



Webcams, TV Shows and Mobile phones: Empowering Exhibitionism*

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Abstract

The roles of visual representations have been multiplied. In contrast of being targets of the ever-increasing surveillance, people seek to play an active role in the production of images, thus, *reclaiming the copyright of their own lives*. In this article, three examples of this development are examined. 'Reality shows' in TV aim to create an impression of the viewer participating in crime control. *Mobile phones with cameras* enable individuals to become active subjects in circulating images and to participate in 'counter-surveillance'. 'Home webcams' present daily lives of individuals in the Internet, generating new subjectivities. They change the conventional code of what can or cannot be shown, and thus, expose cultural tensions surrounding epistemological conceptions of vision, gender, identities, and moralities. By revealing their intimate lives, people are liberated from shame and the 'need' to hide, which leads to something called 'empowering exhibitionism'. These deliberately produced images contest many of the conventional ways of thinking how visibility and transparency connote with power and control. To be (more) seen is not always to be less powerful. By rebelling against the shame embedded in the conception of the private, people *refuse to be humble*. They may gain power, but it does not head for control over others but, rather, blur and mix the lines of control. Televisualisation, cyberspace presentation, and mobile phone counter observation also raise new questions considering 'traditional' surveillance. Images can be played with, and can work as a form of resistance. Sometimes it is more radical to *reveal* than to hide.

Digital individuals doubled

Objects which we are used to calling surveillance cameras are at present times not only watching from above but can be hidden, miniaturised, crawling or flying. The most peculiar ones have been called 'cyberinsects' (Whitaker, 1999: 88). Despite the increasing critique of surveillance and demands for regulations, we have already reached the point where surveillance cameras can be literally anywhere. Anybody may watch anybody, anytime. Cameras view a huge range of spaces and activities from public urban space to private summer cottages, from industrial manufacturing processes to babies and their nannies, from military targets to the internal organs of human beings. In my recent article I have called this era of endless representations 'the camera era' (Koskela, 2003).

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When surveillance cameras are combined with visitors' registers and 'people-finding tools', such as face recognition systems, the visible surveillance is linked to other forms of information, forming a net of technological control (e.g. Curry, 1997; Graham, 1998; Whitaker, 1999; Norris, 2002). Bodily individuals become, in one sense, intertwined with 'digital individuals'. When webcams distribute images to the audience in the Internet, local gazes are connected with the global community and bodily individuals become intertwined with 'digital individuals' in another sense (Lyon, 1998; Green, 1999). Altogether, people have become 'doubled' digital individuals. As surveillance spreads from material space to cyberspace the 'panoptic power' is replaced by what different scholars have called a 'polyopticon' (Allen, 1994), a 'superpanopticon' (Poster, 1995), a 'synopticon' (Mathiesen, 1997), an 'omnicon' (Groombridge, 2002), or a 'neo-panopticon' (Mann *et al.*, 2003). This condition of 'over-production' and increasing circulation of images will mean that there is not only need for traditional empirical research on surveillance as we know it but also need for conceptual understanding of the new forms of looking, seeing, presenting and circulating images.

'The promise of reality'

In his article *I am a videocam*, Tabor (2001:125) states that 'the algebra of surveillance structures the reveries of voyeurism, exhibitionism and narcissism'. 'Reality shows' in TV have become common all around the Western world (e.g. Pinck, 2000; Groombridge, 2002; Weibel, 2002; Zizek, 2002). Some of them, such as *Big Brother* or *Temptation Island*, create new 'artificial realities' and others, such as *Crimewatch UK*, *I Witness* or *Cops*, present material from surveillance camera and other video tapes endeavoring to create an impression of the viewer being able to both verify and participate in what is happening 'in the real world'. This genre is something of a 'crime control pornography' where the viewers can, with a pretext of crime control, both moralise and peep into the field of criminal action (Korander, 2000: 185). These shows have high levels of interactivity with mobile phone numbers where you can call or send an SMS message, and Internet sites (Groombridge, 2002: 40). Fighting crime as well as crime itself can make "an excellent, exiting, eminently watchable show" (Bauman, 2000: 215), the "ultimate escapist fiction" (Zizek, 2002: 226). In and through the images, crime becomes a commodity. The higher "the fetish character" of an image, the more valuable it is "as a good" (Weibel, 2002: 211). As Presdee (2000: 65) accurately argues "we all participate in the creation of crime as we consume the filming of the carnival of chase, becoming part of the process of production of real crime and real violence".

