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Abstract

This paper considers sexualization of surveillance as a mode of resistance. It explores various modes of sexualized surveillance, from 'reality porn' to webcam footage, and focuses on the ways in which voyeurism and exhibitionism are mobilized within an emerging 'surveillance aesthetic' across these forms. Building on work that considers 'playful' engagements with surveillance, and discussions of forms of counter-surveillance, the paper attempts to locate 'sexy surveillance' within this body of critical engagement that seeks not to hide from surveillance, but to confront its logics head on. In exploring how the omnipresence of surveillance shifts experiences of voyeurism and exhibitionism into new contexts, the paper argues that sexualization is one possible response for the 'surveillance-savvy' subject to utilize.

Surveillance is Sexy

The algebra of surveillance structures the reveries of voyeurism, exhibitionism and narcissism (Tabor 2001: 125).

In this paper I want to consider eroticization as a way of resisting or hijacking surveillance. Set in the broader context of debates about tactics to resist, deflect or refract the surveillant gaze, my paper will focus on sites where surveillance technologies and an emerging 'surveillance aesthetic' are being repurposed through their overt sexualization. In short, I want to think about whether the mobilization of voyeurism and exhibitionism can be read as ways of resisting surveillance. I am aware this may be a controversial move, and that the claiming of eroticization as a mode of resistance raises many questions. I hope that the paper will begin to answer those questions, though its approach is speculative; it is a 'thought experiment', an attempt to think about the potential for reading the eroticization of surveillance as an oppositional repurposing of the logic and aesthetics of surveillance – a repurposing that is implicitly or explicitly framed as a 'hijacking' of the dominant uses of surveillance. I admit at the outset to being ambivalent about some of the practices and materials I discuss here; but that kind of judgement should not stop us from at least considering the possibilities of a resistance that knowingly deploys the 'master's tools' and which brings to the surface, plays with, contests and resists the voyeurism and exhibitionism argued to be latent in what Tabor calls 'the algebra of surveillance'.

In particular, I am interested in the production, circulation and consumption of still and moving images enabled by the convergence of new technologies and sites of image making such as digital photography and video, the Internet, CCTV, cameraphones, webcams, reality TV and so on. What, to borrow Jeff Hearn's (2008: 42) phrase, are the 'new sexual affordances' of these technologies? Through these devices and the cultures they are stitched in to, new ways of surveilling and being surveilled are made possible. Pervasive looking and being looked-at are at thus the heart of my interest in thinking through the

possibilities of voyeurism and exhibitionism as modes of resistance in a culture of surveillance. As Peter Weibel (2002: 208) puts it: ‘the pleasure principle of the voyeur, to see everything, and the pleasure principle of the exhibitionist, to show all, have shifted from private drives to public norms’. It is this shift, and its implications for resisting surveillance, that I want to explore here.

The surveillance uses of new technologies, and the consolidation of a culture of surveillance in contemporary societies, have received a lot of attention, including some interesting work on playful or subversive approaches to ‘surveillance society’ (eg Albrechtslund and Dubbeld 2005; Koskela 2008; Monahan 2006), and a little on the potential for sexualizing surveillance – notably in the work of Hille Koskela who, in a series of articles, repeatedly and tantalizingly alludes to the *potential* sexualization of surveillance, though mostly by reference to its unauthorized voyeuristic deployment by CCTV camera operators (Koskela 2002, 2003, 2004, 2008; see also Hillier 1996). Where my approach will divert from Koskela’s is in her conclusion that the *desexualizing* of exhibitionism as a form of political empowerment is the only strategy capable of subverting surveillance via hijacking exhibitionism. As she rhetorically asks: ‘is it possible to understand exhibitionism as a positive term? Could we reclaim the term, redefine it and *de-sexualise* it? Could it be cultural critique? Or perhaps an emancipatory action?’ (Koskela 2004: 206; my emphasis.). My paper is an attempt to answer Koskela’s question in the affirmative, though rather than desexualizing surveillance in the way she suggests, I want to think through the possibilities of reading sexualized voyeurism and exhibitionism which deploys a ‘surveillance aesthetic’ as cultural critique, even as emancipatory action. So, while exhibitionism and voyeurism are frequently evoked in discussions of the culture of surveillance – most notably perhaps in studies of reality TV and of webcams – an explicit engagement with the sexualization of surveillance has been surprisingly absent. I would have to disagree completely with Koskela’s (2003: 298) assertion, therefore, that ‘it would feel ridiculous to try to *flirt* with a surveillance camera’; to show why, I shall in this paper be exploring ways in which people do flirt, and moreover tease, strip, and in countless other ways act sexually, while other people watch, in contexts structured by the logics and aesthetics of surveillance.

