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Dazzle camouflage as queer counter conduct

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Abstract

Developed as an anti-surveillance strategy during World War I, dazzle camouflage used sharply contrasting colors to disguise ships in the British navy from enemy observation. Unlike traditional camouflage that was meant to keep one's forces or weaponry hidden, dazzle camouflage used hypervisibility to deflect attention, making it impossible to detect a ship's movements. In this article, I develop the concept of dazzle camouflage as a form of queer counter-conduct, arguing that queer subjectivity offers a generative vantage point for theorizing resistance to the hegemonic gaze. I draw on three forms of queer protest against everyday surveillance: Chelsea Manning's response to trolling on Twitter, drag queen practices of reading, and a pair of art projects from visual artist Zach Blas. Taken together, these practices allow me to characterize dazzle camouflage as leveraging aesthetic playfulness and boundary work. Conceptually, my goal is to bring together surveillance studies and queer theory as frameworks for building a more robust account of dazzle camouflage, and moreover, an account that can be instructive for queer activism in a context of everyday digital surveillance.

Keywords

Dazzle camouflage, queer theory, surveillance, surveillance art, trans theory

Visibility has long been fraught for queer folks: the same spaces (Abraham, 2009) and technologies that have provided powerful sources of solidarity, community and recognition (Gray, 2009; Kitzie, 2018) can easily transform into sites of surveillance, harassment and violence. Given tensions of wanting to be seen, but only by some and only

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some of the time, how have queer people resisted, twisted and played with structures of surveillance? What practices of managing visibility have emerged as forms of queer counter-conduct? Drawing on Simone Browne's (2015) theory of dazzle camouflage, I discuss three modes of queer counter-surveillance: Chelsea Manning's anti-trolling on Twitter, drag queen practices of reading, and two projects from visual artist Zach Blas. These examples demonstrate a deliberate arrangement of media and bodies as a means of coping with forms of surveillance, and specifically a surveillant gaze that is trans- and homo-phobic.

This article situates different modes of counter-conduct within the framework of dazzle camouflage as a way of drawing together surveillance studies and queer theory. A guiding assumption in my analysis is that theories of surveillance and theories of queer subjectivity can help frame a convergence of marginalized identities, vulnerable bodies and violent gazes. The gaze has long been politicized in queer communities, both as a form of harm from intolerant, hegemonic authorities, and as an identifying mode of recognition, solidarity and desire (Evans and Gamman, 1995). Bridging surveillance studies and queer alterity provides a framework for politicizing and theorizing a gaze that is heteronormative, disciplining and potentially violent.

What are the productive convergences of queer subjectivities and surveillance theory? Phillips and Cunningham (2007) have argued that queer theory brings three core tenets to surveillance studies: discourse, politics and performativity (p. 33). For Phillips and Cunningham, queer theory's expertise in critical contextualization, articulating power dynamics and theorizing visibility lend themselves to an analysis of subverting architectures of surveillance. Power dynamics are inherent in technologies of monitoring, and queer theory takes as one of its driving projects the critical articulation of power, subjugation and control. As Conrad (2009a) noted, 'the conjunction of queer studies and surveillance studies has the potential to illuminate the relationship between the state and private forces that shape space, behaviour, subjectivity, consumerism, and citizenship', (p. 329). Surveillance represents a key mode of operationalizing heteronormativity, where watching and identifying non-normative subjects is a crucial first step in hegemonic efforts to control.

While queer theorists have conceptualized the political dimensions of surveillance and subjugation (Phillips and Cunningham, 2007; Puar, 2005), in this article, I focus on the ways that queer subjects have countered surveillance by leveraging media, dialogue, bodies and art to produce resistant assemblages. Surveillance theory often operates on the level of states and subjects, but here I analyze less state-based and more distributed forms of surveillance, a many-to-many rather than one-to-many form of monitoring. Working against state-based forms of monitoring and control is politically crucial, but so is addressing surveillance that arises from everyday interactions, whether on the street or online. As the capacity for surveillance continues to integrate into our everyday devices, platforms and interactions, taking a broad view provides a more holistic understanding of how these socio-technical changes manifest in everyday life, particularly for people on the margins (See Eubanks, 2014; McCormack and Salmenniemi, 2016). I concentrate primarily on the politics of visibility as a framework for analyzing how queer and trans people navigate structures of watching, confrontation and attack.

Figure 1. Image of a British naval ship from 1917, disguised with dazzle camouflage. Image from Glasgow School of Art Archives (2014).

