

The Right to Hide? Anti-Surveillance Camouflage and the Aestheticization of Resistance

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There has been a recent surge in artistic designs to conceal oneself from ambient surveillance in public places. These center on the masking of identity to undermine technological efforts to fix someone as a unique entity apart from the crowd. Ranging from fractal face paint and hairstyles, to realistic resin masks, to reflective underwear, anti-surveillance camouflage ostensibly allows people to hide in plain sight. These designs, however, enact an aestheticization of resistance premised on individual avoidance rather than meaningful challenge to the violent and discriminatory logics of surveillance societies.

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A curious trend is emerging in this era of pervasive surveillance. Alongside increasing public awareness of drone warfare, government spying programs, and big data analytics, there has been a recent surge in anti-surveillance tactics. While these tactics range from software for anonymous Internet browsing to detoxification supplements for fooling drug tests, what is particularly fascinating is the panoply of artistic projects—and products—to conceal oneself from ambient surveillance in public places. These center on the masking of identity to undermine technological efforts to fix someone as a unique entity apart from the crowd. A veritable artistic industry mushrooms from the perceived death of the social brought about by ubiquitous public surveillance: tribal or fractal face paint and hairstyles to confound

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face-recognition software, hoodies and scarves made with materials to block thermal emissions and evade tracking by drones, and hats that emit infrared light to blind camera lenses and prevent photographs or video tracking. Anti-surveillance camouflage of this sort flaunts the system, ostensibly allowing wearers to hide in plain sight—neither acquiescing to surveillance mandates nor becoming reclusive under their withering gaze. This is an *aestheticization of resistance*, a performance that generates media attention and scholarly interest without necessarily challenging the violent and discriminatory logics of surveillance societies.

These artistic practices should be situated in the context of the state visibility projects that galvanize them. Visibility is about the normalization of state control through techniques of classification, separation, and aestheticization, which enforce a kind of reductive, exclusionary legibility.¹ As Nicholas Mirzoeff writes, “Visibility sutures authority to power and renders this association ‘natural’”²; it manifests in a set of extractive and dehumanizing complexes (plantation, imperialist, and military-industrial) that are institutionalized through bureaucratic and scientific apparatuses that render classifications true and populations governable. Frequently, these complexes have explicitly racist, neocolonial, and necropolitical aims, affording the prejudicial allocation and distribution of death for populations deemed dangerous to the state, which could include terrorists, asylum seekers, or the poor in today’s capitalist economy. Thus, biopolitics and necropolitics fuse in destructive ways, in the service of neoliberal capitalism, to create conditions of bare life, or at least of abjection and human insecurity.³ Visibility, therefore, denies from the Other the right to legitimate autonomy and agency; it denies “the right to look” back and challenge the identities ascribed by institutions.⁴ As Stephen Graham⁵ reminds us, following Michel Foucault,⁶ there is also a “boomerang effect” to the deployment of biopolitical and necropolitical technologies in distant territories, leading frequently to their application in the homeland on so-called civilian populations, as can be seen, for example, with the domestication of drones⁷ and biometric identification systems.⁸

Countervisuality projects may be necessary to disarm the natural logics of state visibility and confront their supposed order from nowhere.⁹ Rather than merely opposing visibility or seeking to substitute it with different totalizing regimes, countervisuality would instead challenge forms of violence and oppression, acknowledging differential exposures and effects. After all, despite popular claims about universal subjection to surveillance, it must be recognized that a host of surveillance functions are reserved for those who threaten the status quo, principally those classified as poor or marked as Other.¹⁰ Racialized identities of dangerousness are encoded back upon the targets through surveillance encounters that are always tied to the threat of state force (e.g., the stop-and-frisk search, the video-tracking of racial minorities through commercial stores, the scrutiny of purchases made by welfare recipients). These are mechanisms of *marginalizing surveillance* that produce conditions and identities of marginality through their very application.¹¹

This paper builds upon theoretical insights from the field of surveillance studies, particularly with regard to the differential treatment of populations and ways that marginality inflects experiences of surveillance. The field has had a longstanding

concern with discriminatory surveillance practices predicated on “categorical suspicion” of marginalized groups¹² and “social sorting” of populations through increasingly abstract, invisible, and automated systems of control.¹³ Perhaps because of the strong voyeuristic modalities of surveillance, scholars have further interrogated the gendered dimensions of watching and being watched, and have explored possibilities for gender-based appropriation and resistance.¹⁴ Recently, there has also been a concerted effort to foster engaged feminist and race studies critiques that attend to intersectional forms of oppression, which are often enforced by surveillance practices.¹⁵ For instance, Corinne Mason and Shoshana Magnet¹⁶ show how many policy initiatives and surveillance apps intended to combat violence against women tend to responsabilize victims, fail to target perpetrators, and aggravate conditions of vulnerability, especially for poor women who may lack a social safety net if fleeing from an abuser or risk assault or arrest if they do call the police. Feminist and intersectional approaches to surveillance studies connect the embodied, grounded nature of individual experience with larger systems of structural inequality and violence. Such approaches investigate the technological and organizational mediation of situated practice, advancing a critique of contemporary surveillance systems and power relations. The analysis presented here builds upon this orientation by questioning the values and implications of aestheticized forms of anti-surveillance.

Exploring Anti-Surveillance Camouflage

Resisting the impulse to celebrate uncritically artistic interventions that seem progressive or innovative, this paper asks whether the performances put into motion by those designing anti-surveillance camouflage achieve countervisuality. Do they unmask and denaturalize the discriminatory orders imposed by state-corporate apparatuses? Do they force recognition of people as possessing legitimate autonomy and agency? Do they have the capacity and valence to transform systems of oppression? By claiming what can be framed as a “right to hide,” instead of “a right to look,” what, exactly, does anti-surveillance camouflage perform?

