over eighty people, including participants' families, friends, neighbors, and broader stakeholders, such as the housing management staff from the city's housing authorities, dressed formally and attended the event. This event was an opportunity to celebrate all participants' achievements and disseminate research takeaways, fostering community actions for change among residents, the CBO, and housing management amidst the ongoing redevelopment at Community P.

3.5 Data Analysis

We followed Clarke's situational analysis of visual discourse for data analysis [20, p.205-260]. Situational analysis is a postmodern turn of grounded theory that emphasizes analyzing the material and social worlds in which visual artifacts and other research data are produced and circulated [20]. This approach has been widely used in critical visual cultural studies. It is particularly relevant to this paper given our focus on the social worlds in which these video artifacts were produced, interpreted, and eventually circulated; their relationships with broader carceral visuality; and the multiple gazes that these artifacts enacted, mediated, and disrupted. Following this approach, the first author practiced close reading and textual analysis of all the video artifacts, and then prepared in-depth analytic memos for each piece. These memos included locating memos, big picture memos, and specification memos,[6] collectively documenting how each artifact fits within the broader situation of inquiry. These memos thus provided thick descriptions of the videos' content and voiceover narratives and further deconstructed the artifacts by attending to filming techniques, viewpoints, visual references, and their situatedness within wider visual discourses of carceral power [20, p.224–229].

The first author then applied open coding to the interview and workshop transcripts to trace how community members themselves "saw," interpreted, and contextualized their own and others' video artifacts in relation to the social worlds they inhabited, the broader carceral power shaping their lived sociomaterial conditions, and the carceral visuality enacted through surveillance. We discussed the codes, themes, and interpretations with participants in follow-up conversations and check-ins to ensure that the analysis reflected what they intended to convey through their videos.

Then, following Clarke's mapping approach, we created situational, social worlds/arenas maps and positional maps for these videos based on both the analytic memos and analyses of transcripts. The first, second, and last authors met weekly to discuss and refine the maps, generating theoretical insights from the data. The first and third authors also checked in regularly to discuss and make sense of the findings. Through this mapping approach, we identified three ways through which the video artifacts enacted counter carceral visuality.

This data analysis process allowed us to unpack the video artifacts by triangulating multiple perspectives and ways of seeing. The analytic memos mediated the research team's interpretive lens, while the coded interview and workshop transcripts sought to actively triangulate how the residents described their ways of seeing. This enabled us to examine how the video artifacts mediated these different ways of seeing, how they converged and diverged, and how they interacted with and disrupted the social and epistemological boundaries erected by dominant carceral visuality.

4 Counter-Visual Artifacts

By placing the lens in their hands, residents subject to ongoing surveillance produced video artifacts and stories that disrupted and challenged carceral visuality's authorized way of seeing. Each resident's video provided a unique, situated vantage point, offering alternative ways of seeing and understanding the public housing space and everyday experiences in public housing. In the following subsections, we demonstrate three orientations through which residents' video artifacts enact counter-carceral visuality of public housing. To illustrate each orientation, we present one to two participant-produced videos as exemplars.

4.1 Seeing Back: Questioning Surveillance Devices

The first orientation to enact counter-carceral visuality is reversing the gaze onto specific surveillance devices, such as policing surveillance cameras and Ring doorbells. By doing so, residents direct their smartphone lenses back at these devices, which are often tools of institutional power or serve to enact and mediate carceral visuality in public and domestic spaces in public housing.

In her video "This is Katherine's Safety," Ms. Katherine documented her situated vantage point of interacting with a city's PGL surveillance camera near her house, which marked one of the primary connections to and everyday experiences of the carceral state. Katherine, in her early 70s, was the most senior participant in our project, and she had lived in Community P for over five decades. Despite being a longtime resident, Katherine had not actively engaged in community activities. In fact, her involvement in our videovoice project was one of her very first experiences with community programs co-organized by the CBO, driven by her interest in learning digital skills for taking photos and videos on

[6] Locating memos situate the visual artifact within its social world(s), tracing who produced it, for what purposes, and its intended uses. Big picture memos focus on the analyzer's initial impressions and offer full descriptions of the video and small visual details. Specification memos analyze the visual material from multiple angles, focusing on specific elements such as framing, representation, viewpoint, lighting, and color.

Figure 2: An image sequence of partial scenes from Ms. Katherine's video, "This is Katherine's Safety."

her phone—even though Katherine had a smartphone, she did not know how to record and share videos on her phone.

As our project progressed and we established relationships with Katherine, she began to open up, sharing stories about her life and her everyday experiences as a long-term public housing resident. In the final interview, Katherine explained that as she pondered what to film, she returned repeatedly to a longstanding question: whether the PGL surveillance cameras positioned throughout the neighborhood that flashed visibly every night would actually protect her from physical or property harm. As a single senior woman living alone, she described safety as an ongoing concern, but she remained skeptical that the surveillance cameras or the police behind them would protect public housing residents like her, especially given the heavy policing she had witnessed for over fifty years in Community P.