Visual images are loaded with "the promise of reality" (Groombridge, 2002: 38). Local presence, as Virilio (2002: 109) has presented, is replaced not by absence but, rather, by 'tele-presence' – 'local time' loses its meaning in the glorification of 'real time'. The fiction becomes "indistinguishable from reality" (Zizek, 2002: 226). We are seduced by the idea that what we see is 'real' – perhaps more real than our own everyday lives. Simultaneously, individuals increasingly 'disappear' in the televisualisation of their lives (Koskela, 2003: 305). The everyday life appears gloomy and trivial compared to the ever-spinning action of the virtual lives. The individual experience *melts* into the collective imagination. According to Weibel (2002: 214) "the

real becomes a copy of its image”. The boundless (re-re-re-)representations of visual images blur the line between reality and fantasy, original and simulation.

Reality TV is only one of the ways in which the visual images of surveillance cameras are circulated. It is institutional and often commercial, so usually individuals do not have an active role in producing it – except when it comes to some programs presenting ‘the funniest home videos’. Webcams are of a different order. Also many of them are institutional and commercial, but there is a huge amount of webcams installed by individuals, for other individuals, without any commercial tone. The webcam network can be conceptualised as a “grassroots telepresence project” (Campanella, 2004: 61). Indeed, from the very early times of the Internet – initially without live cameras – it has been claimed to be an arena for interactive democracy, civic activism and free speech (see e.g. Shade, 1996; Wertheim, 1997; Terranova, 2001). Individuals also contribute in running webcams that are more indifferent, or ‘just presenting’.

From place marketing to cyberstalking

Starting from “a humble coffee pot” (Campanella, 2004: 58) – the first webcam ever, installed in the Cambridge University campus – the phenomenon has subsequently exploded. At present, the range of webcams is amazing. One can click into a collection of family living rooms from Japan to the Netherlands², a hair dressers salon in Spain³, to see elephants in a zoo in Germany⁴, or wild elephants in a South African nature reserve⁵, have a look at the scenes of the Antarctica⁶, or check what the road conditions are like in Northern Finland⁷, what the weather is like in Moscow⁸, or how crowded the beaches are in Rio de Janeiro⁹.

Some sites are presented as virtual cities where digital individuals live their lives parallel to the ‘real ones’, some promote the images of real cities being an increasingly important place marketing tool. Especially the most iconic global tourist cities provide images that aim to give to these material places new meaning in the virtual space. Apart from being part of the virtual realm, webcams can, indeed, create ‘real interest on a real place’ adding to them “a whole new stratum of cultural space” (Campanella, 2004: 59). Privately run ‘*home webcams*’ present daily lives of individuals. While all surveillance tends to have a gendered dimension (see e.g. Hillier, 1996; Ainley, 1998; Koskela, 2002) private visual representations are often explicitly connected with *sexuality*. Pictures distributed in the Internet range from young women turning their real-life images into pornography – by charging the viewers of their home pages – to gay communities building a global collective identity by presenting their lives in the net.

² <http://www.2c4.com/familycams/index.shtml#>

³ <http://www.mikel-luzea.com/english/webcam/webcam.html>

⁴ http://cgi.zoo-leipzig.de/de/nc_camera_off.htm

⁵ <http://www.elecams.org/>

⁶ <http://www-old.aad.gov.au/wb/webcams/davis.asp>

⁷ http://www.tiehallinto.fi/alk/kelikamerat/kelikamerat_5.html

⁸ <http://www.ophoto.ru/camera/>

⁹ <http://www.webcam-index.com/cgi-bin/links/jump.fcgi?ID=3154>

Especially in the early times of the Internet it was claimed to become a site of identity formation, critical expression, and resistance (Wakeford, 1998; Cheddie, 1999; Higgins *et al.*, 1999). Further, it was assumed that the virtual realm would replace essential parts of the physical one, that “cyberspace threatened the robustness and vitality of the so-called ‘real’ world” (Campanella, 2004: 57). Later, these idealistic notions have been questioned in arguing that the Internet actually supports global capitalism and can also be conceptualised as “a more technologically sophisticated version of the “private city”, sanitizing the urban of its social encounters” (Nunes, 2001: 63). The Internet provides a channel of extensive surveillance and control of the individuals and moves ‘surveillance integration’ to a new level (Lyon, 1998). The prejudices of physical life are reflected in the virtual life more than was thought in the beginning. As Higgins and others (1999: 111) point out, “[t]he electronic frontier has a history, geography and demography grounded firmly in the non-virtual realities of gender, class, race and other cultural variables that impact upon our experiences of the technological”. Further, concepts such as ‘cyberfacism’ (Davis, 1995), ‘cyberhate’ (Zickmund, 1997) or ‘cyberstalking’ (Adam, 2001) have emerged, arguing that the virtual environment is by no means free from the cultural tension of the material world.