In the Raw

To begin, I want to turn my attention to Ruth Barcan’s (2002, 2004) discussion of ‘homemade’ and ‘reality porn’, which for her includes ‘found’ and covert footage, paparazzi and other unauthorized images of ‘celebrity skin’, amateur porn, and forms of porn fashioned to look like found, amateur or covert footage. While ‘amateur porn’ has a history that outstretches modern surveillance technologies, I think it is possible to trace, in contemporary forms, a mobilization of a ‘surveillance aesthetic’ – where the technologies and staging of pornographic images plays on ideas of surveillance, voyeurism and exhibitionism and where the technologies of surveillance structure the narrative, the action and most importantly the ‘look’ of porn.

Barcan notes the increasing popularity of ‘reality porn’ within the overall ‘pornscape’, and describes how this genre fetishizes authenticity and ‘brazenness’ or ‘rawness’. Readable as a response to the ‘pornonormativity’ of much mainstream commercial porn, reality porn paradoxically at once ‘ordinarizes’ porn *and* challenges the normativity of the standard porn recipe or script (see also Hardy 2008). The growth of ordinari-ized amateur porn featuring ‘real people’ has been especially propagated by the Internet, though it has migrated across other porn platforms, and even into the ‘mainstream’, for example on the TV show *Pants Off Dance Off*, which features ‘ordinary people’ stripping and dancing on camera.¹

Central to the ‘realiti-ization’ of porn for Barcan (itself embedded of course in the broader rise of other ‘reality’ formats) are ‘technological changes that have democratized access to image-making technologies and to circuits of both amateur and commercial exchange of images’ (Barcan 2002: 88). These technological changes’, she adds, ‘have impacted on both the economics of porn production and the

¹For clips, see <http://pantsoffvideo.com/> [Note that some of the sites that appear in the footnotes contain ‘pornographic’ material. All these sites were accessed on 21 September 2008.]

cultures of porn viewing' (*ibid.*). The increasing ubiquity of Internet and other digital imaging technologies has dramatically changed the 'pornscape' for Barcan, bringing about three especially significant and interconnected transformations:

first, the sheer scale, reach and quantity of pornographic images it makes available; second, the increased visibility of pornographic practices (in the sense that many different kinds of porn become available, or known about, to any home in which there is a computer connected to the Internet); and third, changes in the nature of privacy itself, owing to the ambiguously public/private nature of the Internet. (Barcan 2002: 89).

Barcan's second point, about the increased visibility of porn practices, connects to broader current arguments about the sexualization or pornification of the public sphere (eg Cover 2003; Paasonen Nikunen and Saarenmaa 2008). The proliferation of porn and porn-like images, practices and aesthetics, I want to argue, makes available a new idiom that can be redeployed subversively – in this instance, against normative (and normalizing) surveillance. The pornification of surveillance (which is not to deny its always-already porn-ness, as Koskela points out) draws on and connects to the 'reality porn' aesthetic in diverse ways, sexualizing the positions of both watcher and watched, and the 'realness' and 'truthfulness' that underpins the logic of surveillance just as it underwrites the 'realness' of 'reality porn'. While 'pornification' and eroticization should in no way be collapsed together, my argument here is that the knowing deployment of this 'surveillance aesthetic' in 'reality porn' serves as an interesting site to consider the hijacking and repurposing of surveillance. It asks us to think about the pleasures of looking and being looked at, about the possibility of different ways of configuring the 'algebra of surveillance', and about ways of performing surveillance that are about taking back control over images and their uses. Like other sexual practices which eroticize power dynamics, such as sadomasochism, this argument goes beyond what some people would think of as liberatory. And of course, there are much trickier issues at stake here, in terms of the porn industry, the exploitation of people on both sides of the camera, and questions of whether porn can ever be truly emancipatory. These are questions that this paper cannot settle; but I would like to avoid closing down the possibility of 'surveillance porn' being considered as part of an 'erotics of resistance' in surveillance society. I shall return to this issue in the conclusion.