Dazzle camouflage and queer counter-conduct

Two key concepts help me frame a discussion of queer practices for managing surveillance: dazzle camouflage and counter-conduct. Dazzle camouflage began as a military strategy during World War I, when the Royal British Navy sought to disguise its submarines and naval ships from enemy observation (Figure 1). The strategy involved painting ships in striking and highly visible contrasting of colors, where

> the purpose of this camouflage was not to hide the ship, but rather to utilise a form of obliterative colouring that confused and distorted its shape. This would mean that when German attackers sighted British ships in Dazzle Camouflage they would find it difficult to identify its type, size, speed and direction of travel, making it extremely difficult to target. (Glasgow School of Art (GSA), 2014)

Dazzle camouflage emerged at a particular moment in tactical surveillance – enemy observation of troop movements and resources was pervasive enough that it had to be assumed, but not yet so highly developed that an opponent could accurately detect the size, shape and weapons capability of a dazzle camouflaged ship. By World War II, military surveillance had developed further, but as a tactic, dazzle camouflage remains an instructive approach to managing an enemy's watchful gaze.[1]

Surveillance in the context of military action is distinct from the everyday forms of surveillance that define contemporary networked life (Andrejevic et al., 2015; Brayne, 2017; Finn, 2011; Marwick, 2012). Particularly in the forms of warfare that provoked dazzle camouflage as a response, determining an enemy's gaze was more straightforward than navigating the complex arrangements of corporations, government entities and person-to-person monitoring that surfaces from data brokers (Karppi, 2018),

corporate profiling (Turow et al., 2015), consumer self-tracking (Crawford et al., 2015; Elias and Gill, 2018) and algorithmic sorting (Gandy, 1993; Noble, 2018). At the same time, military strategies of surveillance are increasingly coextensive with the same features of continual monitoring and personalized information management that emerge in everyday online life (see Fattal, 2018). In the examples that follow, an underlying assumption is that although the exact characterization of *who* is watching is sometimes less certain than was the case for British naval vessels in World War I, the certainty of *being watched* remains, as does the potential efficacy of highly visible forms of tactical maneuvering.

Dazzle camouflage emerged from an objective of managing rather than avoiding surveillance. The innovation of dazzle camouflage was to invite attention in a way that disrupts recognition, where hyper visibility becomes a form of self-protection. In her path-breaking work on the intertwining of surveillance theory and race, Browne (2015) described dazzle camouflage as a set of counter-surveillance tactics that rely on optical confusion: 'rather than concealing . . . dazzle camouflage was intended to make it difficult to visually assess size and speed by way of optical illusion' (p. 163). For Browne, Dazzle camouflage is performative, disrupting expectations of bodily arrangements in order to conceal one's intentions or movements. Browne also suggested that dazzle camouflage may have special significance for members of marginalized groups seeking to protect not just themselves but their communities.

Browne's (2015) brief discussion of dazzle camouflage echoes Glissant's (1997) concept of opacity. For Glissant, opacity offers a profound form of protest against actors that insist on rendering subjects as readable, legible and categorizable. As Blas (2018) summarized, 'struggles for opacity are not oriented towards gaining opacity, as we are always already opaque; rather it is that power violates opacity, which must be resisted as a commitment to anti-imperial politics' (p. 198). For Glissant, like Browne, visibility of difference is a battleground of power and agency. While Glissant (as translated from the French) uses the term resistance, I find the term counter-conduct more productive in claiming dazzle camouflage as a queer form of anti-surveillance.

Following Murphy (2012), I use the term counter-conduct to refer to specific practices of managing and subverting surveillance. For Murphy, counter-conduct is a useful antidote to concepts like resistance in the context of theorizing hegemonic power relations:

> resistance has acquired a romantic moral valence in Left academic work as a self-evidently desirable set of actions antagonistic to hegemony. Counter-conduct, in contrast, invites a historicization that highlights modes of undoing, remaking and antagonism that are immanent with and animated by hegemonic formations. (p. 183)

If resistance implies a discrete set of political outcomes tied to a discrete set of political actions, counter-conduct is more contextual and less linear. Rather than conforming to an explicitly defined agenda of political discourse, counter-conduct is more quotidian, improvised and rhizomatic. I categorize the practices below as forms of counter-conduct in that they are deliberate and subversive, geared toward everyday rituals of managing visibility and undermining surveillance.