Figure 2 showcases a series of scenes from Katherine's final video artifact. Katherine's house was located near the community's border, adjacent to a major road. In her video, Katherine aimed her phone camera toward a PGL camera positioned at a liquor store across the street from Community P. This PGL camera featured a constantly flashing green light, which remained highly visible from a distance. During the check-in and final interviews, Katherine kept emphasizing that she wanted to capture how far this flashing green light penetrated into Community P and her home.

As shown in figure 2, the video first shows a view from behind an unused car exit near Katherine's home, providing a clear view of the flashing green light at the liquor store. Over this scene, Katherine narrates, "*This store is right across the street from my house, and you see his surveillance light up there? That light sheds all the way in my house on my porch, and I'm trying to find out all if something happened, will it pick up, you know, any kind of crime in front of that store, or either in front of my house.*"[7] Then, the video shows Katherine moving back toward her porch as she attempts to demonstrate the reach of the flashing green light. At the same time, the lens shifts to capture her surroundings, while her voice continues, "*Okay, I'm going backwards to my house. And the camera's [green light] shines all the way on my wall, my steps, and even shines in my doorway, but I can't really get it less than this at nighttime. But I'm going backwards to see how far I can get in front of my house. And I'm hoping that I can get safety when that light is on at nighttime.*" While standing on the porch, the video shows Katherine making some clumsy adjustments to keep the flashing green light within the frame, at times with her finger partly blocking the lens. As she repositions the phone, she narrates her process and questions what she sees: "*Okay. Could I see it up on my porch? Okay, here it is... Yeah, there's light right there! Okay, I see it somewhere here... I'm gonna see where that light is in [the camera]—there it is! See it? There is the light right there.*" Katherine's voice reflected her excitement as she successfully captured the flashing light within the camera frame. The video ends with Katherine stepping inside her home and attempting to show the reflection of the flashing green light

[7] Hereafter, we use italic text to denote narratives and voiceovers drawn from residents' video artifacts, distinguishing them from quotes taken from interviews and workshops.

Figure 3: An image sequence of partial scenes from Ms. Denise's video.

in a mirror next to her front door. Katherine concludes, "*You see the light? You barely see it [in this video], but it is shining through my house. I want to know if the [surveillance] camera protects my house when I'm out on the porch since the green light is shining over there. I want to know, when I'm crossing the street or on the porch, if something happens to me, will the green light show it?*"

Indeed, Katherine created this video artifact not only to showcase her everyday interactions with the PGL policing surveillance cameras but also to articulate some of her critical questions regarding these devices and the visuality they mediated. When reflecting on how she made sense of her video in relation to the dominant ways of seeing, she explained in the final interview that the video-taking prompts—inviting her to reflect on the surveillance technologies she encountered, how she felt about them, and how she saw and looked after herself—led her to wonder instead how the surveillance cameras would "see" her. She also questioned how the police behind those cameras "saw" her and other public housing residents, and whether the cameras would actually "look after" them in moments of harm or vulnerability. These questions were especially pressing after decades of witnessing and living with racialized policing and its sociomaterial harms at Community P.

As such, analytically, Katherine's video artifact is counter-visual for two key reasons. First, it unsettles the power asymmetries that structure what is made visible and what remains unseen. Dominant carceral visuality often makes surveillance devices, along with their broader sociotechnical infrastructures, invisible and black-boxed from public scrutiny [57], while rendering racialized public housing residents hypervisible as subjects of governance but unseen when it comes to institutional care or protection [6, 30]. Katherine's video artifact confronts this asymmetry by explicitly positioning a surveillance device as the object of inquiry. Through her framing of the PGL camera and its penetrating green light, the video artifact redirects attention to the dominant visual processes that (re)produce residents as simultaneously watched and structurally neglected.

Second, the video artifact generates a counter visuality by actively redistributing the right to look to those who have long been the targets of carceral surveillance. Rather than appearing as a passive subject under the carceral gaze, Katherine used her phone camera to construct her situated visual narrative. Putting it in conversation with the structuring power of carceral visuality, her intervention redefines what counts as visible, how to frame that visibility, and which questions ought to be posed to the surveillance device itself. In so doing, the counter-visual video artifact reverses the normative directionality of seeing that underpins carceral visuality and reconfigures the positionalities from which visual authority is exercised. The result is a visual intervention in which Katherine asserts the right not simply to be seen differently but to see differently: to interrogate the technologies that govern her life, to document their reach, and to challenge the assumptions embedded in their modes of seeing.

4.2 Seeing Around: Documenting Everyday Sociomaterial Practices

Besides turning their lenses back toward surveillance devices, some resident participants directed their focus to everyday routines that they navigate and survive within the public and domestic spaces of public housing. We position these video artifacts as enacting a counter-visual way of *seeing around*, which centers the mundane tactics residents employ to move through the lived social and material realities of public housing shaped by carceral power. As we will see, these video artifacts draw attention to practices that are not immediately "there" within dominant visuality [78]: the everyday negotiation of situated safety and the ongoing work of making deteriorating material conditions livable. These on-the-ground practices are critical to public housing residents' survival, yet largely remain illegible within carceral ways of seeing that prioritize governance and surveillance of public housing spaces and residents.