Cam with Me

Aligned to the growth of 'reality porn' is the proliferation of websites using webcams to allow viewers access to the minutiae of people's everyday lives; Jennifer Ringley's JenniCam being the most written about (eg Barcan 2004; Burgin 2002; Knight 2000).² While JenniCam was only incidentally about sexual exhibitionism, the 'camgirl' and 'camguy' industry has rapidly grown, and now features countless websites offering explicit content (for free or for a fee). These sites often retain the everyday domestic aesthetic that characterized JenniCam and its kin. Knowingly playing with the 'being-looked-at-ness' of living (and fucking) in the webcam's eye, these sites represent one of the clearest articulations of the sexualization of surveillance. And, as Brooke Knight (2000: 25) persuasively argues, camgirls are 'pioneering both a new erotics and a new kind of performance – one that could be called the art of a publicly lived private life'. Such a life has, of course, become a staple of assorted 'reality' genres, from confessional journalism to reality television.

While camgirl and camboy sites are in some senses unique, in terms of both their production and their consumption, there are commonalities that stretch across the 'reality' genres, especially in terms of the laying bare of 'private' life for an audience whose attraction to the 'text' is a fascination precisely with that 'bareness'. Nevertheless, the technological landscape of surveillance is intensely variegated, from the CCTV infrastructure utilized by private or state security organizations to the particular relationship of paparazzi and celebrities, and from the staged performances of 'reality porn' to the spontaneous and *ad*

²For clips and a telling of JenniCam's story, see <http://technorati.com/videos/youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3D4ii0gLK3meM>

hoc acts of looking and being looked at made possible by personal surveillance gadgets such as cameraphones. And the images captured by these technologies are intended for different uses and different audiences (even if that intention can never be fully foreclosed, as digital images in particular have a habit of ‘floating free’ from their intended locations). So both the ‘technoscape’ and the ‘imagescape’ of surveillance are complexly contoured, proliferating new possibilities – both intended and unintended -- for being on camera, and for circulating, storing, sharing and looking at images. The ‘eroscape’ of surveillance is no less complex, of course. Mapping these ‘scapes’ seems to me to be a crucial task in understanding modes and meanings of sexualized surveillance. And, as any geographer will tell you, no landscape is untouched by power.

To return to the broader ‘reality porn’ landscape, Barcan makes an aside to note that these kinds of image are increasingly being manufactured for ‘commercial’ porn sites, while countless other sites collect and archive contributor images of unverified provenance – such as sites that present the viewer with images ostensibly captured covertly (for example Home Hidden Cams – see later).³ The hijacking of the reality aesthetic of surveillance as a form of commercial pornography is in itself, I think, further evidence for the radical potential for destabilizing the power dynamics inherent in the logic of surveillance. That manufactured porn seeks to reproduce this aesthetic testifies to its potency (and of course its marketability). The aesthetic of ‘reality porn’ – grainy, handheld, shaky, accidental, opportunistic, covert – is, moreover, markedly similar to the images captured from CCTV; the two share a ‘reality aesthetic’ which has also been drawn on by mainstream movies and other forms of cultural production (Levin 2002). While this aesthetic is often read as a way of conferring ‘truthfulness’, I think there’s more to it than that: it also mobilizes a commentary on the *idea* of truthfulness, the currency of truthfulness – surveillance as an antidote to simulation.