Dazzle camouflage in practice

In the context of queer bodies, what does dazzle camouflage look like? For whom is it effective and what kinds of surveillance does it address? To flesh out a theory of dazzle camouflage as queer counter-conduct in a grounded way, I suggest three instances of tactical anti-surveillance. I've chosen these case studies as disparate but interrelated examples of surveillance politics, allowing me to focus on counter-conduct that surfaces from different subject positions. Chelsea Manning's Twitter feed exposes transphobic social media surveillance, reading in drag culture taps into dynamics of racial oppression, and Zach Blas' art projects reflect queer and intersectional subjectivities targeted by facial recognition software. This list of practices is clearly not exhaustive, and is meant to interrogate the capacity of dazzle camouflage as a concept relevant to and useful for surveillance studies, as well as an activist strategy of queer counter-conduct. While I do not mean to suggest that dazzle camouflage is an exclusively queer practice, I am arguing that queer subjectivity has extensive familiarity with managing visibility and performativity (Gregory, 1998; Johnson, 1995; Puar, 2005), key components of dazzle camouflage's efficacy. Across my descriptions of dazzle camouflage counter conduct, I trace two conceptual through-lines: aesthetic play and boundary work between insiders and outsiders. These concepts help articulate the capacity of dazzle camouflage to, in Glissant's (1997) terms, 'protect the Diverse' (p. 62).

Chelsea Manning's emoji dazzle. In May 2010, US Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning was arrested for the unauthorized release of over 700,000 confidential files to Wikileaks, a non-profit that accepts and publishes secret information, news leaks, and classified media provided by anonymous sources (Savage and Huettman, 2013).[2] Manning's disclosure revealed details on the abuse of prisoners in Iraq by the US military, information about the lack of evidence for holding prisoners at Guantánamo Bay, and confirmed the existence of an official tally of civilian deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan, among other important geopolitical issues (Boone, 2010; Shane and Weiser, 2011; Spillius, 2010). Manning's transfer of data to Wikileaks was the largest leak in US history (Peralta, 2013), and she was sentenced to 35 years in prison after pleading guilty to leaking confidential data (Chappell and McCallister, 2017). From the outset, Manning was a highly controversial figure, at the center of political narratives that lurched between whistleblowing and national security. Some felt that the sentence for disclosing classified information, which 'served the public interest and never caused harm to the United States', as stated by Manning's attorneys, was unjust (Savage, 2017). Others maintained that she was rightfully punished for illegally violating her obligation to the US government and military to maintain the confidentiality of that data (See Wagner, 2017).

On the day after her sentencing, Manning announced via a statement on the morning talk show *Today* her status as a transgender woman (Stump, 2016), triggering a wave of transphobia backlash on top of pro-military narratives casting her as a traitor. While the army made hormone therapy available while Manning was held at Fort Leavenworth, other restrictions were imposed; during the summer of 2015, Manning was reportedly threatened with solitary confinement for prison rule violations, which her attorneys asserted were veiled forms of discriminatory harassment. Although she received support

from a range of trans and Internet freedom activists (e.g. Eckardt, 2017), Manning's time in prison was difficult and highly isolated, marked by her 'uncertain future as a transgender woman incarcerated at the men's military prison at Fort Leavenworth, Kan' (Savage, 2017). On 17 January 2017, President Obama commuted Manning's sentence as one of his last acts in office. Manning was released in May of 2017 after serving 7 years of her initial 35-year sentence.[3]

In a careful analysis of Manning's trial and imprisonment, Beauchamp (2018) argued that intense scrutiny was crucial for the military to re-assert control over a former service member, and moreover to regain control after such a massive leak of information. For Beauchamp, Manning's trial 'links the secrecy of her gender with the secrecy of her whistle-blower actions, a process that guides public attention away from the U.S. government and towards an individual who must be exposed' (p. 109). While incarcerated, Manning was subjected to constant surveillance and monitoring, which Beauchamp argued served two punitive goals – punishing the display of secret information and punishing the display of being trans. This scrutinization did not cease with Manning's release from prison, and has instead encompassed her public appearances at events and her activity on social media.

Since the commutation of her sentence, Manning has been a fierce advocate for trans rights and intellectual freedom. In addition to her written work and speaking engagements, Manning is an active Twitter user, having created her account @xychelsea in August 2013. As of 2019, she has since published 6799 tweets and accumulated 347,000 followers. She has also been seriously, constantly trolled. On any given day, Manning faces a relentless barrage of hate, a mixture of transphobia and accusations of treason. Manning's public-figure status heightens issues of queer and trans visibility. Although platforms like Twitter can serve as powerful tools of community building and consciousness-raising, they also facilitate harassment, particularly for women and members of marginalized groups (Chachra, 2017).