Ms. Denise, in her early sixties, has been a resident of Community P for over twenty years as a single mother raising her daughters and grandchildren. Facing health challenges related to diabetes and obesity, she has made the maintenance of her health a top priority in her daily life.[8] In her video story, "I Want to Show You Safety Outside and In When Exercising Alone," Denise documented

[8]It is important to understand public housing communities' health challenges within the broader context of the sociomaterial consequences of carceral power [77]. The deteriorating material conditions they live in, including mold, lead paint, and exposure to environmental hazards, have been the main factors contributing to these physical and mental health challenges [42]. The concentrated poverty and spatial containment

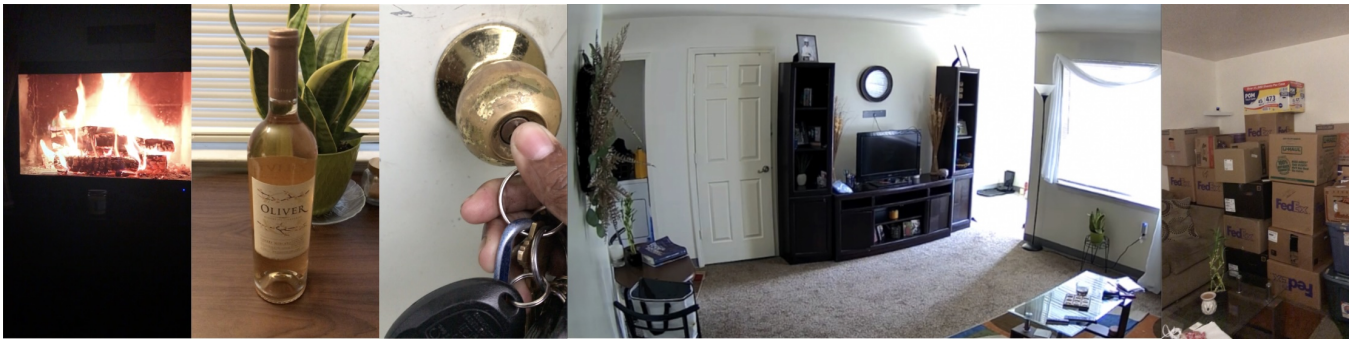

Figure 4: An image sequence of partial scenes from Ms. Lydia's video.

her workout routine on a regular day, which included both indoor treadmill walking at home and outdoor walks near the community's edge. Figure 3 displays a sequence of scenes from the outdoor segment of her video, filmed in first-person perspective as she walks out of her house, crosses an unused car exist the at the community border, and repeatedly climbs a small hill across the street.

Denise's video artifact includes her vivid live narration, which conveys in-situ feelings as she follows her daily workout routines and navigates her personal safety needs. The video starts with the lens moving out through her front door, while Denise's voice in the video reflects her preference for exercising in public spaces: "*I like to come outside because you get fresh air and everything like that. And early in the morning, there is usually nobody out, so I feel safe to be out here by myself.*" Yet, the video footage then shows a large, empty, unattended wild field within Community P, suggesting the absence of functional public spaces for socializing and the deteriorating built environment, which dictate where residents can safely move. As the video view approaches and then crosses an unused car exit marking the community's boundary, it shifts angles to show the immediate surroundings—a quite and broken street, empty sidewalk, and a small hill, which appears vacant and unpopulated while filming. Over these scenes, Denise's narration continues, "*For my safety, I just pay attention to my surroundings. And, I'm real close to home. So if any creepy-looking two-leg human beings or four-leg dogs come along, I can just come down the hill and go [back] home.*"

When reflecting on her motivations for filming the video, Denise explained in our interview that she wanted to make visible the vulnerability and constant risk calculation embedded in her efforts to stay healthy at the border of public housing, which she described as both a site of containment and a point of freedom. The video captures these moments in ways that foreground her tacit knowledge of how to anticipate threats and navigate situated safety, which she has developed such knowledge over years of living within uneven geographies of institutional neglect and policing. When asked what she hoped viewers would take away from her video artifact, she articulated two goals. First, she wanted city housing authorities and the management office to take seriously the abandoned public spaces in and around Community P, which could support residents' well-being but instead have remained unattended and have become safety hazards. Second, she hoped to speak to fellow residents who similarly live with chronic health challenges, inviting them to overcome their fears of stepping outside and to walk together. Indeed, during the final workshop and the community movie night, other residents resonated strongly with Denise's video story. With CBO's support, they began informal walking groups committed to moving through the community together and looking after one another.

Another example of seeing around is Ms. Lydia's video, which shows how the ongoing dispossession of public housing produces carcerality in domestic spaces. These conditions both materially and symbolically shape the "home" where residents dwell and build their lives. After all, Community P is home to hundreds of residents like Lydia who must make a living in units that are "neither fully home nor total prison" [82, p.69]. In our onboarding workshops, resident participants frequently described living in Community P as feeling like being in "prisons" or "cages." They referenced how the metal bars installed on windows and doors as well as the deterioration of the built environment—such as unattended mold, leaks, and structural damage—reinforced a sense of confinement.