I think Barcan needs to add another point in terms of the impact of new technologies on the ‘pornscape’, and that is their sheer ease of use coupled with their ubiquity. Cameraphones, for example, have radically transformed the practices of photography, bringing about both a heightened pervasiveness and a heightened intimacy. Still photos and video are easily captured, stored and distributed without the need for potentially disciplining intermediaries such as processing labs (see Cover 2003 on the policing of images by labs). As Gerard Goggin (2006) writes, the cameraphone is at once an ever-present image capture device *and* an ever-present image sharing and transmission device. A new staple of self-made exhibitionism, the so-called ‘cameraphone cutie’, snaps her (or him) self, and the intimacy of the camera-user connection is further played on in images where the phone appears in shot, almost like a sex toy. (There is, of course, a bigger story here, too, of the sex life of the mobile phone – see Bell 2006.) Cameraphone cuties have become a staple of ‘lad mags’, proliferating the possibilities for wannabe cuties to expose themselves. Like the camgirls and camguys using webcams to disclose their everyday lives (including their sex lives), cameraphone cuties are rearticulating exhibitionism, though *not* to desexualize it.

Of course, being looked at might seem to be the unquestionable *raison d’etre* for exhibitionism. Yet in a paper that attempts to distance practices of exhibiting from classification as ‘paraphilia’ or as a form of sexual deviance, Hugh-Jones, Gough and Littlewood (2005) discuss online (female) exhibitionism websites, arguing that their discourse analysis revealed that ‘the normalization and promotion of exhibitionism was reflected in three main repertoires’, or ways in which their respondents spoke about their practices:

1. *exhibitionism as personal fulfilment* – positive effects on self-esteem, and a way to be yourself (“it’s something you do more for yourself, people can look away”)

³<http://www.homehiddencams.com/>

2. *exhibitionism and self as morally responsible* – distancing themselves from male ‘flashers’, which were seen as immoral and irresponsible, and also downplaying sexualization
 3. *exhibitionism as socially supported* – by the audience, also by friends and family.
- (Hugh-Jones et al 2005: 265).

Here, female exhibitionism is recast as a project of the self, utilizing surveillance and related imaging technologies, and an already established aesthetic and set of practices, as a form of personal empowerment. It seems to me that such an argument can be stretched beyond the personal, to show that colonizing surveillance with reflexive engagements with its own logics and effects (and erotics) represents a powerful critical tactic (cf Monahan 2006).

I Like to Watch

Not so long ago, a man walking down the street with a camera was a rarity. People noticed him. They would wonder what he was doing, what he was looking at. They looked to see where he was pointing his camera. Now the world is full of people photographing anything and everything, with their SLRs, their camera phones, the digital camera on their key ring. Have all the people in the world suddenly outed themselves as voyeurs? (Nicholson 2008: 5).

What, then, about the voyeurs, the watchers, the consumers of these images? Can the position of unseen voyeur also be mobilized as a form of resistance? Sites like Home Hidden Cams certainly play to voyeuristic desires, emphasizing the furtive taboo of being a ‘peeping tom’, and much of the footage is either ‘authentic’ or else skilfully rendered to appear covert. Hidden cam sites (and there are many) offer footage collected in a range of scenarios, from covert filming of people enjoying outdoors sex, to hidden cameras capturing people bathing or undressing, images of sex captured in people’s homes, and secret film from nudist beaches. Sites offering dorm cam, locker room cam and toilet cam provide other niche voyeuristic pleasures. The case of nudist beach footage is particularly interesting, as such footage is widely available, in ‘better’, even glossy, overtly-filmed formats across a range of nudist media. In this case, it is the (apparent) covertness of the footage that gives it extra value – a clear instance of the parlaying of the ‘reality porn’ and surveillance aesthetics. Here, it is the ‘voyeur-ness’ of the images that gives them erotic appeal, perhaps to counter nudists’ own stringent disavowal of the erotic nature of their pastime (Bell & Holliday 2000).

As Hillier (1996) and Koskela (2002) have both reported, surveillance technologies such as CCTV have been linked to practices of voyeurism, too, for example when camera operators are found to focus their attentions in particular ways:

Male [CCTV] operators monitoring cameras located in women’s toilets and artistes’ changing rooms, as well as in the car parks and main body of the casino, had zoomed in on images of women’s exposed breasts, genital areas and buttocks, together with couples fondling each other and having sex, generally “hidden” behind large indoor plants, and a woman urinating in the car park. Individual sequences from the four-year period had been edited onto one tape and shown locally at house parties by the operator(s) responsible.