Mobile phone ‘surveillance’

While there already is a good amount of reasoning and empirical research on reality TV and some also on webcams, the third increasingly important way of creating and circulating images remains more or less under-researched until now, namely, the mobile phones with cameras. The increase in the amount of camera phones is likely to crucially change the role of visual representations. Finland provides a good example of this. Already, almost every adult Finn (and many children as well) carries a mobile phone (Kopomaa, 2000). Each phone approximately lasts between two or three years, and many of the new models have a camera installed in them. This will mean that within a couple of years almost everyone will carry a camera. What kind of images will become popular, what uses will they have, and where they will be circulated, remains unanswered. Although camera phones do not literally form a surveillance system, they can create a condition, which is reminiscent of surveillance.

Mobile phones have been discussed in relation to the multiple new forms of control. They are claimed to constitute “a notorious security risk” since it is possible to locate the geographical position of the users (Whitaker, 1999: 94-95). Therefore, by using their mobiles individuals “constantly participate in their own surveillance” (Lyon, 2001: 115). However, individuals may also be able to use mobiles for ‘counter-surveillance’. By shooting pictures the camera phone owners become active subjects in creating and circulating images from both private and public spheres. Further, when distributing images the information about geographical positions may become somewhat irrelevant since it will be more important to *reveal* than to *hide*.

It may seem exaggerated to state that the role of images circulated privately by individuals will change dramatically with mobile phone cameras, as most people already do have (traditional) cameras. However, a camera set in a mobile phone makes a difference in many respects. First, the nature of a mobile phone includes that it is constantly ‘kept on’. The cameras will be carried

by their owners to places where they previously were not often present – to mundane everyday places and to sudden unexpected incidents. Second, a camera set in a mobile phone is much less visible than a traditional camera. The act of shooting a picture does not necessarily visibly differ from the act of sending an SMS message. The lens can also be rotating, which makes it difficult to notice when and what is being shot: a mobile phone camera does not have ‘the appearance of intentionality’ (cf. Mann 2002: 534). And third, mobile phone cameras can be ‘wired’. They are much more efficiently *linked to other flows of information* than a traditional camera. The images can be immediately sent to a friend (or to a journalist), and with the WAP function models, directly to the Internet.

OCTV – visual representations everywhere

This is where the concept ‘OCTV’ becomes relevant. Altogether, the roles of visual representations have been multiplied. Weibel (2002: 219) has argued that we have arrived at the point where “we live in a society that prefers the sign to the thing, the image to the fact”. By televisualisation, cyberspace distribution, and mobile phone counter observation, surveillance systems end up being, rather than a closed circuit television an *open circuit television* – ‘OCTV’ (see also: Koskela, 2003). Arguably, the whole term CCTV is a ‘bias’: surveillance systems are often claimed to be ‘closed’ but end up being the opposite.

According to a recent survey conducted in Helsinki, people are critical towards the televisualisation of surveillance (Koskela and Tuominen, 2003). Although the citizens of Helsinki were quite pro surveillance in general, their attitudes were opposing when asked about the media and Internet use of surveillance tapes. While 90 per cent of the respondents thought the tapes could be used in crime investigations and trials, only 14 per cent agreed that they should be showed on the TV news. Only three per cent were willing to accept the use in the TV entertainment programs, such as the populist crime prevention programs or the ‘candid camera’ genre. Only two per cent thought that surveillance material should be allowed to be placed in the Internet. The respondents seemed to rely on the authorities using surveillance tapes but the media and Internet representations were seen as a threat to privacy.

This made me deliberate upon the role of the Internet in relation to surveillance tapes and other visual images. Is it really the case that the Internet is more of a threat to privacy than the activities of the authorities? What is a surveillance camera in the first place? What is the difference between a surveillance camera and the so-called webcam? What is the role of a webcam, first in public and commercial fields, and second, in the private citizens’ lives? Since the majority of the public seems to oppose Internet presentation, why do other people install cameras in their homes? How should we interpret this act?