Ms. Lydia produced her video artifact against this backdrop. Lydia is in her mid-fifties, and she is a single mother who had lived at Community P for 16 years and raised two daughters and a son there. Lydia often described her vision of home as a safe space that is marked by "peace," "freedom of disturbance," and "tranquility." In the final interview and group reflection workshop, she explained that she intended for her video to convey two intertwined and conflicting realities: On the one hand, her practices of refusing to dwell in a prison like a "criminal" or "people who are down and out," certainly not in the way "people on the outside would imagine," and on the other, having no choice but to live with these precarious material conditions.

As shown in the image sequence in figure 4, Lydia's video begins with glimpses of her mundane practices of making her home a safe and peaceful place, captured from a first-person perspective. It starts with a fireplace inside her house, which is actually a looping video playing on her TV. With the sound of crackling firewood in the background, she narrates "*Although this is not a real fireplace, listening to the crackling fire is actually a little bit of my peace.*" The video then transitions to a bottle of wine on a table, and the narration continues, "*Or enjoying a glass of wine... is my peace.*" This hope for a peaceful home is interrupted in the second half of the video, which documents Lydia's recent displacement due to a

of public housing communities, which limits access to affordable healthy food and healthcare, further exacerbated these challenges [94].

Figure 5: An image sequence of partial scenes from Ms. Naomi's video.

sewage failure. The video then shows Lydia inserting her key into the front door, as she narrates, "*Being able to put my key in my door should be a sense of peace.*" The video then transitions to a still photo of her living room before the displacement, which is a clean and organized space she expected to see upon getting into the front door. But this photo quickly gives way to the view of a chaotic, box-filled living room with belongings stacked and packed. As the lens points to different boxes, Lydia's narration continues, "*I can definitely tell you when walking into my home, this is not peace...*"

It is necessary to situate the political significance of Lydia's video within the constant material breakdown and precarity that structured public housing residents' everyday lives. The sewage failure forced Lydia, along with her son and other families on her block, to leave their homes and temporarily stay in hotel rooms for several months. At the time of her filming, Lydia had already been displaced for three months, with uncertain repair timelines and little progress.[9] And this was not the first displacement Lydia had experienced. In fact, over her past 16 years at Community P, housing management had forced her to pack up and move to different units five separate times due to different material damages in her units. During the final group workshop, Lydia shared with the other participants that she wanted her video to make visible these otherwise obscured but routine experiences of displacement:

> Basically this is how I am living because I am displaced. But this is what I see in every room that I walk in. Just box after box, after box... So you're basically living out of boxes until your situation is better. And this is what I see every day, so it's not like home anymore. It took a while to take everything off the walls, because I wanted to keep pictures and everything on the wall, you want to keep it home and have it more homely. But after a while, this is what it is.

Indeed, through her video artifact, Lydia sought to document both her everyday efforts to live peacefully and with dignity, like any other ordinary citizen, and the compromised realities of "living out of boxes." As we reviewed the video artifact in the final interview, she identified two primary intended audiences for her artifact. First, by showing how residents like herself continue to strive for dignity and peace despite their deteriorating material environments, she hoped the video would challenge public stereotypes that cast public housing residents as undeserving or deficient. Second, by documenting the material conditions that encroach on the possibility of "home," Lydia aimed to draw the attention of housing authorities to the precarities residents endure. Importantly, both the discursive and material harms that her video surfaces are inseparable from the carceral visuality that governs public housing communities, shaping how these spaces and people are made visible, legible, and thinkable within dominant discourses [36, 77, 101].

Taken together, both Denise's and Lydia's video artifacts are counter-visual precisely because they translates what might otherwise remain distant, abstract, or systematically muted into immediate visual experiences. By seeing around the ordinary routines and practices of their everyday life, these video artifacts confront what carceral visuality obscures—the ongoing labor required to make carceral space livable, the residents' constant efforts to sustain dignity, and the material and emotional burdens they carry even when institutions fail them.

4.3 Seeing Self: Rearticulating Subjectivities

Public housing residents often bear the weight of stigma perpetuated by political and popular discourses. In the onboarding session, one resident reflected on his early years in the community: "People often view Community P residents as 'criminals' or 'to-be criminals,' but I wasn't like that, and my friends weren't like that." The narrative of naturalized criminality cast Community P as inherently unsafe and its residents as deviant, aid-dependent, and undeserving. This stigmatization precisely reflects the work of carceral visuality, which shapes how institutions and the broader public come to "see" public housing bodies—legible for surveillance, discipline, and punishment [36]. Against this backdrop, the final set of video artifacts centered on turning the lens toward residents themselves. In doing so, these artifacts enact counter-visuality through *seeing self*, rearticulating forms of subjectivity against the images that dominant carceral ways of seeing have configured.

[9]Housing management evetually relocated Lydia and several other families to different units after over a year of displacement in hotel. During this period, the management asked these residents to move their boxes from place to place on their own.