There is no generally accepted way to mitigate the antagonistic behavior of trolls (On the complexities of trolling, see Buckels et al., 2014; Phillips, 2015; Phillips and Milner, 2018). Some argue that the best approach is to ignore antagonistic behavior (summed up in the mantra, 'Don't feed the trolls'), while others argue that agonistic dialogue is key to diverse and democratic publics. Manning's response is, I submit, one of dazzle camouflage, a determined blitz of upbeat visual cues and positive affect that disrupts attempts to monitor and control her online presence. For example, in an exchange from February, 2018, Manning is called out specifically for her use of emoji, and her response insists on the validity of her style of visibility. Accompanied by a steady stream of sarcasm, Manning's anti-trolling produces a strikingly playful discourse that typically contrasts sharply with the aesthetics and tone of her attackers.

More than just deflection, Manning's emoji responses acknowledge her attackers without engaging them, papering over their antagonistic hostility with a wave of cheery smiley faces and rainbows (Figure 2). These responses draw on disparaged, campy forms of dialogue in a way that is both playful and boundary making. The cheerful positivity of her tone and her affection for emoji present a hyper-visible response to her critics, one that acknowledges and plays with their attacks, and dismissively sets up a divide between trolling, hostile misreads and a pro-trans, pro-camp decidedly upbeat discourse.

Figure 2. Screen captures from Chelsea Manning's Twitter feed, all taken between November 2017 and February 2018. The images convey the degree of harassment leveled at Manning on a daily basis, as well as Manning's typical responses, which rely heavily on an upbeat tone and colorful emoji (Manning, 2017A, 2017B, 2018A, 2018B).

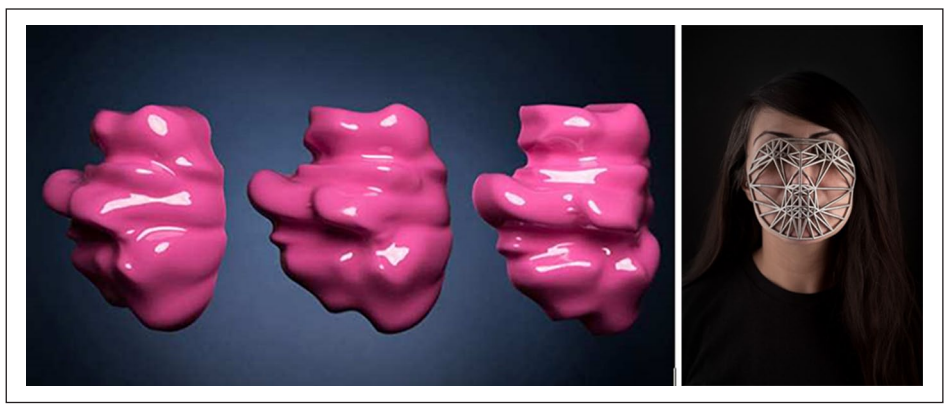

Figure 3. Left, images of Facial Weaponization Suite (2011–2014). Right, image of Face Cages (2013–2016). Images from Blas (n.d.)

As others have noted (Beauchamp, 2018), Manning's status as a white trans person has allowed her certain forms of protection from individual and state-based forms of violence that disproportionately target, delegitimize and threaten trans people of color

(Strangio, 2018). Within the scope of anti-trans aggression, harassment on Twitter operates at a different level than physical or sexual violence, including (significantly) violence from the police, which predominantly affects trans women of color. By writing about Manning's strategies for managing Twitter harassment, I am suggesting that dazzle camouflage emerges as a tactic that makes sense in particular sets of circumstances, for particular groups of queer and trans bodies. The playful aesthetics of Manning's anti-trolling, anti-surveillance counter-conduct are striking in their ambivalence and provocation. But this is not to say that Manning's approach can be mobilized by trans people of color, differently abled trans people or migrant queer and trans people, for whom Twitter trolling may not be the most salient concerns of surveillance.

A defining feature of dazzle camouflage is the management rather than abatement of surveillance. By being active on Twitter, Manning invites a kind of visibility, and she cannot engage with her followers without being surveilled by her detractors. Like other proponents of dazzle camouflage, Manning's main goal is to manage rather than avoid surveillance. But she can subvert it, introducing narratives that acknowledge but neither dignify her attackers nor reveal her interiority. The playful aesthetics of dazzle camouflage allow Manning to continue on her platform without forfeiting agency or participation.