Taken at face value, anti-surveillance camouflage enacts a play of surveillance avoidance. It frames the enemy either as state and corporate actors invading one’s privacy or as malicious individuals seeking to violate helpless others through voyeuristic transgressions. The gaze is always unwanted; it always individuates; it always objectifies. In this narrative, there is little room to engage the problems of categorical suspicion that undergird marginalizing surveillance because the unit of analysis is the individual, not the group. There is little room to explore complex amalgams of desired surveillance, extractive systems, and hidden effects. The provocation is one of the enlightened, bourgeois subject asserting his or her right to be left alone, which is a claim that by its very implied utterance already reveals the relative privilege of the one making it. It is also a heroic, masculinist narrative that positions women as feeble targets of voyeuristic encounters (e.g., the dreaded “upskirt” shot) who are in need of stylistic, technological shields to preserve their

dignity and honor. It would seem, then, that *systems* of oppression and discrimination—racism, sexism, classism, ableism, etc.—are preserved or at least not directly contested by anti-surveillance artistic experiments.

In the following discussion of anti-surveillance camouflage and fashion designs, I analyze a number of artistic products, performances, and discourses to assess their relation to state visibility more broadly. In addition to exploring artistic materials, I draw upon media representations of such work to unpack the presumed critical potential of anti-surveillance art projects. My attention extends beyond an assessment of the practicality or efficacy of the artifacts in question. Following Hanna Rose Shell, I approach camouflage as “a way of seeing, being, moving, and working in the world. It is a form of cultivated subjectivity. As such, it is an individuated form of self-awareness that is also part of a network of institutional practices.”¹⁷ Therefore, I read these resistance efforts as part of larger cultural processes and critically interrogate their symbolic and performative functions. My aim is not to criticize the artists and designers involved in these endeavors, as many of them are committed and creative intellectuals. Rather, I seek to advance the collective dialogue by situating such creative practices within their larger systems of meaning and control—or within their “visual economies”¹⁸—and in so doing begin to draw into focus (even in negative form) radical possibilities free from the manacles of “the right to hide.”

Although anti-surveillance camouflage and fashion designs may offer creative forms of resistance that resonate with artists and their audiences, I argue that they fail to achieve countervisuality. The reasons for this failure are rooted in tensions with the framing and execution of the projects in question. On one hand, the artists and designers do perceive the symbolic violence of having one’s identity fixed by others and one’s movements tracked by objectifying surveillance systems. Some of them additionally recognize how these systems might introduce additional vulnerabilities for women or LGBT groups. On the other hand, the works enact a play of individual avoidance, rather than asserting a collective right to look back and challenge authority. Many of them reproduce discourses of universalism that elide difference as well as the marginalizing and discriminatory effects of surveillance. As such, these forms of aestheticized resistance identify vital areas of concern but address them in ways that may fetishize, trivialize, and normalize larger structural conditions of inequality and danger.

The Thrill of “Perilous Glamour”: Face Paint and Hairstyles

Bold asymmetrical marks on haughty white faces. Pointy blue and red bangs cutting dramatic lines across models’ straight noses, plucked eyebrows, and parted lips. These are some of the images that comprise the fashion “look book” for the CV [computer vision] Dazzle project intended to confuse face-recognition systems (see [figure 1](#)).¹⁹ The designers proudly embrace what they call “the perilous glamour of life under surveillance”²⁰ and appropriate naval tactics from a bygone era to

ostentatiously “dazzle” and confuse electronic observers. As an *Atlantic Monthly* article explains:

Dazzle takes its name from a type of naval camouflage (and otherwise) used in the world wars. Huge, jarring stripes were painted on ships, less with the intent to conceal them in the water and more with the idea of disorienting enemy weapons and maneuvering. CV dazzle applies the same concept to algorithms.²¹

The presumed enemies in the contemporary surveillant context include any operators of automated face-recognition technology, be they state agents, advertisers, or technology companies like Apple.

To justify dazzle approaches to anti-surveillance camouflage, artists mobilize evolutionary discourses to position their work as innovative because it is modeled on nature. A Roy Behrens quote prominently displayed on the CV Dazzle website reads: “From all appearances, deception has always been critical to daily survival—for human and non-human creatures alike—and, judging by its current ubiquity, there is no end in immediate sight.”²² In providing advice for makeup application, the designers make a similar comparison: “Ideally, your face would become the anti-face,



Figure 1. Adam Havey’s CV Dazzle Project.

or inverse. In the animal kingdom, this inverse effect is known as countershading.”²³ This conflation of natural and social systems frames surveillance from enemies as an inevitable, natural state of affairs that demands creative adaptation on the part of the would-be prey. It is a framing that—in neoliberal and social Darwinian fashion—responsibilizes avoidance of undesired scrutiny and implies that those who cannot evade the predator deserve targeting and are unfit for survival. Not only does this preserve structural inequalities and current surveillance practices, but also it invites the production of augmented surveillance applications to counter deception and avoidance.²⁴ For instance, when deception is considered normal and unavoidable, imperatives increase for direct, unmediated access to bodily truths, as can be seen with the increasing popularity of neuromarketing, behavioral monitoring, and lie detection tests, each of which claims to circumvent intentional or unintentional dissimulation.²⁵

Not restricted to evolutionary discourses, the rhetoric deployed by CV Dazzle at times seems as disjointed as the designs themselves. The discursive registers invoke the biological (“the animal kingdom”), marketing disclaimers (“results will vary”), scientific experiment (“tested and validated”), practical suggestions (“avoid enhancers”), and participatory enticements (“creating your own looks”).²⁶ This disparate appeal for attention fits snugly with observations about the contemporary era of populist postmodernism, where a surplus of messages each vie for recognition and no longer rely on shared adjudication processes to determine which is more factual or true.²⁷ The key designer, Adam Harvey, is clearly invested in promoting himself and his artworks as part of his brand, so the visual elements (photos, diagrams, videos) are given primacy as fungible referents in this aestheticization of resistance. The limitations and meaning of such choices are perhaps more difficult to detect.