Surveillance webcams

There is some voyeuristic fascination in looking, but, reciprocally, some exhibitionist fascination in being seen. While being under surveillance is unpleasant for some, others are eager to increase

their visibility (Groombridge, 2002: 43). No longer is surveillance necessarily interpreted as a threat but rather “as a chance to display oneself under the gaze of the camera” (Ernst, 2002: 461). The panoptic principle is “turned into the pleasure principle” (Weibel, 2002: 218). The popularity of webcams demonstrates this clearly. Webcams seem not to be an amply discussed theme among the researchers of video surveillance. Yet, the difference between a webcam and a surveillance cam is blurring, sometimes not existing.

A glaring example of this is provided by the city of Joensuu in Eastern Finland. The Police Department of Joensuu decided to install three surveillance cameras around the city market place “to promote the feeling of safety and to curb crime” – as the usual rhetoric goes. A follow up survey was conducted between years 1998 and 2000 to find out how the cameras fulfill their purpose. I was recruited by the police to carry out the study. In preparing the study, the role of the cameras was discussed in detail, including a discussion where the police insisted that the term ‘security camera’ should be used instead of the term ‘surveillance camera’. The final report (Koskela 2001) looks like any typical survey on public space surveillance. There was no doubt that the question was about video surveillance. However, exactly the same cameras are now used as webcams showing images from the market place of Joensuu in the Internet¹⁰. In this case there is no difference what so ever.

These practices obviously vary country by country. In some places it may be or become illegal to circulate surveillance camera material in the Internet. However, already the same cameras are now used for surveilling and for circulating images in many other countries. As Lyon (2004) has mentioned, one of the latest examples comes from Tehran¹¹. In addition, many private institutions and companies have cameras – to watch over the surroundings of their premises but also to promote their public images in which the Internet plays a crucial role. In countries where public space surveillance is not forbidden (meaning definitely most countries of the world), regulating the web circulation of images is practically impossible. Even in places where surveillance of public space is illegal in principle, it seems to be difficult to control: the Internet representations of Berlin¹² give an example of this.

This most obvious link, however, is perhaps not the most interesting one. The private non-commercial webcams, which promote nothing but the existence of the person presenting oneself – and perhaps her/his belonging to a certain (virtual, global) community – differ a lot from traditional surveillance cameras. Nevertheless, they can be worth studying if for no other reason, for increasing our conceptual understanding of presenting and hiding, power and control, hegemonies and resistance. It has been claimed that there is not much that an individual could do to resist the multiple forms of surveillance (Lyon, 2001). In one sense this is true, but from a wider perspective resistance can be conceptualised differently and also individuals’ roles may look different.

¹⁰ <http://www.eastpop.com/webcam.html>

¹¹ <http://ganjineh.com/section.asp?name=community&sub=webcams&location=ir.teh.gholhak>

¹² <http://www.dhm.de/webcams/>

Hacktivism and counter surveillance

While it is evident that the Internet does not provide such idealistic open, truly democratic forum that was first thought, it still has a profound role in creating and organising resistance. Political activism in the Internet – the so called ‘hactivism’ (e.g.: Terranova, 2001: 95) – takes many forms. Many (global) resistance movements originate and keep up their function through the Internet, sometimes combining computer-based and street-based actions. Alternative news production is vivid, and especially important to non-democratic countries (Terranova, 2001). News production is perhaps where the combination of the Internet and the WAP mobile phones with cameras may be the most efficient one. Yet, it must be acknowledged that the distinction between critical non-professional journalists and ‘amateur paparazzi’ will remain vague. The Internet also has a role in identity politics, for example in re-connecting ethnic identities in the ‘digital diaspora’ (Cheddie, 1999). Altogether it forms “a complex web of semi-legitimate, oppositional and alternative subcultures” (Higgins *et al.* 1999: 117). Resistance of *surveillance* has also been organised in the Internet: organisations such as *Privacy International*¹³ and *American Civil Liberties Union*¹⁴ use it effectively to promote of the surveillance critical views.

A closer look at resistance of surveillance shows that it can take at least two forms. First, it can be about *opposing surveillance* and, second, about organising *counter surveillance* – avoiding images versus creating images. Opposing surveillance includes hiding from it in one way or another, demanding tighter regulation, as well as organising ‘surveillance free zones’. An example of the latter is given by the *Institute for Applied Autonomy* in their project *iSee*¹⁵ (see also Schienke and IAA, 2002; Monahan, 2004) originally carried out in co-operation with the *New York City Surveillance Camera Project*¹⁶. The Institute for Applied Autonomy provides a service in the Internet with which a traveller in New York (and in Amsterdam and Ljubljana as well) will be able to use routes that avoid surveillance cameras as carefully as possible. There is an interactive map to which the user can indicate points of origin and destination and then the map displays a ‘path of least surveillance’. The project aims to raise public awareness and to criticise control that undermines civil liberties. It also is designed to allow people “to play a more active role in choosing when and how they are recorded” by surveillance cameras (Schienke and IAA, 2002).