The camouflaged solidarity of ballroom reads. Although shade has come into common lexicon as a queer practice of passive-aggressive interpersonal drama, it has a less widely known predecessor called reading. Reading refers to an impromptu dialogue between two drag queens, typically in a way that leverages insults and personal attacks tied to appearance and style. Reading is public, dramatic and ritualized, a highly stylized form of mutual antagonism. Arguably the most famous account of reading comes from Dorien Corey, interviewed in the 1991 documentary *Paris is Burning*[4]:

> Reading came first [before shade]. Reading is the real art form of insult. You get in a smart crack, everyone laughs . . . because you found a flaw and exaggerated it – then you've got a good reading going. If it's happening between the gay world and the straight world, it's not really a read, it's more of an insult, a vicious slur fight. But it's how they develop a sense of how to read. They may call you a faggot or a drag queen, you find something to call them. But then when you are all of the same thing, then you have to go the fine point. In other words, if I'm a black queen and you're a black queen we can't call each other black queens because that's not a read, that's just a fact. So then we talk about your ridiculous shape, your saggy face, your tacky clothes. (Livingston and Swimar, 1991)

Reads are a customized and clever series of rejoinders that signal membership within a community (McKinnon, 2017). Reading also constitutes a playful form of boundary work, where skills of critique are first honed between insiders and outsiders, and then become a performance that paradoxically dramatizes difference between insiders.

As a practice, reading is queer, but it's also deeply and importantly raced. Drag and ballroom culture has become popularized and less homogeneous in recent years, but when queens like Dorian Corey were explaining the practice in the early 1990s, drag communities in New York (as well as other metropolitan areas like Detroit, Chicago and Atlanta) were predominantly black (Bailey, 2013; Marion, 2008). Reading has ties to

rituals of word play in black culture, from games like the Dozens (Abrahams, 1962; Lefever, 1981) to snapping (Johnson, 1995) to battle rap and diss tracks, where trading insults displays improvisational wit as well as highly personalized knowledge of an individual and the surrounding community. Like reading, the Dozens is typically enacted within rather than between raced groups, and anthropologists have argued that the game is meant to prepare members of a marginalized group for hostility and aggression from those in power (Lefever, 1981). Key parallels emerge here, in that forms of play like the Dozens can appear hostile to people outside the group, even as ritualized wordplay is partly meant to hone skills of coping with antagonism from those same outsiders. A fundamental objective of dazzle camouflage is to conceal the strength and resistant capacity of a community under attack.

Reading began on the street and in ballrooms at a moment when queer people, and particularly queer people of color, had to manage visibility against a heteronormative gaze that was both continual and violent. As drag culture has evolved, reading has endured in digital forums and social media platforms (Kitzie, 2018) and televised performances like *Rupaul's Drag Race*. While reading may seem antagonistic and aggressive, queer theorists have argued that reading is actually meant to be playful (Calder, n.d.), a ritualized form of solidarity-building concealed by highly visible antagonism (Gregory, 1998). Drag queens first learn skills of deflection and mockery through bigoted harassment, yet reading can become a release valve (Simmons, 2013) and a subversive reclaiming of the same terms and names that surface in racist acts of watching and control.

Drag balls are spectacular events of literal and figurative glitter and dazzle, combining drama, talent and competition. Within ballroom culture, reading is a dramatic and highly stylized ritual of reworking verbal aggression, transforming anti-queer and homophobic slurs from aggressively straight culture. Like Manning's skillful anti-trolling, reading involves a highly performative dazzle that exceeds the actual content of dialogue. This is not to say that the content of a read doesn't matter – reads are valued precisely for their display of detail and wit. But the strategic value of reading stems from a broader context of surveillance and aggression – the political agency of reading draws from countering homophobic discourse through shared ritual. Where Manning's anti-trolling takes shape between antagonistic strangers, reading takes place between community members, allowing each to develop collective coping strategies. Where Manning greets surveillance and hostility with emoji, drag queens transform a 'vicious slur fight' (to quote Dorien Corey) into a game of cleverness and audacity. Boundary work, or exposing divisions between insiders and outsiders, is key here, in that from the outside, reading appears antagonistic, but from inside a drag community, reading can strengthen social ties and sublimate painful experiences of harassment.