(Hillier 1996: 99).

Indeed, ‘found’ footage from CCTV also enters the technologically-mediated pornscape, collated on websites and on DVDs featuring ‘Caught in the Act’ footage (such as people having sex in ATM foyers or in surveilled public spaces).⁴ These sites knowingly play on current feelings about surveillance; as Tabor (2001: 135) writes, ‘the very idea of surveillance evokes curiosity, desire, aggression, guilt, and, above all,

⁴See http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/law/public_law/article703653.ece for a court ruling that public sex caught only on CCTV does not constitute a threat to public decency in UK law.

fear – emotions that interact in daydream dramas of seeing and being seen, concealment and self-exposure, attack and defence, seduction and enticement'. While sex in public space has always had to deal with the possibility of being seen – and has sometimes dealt with this possibility by eroticizing it (Leap 1998) – the added frisson of capture by surveillance technologies undoubtedly adds to the erotics for some participants (and for those who later consume the images; see Holert, 2002). In fact, the widespread availability of surveillance technologies means that seemingly every device has spawned new erotic practices. Wearable cameras, such as those used by surveillance activist Steve Mann to 'shoot back' at the watchers (Monahan 2006), are also used to covertly film sex acts – see for example the Street Blowjob website.⁵

Evidently, as already noted, the 'landscape' of sexualized surveillance is complex and variegated. Different technologies (cameraphone, webcam, digital video, CCTV), different intentions (covert/overt, sexualized in the making or sexualized after the fact), different audiences (security officers, paying customers, tabloid readers, lovers), and different forms of agency (knowing performance versus caught on film, exhibitionist-made versus voyeur-made) will inevitably combine in different ways, producing different 'texts' and contexts. A full typology of sexy surveillance is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important to reiterate this complexity and diversity, and to acknowledge the partial and fragmentary nature of what I present here.

Celebrity Skin

Just as previous writers have described playful and antagonistic engagements with surveillance as forms of resistance (eg Albrechtslund and Dubbeld 2005; Koskela 2008; Monahan 2006), we surely can see the overt sexualization of surveillance as a resistive tactic. While Virilio (2002: 109) sees only horror in what he calls 'the democratization of voyeurism', opening up the spaces of voyeurism and exhibitionism serves to destabilize and denaturalize authorized modes of surveillance (the modes, in fact, that Virilio fears). While commentators regularly cite activists such as Mann and their resistive tactics, I want to suggest that the democratization of voyeurism (and exhibitionism) through its eroticization is another powerful way of contesting surveillance. Such tactics are a clear example of the broader ways in which 'people are not just passively adjusting to surveillance but taking *active* roles in producing and circulating images' (Koskela 2008: 151).

Of course, as Hillier notes, the circulation of voyeuristic images captured without their subject's knowledge or consent raises ethical issues. New imaging technologies have proliferated the possibilities for hidden filming. The cameraphone, for example, has enabled new impromptu opportunities to capture covert images, for example the 'upskirt' shot.⁶ Covert footage of celebrities – another huge growth area – raises this issue, albeit in a slightly different way, since the celebrity's ambivalent occupation of the public and private spheres is of a different order from the 'ordinary person' (Frith 2008; Knee 2006). In fact, some celebrities are alleged to knowingly manipulate the possibilities of covert filming, staging their own headline-grabbing shots for the waiting paparazzi – culminating in a spate of 'upskirt' photographs of celebs caught wearing no underwear, including Britney Spears, Paris Hilton and Lindsey Lohan (Frith 2008).⁷ Knee (2006: 174) argues convincingly that such 'celebrity skin' images have their own 'progressive dimensions', not least by reasserting the 'material, physical, human reality of the celebrity' (an argument that neatly echoes Monahan's 2006 reading of Steve Mann's Shooting Back project). But celebrities are, in a sense, only deploying the same knowingness that everyone living in a surveillance society enacts. They are merely subject to different regimes of visibility and fascination – regimes themselves increasingly implicated in a whole host of surveillance practices, from celeb spotting to sex