Dazzle face paint, with its allusions to the primal and overtones of stylized subversion, can be generatively compared with tattooing in contemporary US society. In her work on the cultural politics of tattooing, Jill Fisher writes:

Fashion, by definition, has a fear of commitment. Consequently, the permanence of tattoos is terrifying. Permanence is a “bad word” within late capitalist economies, which are dependent on and nurture change. . . . Semi-permanent body modifications are ideal in a capitalist structure because there is always already space for the next body modification. Hair grows, bodies expand, clothes fade. Resistance is everything because there are always new (pre-packaged) battles to wage. . . . The postmodern primitive can play at permanence when it is fashionable without any danger of commitment.²⁸

With dazzle designs, the face’s surface may be rendered unreadable, at least temporarily, granting the postmodern primitive freedom from a radically delimited form of fixity. While late capitalist economies may thrive on the protean, the state seeks permanence and precision with respect to the identity of bodies flowing within, across, and beyond its territories.²⁹ Playing with illegibility allows one to flirt with, and become titillated by, the idea of deviance, all the while masking deeper inscriptions on the body, as well as on one’s data doubles.³⁰ After all, there are many circulating, overlapping, and reinforcing markers of identity beyond the face,

so the notion of evading them entirely is always a losing game. It is the relatively privileged and white who ride the waves of voluntary mobility and whose state-verified identity markers buoy them in their pursuits. While attention is paid to the poses of the privileged adorned with tribal-looking paint, absent are critiques of racialized threat inscribed indelibly on black and brown bodies.³¹

Rather than being neutral in any way, biometric systems, like face recognition, catalyze symbolic and physical violence. As Simone Browne argues, bodies are racialized and disassociated from what is seen as the normal order of the world when biometric systems mediate the encounters between state agents and those marked as Other:

it is these moments of observation, calibration and application that can reveal themselves as racializing. . . . It is the making of the body as out of place, an attempt to deny its capacity for humanness, which makes for the productive power of epidermalization.³²

The play of CV Dazzle does not account for the ruptures in identity that occur when the encounter draws upon markers of difference to position one as threat. Instead of such a conversation, CV Dazzle is met with fawning journalistic coverage relegated to shallow quandaries about whether the time spent grooming would be worth it:

Harvey's work is amazing. I adore this male 'do and make-up; I may have dreamt of the day something like it will appear in some thumping, ominously globalized music video. But, like, look at it! Do you know how much time getting downward-facing spikes like that takes in the morning? And that pixelated make-up? Every morning? Oy vey! Maybe it's better to acclimate yourself to the omnipresent eye of Total Surveillance than the daily toil of a blowdryer and göt2B Glued.³³

Clearly this aestheticization of resistance and its accompanying discourses have serious blind spots, specifically where issues of racial identity, difference, and power are concerned. Given that biometric systems already "fail" at a greater rate for racial minorities,³⁴ effectively nominating those populations for increased scrutiny, what might be the effects of someone marked as Other openly and intentionally challenging state surveillance systems? Could this lead to anything but intensified observation, search, and intervention?

Masking and Weaponizing Faces

Beyond the surface decorations of face paint and hairstyles, physical masks invoke a deeper symbolic order. Used in rituals across cultures and times, masks can convey connections to the natural world, communicate social status and privilege by referencing one's ancestral lineage, or temporarily equalize revelers at carnival events, which in turn may signify the casting out of dark forces from society.³⁵ Masks can conceal one's identity, affording behavior that transgresses traditional social norms and boundaries. Used by social movements, they can also assert an anonymous collectivity, drawing attention to issues of shared concern while protecting individuals from reprisal; such deployments of masks can be seen, for instance,

with ski masks worn by the Zapatistas, scarves worn by the “black bloc,” or Guy Fawkes masks worn by Anonymous or Occupy Wall Street activists.³⁶

In the service of combatting surveillance, especially face-recognition systems, one artistic effort by Leo Selvaggio involves the design of masks that are eerie reproductions of his own face, potentially spawning swarms of expressionless doppelgangers moving through the streets (see [figure 2](#)). The resin masks created by Selvaggio, which are generated through a process of 3D scanning and printing, are realistic “personal surveillance identity prosthetics” that match his facial contours, skin tone, and facial hair.³⁷ He has tested the masks with face-recognition systems like the one used by Facebook and found that they consistently fool these systems into identifying the masks as his face.³⁸ When asked whether he is concerned about people committing crimes wearing a realistic mask of his face, he adopts a brave tone of willing self-sacrifice in his response: “it is worth the risk if it creates public discourse around surveillance practices and how it [*sic*] affects us all.”³⁹ The resin mask is but one element of a larger project called “URME” (pronounced “you are me”), which will also include open-source software that will automatically edit video to replace individuals’ faces with Selvaggio’s face.⁴⁰