Counter surveillance is another type of activism that takes place to criticise surveillance. The most famous example of this is probably Steve Mann and his group who have developed ‘wearable’ surveillance equipment to watch the watchers and to criticise their practices¹⁷. Mann’s projects aim to challenge the rhetoric of public safety embedded in surveillance, the unquestionable nature of the authorities and the criminalisation of the critic of surveillance. Further, the aim is to “examine how using wearable computing devices can promote personal *empowerment* in human/technology/human interactions” (Mann *et al.* 2003: 336, italics added).

¹³ <http://www.privacyinternational.org/>

¹⁴ <http://www.aclu.org/>

¹⁵ <http://www.appliedautonomy.com/isee/>

¹⁶ <http://www.mediaeater.com/cameras>

¹⁷ See: <http://wearcam.org/>

Mann calls his philosophical framework 'reflectionism' which means "turning those same tools against the oppressors" (Mann, 2002: 534). He also uses the global audience as a (concealed) part of his projects: *Wearable Wireless Webcam* distributes images via the Internet as he walks around wearing it. Hence, at the point where questions about the event may be asked, neither the user of the equipment nor the security guards targeted "no longer know how many copies of my transmitted pictures might have been made" (Mann, 2002: 535). One set of outfits are called *Existech* (Mann *et al.* 2003) this name being, I think, accurately reflecting the phantasmagoric fusion of human beings and technological equipment.

Exhibitionism and cyborg subjectivity

It is fairly easy to perceive the surveillance free zones, counter surveillance and hacktivism as resistance. But what about private webcams? Their role is not to diminish the amount of visual images nor to criticise the existing use of them but rather to produce more images. They rarely, if ever, make a contribution to hacktivism in the traditional sense. I shall try to find some preliminary interpretations of the role of the private home webcams.

While, as argued, in the televisualisation of human lives individuals increasingly 'disappear', the home webcams can be interpreted as a form of 'bringing back' the subject. In contrast of being targets of the ever-increasing surveillance, people seek to play an active role in the endless production of visual representations. Their shows include a "notion of self-ownership" (Mann, 2002: 533). They seek to be subjects rather than objects. In other words, it can be claimed that what they actually do is *reclaim the copyright of their own lives*. The logic is simple: if practically anyone else can circulate one's images, why not do it oneself.

The choice to present ones private life publicly can be understood as a form of *exhibitionism*. In most cultures it is considered 'normal' that you do obscuring gestures in order to protect your private life. You close the curtains when it's dark outside and light inside. You don't appear publicly if naked or in underwear. You don't allow anyone to see your sex life, unless you want to make pornography. In this respect it is a radical act to install a camera that shows your private life to an unknown audience. This, however, raises a question how we understand exhibitionism? If installing a home webcam is exhibitionism, is it automatically a form of sexual perversion? Or 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?

One of the first, most famous and also most examined (however, recently abolished) cameras has been the *JenniCAM* by Jennifer Ringley. In 1996 she installed a camera in her college dormitory room continuing her ordinary daily life under the gazes of the global audience in the Internet. While inviting the gaze of the world into her private space, she conducted her everyday tasks, did her aerobic exercises, celebrated her birthdays – and also, occasionally, had sex. This ostensibly minor change in the conventional code of what can and what cannot be shown hit deeply in the collective cultural understanding of looking and being looked at. As Jimroglou argues in her article analysing the *JenniCAM* (2001: 286) it "reveals cultural tensions surrounding epistemological conceptions of vision, gender, and identity and raises questions for future

conversations regarding the role of technology in the representation and construction of gendered subjects". Jenni created a paradoxical stage, playing with conventional moral codes, in which she "stabilizes and yet disrupts the process of subject formation by repeating yet resisting cultural norms" (Jimroglou, 2001: 291).

After keeping up the camera for a while Jenni received threats – more precisely, was demanded to 'pose' at particular time for one of her net-admirers (see Burgin, 2002). In one sense her 'show' was a way of creating a subject capable of resisting the traditional readings of female embodiment, however, at the same time it "would seem to offer the perfect heterosexual male fantasy" (Jimroglou, 2001: 287). The harassment she faced was a form of cyberstalking (Adam, 2001). She closed the camera for a while, but then eventually put it back again. When she was asked *why* she chose to reinstall the camera she replied "I felt lonely without the camera" (quoted in Burgin, 2002: 230). I find this statement striking. It places the camera into a position of a companion, or perhaps a pet. Or perhaps a part of Jenni herself? The camera can be interpreted as a component in an integration of body and technology, an object embedded in a 'cyborg subjectivity' (Haraway, 1997) where the corporeal and the mechanic fuse into each other forming an entirety.