⁵<http://www.streetblowjobs.com/2/main.htm>

⁶Type 'upskirt' as a search in YouTube to find countless examples. For a great clip of someone filming someone else filming a covert upskirt, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUVonTpnESk>

⁷For a compilation of celebrity upskirts, see <http://www.wizzing.com/>

tapes, and from gossip columns to upskirts (Frith 2008) And, of course, there are new possibilities to become a celebrity, through the parlaying of 'bareness', as we see most notably in reality TV. But more broadly, as we become increasingly 'surveillance savvy', as we come to be 'self-conscious pro-filmic subjects' (McQuire 2008: 198), so the politics of concealment and revelation, watching and being watched, become ever more complex (Koskela 2003). Into this complexity, I want to argue, tactics such as the reflexive play of voyeurism and exhibitionism can assert a powerful critique.

Learning from *Big Brother*?

The surveillance state is intrinsically omnipresent. There is no escape except perhaps to exhibitionism. (Cuff 2007: 49).

While discussion of surveillance has largely focused on its disciplinary, panoptical properties, I agree with Albrechtslund and Dubbeld (2005: 220) when they write that 'the time has come for Surveillance Studies to recognize and take seriously the fun side of surveillance'. For the past decade, we have been privileged witnesses to the playing out of those 'reveries of voyeurism, exhibitionism and narcissism' that Tabor (2001) writes of, in the form of reality TV show *Big Brother*. While reality TV is not necessarily or straightforwardly a show about surveillance, I would argue that the logics, aesthetics and cultural understandings of reality shows like *Big Brother* are intimately enmeshed in the culture of surveillance. For example, the omnipresence of the camera's gaze on set and the countless ways that contestants respond to being filmed, both consciously and unconsciously, make shows like *Big Brother* experiments in surveillance as much as they are supposed experiments in interpersonal relations. And, I would argue, as reality TV has become a prominent feature of TV scheduling, so the contestants, programme-makers and viewers come to understand the logics of surveillance through *Big Brother*. It teaches us all about how to act in front of an ever-watchful camera, and about the power of images caught on camera. It also teaches us that it is still possible, even under conditions of voluntary hyper-surveillance, to 'forget' one's public exposure, and reminds us of the eternal afterlife of images beyond our control – websites like YouTube are cluttered with clips from *Big Brother* shows around the world.

It's hard to believe the initial hesitancy and lack of comprehension that met the first series of *Big Brother* in the UK, as audiences and commentators struggled to make sense of the programme and grasp its impact on the landscape of celebrity (Frith 2008). Yet *Big Brother* also offers rich insights into the ways in which 'self-conscious pro-filmic subjects' play with surveillance. Borrowing its logic and aesthetic at least in part from the 'everyday webcam' sites, the show sought to reveal what happens to its subjects when they are knowingly exposed to constant panoptic surveillance. The contestants on *Big Brother* reflexively manage their own exhibitionism, knowing that they are participating in the 'attention economy' (Wise 2004), knowing that one way to profit from surveillance is to be interesting, even shocking – though within limits. The viewer-voting structure of the show reveals the audience's expectations and tolerance for self-exposure, its voyeuristic tastes, and the relationship between exhibitionism and 'success'. As Mark Andrejevic (2004: 175) puts it, shows like *Big Brother* depict 'the economic potential of the exploitation of voyeurism (and exhibitionism) in an era characterized by the increasingly important economic role of electronic surveillance'. And as the franchise has evolved, globalized and spawned countless variants, so we have seen the growth of what we might call *the popular culture of surveillance* – a new savvy, even blasé attitude to surveillance, which sees its potential entertainment value (but also knows its disciplining limits).