Several interesting performances are enacted here, not the least of which is a narcissistic assertion that everyone is, in effect, Leo Selvaggio. In a produced video he says,

Surveillance is here, and it’s here to stay. And rather than try and combat that surveillance directly, I propose that we change what’s being surveilled, until the



Figure 2. Leo Selvaggio’s URME Project.

reason we are surveilled is no longer relevant. I'm talking about changing us. Help me change us. And what better place to start than, oh, with me. Join me. You are me.⁴¹

The intended message here seems to be that because surveillance is inevitable, people should both accept it *and* find ways to maintain privacy in spite of it. Another more interpretive read, though, is that the original rationales for surveillance cease to matter as surveillance practices multiply through function creep. Additionally, tenacious systems resist alteration and social norms change through intentional modulations by organizations, for instance by companies like Facebook gradually stripping away privacy protections.⁴² What is left out of Selvaggio's artwork and these articulations is a recognition of and engagement with the profound differences occluded by assumptions of shared social identity. Police may tolerate the wearing of masks in public by relatively privileged, white men in US cities, but meanwhile there is a corresponding criminalization of people of color for wearing hoodies or even daring to look back at (or "eyeball") police in similar urban settings.⁴³

The URME mask is further premised on assumptions of pure or true identities that are somehow corrupted by exposure to state and corporate surveillance. As Selvaggio says, "When we are watched we are fundamentally changed. We perform rather than be."⁴⁴ Absent here is an awareness of the ways in which individuals always perform and craft presentations of themselves for others.⁴⁵ As surveillance studies scholars have shown, greater risks may come from individuals being *unaware* of the extent to which data are severed from the context of their production and acted upon in other spaces and times, enabling the invisible judging and sorting of populations.⁴⁶ Moreover, technological systems are not separate from social context, somehow tainting authentic individual behavior; rather, they are constitutive and co-productive of those contexts, enabling social action and interaction in ways that are always value-laden, regardless of the system in question.⁴⁷ From the starting point of an Enlightenment-inflected belief in a pure, universal, and non-performative core identity, the URME masks may spark conversation about individual privacy rights, but they are ill equipped to tackle the unequal effects of marginalizing surveillance in society.

A different masking project called the "Facial Weaponization Suite" presents a much more complex artistic intervention.⁴⁸ Created by Zach Blas, this project captures the images of many different faces and aggregates them into one, grotesque, cellular, plastic mask that confounds face-recognition systems and defies legibility by people or machines (see [figure 3](#)). Blas forges "collective masks" of this sort to critique regimes of visibility that reduce people to static identity categories and discriminate against them. Thus, one of his masks, "The Fag Face Mask," responds to scientific studies claiming that queerness can be read reliably on one's facial features, which could lead to automated algorithms for detecting sexual orientation in the absence of any other information.⁴⁹ The so-called Fag Face Mask, then, is a monstrous merging of the faces of many self-identified queer men, perhaps showing the grotesqueness of bigoted categorization while also serving as a symbolic weapon against the unnamed enemies who would control through stigmatizing visualizations.

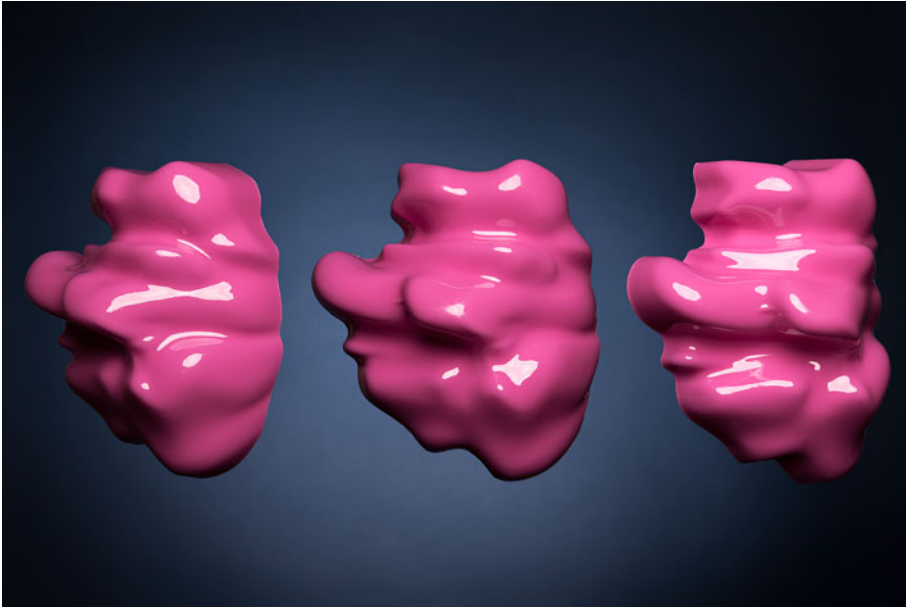


Figure 3. Zach Blas. Facial Weaponization Suite: Fag Face Mask—October 20, 2012, Los Angeles, CA. Photo by Christopher O’Leary.