Face to face – the queer counter-conduct of Zach Blas. Hailed as one of the 'exponent artists in Queer technologies' (Miranda de Almeida, 2015), Zach Blas is an artist, writer, filmmaker, and lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London. Much of Blas' work plays with themes of surveillance and spectacle, but I am particularly interested in his projects 'Facial Weaponization Suite' and 'Face Cages' (Figure 3). An ongoing series from 2011–2014, 'Facial Weaponization Suite' involved creating a series of masks designed to 'thwart facial recognition scanning, a technology with the potential,

possibly already realized, of using racial and sexual stereotyping to isolate groups of social undesirables', (Cotter, 2016). Blas cited four specific surveillance issues motivating this work: studies claiming that faces can be identified as queer based on certain facial characteristics; the racist nature of facial recognition software, which often fails to identify Black faces; French laws restricting women's use of the veil in public spaces; and connections between the use of biometrics as security technology and violence at the United Status–Mexico border. The neon-colored masks of 'Facial Weaponization Suite' are a playful intervention with an edge. The masks highlight the gap between human versus computational facial recognition, with a dystopic emphasis on the technological implications of facial recognition for minority groups (Holmes, 2014). Drawing from these cases of hegemonic surveillance, Blas strives for an intersectional struggle for opacity. Pulling Glissant (1997) into the context of the digital, Blas' projects expose how the gaze of facial recognition produces categorization, with disturbing implications for the algorithmic facilitation of discrimination and violence.

Face Cages (2013–2016) offers another intervention in discourses around facial recognition software and the 'gross, harmful reductions', (Blas, n.d.) these technologies present. To make the masks for 'Face Cages', Blas created 3-D renderings of facial recognition algorithms. The features used by facial recognition software to identify faces – lips, nose and eyes – become the points that form Blas' metal masks. Facial recognition has particular consequences for people of color, queer and trans people, and undocumented migrants. Accordingly, for his video installation, Blas recruited artists who were queer, migrants and of color to wear masks based on facial recognition renderings of their faces. When Blas built three-dimensional versions of the 'supposedly perfect' computer measurements of faces, they proved to be painful for subjects to wear. Resonating with 'torture devices and prisons' (Miranda de Almeida, 2015), 'Face Cages' produces a physical manifestation of the painful and violent potential of surveillant technologies. As a video installation, Face Cages makes it so that facial recognition 'can't be reconciled with its use to ban, expel, and account for certain humans' bodies at borders, in prisons, or on kill lists' (Browne and Blas, 2017).

Blas' work hinges on the face as a display of individuality as well as collective marginality. Just as the face is a powerful mechanism of connectivity and desire, it is also a key (perhaps *the* key) focal point of surveillance. As Pearl (2017) has argued in her analysis of the communicative power of the face:

> The face [is] always going to be a deeply personal project. What can be more intimate, more inviting, more vulnerable, than sharing our faces? But at the same time, what could be more performative, more produced and manufactured, more public, than the faces we present to the world? (p. 4)

Writing about the performative and affective dimensions of face transplants, Pearl noted that the face invites attention but resists scrutiny, a part of the body that we simultaneously treat as deeply private and continually present to the public. In both projects, Blas' use of masks highlight the paradoxical interiority and performativity of the face, so key to the scrutiny of surveillance.

With Facial Weaponization Suite and Face Cages, Blas critiques a particular kind of surveillance meant to identify individuals but with specific consequences for marginalized groups. Face Cages lacks the sense of play evident in the bright colors and soft shapes of Facial Weaponization Suite, but both insist on the politics of categorization. More precisely, Blas' projects call attention to the role of algorithms, artificial intelligence and computation in surveillant assemblages. Here, dazzle camouflage seeks to disrupt a very targeted form of computational watching, the biometric data of faces. Given the embedded biases in algorithms (Noble, 2018), and the consequences of outsourcing social monitoring from humans to machines (Eubanks, 2018), Blas' masks insist on a reinsertion of human bodies – and more specifically, faces – into dehumanized narratives of surveillance and otherness. Like the prior two examples, the masks meet prejudicial narratives and practices of watching with dramatized forms of subversion, producing a spectacle that calls attention to but ultimately doesn't satisfy the objectives of surveillant technologies.

Dazzle Camouflage's implications for theory

What do we get out of calling these instances of queer counter-conduct dazzle camouflage? What does naming them in this way do for media and surveillance researchers and queer communities concerned with surveillance? My main objective has been to develop an account of dazzle camouflage based on practices used by marginalized communities coping with surveillance. Until it is connected to a discrete set of characteristics and practices, dazzle camouflage will remain an intriguing trivia question of military history rather than a conceptually generative model of counter-conduct. In this concluding section, I describe playful aesthetics and boundary work as key characteristics of dazzle camouflage, and synthesize how queer subjectivity demonstrates the radical potential of anti-surveillance counter-conduct.