The life of Jennifer Ringley has been analysed in a psychoanalytical context, the image being seen as a window, a mirror, a fetish, a cinema etc. (e.g. Jimroglou, 2001; Burgin, 2002; Zizek, 2002). My aim here is not to provide another psychoanalytical explanation. Rather, I use her as an example of what is happening in the field of vision. She is a particular case, indeed, but she is a pioneer rather than an exception. Since the mid 1990s home webcams have become more and more popular and spread all around the world. I shall apply to this phenomenon some of the concepts that are well known in the video surveillance discussion: power, control, and agency.

Regime of order / regime of shame

Jenni's story made me think about something that could be called '*empowering exhibitionism*'. With the cameras Jenni and others like her discuss with two fundamental regimes through which power operates. I shall call these the *regime of order* and the *regime of shame*. These can be understood as two common ways of thinking how visibility and transparency connote with power and control.

By the regime of order, I mean the ways in which society regulates individuals. Gathering knowledge is seen as a form of maintaining control, a look equates with a "judgmental gaze" (Burgin, 2002: 235). Everyday life is regulated, not only potential criminal acts. The regime of order was perhaps most clearly seen taking place in the former socialist countries but it also has its role in the capitalist world. A telling example of this is what Presdee (2000) has called the 'criminalisation of culture'. By the regime of shame I mean individuals' internalisation of control, in the Foucauldian sense. The idea of having or doing something that cannot be shown. The basic 'need' for privacy. The regime of shame keeps people meek and obedient as efficiently as any control coming from outside. Rejecting it, is unacceptable and immodest. Further, these controls

coming from outside and from inside are most effective when functioning together: the combination of fear and shame ensures submissiveness.

Indeed, home webcams challenge these both. By revealing their private intimate lives individuals refuse to take part in these two regimes. If this is exhibitionism that succeeds in overcoming these two, then exhibitionism can truly work as a form of empowerment. The liberation from shame and from the 'need' to hide leads to empowerment. Conceptually, when you show 'everything' you become 'free': no one can 'capture' you any more, since *there is nothing left to capture*.

These voluntary shows have something to do with power, but it is difficult to grasp what exactly. Home webcams seem to be opening up *radically new subjectivities*, which are yet to be understood (cf. Featherstone and Burrows, 1995). What Jimroglou (2001: 289) argues in interpreting JenniCAM is that it "challenges traditional definitions of the subject and poses a unique way to conceive of subjectivity and the agency and power that is implied therein". It is difficult to place home webcams into the ordinary conceptualisation of power. While a subject and an object are 'fused', as happens when the 'object' of a camera simultaneously "oversees her own viewing" and, hence, is "refuting and resisting the traditional representations of objectification" (Jimroglou, 2001: 292), the essence of power seems to fade away.

The differentiation between dominating power and resisting power might be helpful here. Sharp and others (2000: 2) define *dominating power* as "[...] that power which attempts to control and coerce others, impose its will upon others, or manipulate the consent of others". In contrast they define *resisting power* as "[...] that power which attempts to set up situations, groupings or actions which resist the impositions of dominating power" that "can involve very small, subtle and some might say trivial moments [...]" (Sharp *et al.*, 2000: 3). This latter definition applies quite well to the lives lived with home webcams. Home webcams perhaps do not fit into the old-fashioned understanding of resistance, but resistance, indeed, may take new unexpected forms, being pluralised rather than homogenous, concealed rather than exposed. Webcams aiming at increasing visibility rather than hiding from surveillance, can be interpreted as a form of confrontation, surveillance turned into spectacle – a form of resistance.