Rather than simply substitute one bizarre collective representation for an alienating singular one, the Facial Weaponization Suite aspires to erase identity markers altogether. It denies the legitimacy of a market of discrete identities and the systems that would reduce people to them. Blas and colleagues explain:

We want a technology that allows us to escape regimes of identification standardization and control, like facial recognition technologies and biometrics. In response to this, we ask, What are the tactics and techniques for making our faces nonexistent? How do we flee this visibility into the fog of a queerness that refuses to be recognized? We propose to start making faces our weapons. We can learn many faces and wear them interchangeably. A face is like being armed. . . . Today, in our biometric age, existence has become a means of control. . . . Becoming nonexistent turns your face into a fog, and fog makes revolt possible.⁵⁰

This articulation epitomizes the logic of the “right to hide,” a right to become nonexistent and invisible to institutions. The envisioned space of fog purportedly frees one from social constraint and expectation, affording identity experimentation and potentially “revolt.” Oddly, this play with masks and faces references a universal “we” and advocates for the erasure of difference, or at least its markers, in the service of individual autonomy. It performs a kind of post-identity politics’ right to social and political equality without any signifiers of difference, which are themselves seen as oppressive impositions on the part of others. The fog is a utopic non-space where the artist can speak on behalf of others, not because everyone is him, as in the case with Selvaggio’s URME project, but because no one is anyone—people, as defined by difference, do not exist.

At the same time, the Facial Weaponization Suite communicates additional messages that deserve interpretation. What does it mean to take seriously dubious scientific claims about being able to read queerness on people's faces? Critical science studies scholarship has revealed over and over how cultural prejudices are encoded in supposedly impartial scientific measurements of biological difference. This can be seen, for instance, in assertions dating back to Aristotle about the inferiority of women due to them having "less heat," or in nineteenth century claims that criminality could be read from one's physiognomy, or in mid-twentieth century research professing to have found bodily markers of homosexuality on women's genitalia.⁵¹ In each case, science reproduces the values of its practitioners and its wider culture. In accepting scientific claims about queerness and the body, Blas might be unwittingly affirming the validity of constructed truths about measurable biological difference. In essence, the Facial Weaponization Suite says that the identity markers ascribed to us by institutions, including the institution of mainstream science, are accurate, so only by erasing and evading (not debunking) them can we obtain freedom. Additionally, it is worth questioning the semantic appeal to militarized action. If faces are already being enlisted in militarized security responses to constructed terrorist threats, for instance through biometric face-recognition capture at borders or on city streets, then military logics already prevail and infuse dominant discourses and practices.⁵² The hegemony of militaristic framings bounds what is viewed as possible and practical, positioning resistance problematically as threatening to the nation state and deserving of criminalization. Perhaps, taking a cue from Jacques Derrida,⁵³ a better goal might be to *defuse*, instead of combat, the violence of binary logics. Such a discursive move could inspire a greater tolerance for ambiguous identities and the messiness of social worlds.

Dangerous Play on the Surveillance Fashion Runway

On a raised stage in a low-lit room, soft azure lights project gyrating patterns on the crowd as male and female models strut across the stage. A mix of house music with drum loops and simulated record scratching sets the tone, creating an edgy vibe to frame the presentation of novel surveillance and anti-surveillance clothing and accessories. Most of the designs incorporate electronic sensors and circuitry, either facilitating or obstructing the flow of personal information. An MC struggles to read the descriptive text for each design, as the models too have difficulty showing off their items without dropping them or engaging in exaggerated miming to communicate their intended functions.⁵⁴ All of this—which was the "Anti/Surveillance Fashion Show" presented by designers from the Noisebridge hackerspace in 2010—generates a spectacle of frivolity, where performers poke ironic fun at their mock serious designs while audience members look on with vague curiosity.

First, there is a demonstration of the Dazzle makeup described above. The voiceover asserts, "This will give you the freedom to travel around in public, free from the unblinking eye of computer surveillance."⁵⁵ Next, affecting a secret-agent

aesthetic, two men in dark suits and sunglasses model computerized belts that can surreptitiously scour nearby networks, collecting serial numbers, passwords, and other sensitive information. Another belt with “vibrating motors” and “digital compass” can constantly communicate the direction “north” to the wearer, who is cast as an agent on someone’s trail: “So he won’t lose track as you try to evade him in a twist of streets.”⁵⁶ In response to potential desires for restricting one’s exposure, the MC later opines: “Then, on the other hand, why try? . . . Get in on the game. Share, share. Over share.”⁵⁷ On cue, a woman takes center stage to present a handbag with an electronic display that constantly reveals the purse’s contents, which, the MC explains, will allow her to move quickly through security checkpoints. Each of these designs promises a kind of “freedom” or empowerment through selective sharing (e.g., a face without face recognition, a purse that enables transparency) or secretive data acquisition (e.g., network-sniffing belts). This play with security becomes part of what Lauren Berlant describes as an emerging aesthetic around precarity, where “adaptation to the adaptive imperative is producing a whole new precarious public sphere, defined by debates about how to rework insecurity in the ongoing present, and defined as well by an emerging aesthetic.”⁵⁸ I would assert that surveillance is not challenged or resisted by this aesthetic so much as it is manipulated or augmented to establish a façade of constrained freedom for individuals.