Looking across these modes of surveillance counter-conduct, two key characteristics emerge: aesthetic play and boundary work. All three forms of counter-conduct that I've analyzed in this paper have ties to the aesthetic, demonstrating modes of dissent that are playful in the midst of harassment and violence. There is a stark aesthetic gap between Manning's upbeat emoji and her online trolls, between drag queen reads and bigoted harassment, and between Blas' representations of the face and what facial recognition software 'sees'. These gaps between surveillance structures and responses of counter-conduct are produced through playful experimentation with aesthetic form. Particularly for Manning's Twitter anti-trolling and ballroom reads, playfulness is key to the disruptive capacity of dazzle camouflage. It is in large part the striking visual experimentation of dazzle camouflage that makes it so appealing as an object of critical inquiry. As Phillips and Cunningham (2007) argued,

> however much surveillance scholars embrace the notion of surveillance as discourse, there is generally little affection for a queer embrace of the discourse, of exploring its productive possibilities, of subverting it rather than resisting it. There is often an air of fatalism or despair in surveillance scholarship. (pp. 37–38)

Dazzle camouflage insists on countering not just surveillance, but fatalism and despair. Its practices call attention to surveillance and violence in a way that acknowledges links between and suggests new narratives for structural inequalities and sociotechnical power.

Visual play may seem like a thin form of counter-conduct against state power. In a thoughtful critique of anti-surveillance art, Monahan (2015) argued that the playful capacity of projects like Blas' (as well as a project called Dazzle Camouflage) were ultimately counterproductive because they 'fail to address the exclusionary logics of contemporary state and corporate surveillance' (p. 171). Art's failure to grapple with exclusionary politics may be exacerbated for subject positions who are marginalized on multiple axes. As I noted in my discussion of Chelsea Manning's Twitter tactics, violent surveillance is not evenly distributed – people of color, undocumented migrants and differently abled people are more likely to be targeted and punished by structures of surveillance. While recognizing Monahan's criticisms, I am willing to embrace a wider landscape of projects, practices and tactics for their capacity as anti-surveillance counter conduct. Moreover, as Blas (2018) has argued in a gloss of Glissant and opacity, a key objective of anti-surveillance work is 'to live with technologies that express the job of opacity, not its destruction' (p. 199). For people of color and trans people, visual features of marginality are often unavoidable, a constant invitation to state-based violence and monitoring. Particularly (although not exclusively) in these contexts, a subversion of the visual can be a crucial form of countercultural protest.

Boundary work marks another defining characteristic of queer dazzle camouflage. As a set of tactics, dazzle camouflage calls attention to dividing lines between insiders and outsiders. In each mode of counter-conduct that I have described, the work of concealment involves renegotiating boundaries of belonging to a group with marginalized status. In Chatman's (1996) path-breaking work on how conditions of marginalization shape relationships to information flows, she remarked on the complexities of theorizing outsider status, where 'theorists debating an insiders/outsiders worldview assume that it refers to 'us' against 'them' rather than an "I" and everyone else is "them"' (p. 205). Part of Chatman's point is that rather than being a collective experience, for many on the margins, outsider status is profoundly isolating. The forms of counter-conduct that I've described highlight uneven power dynamics, while also seeking to overcome forms of social isolation and disenfranchisement.

Dazzle camouflage draws strength from categorization as an outsider while obfuscating the mechanisms by which collective strength and solidarity is formed. For example, drag queens occupy an outsider or marginalized stance when targeted by homophobic and transphobic antagonism. But ritualized forms of anti-surveillance can resituate boundaries of belonging and demonstrate (although only to those in the know) collective forms of power. Boundaries are both a source of collective identification and a source of targeting difference. Blas' art projects insist on the political dangers of categorization. What is made visible by dazzle camouflage is not just one's individuality, but collective belonging to a group on the margins.

Dazzle camouflage does not belong exclusively to queer communities, although, queer subjects have long-standing experience with the paradox of visibility, with signaling care and self-expression on the one side, and presenting ourselves as a target for harassment and violence on the other. Dazzle camouflage plays with this paradox, and

names a set of practices that are available to those who recognize the impossibility of avoiding surveillance, and instead seek to subvert it. Given that an overarching project of queer theory is the subversion of hegemonic structures and narratives, dazzle camouflage presents a prime example of drawing together queer subjectivity and surveillance studies.