The virtual world was once thought to bring us to an era, which could be called "post-gender" (Higgins *et al.*, 1999: 111). It was supposed to be a realm where identities can be hidden, where "the failings of the body will supposedly melt away, where the soul will be able to express itself fully" (Wertheim, 1997: 302), where gender-switching will become possible (Roberts and Parks, 2001) and "misrepresentations of self" (Wakeford, 1998: 181) are understood to be a taken for granted opportunity rather than a morally precarious action. The home webcams contribute in completely turning this development up side down. They create an anti-statement to this by *bringing back the bodily subjects* – or at least their visual representations. They generate a re-embodiment of subjects, and break the distinction between "'pure human beings' and 'simulated disembodied post-humans'" (Featherstone and Burrows, 1995: 11). The virtual 'avatar' existence is connected with bodily existence. The subject is thus mediating 'between the embodied self and the "I" that is simultaneously present in the virtual realm' (Higgins *et al.*, 1999: 115). While Jenni with her camera can from one perspective be interpreted as a 'cyborg', her visual representations also bring us quite close to her material (female) body. Yet, she seems to

be flouting the cultural rules for the display of the female body by clearly announcing her own precedence and awareness of the position as something to be seen.

Challenging the understanding(s) of power

It is evident that rather than being confined to the ethos of discipline, power seems to have become more dispersed and flexible (Bauman, 2000). However, the idea of empowering exhibitionism goes quite far from the original idea of video surveillance. Why might this theme be interesting to the researchers of video surveillance? Would this have any conclusions that would be valid in 'traditional surveillance' or helpful in understanding it? The reason I find home webcams interesting is the notion that they *contest* some of the conventional connections of power. First, the connection between visibility and power. Second, the idea of internalisation of control, as already mentioned. And third, the connection between power and control.

Much of the discussion around the new forms of surveillance has focused on power. 'New technologies' as Whitaker (1999: 140) points out, "render individuals "visible" [...] to multiple gazes coming from many different directions looking for different things". In Foucauldian thinking visibility connotes with power. The basic nature of the exercise of disciplinary power "involves regulation through visibility" (Hannah, 1997: 171). The traditional idea of power places those who *can see* in the position of being powerful – more powerful than those who *are seen*. This applies, I would claim, also to the Foucauldian idea of power as not possessed or exchanged but rather, exercised. The control of individuals is claimed to be the more efficient the more willing they are to submit to the overseeing gaze, the more willing they are to make themselves transparent (Seppänen, 2002: 44).

Home webcams challenge this conventional conception of visibility connecting with power. People deliberately make themselves visible, but it does not follow that they would be in a position where the "automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1977: 201) is assured. To be (more) seen is not to be less powerful. Rather, quite the opposite. The practice of presenting oneself to the global audience "muddies our understanding of the power of watching and the privilege of sight" (Jimroglou, 2001: 300). Exhibitionism *plays* with visibility. Home webcam owners – like Jenni, as "she trespasses across traditional visual boundaries, always winking back at her audience" (Jimroglou, 2001: 288) – set visibility and power into the context of *irony*. Second, being constantly conscious of being watched by invisible overseers is supposed to lead to *internalisation of control* (Foucault, 1977: 202-203). The feeling of 'being watched' is not depending on someone looking (e.g. Seppänen, 2002: 111). People internalise the rules, regulate their own behaviour even when it is not necessary and, thus, exercise power over themselves. The emotional event of being seen has been described as "the constant *torture* of the random but ever possible gaze" (Ainley, 1998: 90, italics added). Power operates by creating 'bad conscience' and self-vigilance (e.g. Faith, 1994: 9; Koskela, 2000: 253; Tabor, 2001: 128). Surveillance works to normalise human bodies.

Home webcams challenge this understanding, too. By presenting intimate pictures of private life, their owners refuse to play ‘the game of bad conscience’. They rebel against the modesty and shame embedded in the conception of the private. They may be ‘normal’ in some sense but they are also automatically outside some of the conventional notions of normal, exactly because of their cameras. They *refuse to be humble* which, to my opinion, is the most interesting point in the whole phenomenon.

This exactly is the reason why home webcam owners easily face moralism, why “people find it puzzling, peculiar and perverted that someone would expose herself in such a graphic, public way” (Jimroglou, 2001: 291). When some of the fundamental boundaries between private and public are broken, it will create confusion. It must indeed, be the case, as Jimroglou (2001: 291) argues that “the aversion to JenniCAM lies in its ‘profane’ nature, the way in which it pushes against traditional definitions, particularly of the private and public”. The phenomenon is difficult both to understand and to accept – in a word, *weird*.