When the fashion show turns toward issues of harassment of and violence against women, the severe limitations of this neoliberal logic of freedom become even more apparent. There are women’s shoes equipped with panic alarms to “tell people to stay back and for her handlers to pick her up.”⁵⁹ As an accompaniment to a hoodie that blinds cameras with LED lights, another design, referred to as a “rear window shade,” allows women to see when someone is sneaking up on them; the MC explains: “Of course, as a soloist, no one’s going to watch her back but her. . . . [The rear window shade will] allow her to surprise her surprise assailants.”⁶⁰ Finally, there is a device for dealing with upskirt photographs of women’s underwear. As a woman sashays to center stage in a very short skirt and high heels, the MC asks:

But what about the common problem of the upskirt? What is a girl to do? Fortunately, she has the ‘crotch dazzler’. . . . She simply need not worry. . . . [The reflector on her underwear] will show only flashes of the paparazzi’s cameras rather than her privates.⁶¹

The message delivered by each of these designs is a variation on the theme of not worrying about the male gaze or sexual assault. Technological gadgets are presented as exerting a form of delegated patriarchal protection (with the panic alarm shoes and crotch dazzler panties) or individual responsibility for detecting and evading attackers (with the rear window shade).⁶² The designs problematically assume both the inevitability of dangers and the vulnerability of women. As Hille Koskela⁶³ has illustrated, external security efforts tend to construct women as passive victims and sexualized objects, while responsibilization motifs do little to undermine these hegemonic constructs. Violence against women is normalized with these designs, just as is exposure to public surveillance, which effectively removes from the discussion

any question about how to change the underlying cultural conditions of violence and abuse.

The playfulness of the anti/surveillance fashion show belies the stated aspirations of Noisebridge. As the group writes:

Constantly under the lens of the camera, fashion is a natural form in which to explore the relationship between surveillance and culture. How are we watched? How do we watch? How do we present ourselves to the eyes of the world? . . . Anti/Surveillance [is] a runway show that explores the role of and our relationship with surveillance in our society.⁶⁴

On the whole, as this section has suggested, the Noisebridge designs fail miserably at achieving any critical responses to these issues. Instead, they normalize unchecked exposure to surveillance in public, especially surveillance that can lead to objectification of and violence against women. The dominant message of this fashion show is that women and others must take responsibility, through the consumption of anti-surveillance clothing and devices, for anticipating and managing dangers. A semblance of freedom is secured through such consumptive practices. Clearly, this postpones any engagement with root causes of gendered violence.

Conclusion

The aestheticization of resistance enacted by anti-surveillance camouflage and fashion ultimately fails to address the exclusionary logics of contemporary state and corporate surveillance. These anti-surveillance practices emerge at this historical juncture because of a widespread recognition of unchecked, pervasive surveillance and popular criticism of government and corporate overreach. The key to the popularity of these artistic efforts may be that they mobilize the trappings of radical intervention, in highly stylized form, but do so in ways that do not compel people to challenge state visibility projects. They offer hyper-individualized and consumer-oriented adaptations to undesired surveillance. To the extent that such efforts can be seen as critical interventions, they rely on an appeal to the pedagogical potential of art to galvanize meaningful political change. As Jacques Rancière explains:

Art is presumed to be effective politically because it displays the marks of domination, or parodies mainstream icons, or even because it leaves the spaces reserved for it and becomes a social practice. . . . The logic of mimesis consists in conferring on the artwork the power of the effects that it is supposed to elicit on the behavior of spectators.⁶⁵

In the case of the examples covered in this paper, it is clear that while some of the signifiers of critical art are present, for instance with the Fag Face Mask's blurring of institutionally imposed identities, the primary message is nonetheless one of accommodating pervasive surveillance and inviting a playful dance with it. Recognition of the violent, unequal, and marginalizing applications of surveillance is bracketed or denied in the presentation of universal, neoliberal subjects in search of a modicum of (fashionable) control over their exposure.

This is not to say that play has no place in resistance efforts. As Jeffrey Juris⁶⁶ has illustrated in his ethnography of the anti-corporate globalization movement, play and frivolity can sometimes succeed in ways that oppositional tactics cannot. For example, in spaces of confrontation, people playing music or staging performances while dressed in elaborate costumes are effective because they are symbolically powerful solidarity-building activities that are not physically threatening to the police. Juris writes, "Such playful provocation represents a form of ritual opposition, a symbolic overturning of hierarchy much like medieval carnival.... Play, in particular, reveals the possibility of radically reorganizing current social arrangements."⁶⁷ In the mode of anti-surveillance, groups like the Surveillance Camera Players similarly embody a spirit of play as they stage performances for video surveillance camera operators and spectators in public places like New York City subway stations.⁶⁸ Perhaps because of the public setting of these performances, which usually end with police or security guards escorting players off public property, these interventions may have the effect of fostering in audiences a critique of policing priorities and the commodification of public space. Play of this sort may be an effective form of resistance that alters public awareness and cultural sensibilities, but it can be a difficult task for such interventions to problematize inequalities that can fester within assumptions of shared rights.

Ultimately, discourses of "the right to hide" are weak variations of "the right to privacy," both of which depend on conceptually inadequate and empirically deficient mobilizations of universal rights. Indeed, poor and racialized populations subjected to the most invasive forms of monitoring are much more concerned with issues of domination and control, along with the practicalities of survival, than they are with legal or philosophical abstractions like privacy.⁶⁹ Privacy is also a deeply individualistic concept, poorly suited to forestall discriminatory practices against social groups.⁷⁰ As Sami Coll explains, "The notion of privacy, as a critique of [the] information society, has been assimilated and reshaped by and in favour of informational capitalism, notably by being over-individualized through the self-determination principle."⁷¹ The discourse of the right to hide, as with the right to privacy, accepts the legitimacy of state demands for legible populations and offers symbolic compromises to assert degrees of freedom within those constraints.

