RESISTING SOVEREIGN SURVEILLANCE: AN ACTIVIST AGENDA FROM THE INCARCERATED

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In the wake of recent disclosures about government surveillance, longstanding questions of privacy and individual control of information have become vitally and politically important. Although there is much that we do not know about the extent of who is watching and what happens to the data generated by these actions, we do know that surveillance is constant and wide reaching, such that it can be difficult to imagine technological practices that would ensure privacy, whether of cell phone use, search engine queries or emailing. In order to suggest an activist agenda for protesting infrastructures of surveillance, this paper draws on practices of resistance among populations that have extensive experience with near-totalizing mechanisms of monitoring and control - the incarcerated. Institutional monitoring of prisoners typically encompasses clothing, food, visitors, medication and communication, where part of the loss of subjectivity and selfhood that prisoners frequently report is tied to the inability to experience any sense of personal privacy (Passmore, 2009; Ziarek, 2008). Despite, and in fact because of, these mechanisms of surveillance, penal history contains many examples of resistance, including staging protests, forming alternate networks of communication and appropriating minimal resources into bootstrapped tools and artifacts. These tactics form the crux of our inquiry, in that we use these forms of protest as a means of thinking through possibilities for coping with and perhaps even undermining institutional surveillance.

It's important to state at the outset that there is a real risk of rhetorical overstatement in drawing a comparison between people serving prison sentences and people whose information and communication technologies (ICTs) are being monitored. Rather than trying to draw a direct comparison, we investigate modes of resistance that have emerged within prisons as useful in identifying tools of dissent in the context of

technological monitoring. Following Appadurai's (2001) work on infrastructure of sewage as a point of intervention for class politics, we conceptualize the socio-technical practices of surveilled prisoners as a "node at which concerns of the human body, dignity and technology meet" (p. 37). In this article, we identify three such nodes, drawn from the praxis of incarcerated communities. We divide analysis of each technology into three parts: a brief introduction to its penal history, a rearticulation in terms from critical theory, and suggestions for how these technologies of resistance can be deployed by individuals and communities contesting government surveillance. Across these cases, we seek to address questions of how to identify acts of resistance among surveilled and dispossessed groups, and how the public at large can use these tactics to develop responses to state and sovereign surveillance in their everyday online lives.

We begin with a discussion of hunger strikes, which we connect to a Foucauldian construct of askesis (1988). Under circumstances of near-total surveillance and highly-structured routine, hunger strikes have offered a highly disruptive form of protest, where contemporary examples include members of the Russian feminist punk band Pussy Riot refusing food in the fall of 2013 at a forced labor camp (Coleman, 2013); years-long protests among prisoners held at Guantanamo (Harris, 2013); and a massive hunger strike among inmates in California's prison system in the summer of 2013 (Wallace-Wells, 2014). In developing a theoretical lens for adapting hunger strikes to modes of protesting mass surveillance, we turn to Foucault's later work on askesis, or "an exercise of self upon self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self and to attain a certain mode of being" (p. 2). For Foucault, askesis becomes transformative both individually and collectively, referring to the ability of the self to generate an impact on those in the surrounding community as well as to reconstitute oneself through daily practices of self. Our paper considers what online hunger strikes might look like, framing actions such as unplugging, information detoxing, page blackouts and icon alteration in terms of askesis and ideological praxis of political change.

In the following section of the article, we identify four specific technologies of resistance that have been employed as alternative communication networks within prison populations: argot, knock codes, encryption and smuggling. As a theoretical lens, we draw on de Certeau's (1984) construct of tactics as individual moments of resistance to institutional strategies of control. The tactics identified in this section offer some provocative suggestions regarding resistant technologies that may be deployed by the broader internet population to counter institutional surveillance. By connecting each of these alternative communication technologies to forms of information activism that have surfaced online, we suggest possibilities of resistance for contesting and appropriating infrastructures of surveillance, including memes, mesh networks, encrypted cybernetic communications and virtual private networks.

Finally, we consider the phenomenon of viral dance videos choreographed in prison, framed through a discussion of Ranciere's (2013) work on aesthetic politics. We refer to a phenomenon that could be called viral dance videos, the most famous example of which comes from the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center (CPDRC) in the Philippines, where inmate performances range from Michael Jackson's "Thriller" to a Queen medley to Psy's "Gangnam Style." We view prison dance videos as both highly mediated (leveraging convergence culture to produce an artifact that is at once a representation and somehow unknowable) and ultimately illegible, and it is precisely this

inscrutability that we see as potentially disruptive in the context of sovereign surveillance. Ranciere argues that to produce illegibility is a deeply powerful (and perhaps the only) form of political protest, in keeping with Lorde's (2003) insistence that the master's house will not be dismantled with the master's tools. We connect viral prison dance videos to actions like flash mobs (Bimber, Flanagin & Stohl, 2005) and street art directed to CCTV (Moore, 2008). In doing so, we provide a highly politicized framing of media content that circulates quickly and with socio- political consequences, contributing to existing research on memes (Shifman, 2014) and spreadable media (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013).

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