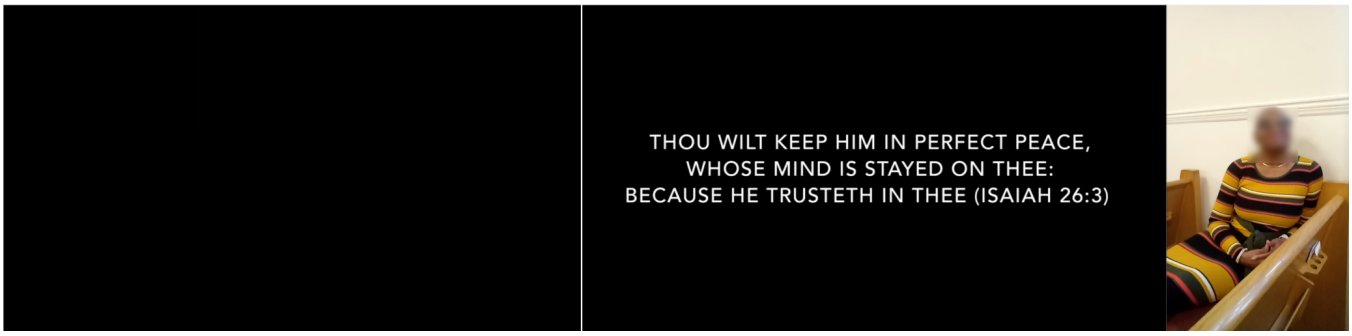

Figure 6: An image sequence of partial scenes from Ms. Jasmine's video.

A salient example is Ms. Naomi's video. Naomi, in her mid-sixties, did not finish high school, but she was perhaps one of the most tech-savvy participants. Unlike many other residents who filmed their videos from a first-person perspective, Naomi's video takes the form of selfies (see figure 5). Her final edited video artifact stitched together three short video clips, foregrounding joy and playfulness to offer a powerful counter-visual image that contrasts with dominant representations of public housing residents.

The first segment of her video opens with the title "Take my friend out to enjoy the breeze." The video then features Naomi seated in the driver's seat of a car, dressed in a bright yellow headband, blue hair, and vibrant red lipstick. She appears joyful in the footage as she looks into the camera, smiling and adjusting her hair, just as she was preparing for a special occasion. Over this scene, her lively narration sets an upbeat tone: "*Hello everybody, going live, feeling good, hanging out. Woooh, having a good time! Hey, [friend] back there, what you gotta say, you enjoying yourself getting a little cool air?*" Halfway through this scene, the camera lens briefly moves to the backseat to include her friend, who responds with a smile and a simple "*Yes, I am.*" This segment ends with Naomi returning the camera lens to herself and exclaiming, "*What a relief there... I'm going downtown, which I'm already here!*"

The second segment opens with the title "Coming home back to my Jesus." This part shows Naomi in a black dress and a wide-brim hat, standing in her living room. In the video, Naomi appears relaxed and looks directly into the camera as she addresses her audience: "*Hey everybody, it's Naomi. I'm testing my voice this morning because I'm going to do a little singing now. It's called 'Going back to Jesus, just a saying.'*" The video then proceeds to her remarkable singing performance, capturing expressive gestures and body movements, while conveying a sense of playfulness and embodied presence. The third segment, titled "Living toward joy. Funny dancing with a cowboy hat on" shows an even more vibrant and carefree energy from Naomi. In this part, Naomi wears a purple dress with a matching purple belt and blond hair, dancing to the Pussycat Dolls' "Don't Cha," which plays on the radio. The camera lens remains still, while Naomi smiles broadly, rotates her hips, turns playfully, and moves with the beat in front of the lens. The cowboy hat she wears adds an extra layer of character to her dance, showing her confidence in infusing humor into her expressions of joy.

The video artifact by Ms. Jasmine, another participant, enacted counter-visuality not by making herself visible but by refusing visibility altogether. In her late fifties, Ms. Jasmine was actively involved in community activities and served on the resident council. To her, Community P is her home where she had raised six children since they moved in 12 years ago.

Her video (see figure 6) features a dark, blank screen that lasts 1 minute and 10 seconds. This darkness is accompanied by the ambient sound of ocean waves. Jasmine's voice enters gently and slowly: "*Peace, peace, peace... Peace can come in many different forms and shapes... Sometimes for me, peace is just a quiet home... Peace, peace, peace. A piece of cake... Peace, peace, peace, in my soul... Peace, peace, can heal your soul... Peace, peace can heal your mind...*" Her narration is soft and unhurried, punctuated by long pauses. As her voice fades, a Bible verse appears on the screen: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee (Isaiah 26:3)." Following this segment, Jasmine's video transitions to show her conversation with an evangelist from her church. In this conversation, the evangelist eloquently articulates the meaning of peace as one's embodied control over one's circumstances amid turmoil and the ability to sensitize contentment despite the presence of troubles all around.