Instead of being content with artistic forms of hiding, countervisuality projects, by contrast, would "look back" *and* pursue alternatives to totalizing regimes of state visuality. They would seek to undermine the authority of state control by challenging the capitalist imperatives that lend legitimacy to forms of state violence and oppression.⁷² What is required is a full engagement with "the political," which, as Rancière describes, is always in opposition to the police:

The police is not a social function but a symbolic constitution of the social. The essence of the police lies neither in repression nor even in control over the living. Its essence lies in a certain way of dividing up the sensible. . . . Politics, by contrast, consists in transforming this space of "move-along," of circulation, into a space for the appearance of a subject: the people, the workers, the citizens.⁷³

Artistic intervention, broadly construed, can serve an important role in disrupting the authority of the police to structure the sensible, or exclusionary logics in societies more generally. Whether through filming and documenting cases of police misconduct,⁷⁴ engaging in culture-jamming activities to raise awareness of corporate malfeasance,⁷⁵ or challenging the status quo of rape culture by hacking into computer systems and publicizing attempts to cover up sexual assault,⁷⁶ there are many viable prototypes for artists and activists.⁷⁷

While it is uncertain the extent to which the designs discussed in this paper could ever achieve countervisuality, they could move in this direction if they sought to disrupt structural—as opposed to superficial—asymmetries in transparency. For instance, instead of fractal face paint, masks, or fashion accessories to hide from identification systems, alternative projects might “hijack”⁷⁸ computer algorithms to identify abusive police personnel or perpetrators of violence against women and hold them accountable. Projects might make visible data on police shootings, stop-and-frisk profiling, security contracts, drone attacks, or illegal rendition of terrorist suspects.⁷⁹ Alternatively, artists could launch projects like the “Million Hoodies Movement for Justice”⁸⁰ that emerged after the 2012 shooting death of black teenager Trayvon Martin by neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman in Florida; the “hoodies” used in this movement might disrupt legibility by surveillance apparatuses, but their more important function is to express solidarity, protest systemic violence against racialized groups, and galvanize change.

By contrast, the anti-surveillance designs presented in this paper offer narrow forms of resistance that are unlikely to challenge current regimes of visibility. The reason for that has to do with how the artworks frame problems with surveillance as universally experienced or as needing individualized and product-based solutions to manage—rather than correct—systemic social problems. What gets left out of this framing is a serious discussion of race and gender differences, a critique of surveillance commodification, and reflexive awareness of the possibility that the artistic interventions could contribute to the harmful conditions they seek to change.

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Notes

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- [5] Stephen Graham, *Cities under Siege: The New Military Urbanism* (London, UK: Verso, 2010).
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- [9] Mirzoeff.
- [10] John Gilliom, *Overseers of the Poor: Surveillance, Resistance, and the Limits of Privacy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Shoshana Magnet and Tara Rodgers, "Stripping for the State: Whole Body Imaging Technologies and the Surveillance of Othered Bodies," *Feminist Media Studies* 12, no. 1 (2012): 101–18; Torin Monahan, "Editorial: Surveillance and Inequality," *Surveillance & Society* 5, no. 3 (2008): 217–26; Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
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- [24] cf. Luis A. Fernandez and Laura Huey, "Editorial: Is Resistance Futile? Thoughts on Resisting Surveillance," *Surveillance & Society* 6, no. 3 (2009): 198–202.
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- [29] David Barnard-Wills, *Surveillance and Identity: Discourse, Subjectivity and the State* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012); Toby Beauchamp, "Artful Concealment and Strategic Visibility: Transgender Bodies and U.S. State Surveillance after 9/11," *Surveillance & Society* 6, no. 4 (2009): 356–66; Paisley Currah and Lisa Jean Moore, "'We Won't Know Who You Are': Contesting Sex Designations in New York City Birth Certificates," *Hypatia* 24, no. 3 (2009): 113–35; David Lyon, *Identifying Citizens: ID Cards as Surveillance* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2009); Irma van der Ploeg, "The Illegal Body: 'Eurodac' and the Politics of Biometric Identification," *Ethics and Information Technology* 1(1999): 295–302.
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- [31] An interesting paradox emerges from these examples: hiding becomes a form of expression, and uniqueness is asserted by obscuring identity markers. This can be juxtaposed to other treatments of surveillance and media, such as reality television or films like *The Hunger Games*, where *performance of non-performance* signals "authenticity." Rachel E. Dubrofsky, "Surveillance on Reality Television and Facebook: From Authenticity to Flowing Data," *Communication Theory* 21, no. 2 (2011): 111–29; Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Emily D. Ryalls, "The Hunger Games: Performing Not-Performing to Authenticate Femininity and Whiteness," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 31, no. 5 (2014): 395–409. CV Dazzle, by contrast, overtly performs its own performance in an attempt to create a space for the cultivation of authentic subjects. It is worth probing the extent to which this is a largely white and privileged form of expression. As Rachel Hall asserts, in the pursuit of state security, the contemporary "aesthetics of transparency" holds the white body as the transparent ideal, whereas the perceived opaqueness of non-white bodies is viewed as threatening and in need of further investigation. Rachel Hall, "Of Ziploc Bags and Black Holes: The Aesthetics of Transparency in the War on Terror," *The Communication Review* 10, no. 4 (2007): 319–46.
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- [43] Charlotte Bell, "The Inner City and the 'Hoodie'," *Wasafiri* 28, no. 4 (2013): 38–44; Ross Tuttle and Erin Schneider, "Stopped-and-Frisked: 'For Being a F**King Mutt'," *The Nation*, 8 October 2012, <http://www.thenation.com/article/170413/stopped-and-frisked-being-fking-mutt-video#axzz2YU9ugp4y> (accessed May 25, 2014); Tyler Wall and Travis Linnemann, "Staring Down the State: Police Power, Visual Economies, and the 'War on Cameras'," *Crime, Media, Culture* 10, no. 2 (2014): 133–49.
- [44] Katz.
- [45] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London, UK: Allen Lane, 1969).
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- of *Difference: Cultural Politics of Contemporary Science and Medicine* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011); Sandra G. Harding, ed., *The "Racial" Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993); Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
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- [53] Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988).
- [54] Angela Sheehan, "Noisebridge Anti/Surveillance Fashion Show," 29 May 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mbsI2UXA8U> (accessed May 25, 2014).
- [55] Ibid.
- [56] Ibid.
- [57] Ibid.
- [58] Lauren Gail Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 195.
- [59] Sheehan.
- [60] Ibid.
- [61] Ibid.
- [62] With these designs, the discourse of individual responsibility mirrors the dominant discourse surrounding rape. Women are problematically framed as complicit in their own abuse if they don't take steps to minimize their exposure to potential objectification or violence, where now those steps might include the adoption of surveillance shields such as "crotch dazzlers."
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- [67] Ibid., 140–141.
- [68] Torin Monahan, "Counter-Surveillance as Political Intervention?," *Social Semiotics* 16, no. 4 (2006): 515–34; Surveillance Camera Players, *We Know You Are Watching* (Factory School: Southpaw Culture, 2006).
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- [70] David Murakami Wood, et al. (eds.), *A Report on the Surveillance Society* (Wilmslow, UK: Office of the Information Commissioner, 2006); Jason W. Patton, "Protecting Privacy in Public?: Surveillance Technologies and the Value of Public Places," *Ethics and Information Technology* 2(2000): 181–7.
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- [72] Armand Mattelart, *The Globalization of Surveillance*, trans. Susan Taponier and James A. Cohen (Malden, MA: Polity, 2010). See Wall and Linnemann for a complementary analysis of police crackdowns on citizens filming of their activities, which Wall and Linnemann read as a "diagnostic moment" for interrogating the ways in which the social order is fabricated through police elimination of perceived threats to security. Tyler Wall and Travis Linnemann, "Staring Down the State: Police Power, Visual Economies, and the "War on Cameras"," *Crime, Media, Culture* (2014): 1–17. Furthermore, as Reeves and Packer argue, inquiry into the intersections of police and media should also attend to the ways in which