Part of the attraction of dazzle camouflage as a concept is that it operates at the level of managing and subverting rather than avoiding surveillance. Increasingly, privacy scholars advocate an approach to technological infrastructure that assumes watching is inevitable, but subversion is nonetheless possible (e.g. Bossewitch and Sinnreich, 2013; Brunton and Nissenbaum, 2015). Dazzle camouflage forces an encounter with and acknowledgment of power dynamics underlying surveillance. Contemporary threats of both state-based and distributed surveillance involve the overt identification of marginal behavior as well as the internalization of hegemonic disciplining. As Conrad (2009b) has argued, 'surveillance contributes to the reinforcement of sexual norms both by facilitating exposure for deviance, which is then often punished, and by promoting self-regulation and concealment by those who operate outside of the norms' (pp. 384–385). Dazzle camouflage categorizes a set of efforts to resist both consequences of surveillance, by reinserting agency and collectivity. Anti-surveillance counter-conduct insists that oppressive forms of surveillance are not all-encompassing, demonstrating aesthetic re-alignments against a surveillant gaze.

Conclusion

Dazzle camouflage emerged at a particular moment of surveillance power, when military technology was sufficiently common that counter-surveillance measures had to be pursued, yet before enemy capabilities were able to detect specific features or predict movements. We are in a similar moment of surveillance capability where monitoring must be assumed in our everyday lives, whether online or off. Technologies that can predict our routines, sexual preferences and political leanings already exist (Ashbrook and Starner, 2003; Levin, 2017; Mock, 2018) but are not yet widely deployed, making the present moment a crucial time for intervention. As Eubanks (2014) has argued, strategies of surveillance are first deployed against the marginalized before being rolled out against the privileged. It is precisely in this context of developing, but not yet all-encompassing, forms of monitoring that we should look to queer and trans forms of counter-conduct. Technologies of watching and control have been in constant development among government and industry actors, but so have tactics of opposition among the marginalized. Under conditions of continual surveillance, we can look to the radical capacities of dazzle camouflage as instructions for subverting, playing with and unmasking technologies of control.

Dazzle camouflage originally named a specific arrangement of military property targeted by a specific set of enemy forces. Contemporary forms of surveillance are more distributed across devices and actors, and it is the heterogeneous range of continual surveillance that makes attention to queer modes of counter-conduct so conceptually generative. Tolerance and inclusion of queer bodies have increased substantively (in certain places), but hard-fought legislative victories for queer and trans rights are by no means

final (Green et al., 2018). Across national divides, homophobic discrimination persists against queer people (particularly youth), as well as the systematic disenfranchisement targeting trans folks, people of color, migrants and people who are differently abled. The tactics described in this paper are pulled deliberately from subject positions that expose marginalization of precisely these groups, with Manning's advocacy for trans rights, the connections between drag queen reading and racism, and Zach Blas' advocacy for attention to intersections between queerness and racial discrimination, xenophobia and misogyny. For these groups, it is often difficult or impossible to hide one's status as a marginalized subject, and experiences of surveillance and monitoring are continual and potentially life-threatening. Having lived with distributed forms of pernicious surveillance, people who embody intersections of queerness, trans subjectivity and racial minority have much to teach us about surveillance and the politics of visibility. By categorizing some of their defensive maneuvers as dazzle camouflage, my goal has been to develop a more robust account of this under-theorized concept and to advocate for more research at the intersection of queer subjectivity and surveillance theory.

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Notes

1. Although dazzle camouflage is no longer used in the military, there's a very similar practice in the auto industry, In order to protect prototypes of cars from competitors and journalists, car manufacturers camouflage their early models in ways that recall WWI dazzle camouflage. I'm grateful to Katherine Sender for sharing this example with me.
2. A full account of Wikileaks' relationship to structures of surveillance is beyond the scope of this paper. It's worth noting, however, that although Wikileaks has benefited many progressive causes, it has an increasingly ambivalent reputation among activist communities and the general public (Stancil, 2010), made more complicated by the extended legal and political controversies surrounding its founder, Julian Assange (Heffernan, 2018).
3. In 2019, Manning was re-incarcerated after being held in contempt of court for refusing to testify in the federal government's prosecution of Wikileaks.
4. Specifically in the context of surveillance, it is impossible to reference *Paris Is Burning* without acknowledging its contentious racial politics (hooks, 1992). The documentary brought visibility to a community of working class and queer people of color in ways that are simultaneously an important documentation of queer life and an exploitative project from a white lesbian filmmaker, Jenny Livingston. It is because and not in spite of these themes of managing surveillance that I draw on *Paris Is Burning* in my discussion of reading.

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