As we reviewed the video artifact during the final interview, Jasmine explained that she intentionally kept her video dark and blank for more than a minute. She told us that she filmed the darkness of her room at 2 a.m., a moment she described as "free from what the surveillance cameras can reach." She hoped her video could speak to "the whole world." By leaving the screen intentionally blank, Jasmine wanted to invite viewers to pause with her and reflect on what brings them peace, what allows them free from surveillance, and what makes them no longer fearful. In this sense, Jasmine's video artifact is an aesthetic and political refusal to be captured, categorized, or made legible within the logics of carceral visuality.

Moreover, Jasmine's video is deeply poetic and spiritual. Thinking with Jasmine and Black feminist scholars, we can understand Jasmine's video artifact as an effort to rearticulate the presumed duality of Black body and mind, which has historically sustained carceral spaces and their dehumanizing scripts [12, 65]. Her artifact invites viewers to step beyond the imposed boundaries of familiar visual frameworks to explore alternative forms of subjectivity. The prolonged dark screen and the tranquil sound symbolizes her pursuit of peace and freedom—it is everywhere out of nowhere, transcending the imposed boundaries that segregate body from mind. The absence of visuals draws attention to sound, breath, and

rhythm, inviting viewers to locate their own places of embodied and spiritual peace beyond the material body. Thinking with critical scholar Jayna Brown, we might read Jasmine's video as an invitation to embrace the freedom in body and flesh, particularly in "the moments when it is excluded from being marked" [12, p.12]. As Jasmine powerfully stated during the group reflection workshop:

> Don't forget that we are people with families. Don't forget that we want to have that security. We want a home. Without us, there is no you. Just because we are in what you call "lower income" does not mean we do not strive for better or we do not want more. We want more, we want better, we want comfort, we want peace. When we open up our door, we can leave that door open for a little bit of time and not wonder if someone is gonna walk in on us. We want that freedom to decorate our yards and keep them pretty because we have pride in where we live. We are here, we are real people with lives that thrive and want more and want better.

What Jasmine described perhaps reflects the collective meaning of videovoice for her and fellow residents. By seeing self, the video artifacts rearticulated who public housing residents are and how they wish to be seen, beyond the racialized and reduced figures produced under carceral visuality [13]. These artifacts open space for subjectivities and forms of humanity that carceral visuality cannot accommodate and thus erases. We read this as a deeply political act of rehumanization—a counter-visual intervention through which residents reclaimed the right to be seen on their own terms, challenging the dehumanizing frames that carceral surveillance impose. Taken together, these videos operate as counter-visual artifacts that enact political acts of disruption and reimagination. Through these artifacts, residents started reasserting their presence, agency, and belonging, not just as public housing residents but as full and equal participants in the broader social world.

Importantly, their videos do not simply seek recognition from an external public. They collectively unsettle the assumed positions of "seer" and "seen" of the dominant carceral visual regimes. Producing their own visual accounts enabled residents to reclaim the authority to interpret, critique, and remake the social worlds they are part of, revealing forms of knowledge and practices that carceral visuality routinely obscures or dismisses as unintelligible. Rather than positioning residents as the othered objects of a gaze, these counter-visual video artifacts demonstrate that residents have always been active interpreters of their conditions, capable of weaving together and visualizing alternative discourses of what it means to live, to be seen, and to claim humanity under conditions of systemic dehumanization.

5 Discussion

5.1 Counter-Visual Artifacts and Implications for HCI

At first glance, counter-visual artifacts (i.e., residents' video clips) might appear similar to what Star and Griesemer describe as "boundary objects" [87], as they are adaptable artifacts that traverse multiple social worlds while retaining enough interpretive flexibility to facilitate communication and coordination. Indeed, much like other visual materials that HCI scholars have examined through the lens of boundary objects (e.g., maps [87], photographs [28], and architectural plans [80]), these resident-produced videos possess a certain plasticity and interpretive flexibility. Their material format and narrative openness make them flexible enough to different interpretations across contexts, mediating dialogues between public housing residents, community organizers, policy advocates, and institutional actors. This suggests that these videos could function as sites of collaborative meaning-making across boundaries, supporting engagement across the often-fragmented social worlds and institutions that converge around contested sites like public housing. In this sense, the video artifacts seem to embody the qualities of boundary objects: grounded in local context yet able to circulate and adapt to new uses while remaining intelligible across domains.

While this interpretive flexibility positions these resident-produced videos within the broader lineage of visual boundary objects in HCI research and design, it is precisely at this intersection that our conceptualization of counter-visual artifacts diverges. The counter-visual artifacts' purpose is not to mediate understanding across domains but to *disrupt* the terms that typically construct such understandings and boundaries. Unlike the traditional understanding of boundary objects, which often presumes a loosely shared project or goal at hand within or among communities of practice, counter-visual artifacts do not quite align with the required practical consensus or willingness of collaboration, particularly in contexts where institutionalized power structures shape, constrain, and often co-opt such "consensus" into dominant carceral logics. We thus argue that the political force of counter-visual artifacts lies precisely in their refusal to stabilize meaning or facilitate coordination, especially when the social and epistemological boundaries in question are themselves the very products of carceral and racialized power.