However, some commentators argue that while this surveillance-savviness, shared by participants and audiences of reality TV may be perverse, is certainly not subversive. In his reading of the show *Temptation Island*, Andrejevic (2004) highlights the show's (and the audience's) socially complicit, even conservative effects. For Andrejevic, *Temptation Island*'s deployment of voyeurism/exhibitionism is socially productive of the 'logic of late capitalism' precisely because self-revelation is tied to economic 'success'. In his reading, the idea that 'submission serves as a form of empowerment' is exposed as a fantasy that serves the market and enslaves the individual (Andrejevic 2004: 192). Yet this psychoanalytic

theorizing runs counter to the empirically grounded analysis of exhibitionism provided by Hugh-Jones et al (2005). While I find much of what Andrejevic writes persuasive, it makes for pessimistic reading of the (im)possibility of resisting surveillance in that resistance is so easily recuperated by the market. For him, this is the end of the line: ideas, images and actions that might appear subversive are actually revealed as complicit (and perverse). While I think that the ‘commodification of resistance’ needn’t be the end game – there are, after all, countless ways to resist *within* capitalism -- I would also like to think there is a more productive argument to be made, perhaps by aligning voyeurism/ exhibitionism with work on counter-surveillance.

In her broad cultural analysis of nudity, Barcan (2004: 93) argues that ‘nakedness is linked to self-assertion or rebellion. In societies where there is a legislated taboo on public nudity, the naked body is an effective weapon in political protests’. While it might well be a stretch to see most of the forms of sexualized surveillance discussed here as ‘political’ in this sense, there is surely an argument to be made for the ways that sexualization confronts the logic of surveillance, not least in reminding us of its ever closer scrutiny of the intimate sphere. As already noted, there are parallels with accounts of counter-surveillance that I think are fruitfully resonant. Discussing Steve Mann’s *Shooting Back*, for example, Monahan (2006: 524) suggests that this ‘is a provocative project because it calls attention to the embodied experiences of watching and being watched, of recording and being recorded. ... *Shooting Back* disrupts the illusion of detached, objective, impersonal, disembodied monitoring’. In embracing those reveries of voyeurism, exhibitionism and narcissism, there is also a refusal to passively accept surveillance; rather than attempting to block or hide from the camera, being *over-exposed* is arguably a more response, tapping into what Tabor (2001: 135) calls ‘the glamour of surveillance’. Moreover, given Cuff’s (2007) key point about the omnipresence of surveillance, deploying its logic and its glamour, *flashing back* so to speak, works equally well to denaturalize and disrupt the authorized uses and ‘flow’ of surveillance.

Conclusion: the Erotics of Resistance

It’s easy for the voyeur to jump to conclusions. A man who relies on visual data can easily be led astray by his own imagination. (Nicholson 2008: 6).

Yet there are lingering questions – what’s at stake in claiming these images and practices as forms of resistance? Have I been led astray by my own imagination, and seen resistance where there is none? As with any work seeking to advance arguments about the political uses of sexualization or eroticization, there is a danger of getting mired in debates about, among other things, the ‘effects’ of sexualized and pornographic materials. In my analysis I have (sometimes hesitantly) positioned these materials and practices in the context of Albrechtslund and Dubbeld’s (2005) call for work on ‘playful’ or ‘entertaining’ surveillance. But in positioning ‘surveillance porn’ as play or entertainment, and as part of the popular culture of surveillance, I am aware that alternative viewpoints would immediately contest such an upbeat analysis, and want instead to emphasize the harmfulness of pornography, and perhaps especially the increasing harms that new regimes of pornographic production, distribution and consumption propagate (Hearn, 2008). What, we might ask, is being resisted by these images, exactly?