the police control and restrict access to the logistical capacities of media: “police maintain superiority not simply through a monopoly on the use of violence, but by creating a monopoly on the use of logistical media as well.” Joshua Reeves and Jeremy Packer, “Police Media: The Governance of Territory, Speed, and Communication,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 10, no. 4 (2013): 359–84.

- [73] Rancière, 36–37.
- [74] Wall and Linnemann; Laura Huey, Kevin Walby, and Aaron Doyle, “Cop Watching in the Downtown Eastside: Exploring the Use of (Counter)Surveillance as a Tool of Resistance,” in *Surveillance and Security: Technological Politics and Power in Everyday Life*, ed. Torin Monahan (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006); Stephanie Simon, “Suspicious Encounters: Ordinary Preemption and the Securitization of Photography,” *Security Dialogue* 43, no. 2 (2012): 157–73.
- [75] Amy Goodman, “Yes Men Hoax on BBC Reminds World of Dow Chemical’s Refusal to Take Responsibility for Bhopal Disaster,” 6 December 2004, http://www.democracynow.org/2004/12/6/yes_men_hoax_on_bbc_reminds (accessed 6 October 2014).
- [76] Thomas Prior, “Anonymous Vs. Steubenville,” *Rolling Stone*, 27 November 2013, <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/anonymous-vs-steubenville-20131127> (accessed May 25, 2014).
- [77] As an important caveat, in keeping with this paper’s critical approach to anti-surveillance artworks, forms of resistance should not be romanticized but instead subjected to additional scrutiny and problematization. For example, Huey, Walby, and Doyle’s empirical study on Cop Watch in Toronto found that contrary to the claims of Cop Watch members, on the whole the community in question did not feel that this group represented them or their interests. Likewise, each of these interventions also runs the risk of creating new harms, such as when the hacktivist collective Anonymous publicized the rape victim’s name in the 2012 Steubenville, Ohio rape case, leading to further harassment of and threats to the victim and her family. As Heather Woods cautions:

digital activists [must] weigh carefully the benefits of visibility alongside possible limitations of that goal. In particular, feminist activists must guard against losing control of a campaign’s message and be especially cautious of overexposing potentially sensitive individuals related to the cause.

Heather Suzanne Woods, “Anonymous, Steubenville, and the Politics of Visibility: Questions of Virality and Exposure in the Case of #Oprollredroll and #OccupySteubenville,” *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 6 (2014): 1096–8 (quoted p. 1096).

- [78] Hille Koskela, “Hijacking Surveillance? The New Moral Landscapes of Amateur Photographing,” in *Technologies of Insecurity: The Surveillance of Everyday Life*, eds. Katja Franko Aas, Helene Oppen Gundhus, and Heidi Mork Lomell (New York, NY: Routledge-Cavendish, 2009).
- [79] Some of Trevor Paglen’s excellent work has operated in this vein to identify CIA agents involved in extraordinary rendition, “black sites” where torture likely took place, and drone flights. Trevor Paglen and Rebecca Solnit, *Invisible: Covert Operations and Classified Landscapes* (New York, NY: Aperture, 2010); Tim Gaynor, “Artists Take Aim at Hidden World of Modern US Surveillance,” *Al Jazeera America*, 26 September 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/9/26/covert-operationsscottsdalemuseumcontemporaryart.html> (accessed October 2, 2014).
- [80] <http://www.mhoodies.org/> (accessed October 6, 2014).