In this project, public housing residents in Detroit produced a series of smartphone videos. Through *seeing back*, Ms. Katherine's video interrogates the surveillance devices that enact and mediate the carceral visual regime. Through *seeing around*, Ms. Denise's and Ms. Lydia's videos draw attention to the everyday labor required to make life possible in a carceral space while living with its sociomaterial violence. Through *seeing self*, the videos of Ms. Naomi and Ms. Jasmine rearticulate themselves as joyful and spiritually grounded subjects, confronting the pervasive dehumanization that carceral visuality imposes on public housing residents.

The residents' views in these videos ask us to attend to what is not readily "there," or what the dominant visual regime of carcerality renders unseeable and thus unintelligible [74, 78]: the slow, everyday practices of survival, negotiation, care, and the imagining of life otherwise. These are aspirations for dignity, safety, and recognition as equal citizens in the face of imposed narratives of impoverished criminality. These videos do not function as objective "visual evidence" like surveillance footage or mug shots, which—as Black feminist scholars [6, 13, 64, 83] and HCI researchers [22, 58] have critiqued—are products of the reductive, exclusionary visual logics of racialization. As counter-visual artifacts, these resident-produced videos are epistemically disruptive, unsettling the visual and analytical boundaries that typically frame public housing residents as threats, criminals, or passive recipients of state intervention.

While HCI and critical computing researchers have recognized the agency of artifacts through new materialist and feminist computing traditions that foreground their rhetorical force and more-than-human entanglements [33, 51, 54], counter-visual artifacts introduce a distinctly political imperative. Our understanding of counter-visual artifacts as disruptions leads to an important question: What purposes do artifacts serve? While typical functions of boundary objects include facilitating practical consensus or mediating collaboration [87], counter-visual artifacts are intentionally designed to produce epistemic dissonance. Counter-visual artifacts invite HCI researchers and designers to rethink the field's assumptions about the relationships between artifacts and practices. They raise new questions: What forms of disruption, non-cooperation, or refusal might constitute meaningful sociotechnical interventions? How can we design with, not over, counter-visual practices that challenge dominant aesthetics and reframe how we come to see, know, and relate to one another? What might HCI look like if it took seriously the politics of seeing otherwise, or noticing differently [95]—not just making visible what was hidden, but articulating alternative visual logics rooted in the lived experiences of people and communities whom the dominant carceral visuality and its violence impact most?

These questions position counter-visual artifacts in critical dialogue with HCI's theoretical tradition, offering an alternative lens for understanding artifact production and use. Instead of seeking to stabilizing knowledge or facilitating collaboration within carceral or institutional logics, this lens orients toward unsettling dominant visual and analytic frameworks. It makes space for situated, contested, and alternative ways of seeing, knowing, and relating [22, 58]. Our work argues against defaulting to the binary of invisibility versus visibility, which critical scholars have critiqued as a political limitation of existing counter-surveillance strategies that stop short of challenging the broader institutional structures and power arrangements of surveillance [69]. Instead, this work argues for counter-visual artifacts to embrace alternative visual epistemologies that center the situated ways of seeing and knowing of those who are most impacted [21]. In this sense, counter-visual artifacts embody a political imperative. They make perceptible what has been rendered imperceptible, not by asserting visibility in familiar or institutionally legible forms but by reclaiming the everyday, the relational, and the affective as sites of seeing and being otherwise [30, 53, 65, 74, 78]. This is precisely what our videovoice method aimed to do.

In doing so, counter-visual artifacts neither bridge epistemic boundaries as traditional boundary objects might [87], nor facilitate the negotiation of emerging boundaries, as what Lee describes as "boundary negotiation artifacts" might [50]. Instead, they confront and refuse the legitimacy of such boundaries altogether, unsettling the very conditions that organize visibility and collaboration. As such, counter-visual artifacts offer HCI and critical scholars a critical vocabulary and analytical repertoire to reflect on and move beyond the familiar frameworks of visibility and collaboration, and instead, as Lee suggests, to "open ourselves to models of collaborative work that go beyond simple exchange to more comprehensive and richly specified models of negotiation and enactment" [50, p.335]. This might mean attending to disruptive objects and fugitive visual forms that challenge the authority of dominant visual regimes and imagine otherwise [47] and importantly, as we discuss next, committing to counter-visual methodologies and sensibility within HCI research and design [78].

5.2 Moving Beyond In/visiblity: Toward Counter-Visual Methodologies and Sensibilities in HCI

HCI and critical computing have long grappled with the politics of visibility. Star and Strauss [88] use visibility to highlight the hidden labor that sustains sociotechnical systems. This tradition has often been positioned making work visible as a critical move to interrogate the sociotechnical harms of design and consider the potential redistribution of labor through design. Suchman further emphasizes how visibility is always situated and contested within systems of classification, accountability, and power [92]. Yet HCI scholarship has rarely understood visibility in terms of visuality—as a historically and ideologically structured visual regime that governs not just what is seen but who is seen, how they are seen, and with what consequences [13, 67]. Building on our work, we suggest that HCI consider how we might move from the binary of in/visibility to visuality as a contested terrain of power.