Third, home webcam owners may gain power with their cameras, by being able to overcome the regimes of order and shame, but this form of power does not head for control over others. *Power and control are not synonyms* although we easily slip to think so. The difference between these two concepts has largely been ignored in the surveillance discussion. If we think about the distinction between dominating power and resisting power, it becomes clear that not all forms of power seek for control. The empowering role of home webcams shows that there is a possibility to gain power without gaining control. Home webcams clearly break the old power relations but their purpose is not to increase control but rather to blur and mix the lines of control. They permit many interpretations, and thus, ‘communicate’ with viewers rather than aiming to restrain them: “Jenni is always on the move, never allowing for a final reading yet inviting the viewer to use her body as a canvas for the creation of meaning” (Jimroglou, 2001: 300). The (contradictory) meanings depend on the viewer as much as the viewed.

Finally, it must be said that in practice most home webcams are extremely mundane. While JenniCAM might have been ‘sexy’ (i.e. a young woman keeping up a famous site and having lots of fan pages) most cams are so trivial that it is difficult to imagine anyone being interested in looking at them. This perhaps does not apply to the owners of other webcams, the group hence forming yet another global (virtual) community. When looking at these webcams it is difficult to see a slightest sign of resistance. However, the point that I want to make is not that the actual pictures would show resistance. The question is not about political activism in traditional sense but about *revealing as a political act* – intrinsically.

Concluding remarks and unanswered questions

It must be acknowledged that ‘showing it all’, literally – the idea on which I based this reasoning – is never possible. There will always be *dead angles* – both in space and time. Angles of privacy, or perhaps angles of shame. As Burgin (2002: 233) argues “there is something of striptease in the way the space is revealed”. Something is exposed but some secrets kept. No

matter how much is revealed, “there is still something invisible in the visible” (Weibel, 2002: 209).

However, the idea of OCTV means that most surveillance is *more* open than we are used to thinking. The visual material is circulated through various channels and often flees from the control of those responsible for the original purpose of surveillance. As Terranova (2001: 130) states “the society of spectacle, simulation and virtual reality can be seen to collapse into each other”. Unlike the old-fashioned *closed* circuit television systems, the webcam systems are ‘liminal devices’, operating “on the threshold of the physical and the cybernetic” (Campanella, 2004: 58). This means that we need to rethink *all* surveillance. The perspective of home webcams is, in one sense, very different from public space surveillance. Nevertheless, by thinking about the role of the images in webcams, mobile phone cameras and TV shows, we may be able to raise new questions considering the more traditional surveillance as well.

What, however, remains unanswered thus far is what makes the difference between being and not being ‘empowering’? I have argued that some features in the function of home webcams make them empowering. Nevertheless, what are the fundamental differences to suppressing (public space) surveillance cams remains unclear. It cannot be about who is looking: after all, when people present their private lives in the Internet the point is exactly that anyone, literally, can be looking. It cannot be about whether or not one is looked at in the first place, because the idea of empowerment is not depending of the act of looking/seeing but the act of presenting. It cannot be depending on the equipment used: the quality of both private and public cameras can vary a lot without making a significant difference to the social practices. And, it cannot be about the fact that presenting is voluntary since one can very well be voluntarily in public space under surveillance but the deed remains without an empowering dimension.

One, but thus far very partial, answer is the role of *agency*. As reality TV contributes in commodifying crime it also has a tone of exhibitionism. In some cases, to be seen is exactly what makes criminal acts thrilling for the criminal (see Presdee, 2000; Weibel, 2002). To what extent could this exhibitionism be called empowering, remains questionable. From the perspective of the viewers, reality TV creates a passive subjectivity rather than supports active agency. Webcams, on the other hand, clearly support agency. What, how and when is presented is controlled by the person(s) whose images are circulated. How these pictures will be subsequently used, runs out of control. This, however, is precisely the point of the phenomenon: to reject the regime of shame means rejecting the traditional understanding of objectification. Mobile phones, although they can be used for tracking and controlling people, also seem to support active agency. From the users’ perspective, shooting pictures with them just adds another function. From a more theoretical perspective it simultaneously leads towards a new step in ‘OCTV’. What it comes to the ‘alternative’ image production loaded with resistance, mobile phone cameras clearly have their potential. Nevertheless, they obviously can be used for repressive purposes as easily as for empowering purposes. What roles may become the most important ones is a challenge for future research.

It has been argued that in the contemporary world the value of an image is overrated. On one hand, this is true. On the other hand, there is still much to do to understand how the images can

be played with, and how they can work as a form of resistance. Most discussion on surveillance has dealt with it in relation to dominating power, which equates with control (over someone). There is no doubt that this is of great importance. However, I think that we also should try to imagine the ways in which resisting power might connect with surveillance and other forms of visual representation. Eventually, the boundless representations may work as a more effective form of resistance than the efforts to avoid the technological gaze(s).

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