I do not want to simply wave those counterarguments away; certainly, to echo (and add to) Koskela (2003: 295), ‘the politics [*and erotics*] of seeing and being seen are complex’. But neither do I want to say that we cannot ever think about sexualized surveillance as a mode of resistance simply because it brings us into contact with the heat of the ‘pornography debates’. In fact, this paper speaks implicitly to those debates, in that it seeks to think about the radical potential of sexualized looking and being-looked-at as, at the very least, re-visibility and re-embodiment of surveillance, while also highlighting the omnipresent, latent sexualization of surveillance. What these images do, in short, is to bring to the surface that already eroticized potential of surveillance. In this context, the possibility of rethinking the act of being surveilled as one of exhibitionism, and simultaneously making apparent the voyeuristic element of the surveillant gaze, offers an alternative way of responding to and acting in the surveillance society. That’s way *Big Brother* is such an important resource: it dramatizes what’s going on all around us. In the same way,

'reality porn' doesn't resist by trying to evade surveillance: it confronts it head-on, with its own brazen imagery. "Look at me all you want", it says, "I know you want to". And then, of course, it adds "I like to be watched". At the same time, as Hardy (2008: 62) argues, 'reality porn' as a genre 'offers the promise of a general queering of pornographic texts', to some extent democratizing pornography; surveillance porn contributes to this broader transformation (see also Barcan 2002). This might seem like a small, even insignificant resistance; but opening up the erotic to new possibilities surely can't be all bad.

So we arrive at the bigger questions. In what ways can surveillance-savvy exhibitionism and voyeurism be considered resistance? What or who is being resisted? Where do issues of power and agency sit in my account? Clearly, there are precedents for arguing that claiming the right to the erotic is an act of resistance in an 'erotophobic' or 'erotonormative' culture. Debates about 'transgressive' sexual acts as political acts have a long history, especially among 'dissident' sexual cultures (Califia 2000). Here resistance is about confronting the limits of what is considered morally, ethically or legally acceptable behaviour, asking who gets to decide what is acceptable, and asking what's at stake in setting the bounds of acceptability in this way. An oppositional erotics is thus framed against a 'mainstream' variously characterized as heteronormative, erotonormative, heteropatriarchal, somatophobic, or just plain 'straight'. There are well established (though not uncontested) modes of activism that mobilize the 'deviant' body and 'deviant' sex as oppositional to this 'mainstream', most notably perhaps in forms of queer politics (though critics argue this is ultimately an unsuccessful political tactic; see Weeks, 1998). Part of my thinking here would be to group the practices I have discussed above in with these tactics, not least because they share what we might call an 'erotics of resistance' – using sexualization as a political tactic, but also sexualizing the oppositional or resistive position itself. In common with the strategy of dissident sexualities which works to claim 'pride' in practices and identities previously rendered shameful, we might also suggest that the sexualization of surveillance opens up the possibility to resist not through rejection of dominant logics (here, of surveillance) but by playful, 'loud and proud' engagement with and celebration of sexy surveillance.

In his short story 'The Modern Voyeur', written to accompany a book of staged voyeurism photos by Richard Kern, Geoff Nicholson (2008) describes this exchange between his male narrator/voyeur, and the woman he has been following and covertly photographing:

"The Peeping Tom is furtive, inhibited, sweaty," he says. "The voyeur is open, confident, cool. The Peeping Tom is small-time, limited, has narrow horizons. The voyeur is worldly, sophisticated, cosmopolitan. The Peeping Tom skulks. The voyeur holds his head high."

"I see," she says.

"Not yet you don't. The Peeping Tom is ashamed, apologetic, self-hating. The voyeur knows himself, accepts himself for what he is, and demands that you do the same.

"The Peeping Tom is square, old-fashioned, out of touch. The voyeur is hip, fashionable, current, modern (very possibly moderne). The modern voyeur is just like me."

(Nicholson 2008: 7).

While this isn't quite a call for 'voyeurs' pride', it nevertheless articulates quite neatly the kind of reflexive engagement with looking and being looked at that I have been trying to explore here. In this sense, my argument would be that we are all of us, all of the time, modern voyeurs and modern exhibitionists. The modern voyeur and modern exhibitionist are, as Nicholson's narrator says, *just like me*. Even if we don't partake of the offerings of 'reality porn' (or even reality TV), our embeddedness in surveillance makes part of its algebra. And while a more obvious resistance route to take might be evasion, secrecy, trying to become invisible (and never looking, either), as Groombridge (2002: 43) argues, 'many people are [in fact] seeking to increase their visibility', and are playing with, goading and yes, *even flirting with* surveillance.

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