This is urgent in carceral and racial contexts, where visibility is deeply social and political. Making something visible, especially through state-sanctioned frames, is an act of exposure, discipline, and control. The carceral visual regime renders certain bodies hypervisible as threats or deviants while erasing their lived realities, knowledges, and social worlds [6]. Within this regime, to "see" is to capture and surveil, and to "make visible" is to govern [6, 13]. In these contexts, committing to counter-visual methodologies is necessary for HCI research and design. Drawing on Schept's conception of counter-visual ethnography [78], we understand counter-visual methodologies as those that "enable the visualization of what mass incarceration's visuality otherwise obscures or hides" and "mobilize the unseen for the purposes of a right to see" [78, p.217]. For HCI, therefore, we suggest two starting points for developing this commitment.

First, HCI researchers can attend more closely to what is not readily "there" in a given sociotechnical system or infrastructure—say, the residues of violent histories, the cracks in institutional narratives, and the relationalities that are actively rendered unseeable [25, 41, 53, 59, 86]. These are the forms of inquiry, as Schept reminds us, "that the state tries to preempt, and [whose] visual documentation the state finds suspect and thus subjects to securitization" [78, p.201]. For HCI, this means asking: What forms of knowledge have carceral visual regimes systematically obscured or delegitimized? What infrastructures of absence—what silences, erasures, or obscured histories—-underpin the systems we study and design? And how might we begin from, rather than attempt to resolve, these absences? These questions point HCI's empirical and methodological inquiries toward interrogating the very power and visual conditions that have rendered certain forms of life, labor, and resistance invisible in the first place, which is well beyond simply visibilizing the invisible. A good example is the work of Whitney et al., which employed tactics such as close reading of public contracts and speculative map-based demos to uncover what was absent from dominant accounts of smart city infrastructure [102].

Second, counter-visual methodologies demand that we redistribute the sensible by recognizing and centering marginalized ways of seeing as legitimized visual epistemologies [74]. Fleetwood's *Marking Time* project powerfully demonstrates how incarcerated people use visual art to resist, reinterpret, and reclaim agency from the carceral gaze [30]. These practices are not efforts to gain visibility within dominant regimes of representation; rather, they are interventions into the carceral visual order itself. Likewise, Campt's notion of listening to images invites us to attend to what photographs as counter-visual artifacts carry beyond what they show—their quiet frequencies, their deferred meanings, and the affective traces of lived experience [15]. In a different context, Rifaad and Aernouts's recent study on digital storytelling in a stigmatized Belgian social housing estate offers an important parallel to our project [75]. Their analysis shows how tenant-produced digital stories function as counterstories that unsettle the "master narrative" surrounding large-scale social estates, foregrounding residents' spatial agency and everyday expertise. Together, these approaches do not simply ask to be seen differently but demand a different way of seeing altogether.

This is what we hoped this videovoice project would be: a process of reclaiming the right to define what is seen and how it should be seen. In line with Schept's counter-visual ethnography, we argue that counter-visual participatory approaches, such as videovoice, are not merely a method for eliciting visual narratives or a technique for analyzing the power of the gaze. Aligning with the "counterfactual actions" advocated by Forlano and Halpern as a relational approach to engage with and challenge the dominant sociotechnical infrastructures [31], counter-visual participatory approaches commit to a collective process of coproducing counter-visual artifacts that transfers the capacity for "politically charged analysis" [37, p.3] from researchers and designers to those most impacted by carceral and racialized visual regimes.

We offer counter-visual methodologies and sensibilities not as a fixed framework, but as an open invitation and provocation for HCI and beyond to engage visuality as a site that is deeply political, infrastructural, and relational. It is a call to pause, to see and listen differently, and to rethink what it means to see, to show, and to design in the context of enduring carceral and racial visual regimes. Counter-visual methodologies do not offer closure or solutions [65]. Rather, they mark an opening toward future HCI practices grounded in solidarity, disruption, and the radical reimagining of the sociotechnical as always already visual. Ultimately, to take counter-visuality seriously is to commit to rethinking not only what and how we *see* in HCI and as HCI researchers and designers in solidarity with the impacted people and communities, but also who gets to define the terms of visibility in the first place.

6 Conclusion

This paper has introduced the concept of counter-visual artifacts to expand understandings of material artifacts and their relationships with boundaries, practices, and power arrangements in HCI. While prior work has drawn on frameworks such as boundary objects to explain how material artifacts support collaboration and coordination across social worlds, we argue that this framing is insufficient in contexts shaped by carceral and racialized visual regimes. Through a community-based videovoice project with public housing residents in Detroit, we show how counter-visual artifacts intentionally disrupt dominant visual logics and reclaim the right to see and be seen otherwise. Our work contributes to HCI by proposing counter-visual methodologies and sensibilities to engage visuality not only as a technical or epistemic concern, but also as a political terrain. In doing so, we invite HCI scholars to rethink what artifacts are for and how they might support alternative ways of seeing and pathways toward imagining and enacting otherwise worlds.

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